

*THEMES AND MOTIFS OF ANCIENT LITERATURE IN THE ROMANIAN
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS*

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Abstract : The analysis of the intercultural dimension of the curriculum from the perspective of Romanian language and literature has started from the assumption that school needs to promote the interest for the reading of the world myths and legends and for the genuine literary values.

As the Antiquity is "a sacred reservoir of models for all eternity" (Zoe Dumitrescu Bușulenga), the present paper aims at an investigation of the main themes and motifs of ancient literature in the Romanian language and literature textbooks for high school.

The objective of this undertaking is that of mapping the presence of the reference works of ancient literature in textbooks, while tracing its typical and general themes, such as: love, sacrifice, vengeance, jealousy, but also the characters' phenomenology and the identification of the "echoes" of the ancient literature in the Romanian literature.

To briefly outline the conclusions of the present research, we can assert that the Romanian language and literature textbooks feature mixtures of elements which contribute in the formation of a single vision of life and creation, by facilitating a vivid intertextual dialogue with the cultural consciousness of all times.

Keywords: ancient literature, mythology, textbooks, reference works, intertextual dialogue

Our undertaking aims at the identification of the main themes and motifs of ancient literature and at the analysis of some literary works with mythical contents presented in four high school textbooks of Romanian Language and Literature published by Corint Publishing.

Setting out from the premise that the school must promote the interest in the reading of world myths and legends, we contend that the reflection on the themes and motifs specific to ancient literature should be included in the discussion of the textbooks and curricula used at the moment. After 1990, Romanian school has been strongly impacted by the changes and

periodical revisions of the Curriculum, by the replacement of the unique textbook with the alternative ones, and also by the new educational approach to the contents specific to the study of Romanian language and literature at the high school level. As it has an important role in the formation of the students' personality and of the skills and abilities necessary for their active integration based on knowledge, the subject Romanian language and literature for high school students is at present oriented towards the formation of competences, values and attitudes. To this effect, the new curricular documents propose the integrated study of language, communication and literary texts, while the ordering criterion is no longer chronological but anthological. Literary history is no longer taught, but a new chapter, The Dialogue of Arts, has been introduced. Another aspect worth mentioning is that the curriculum functions as a guideline, the Romanian language and literature teacher having the freedom to select the contents, themes and texts to be studied. In the spirit of the new curricular reform, more textbooks have been published, as a sign of the democratisation of learning. While the unique, traditional textbook used to provide a rigid selection of the contents, the alternative textbooks of today offer a permissive selection of the contents, stimulating open interpretations and involving the students in the reception of the texts and in expressing their own views, guiding them only through succinct methodological scripts determined by the specificities of each literary work. The alternative textbooks of Romanian language and literature are closely related to the new provisions of pedagogy and modern didactics, which advocate for open learning and advance a functional-communicational paradigm, i.e. the assimilation of the interactive didactic methods oriented towards the development of the ability of logical and symbolical expression. On the other hand, under equal consideration is the adoption of an interdisciplinary perspective on literature which allows its understanding in relation to culture and society – an objective termed contextualisation. Along these lines, it is highly significant for the Romanian school to promote the interest in reading the world myths and legends, in the authentic literary values. A high school student in the third millennium should be familiar with mythology, should know the primary myths of the Greek-Roman Antiquity and the names of the most important gods and heroes, in view of identifying their influence at the level of Romanian literature.

The first writings with a mythical relation are present in the textbooks for primary and secondary school, when the pupils are taught literary texts circumscribable to the **family theme** (*Amintiri din copilărie/ Memories of My Boyhood* by Ion Creangă, *Vizita/ The Visit* de I.L. Caragiale), **the theme of love** (poems by Mihai Eminescu – *Luceafărul/The Evening Star*,

Dorința/ Desire, Floare albastră/ Blue Flower) or the game and play theme (Nina Cassian, *Poezii în limba spargă/ Spargian Poems*, *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi, *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll). Numerous examples of themes and motifs of ancient literature may be found in the high school textbooks, where the curriculum stipulates that the study of Romanian language and literature is made from a structural perspective: in the 9th and 10th form, following the thematic principle, in the 11th form, with consideration to the chronological principle of the literary-cultural phenomenon, and in the 12th form, oriented towards the modern and postmodern periods.

The literary theme, the general aspect of a literary work, the topic around which the entire plot revolves may be related to **love, nature, the human condition** (life, death, happiness, suffering, and existential failure), **the fate of the superior man, the creative sacrifice, time, history**.

