THE FATE OF THE GODS IN THE POETRY OF CHARLES LECONTE DE LISLE AND LUCIAN BLAGA

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Abstract

The present article, which uses the hermeneutical strategies promoted by Pierre Brunel's *mythocritique*, aims to investigate the Germanic eschatological myth of the "Fate of the Gods" in the poetry of Charles Leconte de Lisle and Lucian Blaga. After a historical-religious introduction on the "Fate of the Gods", the article outlines its peculiar symbolic constellation. Subsequently, the article turns the archetypical approach into the mythocritical application to poetic texts. The poem *La Légende des Nornes* (*The Legend of Norns*, 1862) by Leconte de Lisle is a case of *flexibilité* of the "Fate of the Gods" myth in a literary text: the French poet reproduces the mythologeme of great winter and combines the outcomes of the deluge and those of conflagration into the original image of a smoking ocean. The poems *Peisaj transcendent* (*Transcendental Landscape*, 1929), *Satul minunilor* (*The Village of Miracles*, 1938), and *Götterdämmerung*

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(*Twilight of the Gods*, 1970) by Blaga are instead a case of *irradiation* of the "Fate of the Gods" myth in a literary text: although never mentioning the Germanic eschatological event, the Romanian poet depicts its dying god and the world renewal that follows it.

Keywords: *comparative literature*; *mythocritique*; *archétypologie*; *eschatology*; *poetry*.

In *Mythes, rêves et mystères*, the Romanian historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, identified a close creative analogy between myth and poetry:

> "Poetic creation […] implies the abolition of time [...] and tends toward the recovery of the paradisiac, primordial situation; of the days when one could create spontaneously [...]. The poet discovers the world as though he were present at the cosmogonic moment [...]. From a certain point of view, we may say that every great poet is re-making the world, for he is trying to see it as if there were no Time, no History" (Eliade 1975: 36).

Hence, if the poetic act occurs and projects one beyond time, no individual, not even a modern one, will ever be free of the myth; after all, the essential aspects of mythical behaviour are "consubstantial with every human condition" (Eliade 1975: 32). The close communion of creative processes existing between myth and literature and, in particular, between myth and poetry, is the most deeply rooted reason for which myth is one of the keys of literature. This is the firmest thesis of the French comparatist Pierre Brunel who, in the latter half of the twentieth century, founded the *mythocritique*, an innovative « mode d'analyse littéraire », which distinguishes three phenomena: « l'émergence, la flexibilité et l'irradiation des mythes dans le texte » (Brunel 1992: 72). *Émergence* simply identifies the « occurrences mythiques dans le texte » (Brunel 1992: 72); *flexibilité* recognises « la souplesse d'adaptation et en même temps la résistance de l'élément mythique dans le texte littéraire » (Brunel 1992: 77); *irradiation* acknowledges that the presence of a myth in a text may be justified even « à partir du mot » (Brunel 1992: 83).

The hermeneutical strategies of identification of a myth within a literary text can be clarified and integrated, especially concerning the phenomenon of *irradiation*, by Gilbert Durand's notion of myth to which Brunel constantly refers. Myth is a "dynamic system of symbols, archetypes and schemata" (Durand 1999: 62); its equivalent "static organisation" is the "constellation of images" (Durand 1999: 63) – or, according to the Durandian formula "symbolic constellation", which designates "the semantic density which pervades the mythic story itself" (Durand 1999: 33). The presence of even a single component of the constellation in a literary text could reveal the evocation of the whole myth by the poet-creator.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the Germanic eschatological myth concerning the Fate of the Gods – handed down both in *Poetic Edda* and

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in *Prose Edda*, i.e. the most representative sources of Old Norse Literature[2] – and to illustrate its peculiar symbolic constellation in the work of two poets belonging to Nineteenth-century French Literature and to Twentieth-century Romanian Literature respectively: Charles Leconte de Lisle, in particular his long poem *La Légende des Nornes* (1862), and Lucian Blaga, in particular his brief poems *Peisaj transcendent* (*Transcendental Landscape*, 1929), *Satul minunilor* (*The Village of Miracles*, 1938), and *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*, 1970). Therefore, it proposes an original hermeneutical perspective that aims to combine a preliminary research of mythological literature with a detailed comparative literature study, following the mythocritical method. Although there are many studies focused on the background of Scandinavian mythology in Leconte de Lisle's work[3], and although several investigations show the remarkable role of mythic themes in Blaga's poetry[4], no scholar has ever actually outlined by the use of the mythocritical tools, a detailed and systematic research study considering these two poets together and tracing out the myth of the "Fate of the Gods" in the chosen compositions.

1. The Germanic Eschatological Myth

The event called Ragnarök in Old Norse mythology is known as "Twilight of the Gods" but should be literally translated "Fate of the Gods" (Turville-Petre 1964: 280). It is mainly narrated in the final part of the *Gylfaginning* (*The Deluding of Gylfi*), the first section of Snorri Sturluson's (1179-1241) *Prose Edda*, while many stanzas of the *Völuspá* (*The Seeress's Prophecy*) – the first poem of the *Poetic Edda* (compiled in the Thirteenth century) – narrates it more allusively.

