MENTALITY AND AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF LEGENDARY

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Abstract: *The present paper aims to clarify some aspects of a species of literary folklore: the legend. It is approached in its aesthetic and mentality dimensions and the main part of the paper represents a system which takes into consideration three basic elements: the object, the category and the process, pointing out their specific character with this particular cultural product, the legend.*

Key words: *legend, legendary, myth.*

An important feature of the traditional mentality consists in reinforcing some paradigmatic elements in order to make the present stronger. By paraphrasing Wunenburger ("Symbolon", 2001:41), who approached the myth aspects, we can assert that recalling legend has the value of an example, because narration is endowed with truth and significance for those who are mediators. In "Poetica legendei", Silviu Angelescu considered the epic structure of legend type as "*consecinţă a relaţiei între două câmpuri de tensiune inegale ca putere: un prezent al povestirii (...) şi un trecut al evenimentului (...). Conectarea lui acum la atunci, normă poetică a legendei, acuză o insuficienţă a prezentului povestirii, resimţit ca inapt să semnifice prin el însuşi"* (ANGELESCU, 1983: 250).

Between the truth that myth deals with and the truth that the legend transmits there are qualitative differences which may be measured by the attitude of the receivers. In those communities where the myth is *alive*, its truth descends from the sacredness which that founding story is invested with; the myth truth is not negotiable and does not allow exploring. For the other narrative (and partially de-sacred) product, the four legendary subtypes have different truth degrees of intensity; the truth of historical type has other values than the truth of etiological type and the truth of hagiographic legend has other marks than the truth of mythological legend. *The coefficient/value of credibility* of legend (Oprisan), *the degree of credibility* (Ispas) is related to the social convention at the group level; the reception is accomplished by using the parameters of the code shared by the two sides of communication process. Besides, the relation between legend and truth implies a practical intention, centered on memory and the relation between legend and beauty implies an aesthetic intention, centered on imagination.

The truth- etymon, as an event support, is submitted to a series of changes and, in the end, the discourse enters a distributional network both on the space horizontal and on the time vertical. The result is a set of poetical models with structural and functional particularities which are considerably due to the truth form that makes up the genetic context of legend. As the folklore product has a dual existence, at the surface structure but especially at the deep structure, the mentality process that generated the "story" needs understanding. Thus, a field of interrogations is opened: How does a legend come into being? Who tells it? Whom does he tell to? Why does he tell it? What content does a legend transmit? The answers hint at the text-producing devices, performer and

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receiver positions, those functions accomplished within the circulation area, those instruments used to modify reality etc.

The majority of those researches which deal with the literary folklore domain are accused that focus on the lexical problems and ignore the grammar. Here we project a *grammatical* system that may answer the main problems of the present research in a more concentrated form. The system relies on three components:

A) object (**legend**);
B) category (**legendary**);
C) process (**legendarization**).

A.1. Legend – mental object has the function of investigating the real data by adhesion/ rejection/ exploring. First of all, a legend is a connoting device applied to reality. As "a kaleidoscopically experiencer of the universe" a legend cuts the reality into unprecedented and non-common facts which require not only an explanation but also a significance. A legend appears as an elaborated product of a mentality governed by oppositions, analogies, inversions, code switches, proposing answers at the question "why?".

A legend is an opinion vector which translates an attitude, an ideology and designs the image of a social group. Nicolae Panea from the University of Craiova has written about a certain community need of finding an illustrious origin *which makes the uncertain beginning opaque and renders the future existence certain* (PANEA, 1995: 67). The same principles are applied to the royal families; nowadays, this device is reactivated by those inheritance hunters who claim to descend from a "legendary" ancestor. Here we include that need of the society to discover/invent local heroes in order to make them their ancestors or contemporaries: substance transfer, authority achievement, legitimacy in front of the others.

The foundation of a legend consists in a thought which explores the Universe and tries to find its "secrets"; it originates in folk curiosity which exhaustively explores that space related to the daily routine of traditional people. Legend is a cultural response to an existential stimulus or an expected answer to an unexpected phenomenon. Nothing from what exists justifies by itself, but it is a consequence of a gesture from a more or less remote past (legend as a genetic justifier). Almost everything that relates to people life is liable to become a subject of a legend (thus the vast thematic sphere of legend is explained): geographical forms, rivers, roads, animals, plants, atmosphere phenomena; saints who are the patrons of certain days; spirits from the superstition and beliefs sphere; historical personalities who represent Good in a heroic form etc.