The greatest literary works have always had major themes, important to man and his destiny. The present article limits the diversity of these themes to a number of eternal themes, such as: love, sacrifice and duty, vengeance and jealousy. The way in which the theme is articulated in the text is the literary motif, manifested as a typical situation bearing signification and being represented by an object, a phenomenon or a character.

In order to illustrate the presence of the ancient literature themes and motifs in the 9th form, we have chosen the analysis of a Romanian Language and Literature textbook edited by Corint Published, 2004, and authored by Eugen Simion (coordinator), Florina Rogalski, Daniel Cristea-Enache and Andrei Grigor. The text in focus is Dorin Tudoran's *Tânărul Ulise [Young Ulysses]*, in the second chapter, **Vârstele omului în dimensiunile artelor: Maturitatea [The Ages of Man in the Dimension of Arts: Maturity]**, the **Grupaj liric – Aventură, călătorie [Lyrical Group: Adventure, Journey]** subchapter.

Ulysses, the famous mythical character, has entered the substance of many old and new literary works, his name being an international cliché inspired from mythology. The phrase "Ulysses' bow" is traced back to Homer's *Odyssey*. Penelope, Ulysses' wife, waited for twenty years for her husband who had left for the Trojan War. Crowded by suitors, Penelope promises that she will marry the one who succeeds in using Ulysses' bow. No one does except for an unknown man in rags, who is no one else but Ulysses himself, returned from a long journey. The phrase signifies someone's great qualities, talents, unusual gift.

The theme of Dorin Tudoran's poem, *Tânărul Ulise [Young Ulysses]*, is the return of the beloved. The poem is a mythical frame of love, with references to the characters of the Greek epic *The Odyssey*, Ulysses and Penelope.

Though he wandered at sea for twenty years in his way to Ithaca after he had taken part in the Trojan War, to win back beautiful Helen, Ulysses never lost his faith that he would one day return at home, to his wife. Although he faces many obstacles and temptations, either sent by the wrath of gods, or stirred by women's passion, "young Ulysses" ends up near his wife. The image of the woman waiting for her husband to arrive from a long journey is rendered by the poet by transposing her sentiments into visual and by making her the image-symbol of the fire. Dorin Tudoran uses the image of the bird-arrow to emphasise the woman's state of mind, while the burning of the masts may be interpreted as a sign announcing Ulysses' arrival, but also the fire of love. "His faithful masts" become symbols of verticality, and the image of our hero is plain oxymoronic: a young Ulysses is presented with "his chest devoured by kelp", youth being subverted by the erosion of the time and the sea. In fact, "the young man" is just the image preserved in the woman's mind, now projected into the future. As a sign of his appreciation and to get closer to his faithful wife, the man washes his heart in the waters of the sea, as a cleansing from the erotic temptations encountered during his journey: the sirens, with Circe, and nymph Calypso.

If in the Greek epic Ulysses is no longer young when he returns to Ithaca, and his son, Telemachus, is now in his youth, in Dorin Tudoran's poem the hero is "young Ulysses" because this is how he remained in the affective memory of his beloved wife. Time has no destructive power over true love, and love erases distances, annuls the time and defeats death.

As for the 10th form, the Romanian language and literature textbook published by Corint in 2005 and authored by Marin Iancu, Ion Bălu and Rodica Lăzărescu, is, in our opinion, the one that suits best the students' needs, both in contents of learning and methods, as it provides an amount of knowledge which contributes to the optimisation of the students' preparation for their bi-annual exams and for the baccalaureate, cultivating their spirit and personality. The content of the textbook has been compiled according to a few very important criteria: accessibility, attractiveness and value. As the paradigm of the curricula of Romanian language and literature is communicational-functional, this textbook proposes an integrated study of language, communication, and the literary text. This 10th form textbook gives room to creation, cultivating the aesthetic taste and giving, at the same time, correct information on the history of national culture in its evolution and in relation to other cultural models. With consideration

to the applicative part, the textbook in question emphasises the major themes and motifs of ancient literature. To this effect, we have selected the following application for the Literature domain: Mircea Eliade's *La țigănci [With the Gypsy Girls]*, in the chapter **Textul narativ. Înțelegere și receptare – Atracția fantasticului [The Narrative Text – Understanding and Reception – The Attraction of the Fantastic]** and Ion Barbu's poem *Riga Crypto și lapona Enigel [King Crypto and Enigel the Lapp]* in the chapter **Textul poetic. Conținut și formă – Modernismul extrem [The Poetic Text. Content and Form. Extreme Modernism]**.

