FAIRY TALE PATTERNS IN THE POETRY OF CEZAR BALTAG

Ana-Maria Baciu
PhD. student, „1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia

Abstract: In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), Freud argues that civilization was necessarily and tragically built on the suppression and sublimation of instinct. Cezar Baltag’s world is one of conflicts he does not come to terms with, for which the poet finds no answers in a world of limits and limitations, hence his need to escape in his wandering for answers, in his quest for identity, into another one without limits, finality, closure. A deconstruction of the world, of reality, into fairy tales and into poems. He used fairy tales to project another world, one of psychological depth, without borders, a locus for his deep meanings to take roots, a world set free of constraints, of limits and limitations. The fertile ground of fairy tales was wisely used by Baltag in his poetry, with conscious intent, he entitled or subtitled some of his poems -pattern de basm/fairy tale pattern- taking his readers into a realm of multiple meanings.

Keywords: poetry, culture, fairy tales, myths, identity, collective imaginary

Cezar Baltag creates a lyric universe in which the mystical bonds between the material and the spiritual worlds need to be retied. The poet considers that it is necessary to follow his ancestors, to return to the roots, to folklore in order to re-create the broken bonds. The approach is rather intellectual combining ancient spells, formulas taken from children`s folklore, characters taken from the Greek mythology, characters from the Judeo-Christian mythology. The solution sought is one formula of re-charming the world in order to keep the mystery of existence alive. There seem to be more ways to re-create the broken bond between heaven and earth: mythology, folklore, sensuality, spells, religion, poetry, etc.

Baltag’s reliance on fairy tales is clearly seen in his volumes Odihnă în țipăt, Madona din dud, Unicorn în oglindă, Dialog la mal, as it becomes a major theme throughout his entire work, a means of internal liberation in a process of self-recognition. Depicting the rural and its realm, fairy tales become cultural documents he takes into account in his poetry. With the help of fairy tales he projected another world in his poems, one of psychological depth, the only one in which he could set himself free of all constraints, including political ones.

In an interview dating back to 1971, Cezar Baltag confessed: “M-am apropiat de folclor și pentru faptul că, în mod paradoxal, aprofundarea lui contrazice pârea comuna despre simplitate.” (“Another reason for which I turned to folklore is that, paradoxically, its in-depth study contradicts the common belief about simplicity.”) He turns to folklore, investigating thus in the collective subconscious, using what he calls “pattern de basm” (fairy-tale pattern), creating his own fairy tales. With “pattern de basm” as a title or subtitle for some of his poems collected in the volume Unicorn în oglindă, he indicates from the very beginning the way the poem should be approached, as a fairy tale - which is a specific way for our people, and not only, to understand the world, its essence. Lost in the reflections of the mirror and of poetry, the poet looks for identity, for his true, inner self caught in a conflicting world, aware of its faults and also of the passage of time. He becomes a stranger in the outer world where he finds no answers to his questions, thus, he moves his quest inwards.

Rooted in fairy tales, some of his poems are a way of re-charming the world, of finding its essence; such a poem is Fata din dafin (The Girl in the Bay Tree) included in the collection Unicorn în oglindă (Unicorn in the Looking Glass):
Fata din dafin
"Ea trece ca o corabie
   cu catargele evaporate
naufragiază pe o mare de camfor
de unde
nu se mai poate
întoarce

The Girl in the Bay Tree
She sails like a ship
with no masts
she sails on a sea of camphor
from where
she can no longer
return

Nervii ei sunt raze, inima ei
e un nod de lemn
împrejurul ei e o secetă
înăuntrul ei o fântână.
În fântână doarme un șarpe.
Din frunțea șarpelui curge o stea.

Her veins are sunrays, her heart
a crux of wood
around her is dryness
within her a well.
The well is nesting a snake.
The snake has a star on its head.

