REPRESENTATIONS AND FEATURES OF DESTINY IN ROMANIAN FAIRY TALES

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Abstract: Destiny, with its various representations of mythical order – Luck/ Mischance, Fate, Faith – reveals in the fantastical Romanian fairy-tale the distinctive vision of the simple man about existence, about the role of the human being in this world, about the coalescence with nature, with the sacred. In the mythological paradigm, Destiny governs, along with other divinities (Fărtate, God), the mundane and the cosmic order. Its autority is unassailable and can act through instances that receive the attribute of sanctity. These are imagined as mythical beings which belong to a mysterious world and highlight the diversity of a cultural background.

Keywords: destiny, luck, mythical being, sacredness

The mythology of Romanian people, just like any other mythology, reveals to us as a genuine „spectacle" of the imagination of the human being. Because of its orality, it materialized in superstitions and rites, in miraculous stories and legends, which disclose „keys" of lecture in the history of the Romanian popular culture and mentality. The characters, symbolical reflections, ideals of the simple man from the folk, through the initiation in knowledge reveals fundamental aspects of human existence.

Concerning the mythology from the Romanian space, an important chapter is represented by the mythology of fate, which emphasizes the specific perspective of life, destiny, the meaning of the being in this world, about the bond with nature, with the sacred, of the people from this land. The participation at the ritual of „coming into being" redimensions the fate/destiny of the romanian. From birth to death, in every existential moment, he creates and recreates the world, defines himself as individuality in a microuniverse and he assumes his personal destiny, because he believes that he can not escape it.

In the mythological paradigm, Destiny is also called by the Romanians Fate, Fatality, *„terms that express an indo-european alter-ego of destiny"* (Romulus Vulcănescu, 1985, p.162), called Moira at the ancient Greek and Fatum at the romans. As the popular creations of mythical nature accentuate, Destiny governs alongside with other divinities (Fărtate, God), the mundane and the cosmic order, its authority being unassailable. Likewise, it can act through instruments, through instances loaded with sacred. In the popular romanian fantastical fairy-tales, the instances that frequently appear are Ursitoarele, Luck, and, sometimes, Mind. These are imagined as mythical, supranatural beings, without a well-determined physical contour, belonging to „the other", mysterious world, into which the access can not be granted but to the hero, because he is the initiated one, the chosen.

Ursitoarele, that we meet at numerous ancient civilizations, present – according to the Romanian mythological imaginary – to the three rituals of passing (birth, wedding and death) but also to other important timelines (The Christmas Holiday, that of New Year – when the

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girls practiced certain rits of fate, with the purpose of finding out who was to become their life-partner) – establish the human fate in the first three nights from the birth, according to the following mythical scenario: clad in white, they counsel together and then the oldest utters the destiny. Frequently, they can be influenced by material factors (the gifts put on the table of the Ursitoare by the child's parents, by the midwife which assisted the birth of the first-born), by atmospheric conditions. These mythical characters, like the ritual of future-telling are, probably, of local origin, however, the existing influences from the Greco-Roman and those of livresque nature can not be neglected. Ursitoarele from the romanian mythological background resemble the Naracitele from the Bulgarian mytho-folklore, the Usudele of the Serbians or the Sudenitele of the slavic nations from the Eastern and Western part of Europe (Ivan Evseev, 1999, p. 474).

We consider as being significant the fact that in Romanian mythology, the establishment of the essential details of a human being is not considered as absolute, immutable, most of the times being offered as an alternative through circumstances of objective nature. In this respect, a relevant example is being represented by the destiny of the hero from the fairy-tale *The sturdy born with the book in his hand* (from Petre Ispirescu's collection, ***Legends or Romanian Fairy-tales)***. His birth draws attention through uncanny, because he appears in this world with a book in his hand, this fact assigning him a different status, privileged in the ontological universe in which he is situated. In the third day from the birth of the stout, the three Ursitoare appear and the older one prophesizes him that he will become rich, the middle-aged one that he will be kidnapped by the evil spirits at the age of twelve, and the last one that he will become emperor „if he escapes". This happens, after the crossing of the first step of initiation, wedding and the sublimation of the forming process as a complete man. The exceeding of the challenges, of all the attempts the hero is subjected to, the transition from the mundane space to „the other world" and vice versa, all these are sequences of the process of spiritual formation, proving that the whole human existence is, basically, an initiation. This fairy-tale points out that it is in the power of man to influence the destiny in its favor, through perfect demeanor (goodness, honor, loialty, courage) and through knowledge.The destiny of the exceptional hero is, for that matter, anticipated by his birth through magical, ritualistic intervention, therefore it is a miraculous birth, to which the popular narrator adds a symbolical element, namely „the book he was born with" and which he „did not let go from his hands", becoming ever since his childhood, up to the age of twelve, „a book himself". The insertion of these *ab initio* narrative elements produces a psychological shock to the reader, precisely to remove the confines imposed to thinking, and determining him to perceive the trajectory of the „sturdy born with the book in his hand" as a coordinate of ontological depth regarding the human aspiration of always vanquishing death and settling its own destiny through volition and intelligence.

