

DOMAIN OF DOCTORATE: PHILOLOGY

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

**FANUS NEAGU'S PROSE –
THEMES AND STRUCTURE**

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CHAPTER I

1.1. Fanus Neagu's personality in the context of the '60s generation

1.1.1. *The '60s Generation – General coordinates – continuity/discontinuity; critical reception.*

At the beginning of the seventh decade the Romanian literary landscape changed with the rising and then contribution of the '60s Generation.

Taking into account the social and political context, with the de-Stalinization after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the desovietization (aspect of destalinization in our country), the '60s generation came onto the stage in the most proper moment. Being born, most of them in the '30s, the writers debuted, with a few exceptions in the '60s. During the Ceausescu's regime the spirit of the 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party brought a great deal of discussion, being possibly the origin of the affirmation of a real literature, after a decade and a half of dogmatism. The Congress that had given the power to Ceausescu had benefited, in its turn, from desovietization. Until the instauration of national-communism in the '70s, writers had the chance of an ideological defrost.

At the moment when the first volume of short-stories signed by Fanus Neagu was published (1959, *It Was Snowing in Baragan*) the Romanian literature was not under a favourable zodiac sign. (...) The literary creation was suffering the pressure of a relationship of severe subordination to the political ideology of the age. The paradoxical formula of the *socialist realism* had not finished its resources of destructive authority. Both restraints and especially constraints are equally thematic and artistic. The schemes parallel to reality, or opposed to it, aim at making the artistic talent a facultative quality, if not squarely dangerous, in case they had dared to manifest themselves beyond their limits. It seemed enough then for the writer to follow without deviation a limited number of epic routes and execute, without imaginative additions, a few *imposed exercises*. The achievements did not overreach the conjuncture and sub mediocrity, while their titles, then famous, do not tell anything to us today.

1.2. Fanus Neagu's creation between tradition and contemporaneousness, between continuity and novelty, between originality and uniqueness

Irrefutable representative of the '60s generation, Fanus Neagu prevails in the Romanian prose with a type of originality revealed both in comparison with some of his predecessors, and also with the writers of his generation. Fanus Neagu's prose breathes originality and – in my opinion – uniqueness through all levels of narrative speech (topos, atmosphere, performer/character, language pending between connotative and denotative, onomastics, diversity of the problems approached subject to an innovative vision about a developing world).

Fanus Neagu is a writer of the fields, of the Danube swamps, of the Baragan, of the delta and, in a spatial extension, of Dobrodja. The nature of these spaces - sometimes limited spaces, sometimes escaping spaces – represents an authentic topos in the writer's novels and short stories. In Fanus Neagu's vision the Baragan and actually the whole field of Braila constitutes "*axis mundi*", this vision being transposed and later decoded in his writings.

The landmass of the Baragan and of the Braila Plain, the churning Danube and swamps are spaces with a symbolism that seems undecipherable, because nature manifests mysteriously or apparently favourable, but actually it is strange or maleficent. The Braila space, in all its dimension, with which Fanus Neagu seems to be coalescent, a topos that cannot be denied by nobody and changed from a natural background into a real character present in the writer's short novels and stories belonging to the rural world, breathes also to a large extent in the writings having an urban subject.

The topos decoded in Fanus Neagu's creation that seems imaginary, but which has its source in the spatial and temporal reality, as strange as ineffable, and both romantic and aggressive, outlines an atmosphere that leads to *Balkanism* or *Balkan sphere*, thus surpassing, detaching from the *orientalism* in the "Isarlık" of Ion Barbu.

CHAPTER II

2.1. The atmosphere in the Fanusian writings: nature, space, time

2.1.1. Nature

The atmosphere in the Fanus Neagu's writings breathes from the air of the Braila Plain and the Danube lakes, from this matrix-space. The space is dominated by a bizarre nature, though it is said that it hides in itself the mystery and wonder of waters, being subject either to benefic forces or the evil ones. The space and nature in the Fanusian works are developed in topoi with happenings generally implying dramas and unfulfilled destinies, and at the same time in characters as long as nature reverberates at the people's feelings, while people discover themselves in nature's calamities or in its mystery and harmony. The plain, the Danube swamps and Braila swamps are encoded but they are decoded in symbol succeeding in bringing back home the rootless characters, wandering anywhere, anytime. The Braila Plain is a territory valued as mythological space, shrouding, somehow, the events and characters with the mist of legend, a spirit of the legend pending however between the sacrality and undecipherable thread of archaic traditional legend and that of modern legend that takes even a simple belief and, why not, a superstition into a story.

