THE NAMES OF ROMANIAN FAIRY TALE CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF THE JUNIMIST CLASSICS

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Abstract

The names of the characters present in the fairy-tales written by Romanian writers are embodiments of popular mythology; they belong to the universal imaginary treasury and have been constantly evoked in the epiphanies linked to the fight between light and darkness, become the fight between the beautiful and the ugly, between good and evil. Thus, *Făt-Frumos*, *Ileana Cosânzeana*, *Baba-Cloanța*, *Muma-Pădurii*, etc. are representations of the chthonian forces, their bivalence being adapted to the universal patterns specific to the process of becoming.

The significance of fairy-tale characters' names is an occasion for an aesthetic anamnesis. Names can be a lyrical interlude, anchored in mythology and Romantic poetics, as it happens in Mihai Eminescu's fairy-tale, an exercise of linguistic virtuosity with Ion Creangă, a means of educational persuasion with Ion Slavici or a pretext for humoristic incursions with I.L. Caragiale.

Key words: *onomatology*, *etymon*, *fairy tale*, *folk*, *Christianity*

Résumé

Les noms de personnages de contes de fées des écrivains roumains sont de véritables incarnations de la mythologie populaire; ils appartiennent à l'imaginaire universel étant constamment invoqués dans les épiphanies liées au combat entre la lumière et les ténèbres, devenu plus tard le combat entre le beau et le laid, le bien et le mal. Ainsi, *Făt-Frumos*, *Ileana Cosânzeana*, *Baba Cloanța*, *Muma Pădurii*, etc. sont-ils des représentation des forces chtoniennes, leur bivalence étant adaptée aux moules universels de la transformation.

L'étude des significations de leurs noms tient de l'anamnèse esthétique. Le nom peut être un interlude lyrique, ancré en mythologie et dans la poésie romantique, tel qu'on rencontre dans les récits merveilleux de Mihai Eminescu, un exercice de géniale virtuosité linguistique chez Ion Creangă, un moyen de persuassion didactique chez Ioan Slavici ou bien d'incursions humoristiques chez I.L. Caragiale.

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Mots-clés: *onomastique, étymon, conte de fée, populaire, christianisme*

The Romanian onomatology is a segment of language constantly in the attention of researchers (linguists, folklorists, ethnographers, anthropologists), providing important data for cultural history and evolution. The selection and grounding of proper names is not accidental. They are related to different physical and pschological traits (positive or negative) included within the semantic area of the common terms they originate from.

Under the influence of Romanian folk myths, the Junimist classics took over the archetypal heroes, translating them into their creations under the form of fairytale characters. In the fantastic realm of the analyzed writers' works there are solar characters (Prince Charming, fairies, whitebeards/old men), as well as malefic characters (dragons, basilisks, hags, different tagsters).

In Romanian mythology, *Făt-Frumos* (*făt* "child", "lad", "son", "oaf" < Lat. *FETUS*) is the anthropomorphic hypostasis of the Sun. This hypostasis has been kept indirectly under the form of metaphors, allegories and solar symbols, in the reminiscences of literary-aesthetic texts with fantastic features.

The metamorphosis of the Sun into *Făt-Frumos*/*Prince Charming* (and that of the Moon into *Ileana Cosânzeana*) is found in Eminescu's fairytale fragment *Vasile – Finul lui Dumnezeu*: "(...) ş-au venit un nour gros ş-o luat pe Sf. Soare şi l-o pus la răsărit şi pe Sf. Lună la apus. Şi-au dat ei aşa o putere Dumnezeu, când a porunci, să crească pădurile şi ape să se facă pe lumea asta şi i-a dat numele Ileana Cosânzeana. Într-un fel pe lumea asta şi-ntr-alt fel pe lumea cealaltă"[1].

Although the Sun's name is not mentioned, by analogy with the Moon's name, one can realize it is Făt-Frumos who completes the mythical Romanian couple. The love of the two fairytale characters symbolizes the cosmic attraction of the elements detached from chaos and included in the order of the universe, of "the heavenly scuttles". The poet, in whose work the theme of love is set on a pedestal, could but take his inspiration from the

[1] Mihai Eminescu, 2000, p. 148.

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creations about *Făt-Frumos* and *Ileana Cosânzeana*, the two mythical characters welled from the Romanian people's conceptions and grafted on the archaic elements of the cult dedicated to the Sun and the Moon.

