GENESIS IMAGERY (WORLD/WORD CREATION) IN MIHAI EMINESCU AND NICHITA STĂNESCU'S COSMOGONIC POEMS

Ramona Andreea MUREȘAN*

Abstract: *However different the two poets, there are convergent spaces in which their visions meet, allowing for a comparative view. It is mainly the case of their cosmogonic poems and of how they both choose to model their spatial imagery. The cosmological representations mirror a whole philosophical perception, becoming at times rather abstract, to the point that Stănescu no longer refers to a world model, but to a spatial configuration of poetry itself. Beyond the easily recognizable cosmological models having at core the geometrical imagery of the Universe, one may notice that the need of a world's centre is nothing but the translation of the inner need of one's self which does not require outward fulfilments: all is done through and within the self. Genesis refers to the creation, but what is being created differentiates and, at the same time, complements the visions of Eminescu and Stănescu. Whereas Eminescu chose the creation of the world as a matter pre-existent to poetry (WORLD creation), Stănescu insists on questioning the words to their ultimate meaning, hence the higher dose of self-referentiality (WORD creation). Surprisingly, despite the difference in meaning attached to it, they both make use of the same poetic imagery.*

Keywords*: genesis, shape imagery, word- creation.*

Myth, imagination and imagery of Genesis

According to Gilbert Durand, imaginary is essentially identified with the myth and it forms the first sub-layer of the mental life, being a world of coherent representations and cultural products. Its efficiency resides in the strong bond between structures and symbolic meanings (schemes, archetypes and symbols). Homo sapiens are, at the same time, *homo symbolicus*, giving their own interpretation to cultural and spiritual images.

According to Mircea Eliade, the veridical aspect of a myth is given by the fact that myths are histories referring to realities. Knowing the myth, we know the origin of things and thus we get to dominate and manipulate them according to our own will. (Eliade, 1978: 18) [1]. In the same study, Eliade considers the cosmogony a "sacred myth", whose reality is confirmed by the mere reality of our world. Knowing that any creation repeats the act of cosmogony, becoming sacred, we may hold true that the poetic creation is a divine work, the place of God being taken by the poet who re-creates the language and re-defines it in a personal manner. "From a point of view, one may say that all great poets recreate the world, because they try to see it as if Time and History didn't exist."[2] (Eliade: 1991, 137)

Myth passing into poetry is a complex act, involving an adjustment of the ideological material, a transfiguration of myth's data, which results in the creation of a

*Technical University of Cluj, The North University Centre of Baia Mare, ramonaav@yahoo.com

2 Defining the myth, Eliade operates a distinction between real history and false history, the first referring to myths, and the second to legends and fairy-tales. Myth is, in his definition, a sacred history, relating an event that took place in the beginnings of time, showing the genesis of either the whole (world), or just parts of it.

[2] All the critical quotations are in our translation from the Romanian version.

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poetic myth. Such is the case of Nichita Stănescu, for whom the world creation is essentially synonymous to poetry creation. The poet becomes an architect of worlds, taking demiurgic attributes, being the indivisible, almighty One, totally identified with his creation. The act of hemography[1], of writing in his own blood, becomes an imperative for Stănescu: "I'm but/ a speaking bloodstain"[2] (*Self-portrait*). Stănescu transposes himself in the linguistic sign, modifying its genetic structure. His whole poetry revolves around the powerful verb "to be"; therefore we can define a verbal configuration, of genesis-word, in opposition to Eminescu's nominal configuration, where the stress is placed on key-nouns related to genesis. The imagery of the two creators is a construct of representations nesting complex structures which we will try to analyse by breaking the myth into its constitutive elements.

Elements of the myth

Chaos currently defines the state preceding the cosmogony.[3] For Eminescu, it is a self-sufficient entity, "self-contained", characterized by Stănescu through immateriality: "cannot be seen". Self-sufficient, unlimited, undetermined are attributes deriving most likely from man's incapacity of defining something which does not fall under his senses. Still, the poet manages to transcend the limits, shaping the unshaped.