Ea aude cântând cocoșii
de parte
în scoarța copacilor
Auzul ei e o iederă
genele ei foșnesc
ea aprinde o gură de frunze
vorbete ei sunt vrăbiții:
Deschide-te, Dafine, deschide-te,
Dafine, deschide-te,
Dafine

She hears the song of roosters
far away
in the trees
Her hearing an ivy
her lashes a rustling
her mouth just leafs
her words are sparrows:
Open-up, Bay tree, open-up Bay tree, open-up,
Baytree

Dar Dafinul nu o mai aude
Și ea trece ca o corabie

cu pânzele evaporate

naufragiază pe o mare de camfor
de unde

nu se mai poate

întoarce” (Baltag 1975: 35)

Bay tree hears her no more

She sails like a ship

with no masts

she sails on a sea of camphor

from where

she can no longer

return (my translation)

The girl from the bay tree, a fairy tale character, by coming out from the bay tree and descending into the real world looses her way back to her magic world. The impossibility of return shows the rupture between the two worlds. The symbols associated with her have sacred meanings: the ship (corabia) – Noah’s arch, a symbol of salvation, the rays (razele) – light as a sign of knowledge, the wood (lemnul) – stands for warmth, life, the well (fântâna) – is a representation of wisdom, the snake (șarpele) – a dual symbol, able to reveal wisdom, the roosters (cocoșii) – stand for the passage of time, the coming of morning, warning the girl it is time for her to return to her magic world.

Another poem entitled In illo tempore, in the same collection of poems, is subtitled pattern de basm (fairy-tale pattern):

In Illo Tempore

„Unde

timpul și numele

Într-o zi

cit alți într-un an

Și dacă văzu că nu are încotro:

–Mă duc eu, tată

Și plesni de trei ori din palme

In Illo Tempore

Where

the time and the name

One day

as others in a year

And seeing no other way:

- I will go, father

And clapped three times
şi se prefăcu...
- Să mă scoţi la lumea albă...
ca vîntul ca gîndul
– Ia te uită înăpoi, frate
şi spune-mi ce vezi...

- Doamne, dar greu somn
am mai
dormit

- God, deep sleep
did I
sleep

cu totul şi cu totul de aur
Iar eu am încălecat pe o șa
şi v-am spus” (Baltag 1975: 113)

where everything was gold
And so my story ends
as told (my translation)

This poem is a fairy tale itself. The title sets the action in illo tempore, where everything is possible, where, without time and name, everything is reduced to its essence, to true knowledge. It keeps with the fairy tale frame, beginning in illo tempore and ending with the fairy tale formula ”Iar eu am încălecat pe o șa/ şi v-am spus //” leaving the reader to reflect upon its content and share its meanings.

Another re-working of the fairy tale is the poem La Pod (At the Bridge):

La pod
„Tată”
de atâtea ori visat
de atâtea ori uitat
iar te depărtezi

At the Bridge
Father
so many times dreamt
so many times forgotten
you go away
We have here the image of the father as the one who helps the son in his struggle of becoming. Metamorphosis and the fluidity of time and space help the hero on his way. The bridge is not only one as it appears in Harap Alb (The White Moor), but different stages on the way towards true knowledge. The passage into the world of fairy tales is represented by fire, a symbol of change, of renewal.

His collection of poems entitled Unicorn în oglindă/Unicorn in the Looking Glass is magic. Its vision, metaphors, music, all refer to metaphysics, selfreflexivity and the process of becoming. The self, identity, become relative concepts reflected in a multitude of mirrors. A dissolving of the subject seen as centre of the world and a progression towards a relative self that knows it is a relative self, a proliferation of roles.
Trapped in a deceitful reality, which offers no answers, no meanings, the poet engages in a different search, an inner one.

His poem *De la capăt* (From the Beginning) included also in *Dialog la mal* (Dialogue on the Bank) is an *ars poetica*:

**De la capăt**

“Știa că are chip ș i nu-l mai găsea
și nu-și mai găsea nici mâinile
cu care să-l caute
Știa că are ochi
și nu-i mai găsea
și nu-și mai găsea nici pleoapele
care să-l aperse
Știa că are un drum
și nu-l mai găsea
și nu-și mai găsea nici tâlpile
cu care să-l caute