Făt-Frumos is the character who impersonates the bodily and spiritual beauty. As in folk imagination, in Eminescu's original work and in that of folk inspiration, too, this hero has all the qualities, and for his kindness and generosity he is helped by the fairies, saints, spirits, and animals. He is in a constant battle with dragons, beldams, witches, but after long and numerous adventures he will defeat them. After he had fulfilled the works which he was destined for, he marries *Ileana Cosânzeana*, some emperor's daughter or some fairy.

His remarkable qualities can be distinguished from the very structure of his compound name, *Făt-Frumos*. Being an unusual child, destined to become a hero, the noun *făt* is modified by the adjective *frumos* (*charming*), the attribute which picks him out of the rest of mankind; reference is made both to physical and moral beauty. When another feature individualizes the hero, then the quality appears in the composition of his name. For example, in Slavici's *Doi feți cu stea în frunte*, *Făt-Voinic* is the valiant hero. He is a kingly son, faithful to his wife *Lăptița*; he will have much to suffer because of his stepmother, who replaces his children with two puppies.

Sometimes, the hero's name refers to his origin. This is the case of *Făt-Frumos* from Eminescu's tale, born through a miracle from the tear of *Maica Domnului*. The name indicates the fact that he is heaven-sent, destined to bring harmony to his family and to his inherited land.

Ion Creangă is the writer who kept most stereotypes from the folk texts about *Făt-Frumos*. All folk reminiscences are reproduced in the fairytale under an original form, manifest in the characters' dialogue and the use of numerous interjections and proverbs.

Unlike the portrait of *Făt-Frumos* (who embodies physical and moral beauty) encountered in the folk-inspired works of Eminescu, Creangă, and Slavici, a new image of *Făt-Frumos cu moț în frunte* is presented by I.L. Caragiale in the homonym fairy tale. The image of the royal descendant can be included among the members of "the family" of deformed, physically

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unpleasant figures, but delightful for their noble soul, recalling *Quasimodo*, the hunchback of Nôtre Dame.

The solar male archetype has a female correspondent, that of *Ileana Cosânzeana*. The name *Ileana* (after *Elena*) is "a popular form, very common and typically Romanian"[2]. The term *cosânzeană* is linked to *sânziană* (< Lat. *SANCTUS DIES JOHANNIS*), the popular name of the religious holiday celebrated on 24th of June"[3]. Mircea Eliade considers that the name of *Sânziana* comes from the goddess Diana (< *San(cta) Diana*[4]), the virgin goddess of hunting and light, whose symbol was the Moon.

Ileana Cosânzeana, the girl with golden hair and azure eyes, is the heroine of Romanian folk tales. She is so proud and beautiful that "la soare te puteai uita, dar la dânsa, ba!".

In Ioan Slavici's work, Floriţa[5], like *Ileana Cosânzeana*, is beautiful "ca şi o floare ce creşte ascunsă în umbra tufelor", "încât nimeni nu se putea răbda ca să nu privească la ea şi nimeni nu cuteza să vorbească cu ea"[6].

Ileana cea şireată from Slavici's writing also preserves characteristics of the female prototype from the folk tales. She is the youngest of a royal family, keeper of parental advice and loving guardian of her sisters (who do not like her). As the name suggests, *iscusită şi vicleană* (clever and cunning), she prepares the most unexpected tests for the emperor's son, thus seeking to heal the evil obliquities of his temper. Through her attitude, this Ileana Cosânzeana anticipates the future voluntary heroines from short stories or novels.

In *Făt-Frumos cu moţ în frunte*, I.L. Caragiale endows his heroine with endless skills, apart from intelligence: "pe câtu-i de frumoasă, tot pe-

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[2] Ionescu, 2008, p. 149.

[3] The holiday is also called *Drăgaică*, a day which marks the birth of John the Baptist in the Christian calendar. According to popular beliefs, it is said that *sânzienele*, *drăgaicele* are virgin faries, kidnapped by dragons and emprisoned in hidden castles. They come out in bands, on the day of the summer solstice (21st of June), but especially on the night of 23rd-24th of June, floating, singing and dancing in the sky. So this Midnight's summer holiday was a three-day feast.

[4] Mircea Eliade, 1980, p. 79–80.

[5] "The name *Floarea* is attested at the beginning of 16th century; the masculine *Florea* gave birth to a long series of derivatives, some of them being used as independent forenames: *Florică*, *Floriţă*, fem. *Floriţa*" (Ionescu, 2008, p. 179).

[6] Ioan Slavici, *Floriţa din codru*, in *Opere*, vol. 1, 2001, p. 44.