Also present in the textbooks published by ALL, CORINT, PETRION, and PARALELA 45, the short story *La țigănci [With the Gypsy Girls]* (1959) includes mythical reverberations in its deep structure, which enter the narrative determining a sui-generis resurrection of the primordial, archaic facts. Mircea Eliade's work illustrates the drama of the profane man, incapable of deciphering the mythical signs, of defeating the amnesia of modern consciousness, of "living the myth" by integrating it in the profane space.

The epic material is enhanced by the theme of time travel, with the projection of a mediocre existence into time. Gavrilescu, the music teacher, relives his entire life as if in a dream.

The main character remains a stranger in the labyrinth along the entire short story. The humble high school teacher Gavrilescu does not fully understand the initiatory, unique and exemplary experience he lives, interpreting the facts only in the plane of the real, with the instruments of simple logic. Not only is Gavrilescu the common man of the modern times, he also expresses the human condition, the man who committed the original sin, who has failed and keeps failing, without having the ability of salvation. Gavrilescu missed, when he was a young man, a great love for the German girl Hildegard, the unique, primordial love, and from this point on, what he names "the tragedy of my life" began.

The plot is set on the streets of Bucharest, in one torrid afternoon, when music teacher Gavrilescu returns home from a private piano lesson by tram. The overwhelming heat gives him loquacity, the dialogues revolving around two topics: the adventures of the famous Colonel Lawrence of Arabia and the mysterious garden, a place of ill repute, where mysterious gypsy girls dwell. The teacher notes that he has left his scores at his pupil's house, gets off the tram and tries to get on another one, in the other direction, but misses it and enters the gypsy girls' house out of curiosity. He tells them about "the tragedy of his life", his great love for Hildegard, whom he lost for the more banal Elsa, whom he married. The gypsy girls leave him alone and Gavrilescu wanders around a strange labyrinth, at some point he even enshrouds himself in a

curtain which suffocates him. He manages eventually to get out, in the garden, but noticed, perplexed, that nothing matches the things that used to be.

Organised in twelve distinct epic sequences (the tram, the conversation with the old woman, the encounter with the three girls, the labyrinthine search, another encounter with the old woman, another tram drive, the stop at Mrs Voitinovici's house, the last tram drive, the stop in front of his own house, the conversation with the pub's owner, the return to the gypsy girls in a carriage, the meeting with Hildegard), the narrative of *La țigănci/ With the Gypsy Girls* is projected on a fictional plane, when one finds a central character, Gavrilescu, who oscillates between the Real and the Unreal, travelling from Life to Death, from the Profane to the Sacred.

The text of *La țigănci/With the Gypsy Girls* abounds in themes and motifs: the land of the "gypsies" has a powerful mythical potential, in which the old woman may be a possible embodiment of the mythological Charon, the ferryman of Hades, who carried the souls of the dead over the Acheron river; the labyrinth is a mythical topos; the deeds of the main character are under the sign of the mythical number three¹. Multiple symbolic interpretations have also been ascribed to the gypsy girls in the short story: from the *Iele* of the Romanian mythology to the Indian Guna, representation of the three essences of the existence in the *Upanishads*.

In the same textbook, in the chapter dedicated to **The Poetic Text – Content and form – Extreme Modernism**, one finds Ion Barbu's poem *Riga Crypto și lapona Enigel [King Crypto and Enigel the Lapp]* from the *Uvendenrode* cycle of the volume *Joc secund/ Secondary Game*, published in 1930. Representative for the ballad and the Balkan picturesque stage in Barbu's poetic creation, the poem is subtitled "a ballad" and is an unusual love-story, its novelty residing in the onomastic of the characters. The eternal love story may be perceived as a symbolic expression of a fundamental human aspiration: love, the will to knowledge and the will of rising above one's condition. The poem generally preserves the characteristics of the mediaeval ballad. The first four stanzas, built on a subtle dialogue, provide the framework and suggest a party atmosphere, and the minstrel's song introduces the characters: King Crypto is the unhappy master of the vegetal world, a solitary soul tortured by secret aspirations, a "hidden heart".