Nature is either sublime, breathing harmony, colour, soothing scents or arousing odours, and also violent, destroying peace and harmony with endless hypostases of nature-background and nature-character. Nature is searched with protruding eyes, contemplated with far away thought and with senses aroused perceiving its self-abandonment into the soul's harmony.

At dawn nature breathes scent of bay, when poplars rustle. She is looked upon with protruding eyes because She is a beauty giving microcosm, however She is a being like the person who observes Her [an overbearing lean day was being born under my eyes]. And thoroughly nature opens itself, gives Herself to the person who contemplates Her through eyes breaking off from the place from where She is observed [I had been sitting on the porch of the villa provided with doors-windows, since 3 in the morning, to catch the moment]. The door-window symbol of that *here-there, near-far* is the threshold which man traditionally catches and accepts as a custom registered in the infinite universe. Nature at sunset is full of mystery which grows through the night. The moonlight shrouds everything in mist and thence comes the ineffable but also the unknown.

There appears the same nature-witness of what was going to happen in the place where it is hospitable and which manifests itself like those participating in the events, being given life.

SHE, the all-dominating, is evil and deadly. Once benefic, well-intended, and some other time maleficent for the world development and man's destiny. When drought overtakes the Danube Plain and Dobrudja it is hostile.

The whole of the Danube Plain, the Baragan and the Braila and Dobrudja swamps together with the mysterious, charming but also aggressive nature is outlined from the descriptions of the manifestations of the infinite universe.

Staying in the same spirit of the fields, of the steppe, of Dobrudja that leads to the Balkan atmosphere, we notice the contrast of the Romanian summers with Balkan breath with those at Ohrid, Macedonia, which Pala Ghinescu paints in the story "The Winterless Valley" through words diluted in time. Bucharest, the city of emblematic trees, changed his way of living, mentality.

Splendour and grotesque, sublime and kitsch. Two presences of natural environment and human respectively which interfere but oppose each other at the same time, entering a contradiction. Obviously, in Fanus Neagu's writings we discover his own being and personality, introducing himself to the world in a permanent controversy.

2.1.2. Space

A story writer of the fields, of the Danube swamps and by extension of Dobrudja, Fanus Neagu is in the whole of his works, a prose fiction author of a matrix-space. Anywhere they might be - in the Danube swamps and islets, in the places to which they escaped from different reasons, his characters relate all events to the Braila lands. The space where the performers of the events live can be defined by certain coordinates – HERE (the space where they live) and FAR (the space where they escape). However the two coordinates are reduced to single one – HOME. This HOME has a unique symbolism. At home the heroes take part in events, get involved in happenings specific to the rural world from which they cannot break off. It is home where the rootless come back. Home is the shelter.

The limit-space/bounded space is always the HOME, from where the heroes leave or where they come or where they stay to follow their destiny as sometimes fallen, aggressive people or searching for some way to run away. That is why this place enchants by its beauty or could be the good place or the bad place, a soul destroyer.

The peaceful place in the middle of the harmonious nature is at the same time a mysterious, damned place, full of magic. What is beautiful and good interferes with curses, damns and evil magic. The evil place is always sterile, with negative influences. Evil places can be geographical – the bank, the curve, the marsh, the forest, while others types of places turn bad because something bad occurred in them, that maybe were cursed or spelled, or where the bad fairies danced, or where there was a whirlwind or a murder.

The house and the yard represent symbols of both good and bad places. It is a good place because man and woman love each other passionately and excitedly. They hate each other and the house can be the evil place as it is often deserted or destroyed.

The space of Baragan and Braila swamp are places towards which the Bucharest people go to, no matter how the space of old times looks like and how they respond to the call of those places and their coming back home.