Legend relies on a meta-logical causality, *viable* from the point of view of traditional thought, *fictional* from the rationality point of view. Legends form a mentality system which offers a coherent vision of Universe, regarded in its components and as a whole, a vision that comes out of some contextual "constraints" (social, religious, ideological).

A.2. Legend – text (aesthetic object) can be defined as a discursive projection of folk mentality, which proposes an explanation of a particular aspect belonging to biosphere; which offers a recommendation such as prescription or interdiction regulating the relation between human and essence of things; which imposes a behavior pattern – heroic or ascetic – that worth following. Etiology, the most powerful subclass of legend, represent a type of prose folk epic, with reduced dimensions (often with only one episode), functioning as a genetic explanation for the forms of referential universe, on the ground of a causality which is acceptable in the mentality code of the considered community.

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A legend is a "one piece" text, which consists in prologue, fable and epilogue in a restrained narrative space (the fairy tale-legends are an exception). The fluctuation of narrative amplitude is easily noticed related to the mythological legend sphere, where a belief or a superstition can be lexicalized by different types of sentences, from the concise assertive sentence to the legend-sentence; between them there is a variety of intermediate forms.

The narrator is a mediator between the factual reality (the events frame) and discourse (reality schematically-rendered in a certain approach). The performer *does not reproduce the memory of an event mechanically, but looks for its significance, its genetic cause and clarifies it ethically* (PAPADIMA, 1968: 433). The legend teller does not preserve his discursive personality; he ranges into the pattern in an inertial way, speaking extempore about the same epic scenario and reconfirming the dynamic of the relation between the constant coordinates (invariants) and the variable data. The legendary story aims to strengthen the norms and values system in a social group and functions as a guide of normal usage. The typical formula of legend makes the sentence impersonal and sets it down to a collective authority. Besides, by relating to the context, a legend does not turn into a simple reflection of reality, but into a "circumstantial' reality organizing.

Even if the separate aesthetic character of legend has sometimes been denied, as it was said to have got elements from other types in the neighborhood, legend gets individuality by a series of features: *it uses an artistic procedure really specific – the one of "why, building its structure as a demonstration* (OPRISAN, 2006: 65). The aesthetic identity of legend is argued for, using solid arguments, in „Poetica legendei" [v. ANGELESCU, 1983; ANGELESCU, 2002]. *Anulându-şi funcţia fundamental explicativă, dar menţinându-şi nealterate resorturile sociale şi etice, legenda se încăpăţânează să mai reziste prin virtuţile literar-artistice, prin puritatea gândului rostit frumos, prin forţa imaginaţiei* [ŞEULEANU, 1982: 17].

The existence of a poetic code of the species is confirmed by the "specializing" of some initial phrases. Their double role, as categorical marks and component parts of a separate poetic lexicon also validates the type of relation between sentence and performer. *Poezia legendelor mai mult se citeşte printre rânduri, fiind subordonată total intenţiei etiologice care, în chip paradoxal, nu o estompează, ci dimpotrivă, o reliefează cu mai multă putere, constituind într-un fel tocmai soclul ei expresiv* [BÎRLEA, 1981: 62].

A.3. Legend-sign (social product)

The symbolic structure of Romanian popular legend, which has been also pointed out by Ovidiu Papadima ranges legend into an ample semiotic perspective. Considered this way, legend transmits significance (semantic dimension), interacts with other cultural signs (syntactic dimension) and establishes a certain relation with the beneficiary (pragmatic dimension).

Legends-signs may be considered the texts that accompany the photos, but also the orientation marks on maps, designs, diagrams which make legend get the explanatory function. The iconic signs such as promotion labels for certain goods are endowed with legendary content, but their decoding requires both the visual language and the linguistic code.