Water, universally present in all myths of Creation, "seems to occupy, as age and recurrence in cosmogonic representations, the supreme position" (Vlăduţescu: 1998, 81), corresponding to primordial principle's characteristics: lack of limits, indeterminacy, and cyclic continuity. For these reasons, water appears to Gaston Bachelard as being "the truly transitory element. It is the essential ontological metamorphosis between fire and earth. […] The daily death is the death of water. Water flows continuously, water falls continuously. […] the toil of water is endless." (Bachelard: 1999, 10). The critic emphasizes the fertile potential of this element "A drop of strong water is enough to create a world and to melt the night. […] Water is an embryo: it gives life unexhausted buoyancy."(*ibidem*, 13). Water's supremacy is given by its ambivalent nature: germinating power but, at the same time, a thanatic connotation, ending life by flooding. Water's hypostasis in eminescian poetry ranges from the primordial immensity, to the image of the sea, and to that of the ocean. For Nichita Stănescu water becomes a principle, taking the first place in the *Terrestrial morphology*: "Water is of a majority. / for this reason, / in the universal hunger, / It holds a distinguished, royal place/ called the universal thirst." (*Contemplating the world from the outside)*.

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[1] "…the science I have created is so subtle, that sometimes is mistaken for the natural. It is called hemography, writing with your own self." (Stănescu, 1985: 20).

[2] The English versions of the poems are taken from the volumes cited under references, for the following poems: *The elegies, The Slit-man, Self portrait* (Nichita Stănescu), *Satire I, Lucifer* (Mihai Eminescu). The other poems quoted are in our translation.

[3] In some cosmogonic legends, chaos is no longer the primordial element. For instance, in *Enuma Eliş* world's creation is the result of combining sweet and salty waters, in *In fu jing* the sky, the earth, the thunder, the running waters, the mountain, the wind the fire and the still waters all participate in the act of creation, whereas in *Rig Veda* the seed of life is hidden in chaos and activated by heat. The creation process is spontaneously triggered by the action of opposite forces: Yin and Yang for Chinese, Love and Hatred in Hesiod's representation, God and Devil in Christian beliefs.

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Unlike the other elements, the striking quality of *earth* is its immediate reality, its tangibility. However, the more solid the matter is, the more subtle and toiling the work of imagination. Surrounded by water, from where it is brought by the devil, earth has, consequently, "a secondary cosmogonic dignity to water, for it is contained in its depths as an inform matter. (Vlăduțescu: *op.cit*., 88). Mixed with water, earth becomes clay, representing the primordial matter. The telluric imaginary takes various aspects in the poetry of both Eminescu and Stănescu. As a cosmic entity, the earth is a scale reproduction of the sky, hence deriving a mystical geography having at its core the symbolic centre of the World, the Axis Mundi. Upon this image, the poets' cosmogonic visions are being modelled, and their creation is, in itself, a cosmogonic pattern, describing a circular movement from myth to logos and back to the myth.

Air is, amongst all, the most immaterial element, which endows it with the greatest poetic potential. Associated in the folklore with divine breath, this element becomes sacred, spiritualized, and its poetic image is an ascending one. The attribute of verticality attached to it (Bachelard: 1997, 14) is transposed by the two poets in the metaphor of flying. Especially with Stănescu we notice the construct of a flight dialectics. Even love appears in his poems projected in this aerial space, the couple of lovers being themselves immaterial and, somehow, spiritualized: "Of air I am, of air you are." (*Blue, harrowing spiral*); "As a night's dream you float" (*Poem*). Through this fantastic flight, mind enters the purest air, assimilated to the thought: "Men are strange birds/ their inwardly grown wings flap, / floating, soaring/ in a pure air which is the thought!" (*Eulogy to man*). Similarly, the Lucifer's flight has the connotation of verticality and it takes place in an ethereal space. The ascending psychology being well emphasized, all these poetic images are possible due to the immateriality of the element: "Within the infinite air dimensions fade and […] thus we reach that non-dimensional matter which gives us the impression of a total and intimate sublimation."(Bachelard, *op.cit*, 13).

Patterns and cosmologic representations

At the level of cosmologic imagery, functional in Eminescu's and Stănescu's lyricism, one notices the prominent exploitation of Plato's model, which is a convergence point between the two authors. The geometrical figuration of the Universe focuses upon the symbolism of the sphere and of the circle. Mirroring perfection, these shapes hold the monopoly in the topography of the Universe, mainly in the sequences referring to the sacred moment of Genesis. Nonetheless, analysis points out, especially with Nichita, the approach of Kant's model, marked by decentred worlds and historical crisis. With Eminescu, the presence of this model involves the apocalypse, the entering in a time of solstice. In Stănescu's vision, we are made witnesses to a post-Einstein approach of cosmogony, through the model of worlds' vertical expansion, as it appears in *The ninth elegy*: "Unflown wing, you are born/ from one egg to another bigger egg." The cosmologic representations mirror a whole philosophy, becoming at times rather abstract, to the point that Stănescu no longer refers to a world's model, but to a spatial configuration of poetry itself. The poet is in quest of a way to shape the unshaped, to put into words the "troubling don't-know-what", which he so metaphorically defines as "unspoken organ of words which sees not the colours, hears not the sounds, tastes not the flavours, smells not the odours. […] Behold! My words welcome you and lend you a body." (Stănescu, 1990: 16). Shifting the accent on logos, Stănescu creates a logo-genesis, so that the "body" of the poem becomes a scale reproduction of the Universe's "body".