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atâta o să fie de neroadă". The absence of intelligence is balanced by the gift of "hărăzi frumusețe ființei care i-o plăcea ei".

Although the bedstraw fairies are an anonymous plurality, among them there is a good fairy, too: *Iana Sânziana* or *Ileana Sânziana*, the Sun's sister for whom he has feelings, but who runs away from him, being afraid to commit the sin. An ancient version says the Sun is an emperor who planned to marry his sister, a young girl with silvery hair. But the planned wedding is stopped because the girl is kidnapped by the Divinity (which takes the shape of a pagan god), metamorphosed into the Moon and taken where the Sun can't see her anymore.

Due to onomastic similarities, *Iana Sânziana* is frequently taken for *Ileana Cosânzeana*. There is a slight difference between these two fairies: *Iana Sânziana* is an astral fairy, while *Ileana Cosânzeana* is a human, chthonic one.

The writer who best depicts the difference between these two fairies is Mihai Eminescu in his tale *Vasile – finul lui Dumnezeu*. To prevent the incest, the Sun's sister is sent where the sun sets, while *Ileana Cosânzeana* is sent in the forest. *Ileana Cosânzeana*'s traits are very similar to Iana's, as the end of the story doesn't contain the already known folk episode of the wedding between *Ileana* and the archetypal hero (in our case *Vasile*) from the Romanian tale.

Only the *fairies*' beauty matches Ileana's. The term *zână*/'fairy' (< proper name Lat. *DĬANA*) means a "feminine character, imagined as a beautiful, young and very kind woman, with supernatural powers, being immortal, a fee". Fairies are folk characters having features of evil or kind-hearted semi-goddesses. Evil fairies are sometimes old, ugly, lean and lanky, or sometimes tricky and cruel young girls. Usually, people are those who become entrapped in their net. However, even a representative of Hell can suffer because of these mean goddesses.

Such a fairy is *baba* – the hag (meaning the king's daughter) from the short story *Calul dracului* written by I.L. Caragiale. The fairy holds the key to many secrets, even to those from the dark land of the spirits. She shows her power not to a man, but to *Prichindel*, a representative coming from

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Hell. Her appearance as an old hag, as a "hodoroagă cerşetoare", is the consequence of the curse she fell under because of her unnatural deeds.

In the Romanian folklore, kind-hearted fairies (*zânele bune*) are born from flowers; their number or name is never mentioned. They are beautiful and slender, very young and strong lasses, always finding the suitable solutions to the inevitable difficulties overwhelming the archetypal hero. Sometimes they fall in love with a mortal, but disappear, leaving an open door, the marriage being possible only after the young man had performed several supernatural attempts.

Among the characters helping the hero there are the whitebeards (*moşii*). The inherited term *moş* (*old man*) is a regressive derivative from the word *moaşă* – "midwife" (cf. Alb. *moshë* "age"). In the Romanian mythology, whitebeards symbolize our mythical ancestors. They are thought to be the spirits of the dead, who patronize the seasons and their activities, some imaginary beings who send winter away, to whom the nine days of March are dedicated.

"Whitebeards are essential"[7] not only for Creangă but also for Caragiale and Slavici.

Moş Crăciun (*Santa Claus*) is "a mythical character, portrayed as a man with a white, long beard, and red clothes, with white fringe that brings children gifts and sweets on Christmas Eve". The term *Crăciun/Christmas* (cf. Lat. *CREATIO, -ONIS*[8]) is an ancient term in mythology and folklore. His name is also connected to the Christmas Day.

In another text[9] from 1877, Slavici depicts the holiday dedicated to the whitebeards, where the profane made its presence felt: "În adevăr, Moşii sunt un fel de sărbătoare olimpică, la care se adună românii din raza topografică a Bucureştilor; muntenii, oltenii şi ardelenii se întâlnesc spre a se cunoaşte unii pe alţii, spre a-şi arăta fiecare hărnicia, spre a-şi schimba între dânşii roadele muncii şi spre a petrece împreună câteva zile de veselie. Este un târg de ţară, o expoziţie naţională şi o mare ospeţie poporală". If the

[7] Derşidan, 2000, p. 165.

[8] "Christmas is the continuity of the Latin word *CREATIO, -ONIS*, yet by Slavic filiation" (Ionescu, 2008, p. 113).

[9] Ioan Slavici, *Old Men. Many and little things*, in *Creations*, vol. 6, 2001, p. 814.

