

IOAN PETRU CULIANU AND THE MYTHANALYSIS. THE LITERARY TEXT AS A MYTH

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*Abstract: The mythanalysis consists in an inquiry and an investigation process applied to "the latent mythical material" within the literary discourse by the historian of religions who can make an unique contribution to the literary analysis through his ability to "enlighten the symbols" contained by the texts, often connected with religious concepts in the discourse underlying the textual rhetoric. His intent is to place the Romanian literature within an universal context and prove the fact that "the Romanian culture has its constant values organically fit into a timeless and spaceless concept of culture" (Culianu 2006, 24). Understood as an experiment, the mythanalysis "proposes reading the literary text as a myth" based on a certain regularities' system outlined in a range of psychological and psychoanalytic hypotheses, Culianu making it obvious that this activity demands highly knowledgeable and highly skilled researchers. In the volume titled *Introduction to Mythology*, Gilbert Durand includes the mythanalysis within the science of mythodology, together with the mythocritics. In the same work, Durand points out that the mythanalysis demands "a complete knowledge maturity" from the specialist who approaches the field.*

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The mythanalysis' definition is given in the essay titled *The Phantasms of Freedom at Eminescu* where we are told that the mythanalysis is a "practical approach consisting in the activity of discovering the latent myths within the literary discourse and question it". Culianu points out that his mythanalysis was inspired by Mircea Eliade's interpretation of the short story *Cezara*, thus aiming to prove "a certain continuity in the Romanian interpreting traditions". The method was initially used by Mircea Eliade, followed by Adrian Marino who called it *mythocritics*, although Culianu tends to call this "interpreting tradition" *mythanalysis*. The mythanalitic process' objective is to investigate "the latent mythical material" present in the literary writings, under investigation being the literary text, its author, the former analysts and the context all these elements are inserted in (Culianu 2006, 82-121). The significance of this mythical substrate delivers proper information contained by the text and by the context because "having a meaning actually means reporting information" (Culianu 2006, 84). Understood as an experiment, the mythanalysis "proposes reading the literary text as a myth" based on a certain regularities' system outlined in a range of hypotheses, demanding a certain specific capability. In the volume titled *Introduction to Mythology*, Gilbert Durand includes the mythanalysis within the science of mythodology, together with the mythocritics pointing out that the mythanalysis requires "a complete knowledge maturity" from the specialist who approaches the field. In Durand's opinion, the mythocritics investigates the texts, while the mythanalysis analyzes the "contexts" in order to identify "the mythical or symbolical nuclei which are significant for a society in a certain point of its evolution and its becoming". The connecting point between the two levels of analysis is the myth, named by Durand "the common place emerged at the horizon of the these two approaches" (Durand 2004, 191-192).

If mythocritics is mainly literary, mythanalysis is open to the "wider field" of sociology, making "the shift from literary text to all contexts that encompasses it" (Durand, 2004, 188). However, the mythanalist is not required to make this step; he may remain anchored in the mythocritical analysis, but may assume a philosophical approach, analyzing the circumstances of the textual product starting from the mythical sequences identified and their effects at the social level.

The volume titled *Mythical Figures and Faces of the Literary Work. From Mythocritics to Mythanalysis* provides the necessary theoretical explanations for mythanalysis and mythocritics where Durand specifies that "mythocritics is an extension of the New Criticism" and mythanalysis investigates "mythical broad guidelines of the collective historical and cultural moments" (Durand 1998, 13). Mythanalysis has a sociological implication in that it explores myths that are "latent and diffuse" in a given historical and social context. Therefore, there are a number of myths that have a great impact on humanity, which coordinated "historical moments" and "social relations" throughout history. Durand admits that mythanalysis and mythocritics use a similar method of analysis, carried out in three steps, aimed at finding a "nuclear miteme collection" that is part of a myth, creating the chronological sequence of the myth and finally discovering the network of cultural and social aspects of myth. These instances of the myth structured over time are, according to Durand, "the last mirror" or "the ultimate reference system" of humanity (Durand 1998, 308-315).

