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Cuvinte cheie: sacru, profan, sărbătoare, timp mitic, mentalitate tradițională

Timpul mitic în folclorul românesc

Rezumat

Pentru omul modern timpul este, prin îngrijorătoarea lui curgere, stresant și angoasant. Fără să fie strict cuplat la binomul sacru-profan și lipsind inserția periodică a sărbătorii (eveniment ce ordona ritmul vieții în vechile comunități) timpul omului de azi este resimțit doar ca o însumare matematică a etapelor vieții, secvențe fără rost dintr-un maraton inconștient spre neant. În cazul omului tradițional, în schimb, timpul mitic presupune o întoarcere spre obârșii prin intermediul rememorării rituale a trecutului. În studiul de față am încercat să arătăm că timpul mitic este bidimensional, contemplativ (orientat spre trecut) și anticipativ (privind spre viitor). De asemenea am demonstrat că, în mentalitatea tradițională, nu există o ruptură, o separare brutală între timpul profan și cel sacru. Și unul și celălalt, într-o complementaritate perfectă, contribuie împreună la structura spațio-temporală în care evoluează existența individuală și colectivă, într-o alternanță neîntreruptă de praguri menite a esențializa durata și a-i contracara permanenta tendință entropică.

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Key words: sacred, profane, feast, mythical time, traditional mentality

Mythical Time in Romanian Traditional Culture

Summary

For modern man time is due to its implacable passage stressful and producing anguish. Without being coupled in the sacred-profane binomial and missing the periodical insertion of a feast (an event that set order into the rhythms of time in ancient communities) time is perceived by contemporary man as a mathematical sum of the stages of life, useless sequences in an unconscious marathon towards nothingness. On the other hand, in the case of traditional man, mythical time presupposes a return towards the origins by means of a ritual re-enactment of the past. The present study tries to demonstrate that mythical time is bi-dimensional, contemplative (past oriented) and anticipatory (looking towards the future). It also demonstrates that in the traditional mentality there is no break or brutal separation between profane and sacred time. Both contribute in a perfect complementarity to the spatial-temporal structure in which the individual and collective existence develop, in an uninterrupted alternative of thresholds meant to essentialize duration and counteract its permanent entropic tendency.

Mythical Time in Romanian Traditional Culture

The traditional Romanian culture comprises folklore, folk art, customs and ceremonies, thus our entire traditional heritage, viewed as an “architecture of successive strata”². Extremely pertinent arguments, whether historical, cultural, literary or philosophical lead to the idea that the phenomenon of traditional culture could be viewed as the first great cultural synthesis born in the Romanian space³. Though there is no doubt that it does not represent a philosophy in the classical acception of the term, nevertheless, traditional culture starts from the questions the man of the ancient communities had formulated along the centuries concerning the nature and meaning of the human condition. These together with what could be called the folk philosophical consciousness form a permanent presence in the spiritual pattern of the Romanian society. Lucian Blaga considered this consciousness an outflow of “the entire human personalty”⁴ saying also that “for our way of thinking it is the the blood that gives life and organic strength to our heart, the brilliant background on which we project our laughter or daily melancholies and, maybe, the most important cradle for our will power”⁵.

Inside this spiritual pattern of the Romanians an essential place is occupied by the way the man of the traditional communities related to time. Mythical time (in direct relationship with mythical space) embodies the archetypal element through which the representation of the earthly existence is construed and defined. This begins with the creation of the world and ends with it. If in the Romanian mythopoetic imagination mythical space was represented by the earth (as a fundamental cosmic element), mythical time is construed in “a time of repetition, oriented towards the wells of the spiritual creation, which makes man to actually re-live the genuine purity”⁶.

In antithesis to historical time (that refers especially to the future), mythical time presupposes thus a return to the origins, a ritual remembrance of the past, a sacred kinetics that develops parallel to and independently from historical time. Without being a-historic or anti historic, mythical time presupposes a process of “performance and transformation of the universe”⁷. In this context, we could interpret mythical time as being two-dimensional, contemplative, (directed towards the past) and anticipatory (looking towards the future).

Mythical time has another important characteristic: it can be embodied in diverse mythical characters, heroes, demons or eponymous heroes – representing metamorphoses of terrestrial beings or even mythically transformed phenomena. Mythical time can have beneficial influences on men or, on the contrary, raising against them and changing individual or collective destinies.

