

## FICTION AND FOLK FABULOUS IN MIRCEA NEDELCIU'S NOVEL TRATAMENT FABULATORIU

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### ABSTRACT:

THE PRESENT PAPER AIMS TO PROVE THAT MIRCEA NEDELCIU'S NOVEL TRATAMENT FABULATORIU HIDES A MESSAGE BEYOND THE FIRST READING COMPREHENSION. THE AUTHOR ACHIEVES THE LAYERS OF THE TEXT THROUGH THE USE OF THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS OF THE LITERARY CREATION. THE MAIN CHARACTER OF THE NOVEL, LIKE THE HERO OF THE ROMANIAN FOLKTALES BEGINS AN INITIATING JOURNEY AT THE END OF WHICH HE IS SAVING HIMSELF. FOR MIRCEA NEDELCIU, FINDING REFUGE IN FICTION AND FABULOUS REPRESENTS A MEANS OF AVOIDING CENSORSHIP DURING COMMUNIST ROMANIA.

**KEYWORDS:** FAIRYTALE, FABULOUS, CENSORSHIP, RELIGION, FOLKLORE

### 1. Hiding the message in an ideologically informed world

A text that focuses on hiding the message beyond the immediate reality, beyond the censorship of the word in communist Romania, is Mircea Nedelciu's novel *Tratament fabulatoriu*. The world of the Romanian novelist must be understood, must be deciphered in a unique manner, in order to penetrate beneath the surface, where the author reveals its occult meanings.

Perhaps the cornerstone element upon which Nedelciu is counting on the transmitted message could still pass censorship<sup>3</sup>. Popular culture, exhibited in its entirety, can provide a much clearer message about the novel than a *textualist* reading.

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<sup>3</sup> “The village, as geographic and social environment, was, for our country, the main framework for the development of folklore phenomena. As comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu underlined, the peasantry was the main receptacle of the traditional cultural patrimony, which has been continuously enriched through new creations.” - Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Folclor literar românesc* (Bucureşti: EDP, 1978), p. 100.

Fabulous is present early in the novel. Clues are offered even by the main character, Luca, through his thoughts and uncertainties. “Why we need a weatherman at Fitotron if experiments are carried out indoors in a controlled environment?”<sup>4</sup> The character asks himself while emphatically explains to the taxi driver about that special place, hidden from profane eyes.

Alex Ștefănescu in *Romania literară*, presenting Adrian Marino’s book, *Cenzura în România, schiță istorică introductivă*, comments related to communist censorship “in reality, with the establishment of communism in Romania, in the years after the Second World War, censorship becomes totally different than ever before in the history of the country. It establishes, in fact, absolute control and asphyxiating on any intellectual product and any form of communication. (...) Not only that total control is exercised by people whose lack of training is one of their main attributes followed by bad taste, all leading to grotesque results.”<sup>5</sup>

Nedelciu's attempt to convey significance beyond the immediate meaning of the first reading is done through the use of themes, motifs and symbols of popular literature which, understood, create some author-reader communication privacy. The author aims to provide a different world, fabulous, to double to the real one which is ideologically informed, oppressive and frustrating.

The essential constituent of setting the whole story is the hero's journey, a journey of discovery, in the end. The main character, Luca, turns towards a new life through various attempts to become part of the community. He does not travel as the folk hero did, to save the world, he saves only himself. It is obvious from the first pages of the novel that Luca is looking for the centre. The author himself tells us: “You have kept calm and have advanced to the centre by the widest boulevard rule. Proved good to some extent, there is apparently a hidden centre”<sup>6</sup>.

Luca’s initiating journey is, in fact, the reader’s route to the final revelation that the writer conceals as a first end of the novel. Luca goes, as any fairytale hero, through various trials, removes obstacles in its path to restore the balance of his own universe. The character is a chosen hero, an outsider who comes to save a world and which turns out to be the opposite of balance, safety, and trust in the community. Traditional Romanian

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<sup>4</sup> Mircea Nedelciu, *Tratament fabulatoriu* (București: Cartea Românească, 1986), p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Alex. Ștefănescu, ”Terifianta cenzură ca inofensiv obiect de studiu.” *România literară* February 2000 Nr. 38, accessed : March 27, 2011 [http://www.romlit.ro/terifianta\\_cenzur\\_ca\\_inofensiv\\_obiect\\_de\\_studiu](http://www.romlit.ro/terifianta_cenzur_ca_inofensiv_obiect_de_studiu).

<sup>6</sup> Mircea Nedelciu, *Tratament*, 63.

society has at its centre the family, then the community, protected by intrusions from outside. The hero, at the beginning of his journey, sees the company as one seemingly perfect mansion, but, eventually, he realizes that it is far from the ideal model.