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A whole range of cosmologic configurations are interwoven in the lyrical texture. Eminescu admirably reunites, within only a few verses, Plato's centric model, with the world generating point at its core and the disintegrating model of Kant, forecasting an apocalypse ("the rebel planets freeze and headlong plunge about in space"). The contrast is even more flagrant in the poems of Stănescu, where the passage from a harmonic universe to a poetic image radially atomised in all possible directions is abrupt, without warning. In *Song (Farewell to an age)*, the harmony is counter pointedly opposed by a double negation "but it wasn't, it wasn't like that". Thus, the poet commiserates the state of things which should have been different: "All should have been *spheres*, / but it wasn't, it wasn't like that. / All should have been *lines*, / but it wasn't, it wasn't like that. / you should have been a thin *circle*, / but you weren't, you weren't like that. / I should have been a thin *rhomb*, / but I wasn't, I wasn't like that." Though at first sight the *line* induces the idea of monotony and lack of generative power, geometry defines the line as a succession of points, therefore a succession of centres generating worlds. The line curves, changes shape and forms a circle, yet another symbol of platonic perfection, together with the sphere. The only odd shape in these verses is the rhomb, denominating the poet. The image of the rhomb can be reduced to that of an isosceles triangle doubled in a mirror. Consequently, it is a dual sign, denoting both the beginning and the end, the rise and the fall, in a way that "Everything is the opposite of everything else", as Stănescu claims in *First elegy*.

The primordial need of finding a centre is synonym to the need of finding one's lost self, and this is why the poet chases his own heart. His impetus is so strong, that the self breaks into atoms, in a movement similar to disintegration: "I am going to run in all directions at once/ I am going to run behind my heart/ like a war chariot/ pulled in all directions at once/ by a troop of fiery horses" *(Eleventh elegy)*. The way to oneself demands a transposing of the macrocosmic into microcosmic, which could explain the vision of condensing the Universe in the image of a point, present in Eminescu's *Satire I*, and Stănescu's *First elegy*. Eminescu stands out due to the materiality of his poetic expression. Speaking about "the uncontained", despite a certain dose of ambiguity, one notices the reference to the naught, the primordial chaos, the non-being. In exchange, Stănescu's lyric discourse represents a pseudo definition, hence the impossibility of determining: "He begins in himself and finishes/ in himself". Who or what is "*He*"? Is it the naught, is it the point, is it the creator himself? Whatever the answer, *He* is rather a principle than an entity. It is the principle of perfection, as suggested in the verse: "In some ways he resembles/ a sphere". The fact that there is only a resemblance to perfection indicates a cleft, confirmed by the verbal regime, structured in two opposite, perfectly balanced series of affirmations and negations through which Stănescu defines his imaginary universe.

The symbolism of the sphere[1] is highly exploited in Stănescu's poetry: "the earth is a sphere, / the moon is a sphere, / the sun is a sphere, / the sublime stars are spheres." (*Scolding Euclid*). Even the "organism closes in itself in the perfect shape of a sphere." (Béguin: 1970, 93). In this context, refusing to evolve in a sphere can be translated in the need to stay in the uncreated, in the amorphous: "Around myself I coil/

[1] The geometric shape bears the symbolism of a generative nucleus: "Restrained to three dimensions – sphere, to two dimensions – circle, this shape, being itself close to the fecund shape of the egg, allows the possibility to imagine the continuity and immanence from One to multiple, and the reversibility from multiple to One." (Wunenburger: 2009, 40-41).

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denying access to the sphere." (*Mood*)

Similarly, Lucifer claims his origin in the primordial chaos, in a static eternity, previous to the birth of Universe: "Out of the chaos was I wrought, / In chaos would I be dispersed, / Out of the empty darkness brought, / For darkness do I thirst…". Having "nor time, nor place", Hyperion does not obey the chronology of history, nor the limits of space. Even the idea of death is abolished for him, as it would spoil the balance and lead to the loss of the centre and of unity with the Creator. The same self-sufficient spatial-temporality is present in Stănescu's creations. The recurrence of the reflexive pronoun, both in Eminescu's *First satire* and in Stănescu's *First elegy*, indicates the return to origins, to the inner self, which does not require outward fulfilments: all is done through an inside this self. It does not recognize the "existence of an outside dimension" (Braga: 1993, 162): "Everything is within. / The Universe itself only exists/ within itself." (*Aleph indexed by Aleph*)