If we dwell for a while on this dichotomy, mythical time and historical time, we observe that, fundamentally, the Romanian peasant lives in time, it is in a real time (also called „veac” - age, century) which is still connected to eternity. “The peasant has the consciousness of his living in time but his soul and deeds develop in relationship with something which does not recognize this dimension anymore”⁸. Therefore this “special” reality (in which the dual time is manifest) induces

² *Istoria filosofiei românești*, Vol. I, ed. a II-a, Ed. Academiei RSR, București, 1985, p. 65

³ *ibidem*

⁴ L. Blaga, *Încercări filosofice*, Ed. Facla, Timișoara, 1997, p. 55

⁵ *idem*, p. 56

⁶ Valeriu Cristea, *Spațiul în literatură*, Ed. Cartea Românească, București 1979, p. 72

⁷ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română*, Ed. Academiei RSR, București 1985, p. 19

⁸ Ernest Bernea, *Spațiu, timp și cauzalitate la poporul român*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2005, p.162

the idea of the existence of two worlds: 1) the world of common people, with their life and experience and 2) the transcendental world, which is unconditional in relationship with eternity.

Viewed from the perspective of duration, time has neither beginning nor end. In accordance with the traditional conception, one can say that time begins with God and ends with Him. Concurrently time is lacking its modern dimensions: stress, anxiety and fear. What the fear in front of death represents for modern man, for the traditional man (who lives in the mythical time) is only a form of passage. Time is not having a sequential character, an accumulation of events ending in nothingness, but is a form of metamorphosis. Thus, the peasants' wisdom solves the problem of temporal limit seen as a reality between two successive moments. From this perspective, death has to be understood as a metamorphosis, a passage that connects to a new beginning. The rational perception of the infinity of time gets different valences in archaic communities. In the case of Romanian peasants, their temporal horizon is by no means quantitative but a qualitative one, internalized, spiritualized.

Therefore in the understanding and perception of the notion of time, passage thresholds are essential. The sacred year starts with the solstices and equinoxes, any disbalance of these fixed frameworks imposing significant behavioral changes in the collective mentality. The days, months, seasons, and years do not necessarily represent stages in the calendar but in that of behavior. There are good and bad days, seasons or years grouped in the same way as there are lucky days and good hours etc. As R. Vulcănescu underlined, the calendar does not necessarily measure time, but especially “the *chronocratic* spirits and divinities”⁹.

Mircea Eliade regards the mythical phenomena from the perspective of an original phenomenon, one that develops in time up to the sacralisation of the profane¹⁰. The author identifies and analyzes, in the Romanian mythical folklore, essential frameworks, (re)rationalization ceremonies, in other words, an entire universe of autochthon mythopoetic creation. The original conception of infinite time arises also from the Zalmoxian perspective¹¹. Referring to a text from Herodotus, who sustained that the Getae are „people who do not die”, V. Kernbach relates the mystery of their immortality to their belief in the return to the mythical time (*illud tempus*). Besides, they had also a more concrete perspective on the perception of time, as the archeological remains identified at Sarmisegetuza and Histria have demonstrated that, at least their learned men, knew the secrets of astronomy and had an extremely precise solar calendar. Even in our days, the peasants' calendar, an essential element of the Romanian traditional mythology, establishes the seasonal cycles according to the solstices and equinoxes, marking the fixed and movable feasts in close connection with the moon cycles (new or full), in relation with which are fixed the magic-mythical rituals of fertility and fecundity.

These cycles are associated with the magic practices connected to the dead souls' ascension or the infernal beings' (such as werewolves) activity who „eat from the moon's body”¹². These magical-mythological practices connected to the moon cycles are very well spread in traditional communities. They are repeated periodically and structure the beliefs and traditions. In the same time, the successions of the sun and moon cycles produce the germination of plants and the mating of animals, with an effect upon human activity. In traditional communities people had no need for instruments to measure time. They were listening to the clock of the house which watches

⁹ R. Vulcănescu, *op. cit.*, p.21

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis la Gengis – Han*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1980,

¹¹ Victor Kernbach, *Universul mitic al românilor*. E. Lucman, București, 1995, p.362

¹² R. Vulcănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 431



Simboluri solare pe poartă maramureșeană; foto: Felician Săteanu

unseen, rhythmically and undisturbed the passage of time. This natural clock has often an oracular function, showing premonitorily any change. The constant beat is a good omen, while its halt predicts death¹³.