In Culianu's view, the mythanalitical purpose is to report "facts endowed with meaning" paying attention to the influence of psychoanalysis and sociology (Culianu 2006, 85), considered "obsolete theories" which, in order to be counteracted, a new approach is required. Culianu highlights the Romanian contributions to the mythanalitical studies stating that the mythanalysis concept is coined for Romanian tradition of interpretation in order to mark a certain continuity situation (Culianu 2006, 83). Culianu flexibly approaches this type of analysis, his interest consisting in highlighting "the existence of a certain type of continuity within the Romanian traditions of interpretation" (Culianu 2006, 83). At the time of writing the essay, mythanalysis was an ambiguous discipline, yet not integrated within the academic discourse, being not included in the "university curricula" (Culianu 2006, 84). Ioan Petru Culianu deems mythanalysis is a scientific experiment having a status "laboratory" which can not cover full position and status of a science that operates findings. According to Nicu Gavriluta, Culianu's mythanalysis is configured as a mitanalitic circle used to "discover the presence of mythical fantasy sequences - not necessarily Gnostic - in literary texts" (Gavriluță 2000, 46).

After Ileana Mihaila, Culianu wrote his first mythanalysis in 1973, situation in which he becomes "contemporary of Gilbert Durand in this direction." Mihaila defines the miteme as "minimal units equipped with mythical significance" identifiable by Culianu in the literary text intended to be read as a myth. In the opinion expressed in the text *Ioan Petru Culianu and the Mythanalysis*, Mihaila points out that Culianu's mythanalysis operated on literary works converge with his interest for Hermeticism, resulting in an intentional research and discovery of "the occulted message, if not occult, in the literary text itself." The purpose of the mythanalitical investigation is to find "the lost word", the intelligence and wisdom, ancient, which lies in the concept of "the secret code of the opera" present in "the signifying chain mechanism" where, says Umberto Eco, there is information described as being "something more" real "than the text itself" (Eco 2007, 39). For clarifying this message bearing the secret wisdom, the suitable approach might be "the hermetic-symbolic reading" which applied reveals meanings submitted intentionally or unconsciously by the author. The working tool is the Hermetic semiosis, a concept understood by Eco both as a way of thinking and as a way of interpretation, defined as an "interpretive practice of the world and texts" in

accordance with the microcosm-macrocosm correspondence theory and with the logic of similarity and universal sympathy (Eco, 2007, 17, 31).

Ioan Petru Culianu situates mythanalysis at the border of hermeneutics and scientific discipline, although it is neither one nor the other and "does not aspire to scientific status" for which it might be taken for an apparent "indolence" and a state of creative virtuality comparable to an "intellectual bricolage" (Culianu 2006, 86-87). In the study entitled *Structure, Sign and Play*, Jacques Derrida analyzes the bricolage concept coined by Levi Strauss as a research method used most effectively by the ingenious investigator who employs the tools at hand, method used by Gerard Genette in his literary critics highlights Derrida. In this context, the theorist notes that "every discourse is bricoleur" to the extent that borrows concepts from other parties (Derrida 1978, 360). Although Levi Strauss thinks that bricolage technique seems to be opposite to the engineering calculations and precision, Derrida concludes that "every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs" (Derrida 1978, 361). Bricolage is defined as a type of "intellectual activity" combined with a "mythopoetical activity" because of the mythical reflection involved (Derrida 1978, 361).

In his critical approach towards the "outdated methodologies" among which Marxism, psychoanalysis and structuralism that tend to abuse the "facile formulas" cosmeticizing the scientific language and thus creating an appearance of non semantic, Ioan Petru Culianu seems to adhere to the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss' critical attitude against amateurism in the study of mythology and history of religions (Culianu 2006, 87). In his essay titled *The Structural Study of Myth*, Claude Levi Strauss warns about the wave of opportunistic researchers called "all kinds of amateurs" implicated lately in the scientific study of the history of religions (Strauss 1974, 206). Strauss points out the error committed in anthropology field by avoiding religious studies which paved the way for the involvement of other disciplines, especially psychological, encouraged by the psychologist approach taken by the founders of the anthropological study of religion as Frazer, Durkheim or Tylor, whose interpretations of religious phenomena are considered by Strauss 'flawed' because of the pronounced psychologist orientation. Through this process, the scientific study of anthropology of religion had been "discredited" at the same time with its practitioners (Strauss 1974, 206, 207). Pulled into a shift of emphasis from logical and intellectual mechanisms on the emotional ones, confusion and ambiguity was created, hindering research. From this point of view, Strauss continues, the most exposed area remains that of mythology, which finds itself in a "chaotic" situation in which myths are interpreted in "conflicting ways" directing them towards onirical, ritualistic or aesthetic theory (Strauss 1974, 207). The main purpose of mythology is in Levi Strauss' opinion "to understand what a myth really is" avoiding falling into sophistry or scientific platitude in the interpretation of mythological phenomena as a form of human emotions and natural forces as in the naturalistic and cosmological approach, or shifting the interest entirely towards the psycho-sociological approach (Strauss 1974, 207).