We meet the issue that aims at the destiny of the human being, the ideal, its appetite of living „the deathless life" very well represented in the fairy-tale from Petre Ispirescu's collection ***Legends or Romanian Fairy-tales***, metaphorically entitled ***Tinereţe fără bătrâneţe şi viaţă fără de moarte*** **(*Youthfulness without caducity and life without death*)**, a unusual fairy-tale through its sad and not happy ending that it offers to the reader, because the hero dies. The narrative text of mythical nature reveals the ideal of reaching immortality and the impossibility of keeping it, an universal theme, recurrent in the Chinese, Japanese, Celtic

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(***The Adventures of Brain, son of Febail)*** myths, **in *The epic of Gilgamesh*** or in ***The Book of Enoch***. The hero, Prince Charming, is born through the magic intervention of a „nuncle/greybeard", a correspondent of the „mythical ancestor" from the Romanian cultural space, character which introduces us in the mythical space. He anticipates Prince Charming's destiny, warning that his parents won't have their share of him. The child which is born, thanks to this „nuncle", by an empress that did not succeed to give birth to a child for a long time, comes from a sacred place and rejects the common human condition. Therefore, he does not come in this world but just after his father, the emperor, promises him „youthfulness without caducity and life without death". In the moment of the inauguration of his fifteenth birthday he solicits his parents to give him what they promised they will, he fully assumes his destiny, because he will go on a great journey of initiation, willing to find something that no one can offer him. Traversing an earthly space, and then a quasi-mythical one (in which he meets Gheonoaia and the Virago), he reaches in a mythical space, of „youthfulness without caducity and life without death". His attempt of overcoming human condition succeeds, because he marries the young fairy, she symbolizing, too, „youthfulness without caducity", not only the crono-spatial zone in which he arrived. However, neither from here does an echelon from the terrestrial, profane space miss, this being The Valley of Weeping (the appelation sends us directly to the *Bible*), a transitory place between the mundane realm to the sacred one, that of „life without death", in which he will see a rabbit, symbol of caducity, perishability. Through a ritualic act (hunting) he will return from the world of the myth into the earthly world, because the longing of the native places, of the parents, becomes irresistible. The return to the empire from which he went away means the meeting with his own death, because once he is out of the mythical, ahistorical time, he reintegrates into the biological dimesion, physical, irreversible, irrecuperable time. This is the kind of destiny that pulls and lures Prince Charming, starting from the infinite to the limit, to duration, because the human being is born with the germs dead, and, per se, can not become immortal. Contrariwise, the hero, just like any other mythical hero, even though somehow manages to achieve immortality, does not feel fulfilled because he can not live this unique state in a solitary mode, without his close ones. Therefore, factors, interior „brakes" that do not permit deviation from the circumscription in the laws of nature, intervene in the human destiny.

The other mythical instance acting as a protector or discretionary in the existential labyrinth is Luck, instrument that assures the bond between the real world and the fabulous one. Luck represents, in general in the Romanian mythology and, especially, in the Romanian fairy-tale, the positive side of the sacred. Terms and expressions like Luck, Mischance, Luck and Mind, the world of „Noroace", Human Fate, the flower of luck, The luck of Noroace etc., highlight an extremely rich mythical imaginary and sublimate a *forma mentis* seeker of the deep meanings of life, in a dynamic often concentrated on provoking the divinity, in the attempt to understand and change what seems irrational in its behavior (often prefferential) through which it acts.

Between man and God, man and Luck, a relation of dependence is established, emphasized with „craftmanship" by the anonymous creator, otherwise like man's dialogue, sometimes enigmatic, with these instances on which the quality of his life depends on.

The popular fairy-tales from the Romanian cultural space underline man's special relation with Luck, because the former is under the „dominion" of the other, a „dominion"

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which is looked upon with calm, seen as a common fact unfolded in the transcendental – profane relation.

The spectrum of the representations of Luck is remarkably nuanced, aspect confirmed by the mythical narratives from the collections of Petre Ispirescu, Dumitru Stăncescu, Tudor Pamfile, Al. Vasiliu, I. Oprişan, Arthur and Alber Schott etc., and its attitude towards the one that it accompanies, which sometimes seems to respect no principle. For example, in a story from Bucovina, inserted by Tudor Pamfile in ***Mitologie românească(Romanian mythology)***, is emphasized the major difference between the luck of a crone which lived very well and that of the girl that served her. The luck of the old woman was *„everything wet from the morningdew that it took from all the plains and brought on the old woman's field: and the bread was bad at all of them, only to her it was beautiful and with down-bowed ears."* Also, whence the luck was eating *„back it was growing"*. In opposition with it, the girl's luck was dry and although it was eating *„from the biggest pots",* it could not quench its hunger, requesting more food at the next meeting. At the question of the young servant *„-But I wonder why my luck is not like yours?",* the response offered by the old woman *„Because God ordered so, for every other. Luck is not just one!"*, reveals the idea of the diversity of luck on a transcendental level, correspondent with man's diversity on an earthly level. Good or bad, young or old, active or lazy, luck dimensions the destiny of its human pair.