The episode that comes before Ragnarök and represents its inexorable cause is the death of the god Baldr. In Old Norse *pantheon*, Baldr is portrayed as the best of the gods, both aesthetically and morally. He is fatally wounded by a mistletoe branch, which Hoðr – his blind brother, who, in his turn, is deceived by the wicked Loki – shoots at him:

> "[Baldr] fell to the ground dead. This misfortune was the worst that had been worked against the gods and men [...]. Odin suffered most from this misfortune. This was because

[2] Due to philological reasons, I will use "Germanic" and "Old Norse" interchangeably in this study. For further reading, refer to Puhvel 1987: 189-221.

[3] The main study on this topic is Fairlie 1947: 65 ff. See also Flottes 1929: 136-137; Vianey 1973: 112 ff.; Irving Brown 1924: 99 ff. Although Albouy (1969) and Boyer (1986) dealt with mythological elements in Leconte de Lisle's poetry, they did not examine in depth *La Légende des Nornes*.

[4] See, for instance, Gavrilă 2002: 140 ff.; Todoran 1981: 118 ff.

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> he understood most clearly how grievous was the loss, and that the death of Baldr was ruin for the Æsir" [*Gylfaginning*, section 49] (Sturluson 2005: 66)[5].

Great natural disasters occur after the death of Baldr[6], such as a winter lasting three years – the so-called Fimbulvetr, "Extreme Winter" (Sturluson 2005: 71) – the disappearance of the sun and the moon, the fall of stars, and several earthquakes. At the same time, social disorders violate family ties:

> "Brother will fight brother and be his slayer,
> brother and sister will violate the bond of kinship;
> hard it is in the world, there is much adultery,
> axe-age, sword-age, shields are cleft asunder,
> wind-age, wolf-age, before the world plunges headlong;
> no man will spare another" [*Völuspá*, stanza 45] (Larrington (ed.) 1996: 10).

Afterwards, the sea floods the earth and a number of individual struggles between gods and monsters take place: between the god Þórr and the serpent of Midgarðr, which both pay with their life; between the god Freyr and the giant Surtr, which the latter wins; between the hound Garmr and the god Tyr, in which both perish; between the wolf Fenrir and the god Óðinn, in which Óðinn is slain but is immediately avenged by his son Víðarr; and finally between the god Loki and the god Heimdallr, which brings death to both of them. Finally, the whole universe is burned by the fire giant Surtr – *de facto* the only one who survived the cosmic struggles. Hence, although begun with a huge flood, Ragnarök turns out to be a "Cosmic Fire myth" (Branston 1955: 292)[7].

The earth re-emerges from the same sea that pitilessly swallowed it after the "regression of the world into chaos" (Eliade 1975: 26), and the crops once more prosper without being sown. Some gods return to life: amongst them, there are Baldr himself and Hoðr, his brother and assassin:

> "Without sowing the fields will grow,
> all ills will be healed, Baldr will come back;
> Hod and Baldr, the gods of slaughter, will live happily together
> in the sage's palaces – do you understand yet, or what more?" [*Völuspá*, stanza 62] (Larrington (ed.) 1996: 12).

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5 For the whole episode, see Sturluson 2005: 65-69. Here one may detect the causal connection between the death of Baldr and the imminence of Ragnarök. As Byock comments: "Odin, who sees into the future, is apparently thinking of the coming of Ragnarok" (in Sturluson 2005: 146).

6 The chronological order of the events recounted in the last sections of the *Gylfaginning* – i.e. the death of Baldr, the imprisonment in chains underground of Loki, the entity responsible (see Sturluson 2005: 69-70), the death and the rebirth of the world – is highly relative (regarding this, see Branston 1955: 204-205; Lindow 2001: 40 ff.).

7 For the complete account of the "Fate of the Gods", see Sturluson 2005: 71-75.

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World rebirth is therefore marked by the reappearance and the reconciliation of Baldr and Hoðr[8], namely, the two divine brothers, whose conflict – which later tradition turned into an accidental fratricide[9] – symbolises the cosmic struggle between Light and Darkness[10], and more generally between opposite principles.

By investigating the Germanic eschatological myth through the prism of the structures of the imaginary, the present study reconstructs for the first time the symbolic constellation of Ragnarök. It consists of five fundamental mythologemes, each of which is grounded in a solid symbolic structure. The first mythologeme is the disappearance of the good god, which prefigures the end of cosmos. This motif belongs above all to the myths of the "fertility gods of the near east, whose deaths were followed by copious weeping" (Turville-Petre 1964: 120). In Old Norse myth, too, the death of Baldr is lamented by almost "all things in the world, alive or dead" (Sturluson 2005: 68), except for the giantess Þökk, who is actually the sinister Loki (see 68-69). Therefore, the death of the god is linked to the symbol of tears as a euphemisation of the rain, the "water which comes down from the sky" and "makes the Earth fecund" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 1086). This symbolism makes the myth of Baldr and Ragnarök a vegetation myth, whose protagonist violently dies and subsequently rises again – like the cosmos rent by the apocalyptic catastrophe and then reborn. The water element reappears later in the myth, both in its destructive manifestation – the deluge or flood of Ragnarök – and as "source of life" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 1081) and vehicle of cosmic regeneration ("the earth will shoot up from the sea, and it will be green and beautiful", Sturluson 2005: 77).