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whitebeards'day was an occasion to celebrate the dead within the peasant communities, this holiday was a means of feasting and recalling the king (the 10th of May).

The desacralization of the whitebeards and their celebration is also found in Caragiale's work.

Therefore, the kindness, beauty and courage of the positive heroes are brought to light in antithesis with the negative features of the *balauri*, *zmei*, *babe*, *Mama zmeilor*, *Muma Pădurii*, *Vâlva Pădurii*.

The dragon (*balaurul*) is an archetypal symbol, full of multiple meanings. The term *balaur* (inherited; cf. Alb. *Bollë* "snake", Srb. *blavor*) means "a fantastic monstrous and voracious animal embodying the evil and represented as a huge winged snake". Most often it is embodied by a mythical being, having the shape of a giant snake with one or more heads, with wings and sharp claws, spitting fire from its mouth. In popular beliefs, dragons are born out of snakes on a spring day, after they had mixed their spittle and made a bead of it. The serpent that swallows the bead turns into a dragon[10]. As a character, the dragon sets itself apart from the snake as well as from the basilisk: from the snake, through its evil character, and from the basilisk through its zoomorphic representation. In folklore, the dragons are called (*h*)*ală* or *bală* (monster).

In his fairy tale *Fata-n grădina de aur*, Mihai Eminescu preserves all the features given to the hero's opponent by folk imagination: the terrifying shape of the dragon, with scales, teeth and tail.

In Ioan Slavici's work, the dragons are presented under different forms: with three, seven or twelve heads; always guarding a land and opposing the hero. In *Zâna Zorilor*, dragons stand as guards near the bridge which separates the kingdoms, so that the path of *Făt-Frumos* should be full of difficulties. The more heads a dragon has, the greater its power becomes. But, regardless of the number of heads, the dragon symbolizes evil tendencies and the unity between force and wickedness.

Another representative of the "necessary evil" is the basilisk or dragon (*zmeul*). The term *zmeu* (< old. Sl. *змен*, *змнн*, *змън*) means "a character

[10] Şăineanu, 1978, p. 531.

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that is the fabulous embodiment of evil forces, imagined as a giant with supernatural powers but with a minimum of intelligence, always being defeated by the forces of good". The basilisk completes the number of three, seven or nine brothers from the basilisk family, in which the head of the family is the basilisk's or dragon's Mother.

In spite of their physical strength, these creatures are clumsy and craven, a fact noticed also by G. Călinescu: "From a psychological point of view, the basilisk is a creature gifted with a great power of intimidation that doesn't include intelligence, a bloodstream tyrant, charged in front of the ingenious and any other intellectual operation"[11].

The hero has to face not only the basilisks, but also the one who brought them into the world, *Muma Pădurii* (*The Dragon's Mother*). She subjects the earthlings to different tests, being helped by her children. In Eminescu's tale, *Călin Nebunul*, the basilisk's mother keeps the secret of resurrection. Although the hero's name indicates his strange behavior (he was stupid and was sitting on ash), he proves his wisdom when facing the basilisk's mother.

The tagster or beldam (*Muma Pădurii*) almost matches the basilisks' mother's wickedness. The tagster is a female spirit of the forest, imagined as an old, ugly, evil woman, walking through the forest, singing and mourning, alluring, eating and killing people. She is fierce, cunning, has the ability to metamorphose and is, probably, one of the extreme representations of the evil in our mythology. Her numerous certifications in Romanian folklore – stories, tales, spells – and literature are a proof that she is one of the basic fantastic creatures in our mythology. The same thing is also illustrated by the variety of names given to this character: *Pădureana*, *Fata din Pădure*, *Potca-Pădurii*, *Surata din Pădure*, *Vidma Pădurii*, *Vâlva Pădurii*. It is shown that all these names are based on the word *pădure* – forest (< Lat. *padūle* < *PALUS, -UDIS* "swamp", "marsh") and are made up in Romanian by derivation (with a suffix) or composition (the first term designates the mythical figures with independent existence in our folklore), which may be

[11] Călinescu, 2006, p. 36.

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a proof of the age and importance of this mythological figure in the Romanian folklore.

Ioan Slavici has endowed the tagster with great cunningness to highlight her wickedness. Feigning a certain fatigue, she persuades the Red Emperor's son from *Băiet Sărac* to carry her on his back and therefore she succeeds in transforming him into a horse.

