ELEMENTS OF THE IMAGINARY IN THE ROMANIAN FOLK TALES

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***Abstract*:** *The present work aims at identifying the elements of the imaginary in the Romanian folk tales, in order to determine the fundamental reasons specific to this species. The imaginary register is diverse and appeals to characters, objects, time and space. These are perceived as a whole and lead to the creation of a mythical universe, thus outlining a perspective specific to the Romanian spirit.*

Keywords: *mythical character, space, mythical.*

The folk tale, "popular prose poetry" (Chiţimia 1971: 198) draws the attention of many researchers, who in their endeavour to elucidate the concept, find interesting and relevant definitions. In the chapter *Steps to a pragmatic literary text*, Mihai Coman, after explaining several definitions of the folk tale, concludes "all these formula show that the defining elements of the folk tale are: escape into the myth, hero fighting with supernatural beings, fantastic time and setting, consecrated trials, the presence of the helping beings, predictable victory of the good representative (in terms of content), length of the story, its multiple scene character (in terms of form), listeners' adherence to the story told which is considered untrue, but plausible (in terms of social attitude), and the function of contentment, relaxation caused by its renaissance and transmission"(Coman, 1985: 99) - our translation.

Keeping the same register of communication, it can be noticed that the folk tale conceals its own universe perceived from a mythical perspective. It turned out that this universe "has the local colour of the man linked geographically and historically to a particular climate and a certain social status. In fact, it is the man who has the magical universe in his hand "(Chiţimia 1971: 199) – our translation.

It has been stressed that "what characterizes the folk tale as a work of art is a very special world, conceived within the coordinates of a mythical universe, opposite to reality, in which man's will has no limits, and opposites do not remain unsolved "(Pop, Ruxăndoiu 1976: 263). Thus, it appears that the folk tale is based on reality, but comes off it, going into the surreal where it imagines a world of human desires, actually a transposition into this world by means of fantasy.

It is a world opposed to everyday reality not by characters and events (which may be plausible), but by its inner atmosphere, and essence. The fundamental elements of this world have existed in primitive cultures, but have acquired a new finely structured and organized feature in the folk tale.

The triple rhythm is characteristic to the folk tale; three characters usually appear on stage, but only the third is the one who succeeds; the action (trial) is repeated three times when successful. Thus, the rhythm shows that the folk tale belongs to the archaic belief and highlights the mechanical springs of action, which also refer to a mythical primary vision.

The world of the folk tales is slightly varied in relation to the multitude of variants. Characters can be reduced to a few prototypes with diverse onomatology, but

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few changed details. According to the universal background of the folk tales, the specific values of each people are prominently replaced both through assimilation of compositional patterns, code elements and original creation. The protagonists of the Romanian folk tale are mostly universal: the younger brother, the son of the king or the son of a poor man, good and bad kings, the treacherous character, dragons - are creatures to be found in the folk tales of all peoples. Moving, with universal topics, from one country to another, they acquire specific appearance and name.

The Romanian folk tale prefers certain characters that define its ethical ideal and spiritual horizon. The typical hero is Făt-Frumos, universal as narrative function, but local through the semantics of his name and resonance of the old rural tradition. He is the *handsome lad*, a proper name in the folk tale.

Vernacularity of the hero is deepened by varying onomatology associating proper with common names, archaic terms with marks of ordinary language (*Prâslea cel voinic*…).

The opposition is most often the dragon and his maternal family dominated by the authoritarian she-dragon; the griffin is rare in the Romanian folk tale. The dragons present in the Romanian mythology, beyond the artistic convention of the folk tale, give the narrator broader possibilities to customize the message, to mark the contrast between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, clever and stupid. The matriarchal society organization of dragons and supreme authority of the she-dragon have also offered ironic reflections on the relations between men and women in the oral narrative tradition.

In the center of the folk tale is the young man, known as Făt-Frumos, and Ileana Cosânzeana. Often, the main characters bear different names (Petru Cenușă, Drăgan Cenuşă, Pipăruş, Prâslea…).. A lot of folk tales give up the classical idea, distinguishing the hero by name, calling him the brave, the boy, the son of the emperor, which emphasizes the lack of concern to sketch proper types. The main heroine is known as Ileana Cosânzeana (Ileana Sâmziana) or otherwise (Lina Rujulina, Floarea Florilor, Frumoasa Lumii, Mândra Lumii, Crăiasa Zânelor).