Love is a generator of unhappiness for Luca, the original cause of his journey and love is the one that ultimately restores the balance of his world. Unlike the traditional hero, Luca does not begin his quest for the beautiful Ileana-Cosânzeana, he runs away from her, then follows her and finally finds the true Ileana-Cosânzeana in the shoes of The Poor's Smart Girl.

## 2. The character - a business agent of a symbolic and repairing quest

Luca is the name of one of the Seventy Apostles of Christ, who wrote one of the Gospels<sup>7</sup>, showing in his writing a strong artistic sense of the word.

Luca is *the chosen one* from the beginning of *Tratament fabulatoriu* when we learn about him that he dwelt on the top of a mountain at the weather station. The mountain is an element loaded with pre-Christian and Christian symbolism. It is an *axis mundi*, relating the sky / space to the earth and its ascending involves a ritual.

“Christians consider that space is top of Mount Calvary. All these beliefs express one and the same feeling, deeply religious, ‘our world’ is a holy ground, because it is the closest place to heaven, because, from here, one can get to Heaven, our world is, therefore, a ‘high place’”<sup>8</sup>. This statement by Mircea Eliade, in the context of the novel, contributes to the hero image of Luca, and to justify the choices we make in its labyrinthine path along the novel.

His location on the mountain already puts him on a higher scale than others. Ivan Evseev in *Dicționar de simboluri și arhetipuri culturale* explains the meaning of the mountain as a cultural symbol and as an archetype, in popular faith and creativity folk rituals its ascent brings on the psychological level the attempt to overcome one's own limitations, spiritual ascension and elevation through self-knowledge.<sup>9</sup> The rich symbolism

<sup>7</sup> ”Evanghelia după Luca”, Accessed: March 27, 2011, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/diverse/evanghelia-dupa-luca-69300.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Mircea Eliade: *Sacru și profanul*, (București: Humanitas, 1995), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ivan Evseev: *Dicționar de simboluri și arhetipuri culturale*, (Timișoara: Amarcord, 1994), 110.

of the mountain, which is related to the height and the centre ideas, is explained in *Dicționar de simboluri* by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant.<sup>10</sup>

The understanding of the natural phenomena, those that affect the existence, set Luca, the meteorologist, already, in a favoured position. Do not forget that customs and popular beliefs need knowledge and domination of nature which proves to be of high importance. There are many rituals that can (or at least are trying to) tame nature spirits.

Interesting is the image of Luca in one of his trips to the mansion, emerging from the church with a rod in his hand: “Since I was with my horn bat I had taken from the station, so I seemed kind of shepherd in a flock, especially since I came with the first people out of the former church ...”<sup>11</sup>. He seems to be the shepherd to these people who have lost their centre that he listens and guides. This image contradicts the image of a young Christian philosopher, scholar, attributed to Luca before. The character isn’t what appears to be at first sight, in fact, it is clear in the first lines of the novel. An image can go subtle censorship and manages to create feelings of admiration for the beauty of hidden things.

### **3. Romanesque script vs. fairytale script**

In chapter three we enter directly without any guidance in the fascinating world of the manor, still, in fact, the sequel of the first chapter. Luca is found in a universe where everything is possible, resembling an ancient society. The author uses this trick to introduce the reader into a world far removed as the anonymous creator said, “Once upon a time, that if it hadn’t been, it wouldn’t have been narrated, for it was the poplar that grew pears and willow cyclamen, when the bears beat in the tail, of the throat when taking wolves were kissing the lambs, becoming brothers, when the flea was shoeing itself with a ninety-nine foot iron ounce and they threw themselves in the glory of heaven to bring the stories to us.”<sup>12</sup>

The mansion is the axis mundi, the centre of the world for those who live there, but it seems to be recognized even by Luca. “About half open eyes and low light dusk, I say, all seemed to be ordered around a square cross that divided the valley bottom and ribs arranged in a semicircle around it into four equal parts. The centre would have been the

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *Dicționar de simboluri*. (București: Artemis, 1993), 321.

<sup>11</sup> Mircea Nedelciu, *Tratament*, 197.

<sup>12</sup> Petre Ispirescu, *Opere I*. (București: EPL, 1969), 5.

Mansion itself [...]”<sup>13</sup>. The manor and the surroundings seem to unite in a perfect ideal and balanced design. In pre-Christian symbolism<sup>14</sup>, the cross represents the sun and harmony of opposites. Christianity brings the symbol of the sun represented by the cross, defined by this path towards truth, salvation and faith in God. Romanian fairy tale hero is a Christian. God is helping him along the journey, which is a unique feature of Romanian folklore.

In the fairy tale “Enchanted Pig”, as in other Romanian fairy tales, the main character is king’s daughter, who, when seeing how pig becomes man puts her “hope in God's help”<sup>15</sup>.