Another folkloric text from Tudor Pamfile's mentioned book (the sixth story) emphasizes even more the idea of a destiny that is above luck. Its content is the following: two brothers share the wealth inherited from their old father and, though they had the land alongside them, the lesser brother becomes poorer and poorer as the years are passing, whereas the big brother becomes richer and richer, because luck proves itself discretionary and *„does not work the same for all people".* Not understanding the reason which generated this poverty (his cattle are dying, the crops are withering, his house burnt and he feels that he is endlessly sad, downcast and ill), he decides that his share of the heritage be sold to his brother, and that he must go somewhere else, with the idea that *„changing his place he will change his luck".* He reaches the edge of a forest, where he meets an old man that advices him to walk on a path of that forest, to the end of which he will be able to see a mountain summit. At the peak of the mountain he will find *„the house of Fate"*. He also advices him to understand without being surprised of anything, to remain silent for three days and then he will find what the fate had prepared for him. The hero reaches the palace *„which almost blinded his eyes, so beautiful and shiny it was"* and precisely in the ninth chamber he sees *„on a bed of gold, beautifully adorned, a young woman that sat with her elbow underneath her head, dressed only in jewels and diamonds".*

The hero does not react in any way at the questions and threats of the young woman and even the extraordinary richness in the palace could not amaze him. At lunch *„the table set itself with meal like in fairy-tales"*. The attempt of the beautiful woman to lure him, changing in the expanse of an hour a hundred gowns *„one more beautiful and brighter than the other"* remains unsuccessful. At midnight, the stilness of the palace is disturbed by knocks in the window, someone unseen announcing that *„a baby was born!*", and the second and the third day the scenario changes, the palace being replaced with *„a big house, with a clean but poor wooden bed"* and then *„a very poor cabin".* The woman itself changes, appearing the second day *„more rough, not so beautiful as the first, that was like an empress",* and the third day

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„the young woman aged and withered completely", „dressed in rags and barely moving , so sick she was." The wealthy meal from the first day is poorer and poorer, thus in the last day the two eat only onion and hominy. In reverse rapport, the number of those who come at the house of the mysterious feminine presence during the night is increasing *„as many as leaves and grass".* In the next day, the hero finds out that she *is Man's Fate* and receives clarifications regarding the answer offered to those who knocked at the window in those three nights. Thus, the two that came in the first night received „*greatness and wealth"*, those over a hundred born in the second night „*labor and honor"*, and those over a thousand from the third night have received what she had then, namely *„poverty and disease".* Therefore, the way in which Fate presents at a certain moment determines the standard of living of the human being. The hero is being told in the end that being born in the third day he will remain poor no matter what he does, and, as an optimal solution, he must work for his brother, because he was born in the first day, so he has „luck". The conclusion of this story enframes in a specific „feeling of destiny" and in a life „philosophy" typical of the romanian space: the attempt of changing the „fatum" is just a challenge, because its dimension remains the same, immutable.

This moment of intaking Luck in the own favor of the human being through the marriage with another person, bearer of luck, so the realization of a magical transfer of substantiality, also appears in other stories, popular fairy-tales from the Romanian space – for example ***Povestea Noroculuí(The story of Fortune**-III)* collected by Al. Vasiliu, ***Aflatul*** from Ion Pop-Reteganul's collection – revealing a concept of the simple man, living in accordance with nature, with the cosmic, result of a life experience, concept according to which the human being, through courage and mind power, has the freedom of trying to know the eternity of the laws of the Universe, even though it is a being subjected to frailty and chance, and of restoring the individual, social and spiritual equilibrium through the intervention of an Order/ Instance that has not the greatness of the supreme divinity, but determines the destiny.

According to the scenario of mythical nature from the Romanian fairy-tales and stories, Luck, this anthropomorphization of that positive, bright side of the sacred, determines, for the most part, the favorable destiny of man. The collective mentality enframed it in different representations, not very well contoured, but neither ambiguous, its functions being extremely reduced. Not accidentaly, a feature of the epic kernels have destiny as a theme and central personification. Luck represents the pretty reduced dimension of the occurence in comparison with the other fantastic fairy-tales, the absence of the elements of surprize and of the *„adventurous soul"* (Niculina Chiper, 2006, p.252). In exchange, the unbelievable dose is augmented, numerous picturesque aspects and unexpected situation changes are inserted. The greatly diminished aesthetical valence has as a counterweight the powerful moralizing sense, so that often in the narrative discourse it transforms in a genuine parable. Withal, the divine intervention in directing/redirecting the existential trajectory is met frequently, and the happy-ending does not always respond „the expectation horizon" of the reader.

The Romanian popular fairy-tales, genuine mythical fragments, reveal, in their majority, that Destiny, Luck, Ursitoarele – instruments of the sacred – can positively or negatively influence man's existence since the moment of its conception or from its birth, but their influence is not always immutable. The life of the human being appears as a ritual, being loaded with messages that, sometimes, seem incomprehensible.

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