First, she embodies the ideal female beauty above all imagination, and therefore, it is difficult to reach her.

The hero's opponents are supernatural beings (dragons, demons, griffins), or human beings, bad people. The folk tale does not bring types, but figures on the stage. Simplification comes just from a maximum typification in which reality is reduced to its ultimate features as represented in primitive drawing. Yet, the folk tale figures give consistency, becoming living beings, able to endure in the collective memory. The explanation must be sought in the contrast technique prevailing in the genre, so that "the folk tale may be defined briefly the poetry of the contrast "(Bîrlea, 1981:182). Almost every element corresponds to its opposite in a permanent antithetical dialogue.

Nuances are missing, whereas the popular creator is unable to prioritize them. This feature gives the folk tale the vivacity that delights and enchants auditors and makes it everlasting. Its sap always feeds the poetry of the folk tale, giving it a specific charm, a mixture of naivety and poetic innocence. Therefore, the folk tale remains forever young, as rediscovered by the refined scholar after a rich artistic experience.

Its feature is that the heroes are not only people, but also non-human beings, with their mysterious psychology and sociology that communicate with people, but are not people. Such unreal heroes - dragons, snakes, griffins, giants, other monsters, demons, fairies, fate, wicked fairies - are characters that embody weather symbols (Mama vântului, Vântul turbat…), saints bearing the names of the week days (Sfânta

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Miercuri, Sfânta Vineri, Sfânta Duminică), ghosts, biblical characters (God, St. Peter), mythical animals (Calul năzdrăvan, Zgripţuroaica, Vulturul Corbul, Cerbul…).

The hero of the folk tale, often called Făt-Frumos, commits certain deeds, meets hostile creatures (dragons), malicious or rival creatures (griffins); others are benevolent human allies by their decent and compassionate conduct. The hero alone can succeed nothing without the participation of others, from God and Sfânta Duminică to the humblest living creatures. A process that makes situations difficult or solves them is metamorphosis, the transformation of a being into another, or into a thing, as a result of a curse or by virtue of being a wonder-working.

When a hero cannot break the deadlock on natural or magical ways, he resorts to wonder-working objects (mace, sword, spear, apple, and saddlebag). Similar to the hero of the adventure novel, the hero of the folk tale is in an embarrassing situation: to defeat a huge enemy, to lose the enemy trail, to get off the ground or down into the sea.

The fantastic folk tale was established as a genre in a more advanced culture, assuming the values of primitive cultures as code elements that were able to survive in their new organization, because the folk tale has been and will remain a viable creation. Thus, it can be seen that this species has developed fundamental patterns and artistic language code ever since the genesis, which gained a high sensitivity. This explains the universality of gender in time and space, the vast typological similarity of cultural areas and the high degree of stereotyping.

The first aesthetic aspect of fantastic folk tales is the wholly particular world created within its borders, dominated by fantastic elements, but with real perspectives, a world made up of typical protagonists (humans and non-humans), based on its own time and space dimensions. The oscillation between the real and the fantastic gives the narrative a particular artistic status determined by its own causality. The action of the folk tale is initiated almost constantly in a real framework and claims for credible circumstances. The storytellers imagine this framework based on their surrounding natural and social environment. The fantastic projections arise during the development of the narrative, typically starting with the conflict, and cover the heroic adventure with variable intensities dictated by the logic of the narrative until the end of the conflict.

The universal status (anthropological) of this world involves preset elements of the primitive cultures that define its primary background, and elements developed during the further development of the folk tale, following the basic model, which became universal by cultural parallelism, interferences and cultural borrowing.

As an oral literary creation, the folk tale is performed by a code, an artistic convention that underlies the entire category. The elements of the code have pre-existed, either in the reality of the myth or the reality of life at various stages of social development.

The specific functions of the folk tale, their ability to signify an autonomous universe, organized by their own laws and with other dimensions than the real world, are given by their integration into a hierarchical structure, defining the aesthetic status of the category and its relation to other categories of oral literature.