The second mythologeme is the Fimbulvetr, i.e. the terrible winter during which "the cold will be severe and the winds will be fierce" (Sturluson 2005: 77). The freezing and lashing winds, which sharpen the great winter's harshness, on the symbolic level often herald "the imminence of some important event or change about to take place" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 1112). In the case of Old Norse myth, they are the harbingers of the coming of Ragnarök.

The third mythologeme is the ritual contest. The hostility between the divine brothers Baldr, the bright one (see Sturluson 2005: 33), and Hoðr, the blind one (see 37), corresponds to the cosmic struggle between Light and Darkness – as mentioned above – or between Summer and Winter. This "contest between the representatives of the two seasons" (Eliade 1958: 319) triggers both the crimes between siblings which open Ragnarök and the long sequence of individual struggles, which culminates in Ragnarök itself. When the universe is reborn, the two brothers are reunited, restoring harmony.

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[8] See Dumézil 1986: 106; Lindow 1997: 166.
[9] See Detter 1894: 503; Kauffmann 1902: 54.
[10] On this topic, see Mogk 1911: 159.

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The fourth mythologeme is the roosters' song which announces the beginning of Ragnarök. It can be inferred from the *Völuspá* that three roosters crow at the end of times warning Óðinn's warriors that the final battle is about to begin. As Turville-Petre summarises, "the one is crowing in the gallows tree, or gallows wood, the second is awakening Óðinn's warriors in Valhöll, and the third, sooty-red, is crowing beneath the earth in the world of death" (Turville-Petre 1964: 280). In fact, in Old Norse tradition in particular the roosters perform the symbolic function of "soldierly vigilance" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 210).

The fifth mythologeme is two-pronged in that it includes destruction through water and destruction through fire as the beginning and the end of Germanic apocalyptic cataclysm. Ragnarök breaks out with a violent flood, which underlies the symbolism of the universal deluge:

> "Almost all the traditions of deluges are bound up with the idea of humanity returning to the water whence it had come, and the establishment of a new era [...]. They display a conception of the universe and its history as something « cyclic »: one era is abolished by disaster and a new one opens" (Eliade 1958: 210).

It is no coincidence that the universal regeneration that follows Ragnarök occurs under the sign of water: "breaking up all forms, doing away with all the past, water possesses this power of purifying, of regenerating, of giving new birth" (Eliade 1958: 194). If "in rites of initiation, of death and rebirth, Fire is associated with its chief rival Water" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 380), the Germanic apocalyptic myth integrates the two elemental principles by ending with a cosmic fire. However, the fire of Ragnarök, is endowed with both destructive symbolism and cleansing symbolism: the "apocalyptic conflagration [...] will not result in the complete disintegration of the cosmos" (Eliade 1958: 277).

The present study uses the symbolic constellation – that is to say the repertoire of "symbols, archetypes and schemata" (Durand 1999: 62) – which one may reconstruct from the Germanic eschatological myth, and which represents its deep structure and its supporting and unifying pillar. Due to its archetypical complexity, the myth of Ragnarök might offer an original and specific interpretation key to literary criticism, in order to cast a new hermeneutical light on the identification of Old Norse myth in Leconte de Lisle's work on the one hand, and to decipher the enigmatic images of Blaga's suggestive poetry, on the other.

2. Leconte de Lisle's *La Légende des Nornes*: a French Rewriting of the Eddic Matter

The symbological approach exposed above turns into a mythocritical application to a text of modern literature in the latter part of this study. I will examine the rewriting of the "Fate of the Gods" myth in *La Légende des Nornes*

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(*The Legend of Norns*) by the French Parnassian poet Charles Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894), from *Poèmes barbares* (*Barbarian Poems*, 1862) – a collection that Brunel himself defined « surchargé[e] de mythologie » (1992: 67). My purpose is to establish that Leconte de Lisle's *La Légende des Nornes* is to be classified as a case of *flexibilité* of the "Fate of the Gods" myth in a literary text, because it preserves some of the original mythical elements but it reformulates others of them.

In *La Légende des Nornes*, « le mythe est mis en valeur par l'auteur lui-même » (Brunel 1992: 82)[11], since Leconte de Lisle found refuge in his "barbaric dream" (Ampola 1962: 64) after the political disillusionment of 1848[12]. As Alison Fairlie already argued, Leconte de Lisle consciously drew on the *Völuspá*; secondly, his poem is founded on "supplementary explanations furnished by the *Gylfaginning*" (Fairlie 1947: 76), so that he "draws from a mass of curious and complicated mythology a coherent artistic poem" (Fairlie 1947: 80)[13]. A first clue of the *flexibilité* of the "Fate of the Gods" myth in *La Légende des Nornes* is that he replaces the single prophetess of the Eddic poem with the three Norns:

> "The original *Völuspá* was the fragmentary prophecy of a Northern priestess: instead of leaving this poem as one long and slightly monotonous monologue, Leconte de Lisle has attributed it to the three Norns, who were mentioned in passing in the original, and whose names were explained as meaning Past, Present and Future" (Fairlie 1947: 87).