The mythanalytical experiment undertaken by Culianu undergoes a series of strict rules which if followed carefully lead the analyst to identify "latent myths" present within literary works. Myths are deeply infiltrated within the textual structure, waiting patiently to be discovered and are actually neither a product of the imagination of the analyst, nor his invention. The mythanalist begins by investigating the sources and the biographical contexts that can inform about the author and his creative process and continues by studying the textual "mythical tissue" which must be "recognized" then structured into a research hypothesis (Culianu 2006 94). The mythical elements identified occur repetitively like symptoms fostering a "climate of interpretation" against which the mythanalist should act

suspicious. From the initial phase of the identification or recognition of the mythical symptoms within the text, the mythanalist goes to their significance detection phase (Culianu 2006, 95). As shown, mythanalytical operations are described through medical metaphors, their final objective being to diagnose mythical occurrences and recurrences avoiding sliding towards psychological factors, slipping on the field of psychology. The essential condition is the competence given by acquiring a significant mythical database that the historian of religions certainly does, being immune to the criticism uttered by the incompetent analysts in this regard. The incompetent mythanalists usually tend to challenge the existence of mythical elements in literary texts, denying them primarily because they are not able to see it or do not understand the usefulness of mythical analysis.

Interpreting myths as a series of "deep structure factors revealing the human psyche," Corin Braga believes that the "mythological explanation" complement to the "psychological interpretation" is a complex critical endeavor, benefiting from double intake offered in two different directions, that of the mythanalysis and mythocritics on the one hand and that of psihocritics and psychoanalysis on the other hand. Braga positions mythanalysis and mythocritics within the archetypology field that targets a complex literary analysis, at the metaphysical, psychological and cultural level. Metaphysically, "conceptual cutouts" underlying literary creation, transmitted to the reader, are operated while from the psychological point of view, are sought unconscious fantasies (originar, called preconceptions), those abyssal insights equated with "latent mental structures" phylogenetically transmitted, organized into "archetypal cutouts". The phantasms "lead the artist's pen often without him knowing it or even against his will" onto the production of literary works containing concentrated archetypal information which powerfully impacts the reader. From the cultural point of view, "constants", "invariants" or literary recurrences systemically configured are researched in order to highlight the "symbolic images and collective myths of each culture and trend, and in the final analysis, of all mankind" (Braga, 2007, 5-23).

Ioan Petru Culianu invites the reader to play the phantastic etymology game in order to detect onirical schemes deeply rooted within the literary text. According to Nicu Gavriluta, the mythanalysis is configured as a "mythanalytics circle" and is defined as "the method by which to discover the presence of the mythical sequences and phantasms" in literary works (Gavriluta 2000, 46). The mythanalysis consists in an inquiry and an investigation process applied to "the latent mythical material" rooted in the literary discourse, where the object of investigation is represented by the literary text, the author, its analysts and the context these elements are inserted in. In the article titled *Myth and Symbol in V. Voiculescu's Prose*, Ioan Petru Culianu delivers "the theoretical framework" of the method and acknowledges that his mythanalysis exercises made from the comparative history of religions' perspective were inspired by Mircea Eliade's, Jung's writings and the Ascona's group activity. In his opinion, a historian of religions can make a unique contribution to the literary analysis through his ability to "enlighten the symbols" contained by the texts, often connected with religious concepts in the discourse underlying the textual rhetoric. Ioan Petru Culianu points out that the method proposed has the ability to open "whole new horizons" in the literary analysis field, being convinced that a significant part of the world literature cannot be completely understood without being related to "the phenomena and the religious beliefs that generated it or which are reflected within, being currently reduced to a literary function" (Culianu 2006, 12). Ioan Petru Culianu demonstrates the mythanalytic approach on Vasile Voiculescu's writings, being interested in detecting "the symbolical structure" mapped by surpassing the psychoanalytic approach and investigating the psychological complexes, going deep into "the transpersonal symbols world" (Culianu 2006, 18).