Each time, in the case of such communities one speaks of a synthesis between the habitual, profane time and the sacred one. The former is marked by the valencies of the daily in connection with the work in the field, the activities in the household, or the intra- or inter-family relationships. The latter, the sacred time, on the other hand, is that of the feasts (essential sequences in the communities' life, the foundations of the relationship with the divinity, frameworks of regeneration of the cosmical bonds, the renewal of the time of the calendar.) Each feast determines an accumulation of being and existence. The days when they are produced are marked by a series of ceremonials, rites, and customs strongly rooted in the past of the respective community. This sacred sequence, the feast, sets its mark upon the whole community as well as separately on each individual because it represents „a form of participation of the real human condition in its sacred and a-temporal archetype”¹⁴ This means that during the feasts, space and time are abolished, the sky opens up, the difference between man and the god is annihilated, the human gestures are charged with mythical energy and magical substance. Thus, in the traditional mentality, between profane and sacred time (that of the feast) there is no brutal separation, an irreconcilable caesura. Both of them, in perfect complementarity, contribute together to the spatio-temporal structure in which the individual and collective existence develop, in an uninterrupted alternation of thresholds meant to essentialize duration and the original conception of infinite time and counteract its permanent entropic tendency.

In essence, the mythical vision of time in the peasants' universe occurs on the basis of

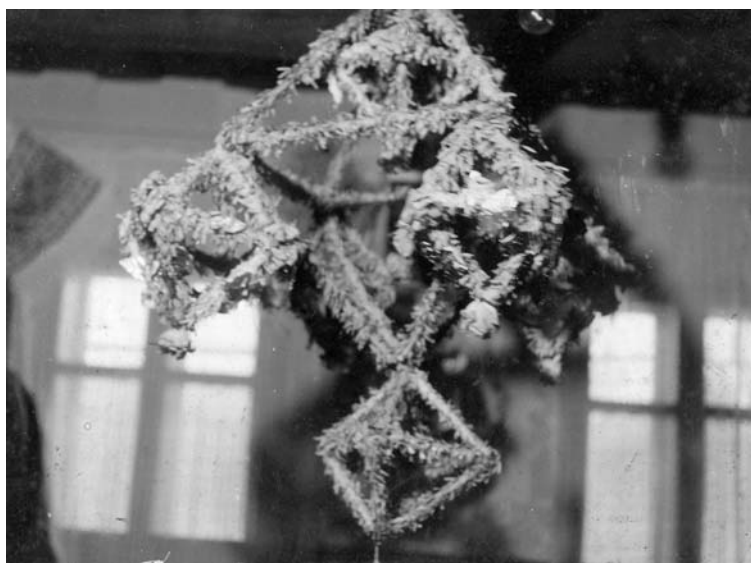
¹³ Victor Kernbach, *op.cit.*, p. 363

¹⁴ Paul Drogeanu, *Practica fericirii*, Ed. Eminescu, București, 1985, p 38

intuition. Time, far from being equal or linear, is discontinuous, inhomogenous. This concept is functional when it is applied to prehistorical times and reflects practices of Osirian type (in which gods are reborn) but also Vedic hipostases”¹⁵. We discover such reminiscences in the concept of “youth without old age”. As C. Noica underlines, “what the folktale knows, certainly, is what man has found through science – naturally – it is that time flows in a certain way in a certain part of the world and differently in another...”¹⁶...

In other words, in the traditional spiritual space, the presence of variable time can be remarked, perceived according to the psychic / spiritual state of the one who perceives it. For example Prince Charming spends in the folktale entitled *Youth without Old Age* a “forgotten time”, while on the earth, “his parents had stopped to live for hundreds of year”. The hero's amazement in front of the changes that had happened during his absence (“it seems I passed through this place the day before yesterday [...] The inhabitants were laughing at him as if he were out of his mind or dreaming while awake...”) takes us to a larger “folkloric stereotype” as I. Badescu writes, respectively, the concentration of certain universal motifs including that of relative time) in a single narrative model of agrarian inspiration. In these circumstances, the motif of mythical time, converted into a construction of the type “the mythical god who dies and is reborn”, entitles us to say that relativist time is ultimately an expression of the fear of death. The motif of eternal youth encompasses the fear of old age, of dangers, of its hardships and loneliness.

To conclude, one could say that in the ancient rural communities, time was interpreted as a phenomenon that continually renewed, was interrupted or enhanced according to the succession of seasons, of the sun and the moon, of day and night. It can be thus perceived as circular time, a kind of eternal mythical present in which any member of the community can integrate periodically by means of the same rites. It is ultimately a fragmented eternity whose thresholds are marked, brought into the consciousness and consecrated by celebrations, vital sequences in the community which releases the renewal of seasons.



Pom de Crăciun din Țara Codrului; foto: Felician Săteanu

¹⁵ Victor Kernbach, *op. cit.*, p. 363

¹⁶ C. Noica, *Cuvânt împreună despre rostirea românească*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2001, p. 137

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