In Old Norse mythology, the names of the three Norns are Urð ("Fated"), Verðandi ("Becoming"), and Skuld ("Must-be")[14] – which Leconte de Lisle adopts in their French form ("Urda", "Verdandi", and "Skuld"). They dwell in the well at the roots of the life tree Yggdrasill, and their task is to shape the human fate:

> "I know that an ash-tree stands called Yggdrasill,
> a high tree, soaked with shining loam;
> from there come the dews which fall in the valley,
> ever green, it stands over the well of fate.
>
> From there come three girls, knowing a great deal,
> from the lake which stands under the tree;
> Fated one is called, Becoming another –

[11] Leconte de Lisle deliberately uses the term *légende* (*legend*). It denotes a literary genre that differs from myth (see Jolles [1930] 2017); nevertheless it fits his poem's gloomy atmosphere since it is often "oriented to perdition and death" (Ténèze 1970: 48). For a terminological discussion, see Gibert 1974.

[12] On Leconte de Lisle's ultimate disillusionment, consult Marinoni-Carroll 1913: 423-424; Estève 1920: 155-158; Denommé 1973: 20-28; Ferrari 1998a: 9.

[13] For further reading on the sources in French translation that Leconte de Lisle probably consulted, refer to Vianey 1973.

[14] On the relation between the arrival of the Norns and the actual beginning of Time in Old Norse mythology, refer to Koch 1997: 192-193.

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> they carved on wooden slips – Must-be the third;
> they set down laws, they chose lives,
> for the sons of men the fates of men" [*Völuspá*, stanzas 19-20] (Larrington (ed.) 1996: 6).

The division of Leconte de Lisle's poem into three parts is due to his selection of the three Norns as the main characters. In the epigraph opening *La Légende des Nornes*, the French poet employs an almost theatrical procedure[15] and introduces the reader to the three prodigious women by specifying their unique location in Old Norse cosmology: « Elles sont assises sur les racines du frêne Yggdrasill » (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 41). Leconte de Lisle does not mention the "well of fate" ("Urðarbrunnr", s. 19) to be found in the *Völuspá*, yet he tells us that the three female protagonists sit at the roots of the Old Norse tree of life Yggdrasill, i.e. where the water of Urðarbrunnr pours; this unequivocally testifies that the *Völuspá* is the main source of *La Légende des Nornes*. In their entirety, the three sections narrate the origins, the development and the final doom of the world; the narration of each poem section is assigned to a Norn, while one all-knowing seeress fulfilled this task in the *Völuspá*:

> « Ce sont ces trois Nornes que Leconte de Lisle a prises comme héroïnes. Chacune d'elles ignorant ce que savent les deux autres, Urda conte les origines du monde, Verdandi le règne des dieux, Skulda la fin du monde [...]. Par cette si ingénieuse et si poétique conception, *La Légende des Nornes* se trouve être, comme la *Völuspá*, un chant prophétique » (Vianey 1973: 140-141).

To identify the Fimbulvetr mythologeme in the Nordic scenery portrayed by the French poet constitutes a fundamental key to the understanding of the temporality of *La Légende des Nornes*. Although Leconte de Lisle never names the Fimbulvetr, both the first and the second section of the poem, in which Urda and Verdandi speak respectively, open with the fall of snow – the same snow that swirls during the Old Norse never-ending winter[16]:

> "First will come the winter called Fimbulvetr [Extreme Winter]. Snow will drive in from all directions; the cold will be severe and the winds will be fierce. The sun will be of no use. Three of these winters will come, one after the other, with no summer in between. But before that there will have been another three winters with great battles taking place throughout the world" [*Gylfaginning*, section 51] (Sturluson 2005: 71).

In the very first lines of *La Légende des Nornes* snow slowly covers the earth with its flocks falling from the heights of dumb skies:

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[15] On this matter, consult Thomasseau 1984: 81.

[16] In his commentary to *La Légende des Nornes*, Ferrari mentions "three years of terrible battles and total upheaval" (1998b: 477), yet he does not name Fimbulvetr as a mythologeme.

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« La neige, par flots lourds, avec lenteur, inonde,
Du haut des cieux muets, la terre plate et ronde.
Tels, sur nos yeux sans flamme et sur nos fronts courbés,
Sans relâche, mes sœurs, les siècles sont tombés,
Dès l'heure où le premier jaillissement des âges
D'une écume glacée a lavé nos visages » [ll. 1-6] (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 41).

The first Norn, Urda, who will reveal her identity and her ontological bond with the Past in the closing couplet of the poem's first section (« Je suis la vieille Urda, l'éternel Souvenir; / Mais le présent m'échappe autant que l'avenir », ll. 71-72; Leconte de Lisle 1977: 43), compares a huge snowfall with the inexorable passing of time, and the winter with the decrepitude of cosmos: "The alternation of the seasons punctuate the rhythm of life and the stages in the cycle of development – birth, growth, maturity and decline. This is a cycle applicable to human beings as well as to their societies and civilizations" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 840-841).