¹Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionar de simboluri [A Dictionary of Symbols]*, Artemis Publishing, București: 1994: Number three is fundamental everywhere. It synthesises the triple unity of the living creature, (...) the expression of totality and of completeness. It means the completeness of the manifestation: the man, son of Heaven and Earth, completes the Great Triad. Number three is, for Christians, the perfection of the divine unity: God is One in three persons" (p. 367).

The ballad *Riga Crypto și lapona Enigel* [*King Crypto and Enigel the Lapp*] revolves around the drama of incompatibility in a novel aesthetic manner. The **idea** resembles that of Mihai Eminescu's *Luceafărul/ The Evening Star*: that the separation between worlds is so large that, most often than not, the bridge of love is not enough. The **ballad's plot** is allegorically organised, following the pattern of the German ballad. *Riga Crypto* - "the mushroom king" actually expresses the *carpe diem* concept for the man who vegetates in the absence of the spiritual life, because he only has a material one. Enigel the Lapp is a representation of the human consciousness in its aspiration towards light, towards Apollonian knowledge, towards completeness and God, which is why the simile of the "soul like a well" is employed: "Because the soul is not a fountain /But for the man, old beast, and bitter". Enigel the Lapp is looking for the path to the sun, just as the girl in *Luceafărul*. The role of page Cătălin is assumed by King Crypto. It is an obvious influence from Eminescu in Ion Barbu's poetic thinking.

The ballad is sung by a minstrel at the request of a wedding guest of symbolic wedding of the spirit with the world – the nature of the male principle, the poet, with the feminine principle – poetry. The active principle is the spirit which organises the world, the universe. King Crypto is trying to play this role, being defined by the metaphor "bridegroom of the glade"². He symbolically tempts the heroin to taste wild strawberries, the pleasures of the sensorial world, concentrated in the *carpe diem* concept. She refuses, unwilling to pluck king Crypto, and prompts him to wait to "grow ripe". King Crypto represents the telluric³ who asks Enigel the Lapp to give up light, to give up the conscience, the sun: "Forget that snipe, /And sleep, be cool, sleeping is fun" but Enigel keeps looking for the light: "The deepest darkness the Sun splinters, /And I adore its wise hot glare". This incompatibility makes the separation by the discriminative knowledge of the heroes. The world of shadows, where the heroin of *Luceafărul/ The Evening Star* also belongs, means lack of consciousness: "In shadow, only flesh shall flow/ and sleep is flesh, and flesh deflates". Enigel the Lapp flees from the shadow, but King Crypto is forced by the sun to look for it. This incompatibility has a structure of three-dimensional platonic thinking. The ideal, archetypal world is represented by the archetypal symbol of the

²Translation of the poem: Dan C. Ghica, available at <http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~drg/personal/rcle.html>

³ Nicolae Manolescu, *Metamorfozele poeziei* (The Metamorphoses of Poetry) Timpul Publishing, Reșița, 1996: "A chasm opens between Crypto, the symbol of the telluric forces, and Enigel, who worships the sun. This motif of the Sun is central in Barbu's knowledge poetry. The poet imagines three successive layers of knowledge, going in spiral and having a corresponding symbol in the astral domain: sensitive knowledge "the wheel of heart" is under the sign of Venus, abstract, intellectual knowledge – under the sign of Mercury, and poetic, symbolic knowledge – under the sign of the Sun (my translation).

sun; the sensorial world of creation is represented by Enigel, while King Crypto is a symbolic suggestion for the world of arts. Art may attract the man with its projections, but consciousness remains the essence. This quest is symbolically uttered by Enigel: “At icy lamps, under the snow, /my pole forever a dream dreams. /Thick, costly thaler, /with emerald glow, /of gold, at night it dreams and schemes.” The encounter of the two characters takes place in a dream, as in the former part of *Luceafărul*. But the roles are in reverse: if in Eminescu’s poem, the emperor’s daughter is calling the (male) Evening Star, in Ion Barbu’s ballad, the girl is the superior being; she is the one who is called. This is the reason why the ballad *Riga Crypto și Iapona Enigel* [*King Crypto and Enigel the Lapp*] has been succinctly described as an “Evening Star in reverse”.

The heroes are symbolic, in symbolic circumstances, and have an obvious archetypal character. The sun is structured around the *fire* principle, Enigel the Lapp – around the *water* principle – “my soul is like a well”, and King Crypto – on the *Earth* principle, because he is “the bridegroom of the glade”. It is a deep lack of compatibility between the three, motivated by the fact that they have different levels of consciousness, different embodiments, and that they belong to distinct worlds. There is a certain correspondence between the vegetal plane (Crypto), the human plane (Enigel) and the cosmic one (the Sun) and, at the same time, an idyll turned cosmic through the Sun’s intervention.