As for the text of the Romanian folk tale, one may clearly indicate that the temporal and space dimension aims at the mythical land by varying original formula: "*a fost odată ca niciodată, că de n-ar fi nu s-ar mai povesti. De când făcea plopşorul pere şi răchita micşunele, de când se băteau urşii în coade...(Tinereţe fără bătrâneţe şi viaţă fără de moarte)*", which place the hero " in a non-representative historical time; this time is paradoxical... At the same time, the real - fantastic relation runs within

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coordinates that develop a non-representative hyperbolic space-time dimension." (Irimia, 1999: 147)

The text of the folk tale has figures whose role is to determine the time: *three, six, ten,* most often associated with the hero's initiatory journey: *de azi în trei zile plecăm, s-a dus, s-a dus trei zile şi trei nopţi...(Tinereţe fără bătrâneţe şi viaţă fără de moarte);* the fight between good and evil *se luptară zi de vară până seară (Prâslea cel voinic şi merele de aur);* the heroes' adventures: *în trei zile mă duc pe lumea cealaltă, rămase trei zile şi trei nopţi plângând la mormânt (Făt – Frumos cu părul de aur); să mă îngrijeşti cu mâna ta şase săptămâni (Tinereţe fără bătrâneţe şi viaţă fără de moarte).*

A detailed analysis of the text shows that the punishments of the heroes are also given according to the dimensions of a mythical time. Such a situation occurs in the folk tale *Prâslea cel voinic şi merele de aur* : "iară împăratul chemă îndată pe argintar şi-i porunci sa-i facă o cloşcă cu puii cu totul şi cu totul de aur, şi-i dete soroc de trei săptămâni, şi dacă nu i-o face, unde îi stau piciorele îi va sta şi capul."

Dawn is another component of the mythical time when Făt-Frumos, starts on his way: "a doua zi când se revărsau zorile, ei se pregăteau să treacă pădurea" (*Tinereţe fără bătrâneţe şi viaţă fără de moarte*). These images of the dawn present quite frequently in the texts develop a unique lyricism, specific to the folk creation.

Midnight is another temporal aspect, a time of uncertainties when sleep masters the whole universe: "se întoarse trist la tată – său şi-i spuse cum priveghease până la *miezul nopţii,* cum mai pe urmă îl apucase o piroteală de nu se mai putea ţine pe picioare;" ,,cam pe la *miezul nopţii,* simţi că-l atinge încetişor boarea zorilor care-l îmbătau cu mirosul lor cel plăcut"(*Prâslea cel voinic şi merele de aur*).

Midday is another frequently used time, full of mythological symbolism "iar pe la nămiezi, când venise slijutorii împăratului ca să-l cheme la palat, el se duse şi îi dete furca aceea care torcea singură."

The folk tale is a narrative of the absurd, an ancient poem. Absurd and utterly implausible situations are created as whopping lies, so that the storyteller to defeat the enemy who, in his turn, imagines similar situations.

Time is represented by the original forms that give a specific narrative tone to the folk tale. Here we capture the nonsense and absurdity of certain extravagant events.

The space dimension in the Romanian folk tale is a concept, even a symbol, with its own functions. We can talk about good spaces as (Green king's palace, The realm of Holy Friday, Wednesday, Sunday) and hostile spaces (kingdom of dragons, forest, places where mountains fight). The texts of the folk tales allow to identify space coordinates by reference to the indeterminate "mergând pe drum şi ajungând la un loc unde li se făcea calea în cruci..."*(Cei trei fraţi săraci).* Space aspects aim at the relation seen / unseen. The unseen place, the other realm is imaginary and acquires a certain substantiality in the Romanian folk tale. Such places are dwelled by supernatural beings that become the hero's allies during his confrontation with the evil.

Space interpretation is also related to the image of the chronotope in the Romanian folk tales. In the researchers' view, the chronotope is "an essential connection of temporal and spatial relationships, artistically valued in the literature "(Bahtin, 1982: 294). Therefore, the journey can be seen as a labyrinth through an exit search: the motif of the emperor without a successor, the motif of a miraculous birth. The journey allows the characters to transcend the mythical space in order to test their bravery. The deriving heroic character is marked by the initiatory journey. In this context, the journey is symbolic.

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From this perspective it should be emphasized that the folk tale has set up a new aesthetic vision of the world. In a time of decay for the myth, the storyteller understood that it opposed to the ideology and practice and he felt the need for a reinterpretation of a new perspective, while making categorical distinctions.

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