The second Norn, Verdandi, directly addresses snow in the *incipit* of the second section of the poem but her attitude is very different from her sister's. She incites snow to fall, as well as invokes the mist and the wind, i.e. the other atmospheric agents of Fimbulvetr:

« Tombe, neige sans fin! Enveloppe d'un voile
Le rose éclair de l'aube et l'éclat de l'étoile!
Brouillards silencieux, ensevelissez-nous!
Ô vents glacés, par qui frissonnent nos genoux, [...]
Par delà ce silence où nous sommes assises,
Je me berce en esprit au vol joyeux des brises » [ll. 73-76, 81-82] (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 44).

Leconte de Lisle's snow is « sans fin » (l. 73)[17]: such a definition emphasizes and definitely proves his choice of the almost never-ending Fimbulvetr as setting for *La Légende des Nornes* – while "the prophetess who speaks in *Völuspá* is not described and the situation in which she gives her prophecy is never made clear" (Lönnroth 2002: 10). The snow that surrounds the Norns coincides – as Alexandre Embiricos affirms – with « le livide suaire du gel amassé » (Embiricos 1979: 155); yet the ice did not gather « depuis des éternités » (Embiricos 1979: 155) – i.e. from the beginnings of Time – as he erroneously states, but during the recent long years of Fimbulvetr.

The mist is to be considered within the framework of the Old Norse End of Times, since it is a "symbol of the indeterminate, of a phase in development [...] when old shapes are vanishing and have yet to be replaced by definite new shapes" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 661). The frozen wind, as shown above, is

[17] In a different thematic context, snow is described as eternal in another poem by Leconte de Lisle which is part of the collection *Poèmes barbares*: *La Tristesse du Diable* (*The Devil's Sadness*; « neiges éternelles », l. 3; Leconte de Lisle 1977: 283).

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a primary symbol of Ragnarök, since it is immediately preceded by a period of chaos, which Sturluson himself calls "wind-age" [*Völuspá*, s. 45]. Although the adjective "silent" is here associated with the mist, the absolute silence pervading the almost uterine landscape, which the verbal forms « enveloppe » (l. 73), « ensevelissez-nous » (l. 75), and « me berce » (l. 82) implicitly instill[18], belongs to the symbolic constellation of snow. As Durand argues, « le silence de la neige est tellement primordial qu'il lance immédiatement l'imagination [...] vers le cortège interstellaire des images cosmiques » (1996: 12): Verdandi's celestial inebriation seems to suggest such a *rêverie*.

The third Norn, Skulda, begins by regretting that she cannot lie, like her sisters, under a shroud of snow:

> « Que ne puis-je dormir sans réveil et sans rêve,
> Tandis que cette aurore éclatante se lève!
> Inaccessible et sourde aux voix de l'avenir,
> À vos côtés, mes sœurs, que je ne puis-je dormir,
> Spectres aux cheveux blancs, aux prunelles glacées,
> Sous le suaire épais des neiges amassées! » [ll. 133-138] (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 46)[19].

Such a verse proves that the huge snowfall is over and that Ragnarök is about to break out. As a matter of fact, the third Norn foretells many tragic events, such as the « cris de mort mêlés à de divins sanglots » (l. 164) of the relatives slaying each other and the cosmic duels between gods and monsters, which the French poet calls « épreuves sacrées » (l. 166).

Leconte de Lisle specifically mentions Baldr in *La Légende des Nornes* and he assigns to Verdandi, the Norn of the present, the joyful exclamations for the birth instead of the death of the god:

> « Balder est né! Je vois, à ses pieds innocents,
> Les Alfes lumineux faire onduler l'encens.
> Toute chose a doué de splendeur et de grâce
> Le plus beau, le meilleur d'une immortelle race:
> L'aube a de ses clartés tressé ses cheveux blonds,
> L'azur céleste rit à travers ses cils longs, [...]
> Et les Dieux, à l'envi, déjà l'ont revêtu
> D'amour et d'équité, de force et de vertu,
> Afin que, grandissant et triomphant en elle,
> Il soit le bouclier de leur œuvre éternelle! » [ll. 115-120, 123-126] (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 45).

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[18] On the constellation of images of intimacy linked to the womb archetype, see, for instance, Bachelard 2011: 134 ff.; Durand 1999: 228 ff.

[19] Snow is compared to a shroud in two other poems by Leconte de Lisle, which are part of the collection *Poèmes barbares*: *Le Vent froid de la nuit* (*The Night's Cool Wind*; « suaire », l. 4; Leconte de Lisle 1977: 244) and *La Dernière Vision* (*The Last Vision*; « linceul », l. 3; Leconte de Lisle 1977: 246) – indeed, here it is directly presented as a shroud by means of a metaphor.