The three symbolic heroes – Crypto, Enigel, and the Sun – would represent in Indian thinking the three tendencies: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The three fundamental principles of Indian traditional medicine are not creations of human thinking: they are the three forces, three fundamental trends of the Primordial Nature: *sattva* is the spiritual tendency towards balance, the essential purity, and *rajais* the ascending spiritual tendency, dynamism and action, while *tama* symbolises the descending spiritual tendency, inertia.

The Sun – “a flaming ring” - is the archetypal symbol which is present in all the cultures of the world. The culture of the day star is at the heart of the solar myths and it has been worshipped in the Romanian space since the ancient times. As a symbol of universal conscience, the Sun is attempting to raise King Crypto to a new level of consciousness, but “his hidden heart can only cower” because “it’s hard under the Sun’s hot spade/ for mushrooms of the forest shade”.

The characters are symbols of two different worlds. For Crypto, the emergence from his environment is equivalent to entering another regnum; for Enigel, the will to acquire

knowledge and an ideal is a natural manifestation of the human. The aspirations of the two do not coincide, which explains the dramatic situation they are in.

The general-human nature of the characters reveals elements of Classicism. Thus, King Crypto lives the drama of fear and helplessness, Enigel – mercy, determination and aspiration, and the Sun seems to symbolise immanent justice. The end of the ballad is moralising, in the sense that everyone should know their destiny, their world and their place.

Ion Barbu understands love as an adventure of the spirit, a path to the miracle of universal creation.

The 11th form Romanian language and literature textbook published by Corint (Bucharest 2002) and authored by Eugen Simion (coordinator), Florina Rogalski and Daniel Cristea-Enache proposes the play *Iona [Jonah]* by Marin Sorescu in the second chapter, **Dramaturgia. Estomparea granițelor dintre speciile dramatice tradiționale [Drama. Blurring the Boundaries of the Traditional Dramatic Genres]**, and the texts *Miorița [The Little Ewe]* and *Monastirea Argeșului [The Monastery of Arges]* in the chapter **Poezia folclorică [Folklore Poetry]**.

The Romanian language and literature curriculum for high school (12th form), approved by the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research 5959/ December 22, 2006, and still in force, requires the study of a play published after II World War. *Iona* by Marin Sorescu is recommended by the alternative textbooks published by: ALL, CORINT and PETRION.

Published during an era of many ideological clichés, with schematic characters with a banal existence mostly springing from the imposition the political thinking of the time, Marin Sorescu's drama is an effort of synchronisation with the themes of European drama, discussing the drama of human destiny, the absurd existence plentifully felt under the circumstances of the oppressive totalitarian regime.

The play *Iona [Jonah]* (1968) is loaded with metaphoric and philosophical connotations. The author rewrites in modern terms Jonah's myth. Jonah is a biblical character sent to spread the word of God to Nineveh, where the men's crimes had escalated. He is designated to be the saviour of the city, as the divine law is unforgiving for those who do not abide by it. Refusing to become a prophet, Jonah wants to escape to the city of Tarsis with a ship, but he is seen by God and punished: the ship enters a huge storm, and the sailors throw him in the waves to be redeemed from the wrath of God. Swallowed by a whale, Jonah spends three days and three nights in its belly, while he repents and accepts his divine mission. The whale subjects to a transcendent fate, executing, in turn, a behest from above, and leads the

way of the revolted. The writer underlines the idea of the claustrophobia of being locked in a fish's belly, but also the saviour destiny of the man, of mankind, more precisely. Even the character seems to have difficulties in reminding "the whale's story", a sign that the connections of the modern man with the myth are fairly weak, and Marin Sorescu has actually a different aim, one deviated towards the contemporary meanings of the existential debate.

Act I depicts Jonah in a mythical topos, a symbolic setting – the stage is half a fish's mouth, and the character is turning his back to its darkness, while the other half is just water and skies, ad infinitum. The setting also features a fish tank with some fish in it, a sign of the limited space but also the first artefact, the first artificial product in this original space.

Time is not moving here, the echo cannot be heard, is never coming back: the echo is dead.