As spatial infinite, this self acknowledges no limitation: "No aura heralds him, / no comet's tail follows him." (*First elegy*). Eluding the historical definition makes reference to the platonic cosmological model governed by equinoctial time, a time of myths and not of history: "It has not even a present, / even if it is difficult to imagine/ in what sense he does not have one." (idem). Stănescu's poetic language vacillates between absurd, paradox and at times a seeming nonsense, whereas *Satire* I manifests an amazing materiality of poetic language. Aiming to put into words the period of pre-Genesis, the poet communicates on two registers: affirmation and negation, trying to shape the immaterial. Then, a sudden movement marks the beginning of Genesis, the point being the masculine principle, to which the maternal instance is added, represented by chaos. From this moment on, the static eternity shifts into a cyclic one, in a continuous movement:

> Then something small in chaos stirred… the very first and primal cause. / And God the Father married space and placed upon confusion laws. / That moving something, small and light, less than a bubble of sea spray, / Established through the universe eternal and unquestioned sway…. (*Satire I*)

World versus Word Genesis

While Eminescu chose the making of the worlds as a matter pre-existent to poetry, Stănescu insists on questioning the words, searching for their intimate meaning. Words' obstinacy to reveal completely generates an ontological pain which seems to be the translation of Eminescu's yearning (the analogy *torment-torture*) into Stănescu's verses, which are far more self-referential. In Bachelard's terms, we may distinguish the presence of vocalised or verbalised images, inferring a creative mental dynamism mediated by language. Poet's hunger for words is fuelled by his strong belief in the power of the linguistic sign. *The word* is reinstated, not in its traditional meaning, but recomposed at yet another level: *the unword*: "eventually, things have in their core/ nothing but a word" (*Hunger for words*).

The word is the centre of Stănescu's vision, the axis of a whole universe. All is being built on words, we exist through words, and the Universe itself exists because of the words. Only they are eternal, the ultimate essence of all things. The concept of *unwords*, with which Stănescu operates, transcends the immediate reality of the linguistic sign, becoming the most appropriate means of relating with and connecting to nature. Only such a transfer of the self into the cosmic unity can provide the key to Universe's mystery: "He stretched to me a leaf like a fingered hand. / I stretched my hand like a leaf with teeth. / […]/ I could hear his thickening sap throbbing/ like blood. /

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He could hear my calming blood rising like sap. / I crossed through him. / He crossed through me. / I remained a lonely tree. / He/ a lonely man." (*The unwords*)

When the transfer is complete, we witness the birth of o cosmic man and of a human cosmos. The logos have been purified and became poetry. From this perspective, the word has a privileged status: "If matter has time, *the word* has *eternity*, if matter is only simultaneous to a second, *the word is simultaneous with anything, at any time*. The shadow of my life is my words." (Stănescu: 1985, 82). Stănescu's words are alive, they are humane; they become the beating hearts of universal love: "I used to teach my words to love, / show them my heart/ not giving up until their syllables/ would start to beat. / […]/In the end, the words/ had to resemble me/ and the world." (*Ars poetica*)

The act of writing is a reiteration of the primal act, the initial matter that preceded the "creation of fingers and of things." (*The art of writing*). The cited poem relates the act of writing with mythical thinking, depicting the image of thought trapped in words, *the signified* caged in *the signifying*: "writing is a way of slowing down the thinking, / a primitive way to understand and to stop/ the movement of thoughts." It is from this perspective, of world transcribed into word, that one should tackle the cosmogonic nature of Nichita's poems. Explicitly present in the title of one poem, the notion of *cosmogony* is immediately given a definition that allows the comparison between world creation and poetic creation: *Cosmogony, or lullaby song*. However, the title is deceitful because it is not an incentive to sleep, but to wakefulness. The refrain is a negative imperative: "Don't fall asleep", and what seems to be metempsychosis turns out to be the image of a cyclic universe in which the individual soul is melted into the universal one.