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The French poet praises Baldr in a way that is similar to that of Snorri Sturluson:

> "Odin's second son is Baldr, and there is much good to tell about him. He is the best, and all praise him. He is so beautiful and so bright that light shines from him. One plant is so white that it is likened to Baldr's brow. It is the whitest of all plants, and from this you can judge the beauty of both his hair and his body. He is the wisest of the gods. He is also the most beautifully spoken and the most merciful" [*Gylfaginning*, section 22] (Sturluson 2005: 33).

For Leconte de Lisle, too, Baldr (« Balder », l. 115) is the most beautiful and the best of the gods, and emanates light. Nevertheless, the episode of the birth of Baldr is unknown in Old Norse sources. Hence, it was fully conceived by the French poet: this is a new evidence of the *flexibilité* of Germanic myth in the poem. Yet later in *La Légende des Nornes* Leconte de Lisle gets back in touch with his sources when he assigns words of distress to Skulda, the Norn of the future, because he that is born will be he whom the universe will soak with tears:

> « Oui! le Meilleur est né, plein de grâce et de charmes,
> Celui que l'univers baignera de ses larmes,
> Qui, de sa propre flamme aussitôt consumé,
> Doit vivre par l'amour et mourir d'être aimé! [...]
> Hélas! rien d'éternel ne fleurit sous les cieux,
> Il n'est rien d'immuable où palpite la vie! [...]
> Pleurez, lamentez-vous, Nornes désespérées! [...]
> [Il est venu] Le siècle d'épouvante où le Juste mourra » [ll. 141-144, 148-149, 165, 168] (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 46-47).

Amongst Skulda's visions, one in particular strikes the critic's attention, i.e. the awakening of the race of Chaos, which « comme un autre déluge, hélas! plus implacable, / Se rue au jour [...] » (ll. 174-175; Leconte de Lisle 1977: 47). In this comparison, Leconte de Lisle reproduces a mythologeme of Ragnarök, that is to say the flood that makes the cosmos return to the embryonal state through water. Leconte de Lisle defines it « un autre déluge » (l. 174) because a deluge also takes place in Old Norse cosmogony, namely, the dismemberment of the giant Ymir[20], which flooded the newborn world:

> "[Bor's sons] took Ymir and they moved him into the middle of Ginnungagap and made from him the world. From his blood they made the sea and the lakes [...]. With the blood

[20] Leconte de Lisle names later this primordial giant simply mentioning « la race effrayante d'Ymer » at line 175 (1977: 88). Therefore, his reference is rather indirect and there is no real allusion to Old Norse cosmogony. Yet, previous in the poem – more precisely at line 88, when Verdandi remembers the Old Norse Beginnings – one may easily detect an allusion to Ymir's sacrifice in the syntagm « déluge sanglant" (84). On this theme, see also Fairlie 1947: 91; Vianey 1973: 134.

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> that gushed freely from the wounds, they made the sea, and by fashioning that sea around, they belted and fastened the earth. Most men would think it impossible to cross over this water" [*Gylfaginning*, section 8] (Sturluson 2005: 16).

The two Old Norse deluges, which open and close the cosmic cycle respectively, are archetypically complementary since they symbolise the double role of water, both creative and destructive. Water is "a substance that we see everywhere springing up and increasing" (Bachelard 1983: 14), as it does gushing from Ymir's body. Moreover, one may note that in this cosmogonic scene "the water symbol contains that of blood" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 1086), so that the two main vital liquids are unified in an eloquent image and convey the creation of the world.

Leconte de Lisle finally alludes to Ragnarök's universal conflagration since the third Norn predicts that Asgard will be reduced to « une ardente ruine » (l. 177; Leconte de Lisle 1977: 47). As told above, the Norse universe was set on fire by the black giant Surtr. In *La Légende des Nornes*, the French poet does not describe Surtr's role explicitly, as Fairlie noted as well (see 1947: 81). Before depicting the scene of Asgard devastation, he simply announces that « le noir Surtur s'éveille » (l. 170). Without a profound knowledge of his mythic sources, it would be impossible to relate these two images[21]. Leconte de Lisle does not forget that the conflagration is added to the cosmic flood, so much so that he depicts the original and sublime apocalyptical image of a steaming ocean:

> « Et dans l'océan noir, silencieux, fumant,
> La Terre avec horreur s'enfonce pesamment!
> Voilà ce que j'ai vu par delà les années,
> Moi, Skulda, dont la main grave les destinées;
> Et ma parole est vraie! Et maintenant, ô Jours,
> Allez, accomplissez votre rapide cours! » [ll. 183-188] (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 47-48).

In *La Légende des Nornes* closing lines, the ocean hit by Germanic Apocalypse is black – not because black "evokes vast abysses and ocean depths" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 95) which contain "the treasury of hidden life" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1996: 93), as because this chromaticism is the result of fire acting, which makes the matter – and, in poetic imagination, even its opposite, water – darker than it was[22].

[21] For a discussion on the lack of world palingenesis theme – which is instead fundamental in Old Norse sources – in *La Légende des Nornes*, see Fairlie 1947: 82 ff.; see also Ferrari 1998b: 477.

[22] On the etymological relation between "black" and "burned", see Partridge 1966: 48.