The mythical character, Jonah, acquires the dimension of the primordial man, of an Adam facing his destiny. He also seems to be the profane man who turns back to his origins, who is required to make another choice, to take another path. In the beginning of the play, Jonah shouts his own name, he still preserves the identity of the profane man, but the echo does not answer back, as an invitation to forgetfulness, to return to the primordial state. He still has the echoes of the world he has just left inside of him, he still hears the enormous noise of the existence: ("Stop the noise at sea!"), the imperatives of having one's own space ("Each man should look into his circle and shut up!"), but also dreams to another space, another destiny: "We should fish in another sea", "As if you could change the sea!"

Jonah repeats the initial mistake, the biblical sin. He chooses to be a fisherman again, dreaming only of fish. The big fish becomes a symbol of a human ideal dominated by vanity. It is significant that children, in their original candour, dream only of sea, without fish, only of paradise and unlimited spaces. The fish tank, present on stage since the very beginning, is, in fact, the temptation, the equivalent of the biblical apple. This is the reason why the end of Act I depicts Jonah taking the same path again, retaking the maze of human existence, swallowed again by the fish, again captive in the existential universe.

Marin Sorescu's play is also a protest against the limited human condition, a voice from the depths, shouting against an unfair destiny, compensated in contemporaneity only with the massive addition of artefacts of modern civilisation.

The theme of the closed, restrictive universes transcribes the truth of man's absolute solitude: man is locked in a series of successive boxes, and the final surprise appears when he is freed from the last box only to realise that he is again in the first, in an odd metamorphosis

process. The illusion of a clean world, unpolluted by the noxae of the civilisation, is given by the presence of the fresh air of the eccentric worlds, which are close to the exterior one: “The air. Yes, that’s air... Don’t tell me that the one inside was also air.” The world refuses to be beautiful for Jonah, exposing its ugliness which eventually leads to change: “Soon, this corpse will sink. Will be flooded and...” Only the sun needs to be saved, caught into a fishnet, from the incontrollable wish to embrace eternity: “That’s it! Just the sun. And to salt it, maybe it resists longer.” Jonah is alone in his search for the exterior universe: everyone else has abandoned him, caught in the carousel of a banal and monotonous life. Bizarre faces appear: fishermen carrying desperation, helplessness, with them, and useless things, shadow-trees, birds, insects, every other step. “And we have nonetheless to pay attention to them, to say hello, how are you, how did you sleep?” The shadows are in fact fallen men, without the inner light given to them by the search for the absolute, men that Jonah cannot communicate with, as he cannot communicate with the rocks around him, because the answers would be stereotypical and lacking substance.

Marin Sorescu’s proposed transcendence is very simple: “for we, human, want only this: an example of a resurrection. Then we can go to our houses, die well, as humans, at home”. This is a biblical reference to Jesus and to Lazarus’ resurrection from the dead, after four days, by using the supreme, divine science of resurrection. However, the resurrection is postponed because the world has taken another path: it left the old ways, in which everything was possible, and goes now counter-current. God himself is exhausted, incapable of resuscitating the act which sets the lives in motion: “And he is here, in the grave, at the end of his ropes, and incapable to make himself heard shouting: Folks, resurrection is postponed!” Postponement is a gesture which belongs only to valid gods, who have unlimited time, but the man postpones out of ignorance, indulging himself in a *dolce far niente* which isolates him even more. Metaphorically, the world is locked up in an endless row of bellies. One cannot see past or future, the extremities of a unique temporal segment, above the decaying present. For just the past and the present matter, never the present, as they are dimensions which may define the state of unlimitedness of man, an expression of the dreamt paradise at the temporal scale. Jonah does not want, during his second illumination, in the end of the play, to be caught in the present, because it would give him supreme unhappiness, the idea that nothing changes. God himself seems captive in the decaying time and space. Jonah embodies the drama of the modern man, “alone in the world”, helpless in front of the great enigmas and existential dilemmas. Man is born and dies alone, and the presence of the ones who surround him is useless. Jonah’s desperate

cry signifies the imperative of the search for a true man, the archetypal pattern, the only way by which he can compensate the existence deficit. This is why, in the spirit of the Existentialists, of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Camus's *Summer in Algiers*, he speaks of the "lonely, incredibly lonely man". Jonah has the final revelation that the entire existential path was wrong, "the path, it made the mistake", his sacrifice turning into a contrary trial: that of finding a new solution for the salvation of the human condition.