*Atunci ș i-a auzit inima*

*înăuntrul unei fântâni*

*și-a coborât înăuntrul ei*

*și și-a recâștigat calul și spada*

*Ca fulgerul*

*într-un ulcior celest*

*Ca bobul de grâu care se trezește în pământ*

*și ș i reamintește dintr-o dată*

*de la capăt*

*toată povestea”*

*From the Beginning*

*He knew he has a face and he couldn’t find it*

*and he couldn’t find his hands either*

*to look for his face*

*He knew he had eyes*

*And he couldn’t find them*

*he couldn’t find his eyelids either*

*to protect him*

*He knew about his way*

*and he couldn’t find it*

*he couldn’t find his soles either*

*to look for it*

*Then he heard his heart*

*within a well*

*and went down in*

*regained his horse and sword*

*A lightening pouring*

*from a divine pot*

*A grain that germinates the earth*

*and suddenly remembers*

*from the beginning*

*the entire story (my translation)*
This poem is a Deleuzian becoming animal, that is, a body of matter and energy, where there are no specialized tissues for separate organs – in other words, a formless mass prior to symbolization. Prince Charming, the archetypal hero, is seeking for his face (recognizable form) and for his organs (eyes, hands, soles) which are being formed as a sort of materialization of his desire. He wishes them into being, he imagines them into being. His becoming mimics Creation (A lightening pouring/from a divine pot). The supreme form of existence is the narrative of one’s own life, the territorialization of material reality into a book.

By deconstructing reality, his poems become a locus for the spiritual search of meanings, of identity, he builds his own imaginary world to resolve his conflicts and answer his questions. He uses his poetry to interpret and elucidate existence, his poems become a verbal organizing corresponding to a spiritual content: "Cuvântul este principiul verbal suprem ce susţine 'toate lumile’" (Baltag 1996:7) ("The word is the ultimate verbal element at the basis of ‘all possible worlds’") argued Cezar Baltag in Paradoxul semnelor, connecting it to the Bible and its „La început a fost Cuvântul și Cuvântul era la Dumnezeu și Cuvântul era Dumnezeu.” (At the beginning there was the Word and the Word belonged to God and the Word was God.”) his search for words is also a a search for God, for identity and since God resides inside us, his search is an inner one, into the depths of his being, away from the external world of representation as stated in his poem Ocultare from the volume Chemarea numelui:

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“Pur? Aventura ia sfârşit o dată
cu puritatea.
Îngerul n-aştieaptă.
De nu l-ai înfruntat la prima treaptă
urci şi tot urci o scară de nămol
şi nu mai întâlnişi nici un simbol
Să fie-o uşă, poate, în ne-gând
un prag mai aspru
un zăvor mai sfânt
şi dincolo de pragul ei curat
să fie chipul tău adevărat?
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Pure? The adventure is over once
with purity.
The Angel waits no more.
If not confronted at the start you climb and climb a a stair of mud no symbol in your way
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Cuvintele s-ar stinge dacă-n rugă
n-ar fi atrase de un punct de fugă,
acolo în adânc
tâcerea arde
şi Dumnezeu în toate se împarte
şi ca-n oglindă
dincolo de lume
El brusc îşi stinge ultimul lui Nume
Orbim
şi facem calea înapoi
şi nu mai ştim că l-am ascuns în noi
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The words would disappear if they were not connected in a prayer deep there
the silence burning
and God is everywhere
and like in mirror
beyond the world
He suddenly silences his Name
We see no more
and back we go
forgetting we have Him in us hidden
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The poet himself is a creator of worlds through words, and the poem a use of words for deeper meanings. In his process of creation he uses not only words but also their music, as seen in his volume _Madona din dud_, so much imbued with folklore, when words where sung, becoming more than just words. We can well place this volume next to Ion Barbu’s _Isarlâc_, Tudor Arghezi’s _Flori de mucegai_ or Anton Pann’s writings.

With his appeal to folklore, fairy tales, games, rhymes, musicality, the poet tries to set the balance right, to compensate for the tension created by conflicts, game-like, inviting us not to take anything for granted, but to question it, for there is always more, a plurality of meanings.

His poetry poses no finality, but a wandering for answers, a quest for true identity, no closure at all, but a continuous becoming. He has a postmodern approach of re-use and collage, of recycling elements of tradition in his poetry.

As we have seen, Cezar Baltag used fairy tales and folklore to enrich and give a distinctive flavour to his writings. Much used and abused, fairy tales remain a rich soil to be exploited.

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