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3. The Apocalyptic Imagery of Lucian Blaga

By extending the field of mythocritical application to Twentieth-century European Literature, it is possible to analyze the process of *irradiation* of the "Fate of the Gods" myth in *Peisaj transcendent* (*Transcendental Landscape*) and in *Satul minunilor* (*The Village of Miracles*) by the Romanian poet Lucian Blaga (1895-1961) – which are part of the collections *Lauda somnului* (*In Praise of Sleep*, 1929) and *La curţile dorului* (*At the Courtyards of Longing*, 1938) respectively, and also in *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*), composed in about 1946-1951 and published posthumously in 1970 as part of the poetic cycle *Vârsta de fier* (*The Age of Iron*).

Blaga is "among the great European creators" (Ciopraga 1981: 273)[23] who, "having discovered the great potentialities of primitive culture for organically representing the world, [...] creates myths as prolongations of the former" (Ciopraga 1981: 261). Most of his poems – which are modern in form but archaic in content, since imbued with a folkloric aura[24] – represent the case of literary texts in which myth irradiates « dans la mémoire et dans l'imagination d'un écrivain qui n'a même pas besoin de le rendre explicite » (Brunel 1992: 84). In the three poems here chosen, « le mythe n'est pas véritablement émergeant » (Brunel 1992: 83); hence, an actual « irradiation souterraine » (Brunel 1992: 83) of the "Fate of the Gods" myth takes place.

Even without mentioning the Germanic eschatological myth, Blaga projects the imaginary of Ragnarök in *Peisaj transcendent* and in its apocalyptic visions:

> „Cocoşi apocaliptici tot strigă,
> tot strigă din sate româneşti.
> Fântânile nopţii
> deschid ochii şi-ascultă
> întunecatele veşti" [ll. 1-5] (Blaga 2012: 137).

The apocalyptic roosters which open *Peisaj transcendent* remind one of the three roosters announcing the end of the world and the final struggle between the gods and their enemies in Germanic myth:

> "He sat on the mound and plucked his harp,
> the herdsman of the giantess, cheerful Eggther;
> a rooster crowed in Gallows-wood,
> that bright-red cockerel who is called Fialar.
>
> Golden-comb crowed for the Æsir,
> he wakens the warriors at the Father of Hosts';

[23] In this regard, see also Gană 1976: 229 ff.

[24] For further reading on Blaga's poetics and metapoetics, see, for instance, Braga 2013: 164 ff.; Jones 2006: 25 ff.; Teodorescu 1983: 33 ff.

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and another crows down below the earth,
a sooty-red cock in the halls of Hel" [*Völuspá*, stanzas 42-43] (Larrington (ed.) 1996: 9).

The rooster called "Golden-comb" sparks particular interest: it summons the warriors of Valhöll, so that they prepare themselves for the eschatological battle of Ragnarök against Loki, the giants, and the forces of Chaos. Although the Old Norse rooster crows at the beginning of Ragnarök, it preserves the role of « oiseau solaire par excellence » (Krappe 1952: 84) usually attributed to the rooster on a symbolic level: its emblematic name – due to its chromaticism – testifies it. Since a cosmic renewal follows the end of Times, one may conclude that both the Old Norse rooster and Blaga's roosters are – apart from an apocalyptic characterisation – « symbole[s] de l'éternité et de la resurrection » (Arnould de Grémilly 1958: 77).

The bleeding god of *Peisaj transcendent* can be archetypically identified with the dying god Baldr who suffers during his death from which comes the end of the world but he is re-invented as Christian since he is called "Jesus" by the Romanian poet:

„Pe mal – cu tămâie în păr
Isus sângerează lăuntric
din cele şapte cuvinte
de pe cruce" [ll. 8-11] (Blaga 2012: 137).

After all, comparative religion studies have shown the analogies existing between Baldr and Christ, as well as between the Germanic "Fate of the Gods" and the Christian Apocalypse: "like Christ, Baldr died, and like Christ he will return at the end of the world" (Turville-Petre 1964: 120)[25]. Nevertheless, *Peisaj transcendent*'s "Jesus" overflows with a blood that does not fall from his body and does not spread around him. Rather, it expands "inwardly" („lăuntric", l. 9), almost as if his wound coincided with the wound inflicted on the cosmos of which he is the lord and which is devastated by the apocalyptic cataclysm.

The fatal synchronicity between the wound of the god and the wound of the world is to be detected within *Satul minunilor* too. While an unknown "sickness" lurks in the pure water of wells, the whole village is pervaded by the scent of a mysterious god, perhaps decomposed and dissolved in the air:

„Lângă fântânile darului harului
pâlpâie boalele, ţipă lăstunii.
Plin este satul de-aromele zeului" [ll. 5-7] (Blaga 2012: 201).

[25] For further reading on this topic, see Dumézil 1973: 61-65; Lindow 2002: 155-169; Samplonius 2013: 137.

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While in *Peisaj transcendent* the roosters crow in "Romanian villages" („sate româneşti" l. 2) because of the forthcoming apocalypse – which, at any rate, according to the Germanic interpretation of the poem, will be followed by cosmic renewal – in *Satul minunilor*:

> „Cocoşi dunăreni îşi vestesc de pe garduri
> dumineca lungă şi fără de seară" [ll. 11-12] (Blaga 2012: 201).