Man's tragedy is manifest, in the existential sense, as a burden he has carried along from the cast out from Paradise onwards. Jonah sacrifices himself to find a new way of freeing himself from the concentric universes he is caught in. He tries to build his own image of the universe, starting from the principle of the "upside down world", which proves that neither logic nor algorithmic thinking can open the gates of the transcendental and can destroy the boundaries of the closed universe, but a new illumination supported by a more profound self-knowledge.

Lost in the labyrinth, the character is looking for a way out. Firstly, Jonah attempts a release towards the exterior, by acquiring new objects and territories, but also the possession of the cosmic elements: he wants, for example, to catch the sun in a fishnet and salt it, to last longer. He soon remarks the futility of the gesture, as the space he lives in is irreplaceable: the air inside is not truly air but a part of a decayed, lifeless and ugly universe. The nostrils feel assaulted by the presence of this air: "Now they begin to freshen up. (Joyful). Here, at sea, the freshening of the nostrils..." Jonah attempts to breathe with the hollow of the hand and even to have "a bit of ozone on the line of luck". Such actions prove illusory, because the world is slowly sinking into the abyss, drowning and turning into a memory. He then attempts to fray the limits of the space, to get through successive horizons, metaphorically imagined as "an endless row of bellies", isolated between them as a captive God who, once trapped in the grave, "can no longer resurrect". This path is closed – man, even with a divine stance, stands no chance to succeed, even "the resurrection is postponed", and God "is here, in the grave, at end of his ropes".

A representation of the contemporary man, Jonah fails to find the paths to eternity, which presupposes totality and infinity. He is closed in a limited space, enclosed by successive rows of fish bellies, and the possibility of the exit is unlikely. The theme is a platonic one, being also used by Eminescu in his poem, *Demonism*. Jonah's failure is explained through the man's inability: he is un-spiritualised, reduced to a mere telluric conscience of living the myth of immortality, but he simply imitates and thus creates a simulacrum.

The Romanian folk ballad *Miorița* [The Little Ewe] – the Mioritic myth

Just as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* marked the trajectory of the Sumerian-Babylonian civilisation, and the Homeric poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* define the cultural space of the Greek Antiquity, *Miorița* is the pastoral epic of the Romanian culture. Among the local ballads which mark the entire oral and cultured creation of the Romanian people, this folklore text is the best known, more than one thousand variants having been catalogued and commented by folklore expert Adrian Fochi⁴.

The poem dwells on the perpetual renewal of life through death, while also making reference to other three local, traditional myths: the myth of ethno-genesis (the formation of the Romanian people), the aesthetic myth of the artistic creation and the sacrifice of the creator, and the erotic myth – *Zburătorul* [the one who flies], for love is the founding, fundamental human sentiment.

The dating of the ballad cannot be made, as the Mioritic myth dates back from that *illo tempore* which generates the universal myths.

The myth of death and transhumance is represented by the old ballad of *Miorița*, which refers to the ancient occupation of the Romanian people, shepherding. The folk ballad *Miorița* was culled by Alecu Russo and Vasile Alecsandri and represents to other representatives of *Gândirea* movement during the interwar period, the resignation of the man facing death. With the help of a magic sheep, the shepherd finds out that he will be killed by his peers and, resigned with his fate, does not take any action to prevent his death and outlines a last will and testament regarding his burial.

The ballad's dénouement reveals the testaments for the mother, the sheep and the other shepherds. The testament for the mother describes the physical portrait of the shepherd, representative for the male beauty of the Romanian people. The testament for the shepherds presents his love for his activity and for Romanian art. The testament for the sheep illustrates the dignity when facing death, the connection to nature and the belief that death in nature is not the end of existence, but its continuation. The last three motifs dominate the third part of the testament, the wedding-death and the old mother. The testament also provides his wishes, the first referring to the burial place, mourning and burial objects. The burial place should be the

⁴ Adrian Fochi, *Miorița. Tipologie, circulație, geneză, texte* [*Miorita. Typology, circulation, genesis, texts*], The Romanian Academy Publishing, București, 1964

same with the place of his life, “by the sheepfold”⁵, to be near the beings he used to tend and defend. Death is seen as a cosmic wedding, where the bride is “a princess, my bride, the whole world’s pride”, the godparents are “the sun and the moon”, and the guests are “firs and maple trees”, while the priests are “the mountains high” and “fiddlers – birds that fly, all birds in the sky”. There is such a strong connection between man and nature, both in life and the afterlife. The passage beyond the earthly existence is a passage to another existence, an eternal one. The motif of the old mother is most emotional part, it designing the maternal love.