Another dark spirit of the forest is *Vâlva Pădurii*. The term *vâlvă* (< Slav. *влъхвъ*), means "a fabulous creature, imagined as a beautiful and kind woman protecting the waters and the houses", and is at the origin of the compound proper name which means a monstrous creature that got this appearance after being cursed. Knowing the folk belief, Ioan Slavici will put this creature in the tale *Zâna Zorilor* (*The Fairy of the Dawn*). To highlight Peter's (Petru) qualities, the writer introduces three scary beldam sisters: the beldam from the copper forest (*Vâlva Pădurii de aramă*), the beldam from the silver forest (*Vâlva Pădurii de argint*) and the beldam from the golden forest (*Vâlva Pădurii de aur*). All three beldams get Peter into trouble. However, in the final part, after their defeat, the curse will be taken out of them.

Făt-Frumos is often obstructed by *babe*. The term *babă* has a Slavic origin (< Bg., Ucr. *Баба*, Srb., Pol. *baba*); except for the meaning of "old woman", it has multiple connotations leading to an ancestral mythology, where whitebeards and crones were given a special place. Usually, these old women are perceived as very malicious, "cele mai ale dracului", and that leads to the usual determinations of the word *babă* by derogatory epithets like *cloanța* (pop.) "ugly old woman, with no teeth and evil spirit" (cf. *clonț* < Bg. *клюнек*), *cotoroanța* (unknown etymology) "old, evil woman; harridan; witch" and *hârca* (< Ucr. *Кхирка*). These make up the names of some feminine mythical characters: *Baba Cloanța*, *Baba Coaja*, *Baba Dochia*, *Baba Hârca*, *Baba Iaga*. *Baba Cloanța* is a character belonging to the Romanian folklore, a character who seems to be the dragons' mother and the witch who knows many spells. The bond between the name and the character is maybe represented by the essential features "evil and quarrelsome" ("rea şi arțăgoasă"). The second part of the name seems to be a form derived from the noun *clonț = cioc*, *plisc* (beak, rostrum).

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Such beldams, whose names reveal certain negative features, are encountered in Ion Creangă's work. The adversity to positive heroes and the embodiment of wickedness in older women can be seized upon the suggestive names like *băboi*, *tălpoiu de babă*, *Ştirba-baba-cloanța*, *băborniță*, *pohoața de babă*, *codoşca de babă*, *hoanghina*.

The Romanian term *babă/old woman/crone* (< Ucr. *кхурка*) has the meaning of "skull, head" ("craniu, țeastă"), but at the same time it refers to an attitude of despise for an old woman. The merging of the senses makes us understand it would refer to a sick man's head which is so weak that resembles a dead person's head. Hence the deprecatory epithet given to old women/crones, whose head "sucked by old age" ("supt de bătrânețe") would have been compared with a dead man's head. In our mythology *Baba Hârca* is the witch who freezes water and makes the stars fall from heaven. These aspects are exploited by Ion Creangă in his tale *Povestea porcului*. The writer combines the popular myth referring to the beldam and the Christian tradition, in which they say only God knows human thoughts.

We can encounter beldams in Ioan Slavici's work, too, but their names distinguish themselves from those belonging to the heroines from popular tradition. In the story *Floriţa din codru*, *Baba Boanța* is the crone having the features of a witch: "(…) o vrăjitoare vestită, care era atât de bătrână încât ținea minte când codrii erau ca iarba, munții ca muşunoiul şi văile ca şi creţăturile la ea pe față (…) atât de bătrână era *Boanța* (…) şi de când trăieşte n-a făcut alta decât vrăji şi alte lucruri ascunse şi nepricepute…"[12].

Unlike the evil women in Creangă's and Slavici's work, in Eminescu's writings these are generally called *babe*. Ion Creangă perceives them with another eye, unlike the evil ones, and this could be noticed from their names. Such a woman is *Nastasia*, the maternal grandmother, a very kind person, who used to cry for both relatives and strangers.

In Slavici's fairy tales there are counseling old women helping the hero. *Birşa* is a crone, an old woman living at the emperor's court, who

[12] Ioan Slavici, *Floriţa din codru*, in *Opere*, vol. 1, 2001, p. 48.

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advises Peter how to choose the enchanted horse and she is the one who blesses him before going to the Fairy Dawn.

The names of the characters of Romanian tales are linguistic proofs of the universal imaginary which reflects the human relationships. Empirically and intuitively, such names acquire ethical and aesthetic knowledge. The characters' names contain terms generally taken from the folk register; their etymology shows that the Romanian folklore is related to the Balkanic one but preserves its authenticity given by the Latin origin of some of these terms.

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