Here, the rooster that Blaga depicts is the authentic "bird of dawn" (Durand 1999: 124), which announces the coming day – that is to say, the triumphal return of light after nocturnal darkness. This holy day – a "long Sunday" („dumineca lungă" l. 12) – will not have any evening: the world in *Satul minunilor* is therefore not simply reborn but eternal, since it transcends any cosmic conception ruled by cyclical time[26].

The act that proceeds – and completes – the events of *Satul minunilor* may be identified in *Götterdämmerung*, in which the Germanic theme is explicit since its title is the Wagnerian version of the name "Ragnarök", which thematizes the advance of the world towards the cosmic Night:

> „Se curmă ziua, vine seară.
> Un fluviu purtător a toate
> duce plute, vârste mute,
> către cele nevăzute
> 'n marea noapte" [ll. 8-12] (Blaga 2012: 345).

Again, in the image of the waters of oblivion – this time, manifesting in the form of a rapid river carrying the bygone times to "the great night" („marea noapte", l. 12), i.e. to the "Chaos before the creation" (Eliade 1975: 223) – one can recognize the flood of Ragnarök on the mythological level, and the periodical "re-engulfing of all things by water" (Eliade 1958: 211) on the archetypical level. *Götterdämmerung* and *Satul minunilor* thus recreate "the myth of the periodic destruction and re-creation of worlds, the cosmological formula of the myth of the eternal return" (Eliade 1975: 243) – the same that underlies the procession of apocalyptical images of *Peisaj transcendent*, with which they share part of their symbolic repertoire. The signal of cosmic rebirth closing *Peisaj transcendent* is the earth that burns as if it were a rough expanse of sea:

> „Arde cu păreri de valuri
> pământul îmbrăcat în grâu" [ll. 17-18] (Blaga 2012: 137).

In this ambivalent scene one can detect the double dynamics of world destruction typical of the "Fate of the Gods", materializing through the

[26] For further reading on this theme, see Vanhese 2010.

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elemental action of the symbolic pair water-fire. The destructive fire of Ragnarök turns into the fecund fire of the germinating earth, which flares up (see Solomon 2008: 72). Yet, at the same time, the earth is compared to a sea surface, reminding one of the earth that "will shoot up from the sea" (Sturluson 2005: 77) after Ragnarök. In this image one may identify, thus, the aquatic process on which the regeneration of the cosmos – and not only its destruction – structures itself in Old Norse myth: "water [...] regenerates because it nullifies the past, and restores [...] the integrity of the dawn of things" (Eliade 1958: 195).

The ending lines of *Peisaj transcendent* suggest a vegetal renewal as well. Indeed, Blaga's poetic I does not know („poate", l. 23) if the song he hears is raised by bells or by graves:

> „Clopote sau poate sicriile
> cântă subt iarbă cu miile" [ll. 23-24] (Blaga 2012: 137).

The archetypical comparison between seeds and the dead underlies his latter hypothesis: "Like seeds buried in the womb of the earth, the dead wait for their return to life in their new form" (Eliade 1958: 350). It is worth noting that Leconte de Lisle's poetic I in *Le Vent froid de la nuit* seems to thematise – in a similar setting – the opposite outcome of Blaga's *Peisaj transcendent*'s one:

> « J'entends gémir les morts sous les herbes froissés. […]
> Mais, ô songe! Les morts se taisent dans leur nuit.
> C'est le vent, c'est l'effort des chiens à leur pâture, […]
> La terre s'ouvre, un peu de chair y tombe;
> Et l'herbe de l'oubli, cachant bientôt la tombe,
> Sur tant de vanité croît éternellement » [ll. 9, 21, 30-32] (Leconte de Lisle 1977: 210-211).

He believes to hear the dead moaning – instead of singing – under the grass, but after a while he realizes that the wind emits that sound, while the « herbe de l'oubli » (l. 31) simply covers what is doomed to never awake.

After tracing an actual set of triple symmetries between mythological literature and modern and contemporary European poetry, one can sum up that two mythologemes appear in both Leconte de Lisle's rewriting of Germanic apocalypse and Blaga's reinventions of it: that of the god whose fate inexorably affects the balance of cosmos, and that of the dual action of water and fire as elements of both violent decay and harmonious recovery. As regards the most original thematic blocks that completed their Old Norse mythical substratum, *La Légende des Nornes* magnifies the incessant snowfall of Fimbulvetr, while Blaga's poems emphasize the role of roosters as harbingers of apocalypse.

The interpretative itinerary outlined herein, which is highly experimental as regards both the theoretical archetypical perspective and the practical mythocritical procedure, aims to demonstrate that this method of inquiry could

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open new territories to literary hermeneutics. The two original re-elaborations of the Germanic "Fate of the Gods" by authors from different ages substantiate that myth undergoes a « résurgence périodique » (Trousson 1964: 104) in the literature of Nineteenth and Twentieth century.

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