At the first level of the symbolic analysis, the resignation of the shepherd who becomes aware that the ideal cannot be reached and settles for a copy of it (“the princess”) is specific to the literary works in which the man’s aspiration to the absolute is one of themes. The same aspect is valid in Eminescu’s *Luceafărul/ The Evening Star* and in Ion Barbu’s *Riga Crypto și Iapona Enigel/ King Crypto and Enigel the Lapp*.

The myth of sacrifice is representative for the folk ballad *Monastirea Argeșului/ The Monastery of Arges*, which also illustrates the aesthetic myth, and which is placed on the border between a ballad and a legend. The literary work is structured on different epic moments: the search for the place, the abandoned wall, the fall of the walls, the dream, the oath, the woman destined for being built into the wall, the gradual walling, the feudal conflict, the motifs of Icarus and the well. Ana’s sacrifice was not enough, because the workers told the prince that they could build a greater and more beautiful monastery, which is why he let them die on the roof.

In what the 12th form is concerned, the study of literature is oriented towards Modernism and Postmodernism. Analysing another textbook published by Corint (Bucharest, 2002, author: Marin Iancu), we find in the second chapter, B. **Studiul aprofundat al literaturii – Dramaticul. De la clasic la modern. Caragiale sau vârsta modernă a literaturii [The thorough study of literature. The dramatic genre. From classical to modern. Caragiale or the modern age of literature]**, Caragiale’s play *O noapte furtunoasă/ A Stormy Night*, and in the second chapter, section E - **Succesul unor specii literare – Romanul de analiză psihologică [The success of some literary genres – the psychological novel]**, Camil Petrescu’s *Patul lui Procust/ The Procrustean Bed*.

⁵All quotations from the ballad are taken from the translation by W. D. Snodgrass, *Mioritza*, available from <http://spiritromanesc.go.ro/Miorita%20-eng.html>

Some international clichés may be traced in certain literary works, regardless whether they are explicitly present in the text or not. In the play *O noapte furtunoasă/ A Stormy Night* by I. L. Caragiale, one of the characters, Master Dumitrache, often mentions his “honour as a family man”, which he sees as being assaulted from the outside. Could this honour as a family man be considered a Polichinelle’s secret?

Master Dumitrache’s supreme ideal is to defend his “honour as a family man”; however, the respectability of the character is just a façade, since Master Dumitrache tacitly accepts the love triangle with Chiriac, his smarter apprentice. A proof of his “respectability” is also his participation in the Civil Guard, where he wears “his captain of the guard suit”, a copy of the Parisian civil guard clothes. Chiriac is the most fervent defender of Master Dumitrache’s “honour as a family man”, while being Veta’s lover. The comedy *O noapte furtunoasă/ A Stormy Night* thus offers a diabolical transfer of roles and family responsibility.

The novel *Patul lui Procust/ The Procrustean Bed*(1933), presented in the textbooks published by ALL, HUMANITAS, and SIGMA, is a novel with an existential theme which brings to the fore the humble condition of the intellectual, of the superior man in general, in a small-minded society. The symbol of the Procrustean bed is borrowed from Greek mythology, the ancient character being a giant rogue and bandit who used to torture the passengers on their way to Athens: he was forcing them to lay down on an iron bed and, if they were too long, he would cut off their head and legs, and if they were too short, he would stretch them, smashing their bones with a hammer. The mythological ogre is a symbol which prevents the access to the road to knowledge, which forces the man to match a pattern, a rigid form imposed by a Procrustean bed. In Petrescu’s novel, the giant is the bourgeois society itself. The mythological giant is defeated by the Greek hero Theseus and ends up exactly the way he was torturing the travellers. Just like he used to lay them down on a bed to stretch or shorten them, the bourgeois society imposes inhuman limits, laws, rules, which destroy human personality, man himself, and his spiritual value. The phrase “Procrustean bed” symbolised the intention of putting things in a pre-established pattern, to subject them to unnatural constraints, to mutilate them. The Procrustean bed is a space of mismatch.

To conclude in a concise form, the conclusions of the present research are that in the Romanian language and literature textbook there are mixtures of heterogeneous elements which contribute to the formation of a seamless image of life and creation, facilitating a vivid intertextual dialogue with the cultural consciousness of all times.