THE INTRODUCTION OF FICTION IN ROMANIAN FOLK TALE BOOKS[1]

Abstract*:The folk tale books gave the satisfaction of discovering reflections and thoughts on life, but the biggest benefit was that of understanding the world. Not the ancient world, but the one which existed and was retold omitting details in order to embellish the stories and constantly enrich the text. The novel encompasses various episodes, with artistic rationales and various feelings, becoming in itself a portative library: inside, the reader can find ancient history, but mostly adventure and the escape from reality into a perfect world, or even the escape which falls prey to the horror of being attacked by never before seen creatures and ends in experiencing the delights of their defeat (for example, in 'Alexandria' there were fights with carnivorous birds of prey, ogres and barbarians with six hands and six feet). The passage from reality to fiction and vice versa is what mostly attracts the audience, all these transformations happening in true Romanian spirit.*

Key words: *Folk tale books, fiction, artistic imaginary*

The descending or ascending trajectory of folk tale books through the social strata is difficult to demonstrate in the case of some social categories 'leveled by the absence of culture'(Haşdeu, 1879-1880: XXII-XXIII).While the theory of the descent of folk tale books from the higher classes to the lower classes and their infiltration in folklore is not demonstrated (the majority of copyists and translators were monks), it is obvious that the perception of their fictional character emerges firstly among the cultivated people, who could have been familiar with the historical sources of the events and characters. M. Moraru, in his postface to the book called *Folk tale books in Romanian literature* (Cartojan, 1974:42), asks himself whether the most popular testimonials (M. Costin, the High Steward Constantin Cantacuzino) imply any perception of the artistic fictional character that these books could have, and his answer is negative. For that matter, this question needs to be extended to our entire ancient literature: the sociological study should focus on the period marked by the emergence of the conscience of artistic fiction, as it is assimilated with the writer's intention.

In fairy tales, entering the realm of fiction is marked by stereotypical formulas; through their titles and tones, folk tale books aim to inspire trust and, at the same time, to be anchored in reality.

The heroic novel contains apologues, maxims, fables, proverbs, and verbalisms. Moreover, it has a moralizing character. M. Moraru considers that the difference between the heroic novel with a moralizing character and the florilegium (including anthologies of fables centered on one character, the proverbs of Archirie) is only in the formal plan; both are open to reception, but they are of different types. Then he illustrates the two main schemes: the journey and the context**.** The journey is rarely shown in full, as we can see in *Alexandria;* the majority of folk tale books which can be counted as using this scheme show an episode or other of this, which, if developed, acquire the proportions of a book. Only from this point of view, adds M. Moraru, if we find two motifs in a book (for example: the miraculous birth or the initiation), they have to closely follow one another. For books that contain the

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integral scheme, it is evident that this succession exists mostly because it sums up the existential trajectory (the succession is chronological).

What is really important is the fact that it's not the spirit of a folk tale book that is defining. The book always allows different interpretations. It is the case of *Alexandria*, which was interpreted in various ways. Therefore, it was seen as an example of perishability of the human condition, mostly fame, as a boundless wish for the fabulous and for transcending the known, and entering the unknown, as a stimulation of national heroism through the example of bravery acts, of Messianic heroism for the time after the Romanian 1848 Revolution[1] *Alexandria* was influenced by many Christian customs: Alexander learns the *Psalms and the Psalm Book* from Aristotle**,** at Rim he is augured that he will defeat the ram – King Porus. Alexander said that all these happened through "God's will" and at Jerusalem he bows to Savaot. From all of the above, we can imply that *Alexandria* could never be classified with certainty into a specific genre. Thus, it was included in various categories: ethical literature, pseudo-historical literature, romantic literature[2].

Another interesting element is that a folk tale book, which in its spirit is close to the medieval morals, also assimilates in its construction, as a freestanding structure, the transformation of a moment of heroic epos. The confronting forces, as it always is the case whenever the fight motif occurs, have different positions in the rigorous hierarchy of the medieval values (allegorical carriages, pageants, the triumphs define the fame, the glory which transcends Death, but is worn by the passing of Time). This concept is present in the text of *Alexandria*, determining much lamentation on the destiny of Alexander, as well as the appearance of his name in a series of versified reflections around the *ubi sunt* motif. The characters in this kind of productions have to be prominent. This hierarchy only applies to the main hero, whereas the common man, in his confrontation with death, does not achieve posthumous fame, and in the true spirit of the ecclesiastic preaching, only benefits from his good deeds, "which will also follow him after death".

Having reached this point in enumerating assimilations and influences, we need to mention the "romances" and their role in the Romanian literature.