Using the metaphor of sleep as a transcending gate, Eminescu distinguishes two levels of analysis: the dream, or the imaginary level, and the reality. Their correspondents are the sacred time of myth (with the metaphor of life as a dream), and the history in crisis, deprived of reason. The poet's option for the imaginary space of dream is obvious. According to Mircea Eliade, sleep is the equivalent of oblivion, therefore a synonym for "*blindness*". (Eliade: 1978, 110) In fact, this is precisely the force that Hyperion is drawn by: "Around him there was naught…And still, / Strange yearning there was yet, / A yearning that all space did fill, / As when the blind forget." (*Lucifer*). Oblivion is refused to Lucifer, because it would equal the loss of immortality, of the primal memory. These attributes differentiate the mortals from their creators, the only holders of the sacred. From this point of view, the poet represents an intermediary between the two instances, as he has access to the origins, but even he suffers the drama of amnesia. *The third elegy* of Stănescu ends with such an image of relapsing into the human state. The transcendent experience does not remain in the memory of the man, despite his efforts, simply because the phenomenal world does not address the intellect, but the spirit: "I stretched to remind myself/ of a world I had understood in a flash/ […]/ But I could remember nothing."

The Genesis and the Apocalypse prove to be of the same substance, originating and reuniting by closing the circle in the image of the point. The continuous, cyclical birth governs this cosmic space where "all are born from all/ uninterruptedly, all are born from all." (*Contemplating the world from the outside*) As for the temporal coordinate of this continuous birth and existence, Stănescu has the original theory that men produce time for the Universe, adding a new dimension to it. Living within the margins of time, men unveil their perishable nature: "We, the inhabitants of this second/ are but a night's thin dream". On the opposite, the superior being is endowed with eternal life: "nor time, nor place shall know, / Unfettered and unending." (*Lucifer*).The

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hypostasis of the creator who gives life and death is taken in Stănescu's creations not by a person, but by a concept, if thus we can define *the song*. Born from words and tears, *the song* becomes a central concept, the demiurge: "He is sometimes called the soul/ but it would be still more accurate to call him, / the song." (*Contemplating the world from the outside*)

The ambiguity and the uncertainty persists in the passages recreating the Genesis from *Satire I.* The junction between philosophy and poetic logics allow the harmonic blending of the opposites. Thus, the issues of being and being-not situate us in the range of the uncreated, prior to the being. Knowledge and logos are absent, all is refused to reason, even if we do not know what this *all* encompasses: "Into the time are things begun, when being and not being still/ Did not exist to plague man's mind, and there was neither life nor will, / When there was nothing that was hid, yet all things darkly hidden were". Looking for answers, the scholar from *Satire I* utters questions in an attempt to run over the possible Genesis scenarios: "Was there a heavenly abyss? Or yet unfathomable sea?" The abyss is a fragmented, discontinuous space, suggesting the image of a world submitted to disintegration. The other uttered possibility reveals quite the opposite, as the sea is a continuum. The scholar's questions remain unanswered and the same uncertainty envelops the perspective of the Apocalypse. The final eternity is nothing but eternal death, the not-being now having thanatic significance: "All falls into not being's night and an unbroken silence reigns/ As once again the universe its primal peace and void regains…"

On the other hand, the ending of Stănescu's world is a continuous lapse into one's own self, in a concentric pattern. The process is so fast that it can't even be observed from the outside. At the same time, birth is also perpetual: "All lapsed in itself with equal speed/ and at the same time, so nobody/ noticed anything/ […]/ All burst out of itself, with equal speed/ and at the same time, so nobody/ noticed anything." (*The Heart*). The concentric pattern becomes obvious in *The ninth elegy*, with the image of the Self contained in a bigger entity: "enclosed in a bigger egg/ hatched by a bigger idea." The poet is aware that "It is only from sleep/ that everybody can wake up/ from the cock of life nobody, / ever." There is a constant game of contrasts in Stănescu's poems, harmonized by complementarity: "The earth of 'to be'/ takes the air from the earth/ of 'to be not'/ […]/Everything is stuck to everything." (*The Slit-man*), or "They say No only those/ who know the Yes; / but he, who knows everything, / has many Yesses and Noes on torn scraps of paper." (*First elegy*).

Conclusion

Tackling with the issue of Genesis, Eminescu surprises with the rich imagery of the Creation myth's elements, while Nichita Stănescu produces a mutation within the logos, invested with magic attributes. "*No*" and "*Yes*", "*To be*" and "*To be not*" become the fundamental coordinates of his creations, bearing an extraordinary semantic power.

The mutations that Eminescu operates within the Romanian poetry are thoroughly discussed in Ioana Em. Petrescu's study – *Eminescu and the mutations of Romanian poetry*. The critic points out the similitudes of vision between Mihai Eminescu and the modern poets, which denotes the visionary and avant-garde spirit of the romantic poet. Subscribing her opinion, we might add that the neo-modernist poet Nichita Stănescu is not that estranged from the romantic philosophy. On the contrary, he proves tributary to this vision, and to Eminescu especially, an attitude expressed in many of his confessions and interviews.

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