In his essay, Culianu posits the "theoretical premises" of mythanalysis and confesses that his mythanalytical exercises conducted from the perspective of comparative history of religions were inspired by Mircea Eliade's writings. Thus Ioan Petru Culianu's mythanalytical demonstration begins with the work of Vasile Voiculescu where he tries to detect the underground "symbolic structure" mapped through the psychoanalytic approach by investigating what is to be found beyond the "transpersonal world of symbols" (Culianu 2006, 18). The ultimate goal of Culianu's mythanalytical approach is to place the Romanian literature in the universal context and demonstrate that "Romanian culture has its own stable values, timeless and spaceless, falling into an organic concept of culture (Culianu 2006, 24). The analyst acknowledged intention is to decipher the symbolic scheme Voiculescu built his opera on and thus discovers "an onirical aesthetic play organizing Voiculescu's prose" (Culianu 2006, 19). When the blind character and the lame priest meet and weld into one body through a "mechanical procedure" which resulted in a new strange two-headed dual kind of creature, the mythanalist recognized connections with the Indian folktale about Purusha spirit in communion with matter prakrti rebuilt in pangvandhavan (Culianu, 2006, 19, 20). In the next essay titled *Vasile Voiculescu, Novelist of Illusion and Hope*, the mythanalist detects an Indo-Iranian symbol represented by the double character consisting of a blind and a cripple, Zahei being a bum addicted to alcohol that anatomically reconstructs himself by joining the lame body of Popa Fulga, a former thief. Culianu names this strange organism "two-in-one" which in his view represents a symbol of spiritual pilgrimage through the darkness.

In the study *Ruthless Destruction in the Mill of Good Luck Novella by Ioan Slavici (1881). A Mythanalytical Exercise*, Culianu describes the method used in his mythanalysis taken with the certain objective to probe the author's deep thinking and the "psycho-sociological interpretation" of the text *The Mill of Good Luck*. Culianu discovers in Slavici's novella a textual confrontation between good and evil, the story being a detective realistic novella taking place in the XIX century Transylvania where the main characters, a Transylvanian family with two children, invest in a property that turns into an inn located in the urban periphery. The place attracts different passing customers and the attention of Lica, an influential merchant who insidiously built a social network based on criminal behavior. Lica uses blackmail strategies and commits a series of crimes skillfully hidden. The family tragedy starts when, blinded by jealousy, the husband kills his wife, afterwards being shot by a member of the criminal gang. Local police representative is unable to resolve the case, but Lica will punish himself, committing suicide. The mythanalysis reveals the space divided into three parts: urban, representing civilization and safety, rural forest being the uncontrollable wilderness and the crossing area marked by the five crosses. Isolated in the outskirts, near the forest, the family of entrepreneurs is exposed to hazards as for the mythanalist the city means life and consequently the forest inhabited by animals symbolizes death. Culianu extracts the mythical essence of the novella scenario which proves to be a ritual of sacrifice in the form of a deadly mission during which the characters are killed, the objective of the intervention being the elimination of the offender Lica Samadau. In this symbolic equation, Culianu detects a Manichean myth visible through the incidence of number five and dual spatiality. In this case, the mythanalist demonstrates that the author of the novella inserted a mythical Manichean nucleus in the story on which he built a scenario endowed with symbolic data easily assimilated by the reader.