On the other hand, a very important element to note in the novel is the lack of the cross on the top of what was once the church, which has now been converted into a place of discussion - let's call it, “philosophical”. What may signify the lack of church or rather its transformation (which again is an axis mundi community) from the profane to sacred element? A simple explanation is that despite the fact that we find ourselves in a sacred place, it is not understood to that extent by its inhabitants. We will see in the end of the novel that they will break the link that to Luca seemed magical at first. Perhaps, as he says, because there are always brought people from outside of the mansion, and those inside who travel outside discover the pecuniary side of the existence, this sacred land is increasingly covered by the profane.

In fact, as happens in the fairy tale “Youth without Old Age and Life without Death”, the son of king returns in a profane world where what was once the sacred realm of the struggle between good and evil. Mircea Eliade in *Sacrul și profanul* states that profane existence “is never found in pure state. Whatever the degree of profane world reached, the man who chose a secular life fails to abolish all religious behaviour. Even the de-sacralised existence still retains traces of a religious valorisation of the World.”<sup>16</sup> So this world strongly sacralised in the beginning, still retains vestiges of the old world.

The hero feels, leaving the mansion, the fear of the too rapid flow of time and is afraid the years have passed over him as over Prince Charming, the hero who sought Youth Without Old Age and Life without Death “I think I was afraid of something or ... I do not know why, but I preferred to go if someone offered me a lead. Through my body all sorts of visceral signals of distress were circulating. In fact, I unconsciously feared losing touch

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Nedelciu, *Tratament*, 137.

<sup>14</sup> “Crucea, forme și semnificații” Accessed: March 27 2011  
<http://www.crestinortodox.ro/sarbatore/duminica-sfintei-crucei/crucea-forme-semnificatii-69773.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Petre Ispirescu, *Opere*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul*, 15.

with the natural passage of time: I expected to find the Fuica village unrecognizable, as if 50 years have passed over it that night. Something like in fantasy novels.”<sup>17</sup>

Here is how it is described in the tale: *Seeing the ruined palaces and weeds growing on them, sighed and, with tears in her eyes, tried to remember how much were once lighted the palaces and how he spent his childhood in them.*

The narrator intervenes to communicate with the listener directly, as it happens in the novel, where the author talks directly to the reader about his character. “What kind of totem hunting author chooses to write a character that has existed for real.”<sup>18</sup> Of course, the relationship with the reader since Nedelciu’s literary debut does not confound him with the popular storyteller. Nedelciu calls for new techniques of narration closer to postmodernism than traditional literature, however, the oral nature of communication with the receiver, is to be noted, which offers both folktale and novelistic invention.

A character in reality of Fuica village, the peasant that accommodates with the help of the mayor, Luca, proves to know the story of the mansion, but when he wants to talk about it, hearing about Luca’s first night spent somewhere on the border between the two small settlements he is interrupted by the mayor: “ ‘O, poor you, didn’t you run into Weeping Valley?’ ‘What Weeping, folks, Did you start telling us fairy tales?’ - Said the mayor”<sup>19</sup>, so the text confirms that it’s a fiction novel. We must not trust either the old man’s words, but sometimes we can let ourselves guided by the narrator to discover treasures.

## Conclusions ...

“Tales present the world as storytellers and their listeners would want it to be. The passing of the heroes by running narrative is always ascending, man defeats dragons and monsters, tricks the devil, the latter comes first, poor boy passes all the tests and marries to the king’s daughter, and the poor becomes due to his deeds very rich. So the fairy tale is the poetry of fulfilled desires the function of defining itself as escape from everyday reality. [...] In the world of fairy tales, good always defeats evil, beauty overcomes ugly.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mircea Nedelciu, *Tratament*, 110.

<sup>18</sup> Mircea Nedelciu, *Tratament*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Mircea Nedelciu, *Tratament*, 114.

<sup>20</sup> Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Folclor literar românesc*, (București: EDP, 1978), 267.

*Tratament fabulatoriu* is a frame for the many stories told by different characters along the way. It is extremely interesting how detailed this novel was written, although at first glance it appears to be simply a story of the journey of a young man on a fabulous realm. It is remarkable the Nedelciu's knowledge on folk techniques.

Luca returns in the end of the novel to the Mierean family as Prince Charming did from his time travel, into his birthplace, which he left in search of the absolute.

The new universe where Luca enters, returning to where it started at the beginning of the novel is totally unknown. It is a world that has not only been changed by time, but a new world of thought, the world of "vegetable-seller", as even the author says, a world that no longer recognizes the hero. But unlike the hero trying to find youth without old age, Luca does not die, he just revives under another form.

The role of the fairytale is to create a new world where everything is possible, a world in which the hero can shape the will of the people according to their needs. Ignoring the social and political context in which it was written, avoiding censorship Communist Nedelciu's novel gives the reader a fable treatment, a refuge in the stronghold fabulous fiction.

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