A.4. Legend-witness (documentary product)

If we try to discover the "historical roots" of the popular legend in a proppian manner we should not use the historian's tools. The remains preserved by the memory of folklore text can not reconstitute a history in its data; they rather explain iterative

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phenomena, which generalize by frequency and establish a model or, on the contrary, tell about uncommon, extra-ordinary events, which hit the expectation horizon of the community and raised echoes in the following generations.

In a historical approach, a legend is an untrustworthy witness; as for the cultural anthropology, it has a doubtless documentary value. As Gilbert Durand asserted, the remains are not a "vulgar memory", but "an epiphany imagination".

B. Legendary

The term "legendary" has been used with different meanings: *legendary*, adj. coming from the French *légendaire*, "of legend, which configures a legend"; "which become a legend due to certain qualities, exceptional deeds; famous, extraordinary" (DEX). At a different level of interpreting, the adjective *legendary* means *ce qui n'est pas vrai au sens de l'Histoire* [JOLLES, 1972: 55]. Continuing the dichotomy proposed by Aristotel for the relation history – poetry (history refers to facts which really happened, poetry refers to facts which might have happened), we use *legendary* in order to focus the hypothetical character of the „(hi)story" present in the folklore discourse. For the man in the traditional societies we may speak about the existence of a "legendary realism", which is fundamental for a history of reality representations approached by mentality structures dynamics.

Within the limits of the system that has been proposed, three semantic and functional values of the concept may be distinguished: 1) *legendary* as an attribute of phenomena, events, characters which mark the "qualitative" transgression of normality, natural; 2) *legendary* (along with fantastic, fabulous, miraculous) represents a mentality and aesthetic category which marks different degrees of intensity for super-reality; 3) *legendary* – domain/class (in the same series with fairy tales and ballads) which gathers discursive forms and at their level we can recognize the particularities of plot/ character/ atmosphere. Vasile Adăscăliței pointed out the existence of the legendary category in different areas of folklore epic: *Dispersat în nenumărate forme posibile, legendarul apare şi ca mod de tratare a realității, putând fi distins în cele mai neaşteptate situații, ataşat speciilor care au caractere total deosebite* [ADĂSCĂLIȚEI, 1966: XVI].

The individualization of some legendary manners becomes legitimate and there are different approaches: time approach (historical legend), space approach (toponymic legend), sacredness approach (hagiographic legend and partially mythological legend). Legend subcategories movement to legendary may be interesting if there are considered several ordering criteria which worth selecting. Thus, four dimensions of folklore legendary might be noticed:

1. explanatory – generates etiologic legendary (metamorphosis as a genetic justification);
2. normative – generates mythological legendary (function relying on the binomial reward/punishment);
3. miraculous – generates hagiographic legendary (phenomena of hierophany and cratophany);
4. heroic – generates historic legendary (the existence of a real cult of heroes by which the community assumes an exemplary origin).

C. Legendarizing – a *process* "of mediation" in space and time which takes over the historic, events component and enlarges it with fictional elements. The legendarizing phenomenon may be noticed especially where the chronological distance between the genetic context and text does not exceed the capacity/store term of popular memory; this may be considered as an extra argument for the opinion that it is not necessarily

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forgetting that leads to truth-etymon "hypertrophy", but the need to control or/and explain the deviation from the every day's routine, to argue the present particularities by linking them to a "legendary" past.

This phenomenon of *legendary* information dissemination is accomplished by amplifying the data which constitute the referential frame; there is a fictional addition to the initial dimension that implies a transfer from informative to formative, at the level of ideas, by selecting some elements with symbolic relevance, able to become models, topoi. Legendarizing involves diminishing the "historic" concentration of message and increasing its fictional character, by re-constructing a discursive universe which does not hurts the fact reality, but makes it sensible. The content which is transmitted is felt as significant by the respective community and the transgression of reality is achieved not only by neglecting the chronology of the events or by the exceeding of *memorable* facts attributed to a character. Legendarizing seems rather a mentality return than an intentional act of historicity sublimation by poetry; as a surface discursive manifestation, legend represents the effect of an ethno-psychological predisposition by which man chooses, organizes and reaches the essence of the universe complexity. By relating to this *world*, man begins his great dialogue with nature and his fellows – a transitive, but especially a reflexive dialogue – which triggers the creation of cultural products by which he legitimates his place and role and establishes his position related to the other elements.

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