In Mihai Eminescu's poetry and prose, the scholar aims to outline a lyrical "mythological grammar" where, underlying the Schopenhauerian influence, the dualist mythology is deeply rooted into the phantastic scenarios set by the Romanian poet, a tendency common to all the Romantic poets, thus Culianu intending to place the poet in the context of the European Romanticism. Culianu tracks a series of phantasms present in Eminescu's lyrics

such as the erotic phantasms, the nihilist, freedom and fear phantasms searching for their origins, the way the phantasm are generated and their role in shaping the poet's personality. The nihilist tendencies are visible in "the transcendence disinvestment" process by which the traditional mythical instances are valued by opposition so that the above becomes negative and the earthly gets positive value. This process triggers destructive phantasms formation in the lyrical scenarios. The erotic phantasms are analyzed by Culianu from the magical perspective of the visual communication process taking place between "the watcher and the person being watched". In the study *Notes about Opsis and Theoria in Eminescu's Poetry*, the mythanalist approaches the notes taken down on a manuscript regarding the visual analyzer and the "psychological mechanism of vision", *opsis*, being a Platonic concept that explains visual act as a more subtle tactile mechanism. Culianu analyzes the metaphors related to *opsis*, the inner eye, the act of being contemplative and the expansion of the lover in the universe, incorporating it into his psyche, the starry sky and the sea being reflected in the contemplator's eyes, the nature being appropriated by the act of vision, finally becoming consubstantial (Culianu 2006, 27-32).

The text titled *Acosmic Romanticism at Mihai Eminescu* analyzes the poem *Muresanu* and the three variants in manuscript within which the mythanalist detects dualist motifs in the semantic structure inspired by the writings of Nicodemus Hagiorites's works accessible in Eminescu's library. Culianu draws a comparison between Eminescu's lyrics and the Gnostic myth and discovers that Gnosticism is present at Eminescu at the imaginary level treated romantically. *The Phantasms of Eros at Eminescu. Luceafarul* represents an attempt to mythanalyze *Luceafarul* poem built on a "phantasms scenario". Working on this text, Culianu mythanalysis operates in three steps: the detection of the myth together with its deployment area and then the assessment of the myth's impact on the psyche of the author and the readers. In terms of space, the universe is structured three-dimensionally: the sky, the sea belonging to the upper essence and the land as humans' place. The window separates the two dimensions, but it is also the connecting element by enabling visual communication as through the window's slit, Hesperus/Hyperion contemplates the girl in a voyeuristic act. Rooted in folk literature, the isolated teenage girl watched by a dead masculine person is a recurrent literary motif at Eminescu. The folk myth of the Flyer can be interpreted as an onirical manifestation or discharge of erotic frustrations in puberty. Contrary to this position, the theme of the woman prostitute offering herself to the drunk client's eyes to be seen in *Poor Dionis* is negatively valued through its dehumanizing function. *The Phantasm of Freedom at Eminescu* analyzes the erotic relationship in the novella *Cezara* built on a reversal of traditional roles within the couple, the woman taking the active role while the man takes the passive one. The hermaphrodite theme is present in the same text reflecting mental androgyny, according to the debates of the time intended to undermine the marital relationships based on contract and contribute to the liberation of women from under the man. In the novel scenario, Cezara refuses to marry at her father's request to clear his debts by trading the daughter who was in love with other man, Ieronim the monk. She builds a relationship with Ieronim in which "model function seems to be eminently feminine, corresponding to the overturning of the perspective on stereotyped roles assigned to the partners in a couple" (Culianu 2006, 104). Following his interpretative approach, the mythanalist discovers four different intersected myths centered on the myth of the Great Mother Goddess and the sacred bees.

The nihilistic tendencies are visible in Eminescu's work in the process of "divestment of transcendence" by which the mythical instances are valued by opposition, so that what's up becomes negative, and what's down gets positive value, a process that triggers the formation of destructive fantasies. *The Nihilism Phantasm at Eminescu* approaches the phantasms of destruction propagated in Romanian folk literature under the influence of Bogomilism and the Asian myths brought by the Mongols. Culianu examines the aesthetic dichotomy between

beauty and ugliness and the ethic dichotomy between good and evil present in the poem *Daemonism*, the aesthetic belonging to the transcendence and the ethic to the material reality. The negative ethic value of reality, the evil is understood by the poet in Gnostic sense as having the role of "motor of history and social life", aggression not being good but rather necessary in some situations because justice can not be done without the use of power. The positive theme of death as regeneration is shown in the image of the anthropomorphized Titan Earth's dead body, where the dust is the rotten meat and people are swarming worms inside the dead body. The mythanalist's conclusion is that Eminescu operated an inversion of values, context within which the negative and its range becomes positive, and what is located below, the mundane, outperforms the transcendental.

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