Romanian specialists classify the following "folk tale books" among the "romances" translated into Romanian: *Alexandria, The History of Troy* (*Historia Destructionis Troiae*), *The Story of Imberie* (based on *Pierre et la belle Maguelonne*), *The Story of Erotocrit* (the Greek version of *Pierre et Vienne*), *Filerot and Antusa* (the Romanian version of the book *Erotokritos), Iliodor* (based on *Aithiopika* by Heliodorus) and *Polotion* (a translation of an original work that is still missing; the brave Polition crossing over Ukraine, Spain, Italy, Turkey and India) (Chițimia, Simionescu, 1963: 83). The first and the second book, *Alexandria and The History of Troy*, are also classified in the category of „pseudo-historical" novels; this classification, and their inclusion into the romance genre, can be thoroughly done if one takes into account their content and their popularity.

During the XIX century, Romanian books became more and more popular. The fact that, in the beginning, romances were read by boyars and later by merchants, does not indicate a "descending" trajectory of that kind of literature from

[1] In *Versuri şi Proză,* he confesses to have known the novel *Încercările şi dispoziţiile mele de lectură.*

[2] M. Gaster includes it in this category, reffering mainly to the primary meaning of the term 'romantic'

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aristocracy towards the lower classes; because when acquiring a copy, a local dignitary did not hesitate to read it out at local ceremonies, and the peasants would listen attentively to *The History of Troy*, "written in the country of Olt" by Matei Voileanu, or to *Alexandria* read out loud in the markets of Bucharest, or to any other folk tale told in the villages of Transylvania.

These new approaches gave fantastic traits into the imaginary of the historical, sapiential and traditional literature. Thus, the chivalrous book brought new elements to the writings on the lives of kings, saints and the spectacular collapses of the empires. These new elements entered the sphere of the fantastic depending on the mentality of the readers and, more importantly, that of the "peddlers". Thus, we can explain events which can only be found in the Romanian literature, events that are specific or adapted to the Romanian spirit (profoundly Orthodox). Generation after generation, the imagination of both translators and readers was stimulated.

At the same time, there was an outward shift of insight values. The "Outer wisdom", which dominates this world, became more fascinating than the "Inner wisdom", which lead the debates between reflection and principles, or the parley of the reasoning with the world of passion. The inner struggle of the philosopher, of the man meditating on the human condition and the destiny of man, changed into a "dialogue" with the forces outside the circle bounded by intrinsic wisdom. The universe, in its smallest components, offered a source for discovering life, learning, evolving.

The destiny of the chivalrous novels is a small part of the destiny of folk tale books, which always embraced the imaginary born at the meeting point between the human mind and the sapiential stories. Through the ages, the folk tale books shifted between areas of the imaginary, following the evolution of imagination within inner strength.

It can be said that there is an inner circle of principles, rigorously preserved, and an outer circle of happenings and significant destinies, retained because of their distinctive value; the two circles intersect and support each other. The memorable events became myths and the singular adventures became moralizing episodes, until the ephemeral and the singular stirred the interest for the balance between reality and appearance. Thus, one can notice a continuous and visible tendency to transform everything worth remembering in the legends where reality meets the fabulous, in such a manner that the clear separation of the two is not easily perceivable. In the XVII century, this reality-fiction or stability-instability game triggered the emergence of baroque elements in literature and art.

The fantasy in folk tale books did not serve in discovering new truths, but to explain the ones learned before. Being considered a part of the mind, just like, for instance, the taste serves the body, the imagination gave meaning to concepts, in a more efficient manner. This approach, also present in a book read by M. Eminescu (*Guarding the five senses***,** Neamț Monastery, 1826), helps us understand the role of imagination in "traditional" books.

The specific elements of the imaginary, as they appear in folk tale books, throw a strong light upon the relation between intelligence and imagination in our culture.

Since it is well known that in every culture "the folk tale book" adapted to collective mentality, we can rediscover people of older times when reading about

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Ducipal fighting the bear, or Jason's sea travels or Barlaam teaching Josaphat how to escape danger. Wisdom is omnipresent, embracing the enchanting game of fantasy.

In the XVII century, the spectacular blossoming of the historical literature in the spoken language triggered important structural changes in the written Romanian culture. Significantly, the High Steward Cantacuzino and Miron Costin rejected the "tales" from *Alexandria* as they had a different perception of the great ruler of Antiquity; they also gave recognition to leisure literature driven by fantasy.

Those who compare the folk tale books in the old original languages to their newer translations from the following centuries, can see big differences, because, as Hasdeu said "they are nowhere translated, but transformed". Hence, the many Romanian copyists modified the text in order to bring it closer to the Romanian condition and give it Romanian traits. The translated and then localized and adopted folk tale books brought useful knowledge for the understanding of the ancient and medieval world to the old Romanian culture.

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