In their nomadism, Fanus Neagu's heroes see the older home differently, although they return there. The home spirit is connected with the road, with Adventure and hence the vision of discontinuous road, with interruptions that attract evil, that is unfulfillment, rootlessness and maladjustment.

The town people belong to another world, that they might create to free themselves from the frustration of being far away from home.

2.1.3. Time

Fanus Neagu's heroes live their destiny in a relationship that probably reminds us of the idea of ancestral, of fortune (what is destined to you it is written on your forehead), which comes true, irrespective of where and when they are taken (by fate), considering the Danube space. The anywhere and anytime terms are two coordinates of human existence, which obviously lead to space and time and, therefore the Fanusian writings confess about the time and space where his heroes live different moments of their lives, with good or bad happenings, characterized by romantism and aggressiveness, by what is sublime and grotesque.

The space with various dimensions in the relationships home/abroad, here/far is subject to only one coordinate, namely the TIME, which is always different: the events happen at sunset, at noon, the hour when zephyr blows, in the middle of August, in spring when the Danube floods the yard, in the evening, (...) the sunset stretching wide. These time

units, thoroughly metaphoric and plastic linguistically, lead us to the Romanian people's time mentality as it was the case with the writer's vision on space.

The time has its own features in Fanus Neagu's vision, the same as in Romanian people's mental. It is a concrete fact and has an objective existence. It is tentacular as everything is in a continuous movement; it is eternity passing beyond; it is vulnerable because it can scatter anywhere, anytime, there, don't know where, and that is why it can be felt in any object; by scattering it gets soft, unrecognizable, gets ephemeral. The time as it is, accepted or not as eternal and ephemeral, is a coordinate of human existence, belongs to and integrates itself into space - see the Baragan, the Danube, that *beyond, there* and again *beyond*. Then there exists the time of the swamps. As a suicidal way – man's unforeseeable attitude of refusal – such time moves everything to the space with which the writer empathies, but chiefly the unexpected, even incredible personification of the Baragan: masochist time, that we can accept since in the author's vision this time brings life as well as death (repetitive life-death sequence), intensifying the dramatism of human existence in a space to which the author always comes back, with adoration, although he knows and understands that in such a space the time is irreversible and is confused with each of the inhabitants' own fate.

The time of the swamps, the time of the Baragan, those Here and There, Near and Far, is concentrated in the day's and man's moments, fixed in relation with the inhabitants' mentality and vision. There are nowhere the hour or the day fixed physically or mathematically, being set considering the day's moments or man's moments.

CHAPTER III

1. Customs – beliefs – celebrations

In Fanus Neagu's vision customs and celebrations completed by their ceremonials get values that often lead to desecration that seems to reach the absurd, the incomprehensible, the unnatural. In order to decipher this valence, it is necessary to follow a route of mutations in practicing customs and holidays, from tradition to contemporaneousness right in the daily rural space, considering it authentic. A ceremony, when performed, implies what is sacred and profane, myth and rite, magic and reality, ludic and even carnival-like. A ceremony represents in its thoroughness visions of life and world or collective imaginary.

A celebration implying custom performance by myth, rite, play and magic gesture is a complex phenomenon undoubtedly linked with the idea of folk religion, defined as a live facet of religion corresponding to people's wish to have a connection with the divine, in more direct, immediate and profitable relationships.

Traditionally, the space in which man lived had social connotations. The events occurred in the village hearth or outside would not accept a magic/real dialectic but an osmose between the two of them, under sacred auspices.

Obviously in the event development in the traditional village, magic practices are consecrated to a family topic, an undoubted proof that any dimension and coordinate of life and world has, in archaic thought, a concrete characteristic, indestructibly connected with everyday life. This familiar topic is not by chance known by experience or revelation.

There are types of spaces within which there perform the custom, actually the belief / the myth manifested by rite or ceremonial in the whole Fanus Neagu's work (stories, novellas, some fragments in novels). By decoding we can see a certain vision of the writer leading to the desecration of the holiday itself at all levels in the contemporary society. The contemporary world disapproves the sacred and rituals become ceremonials, actually some event developments changed by re-inventing of tradition.

Celebration is defined now as in older times – by dance, songs, food ingestion, drinking, frenzy but each feast element is under the sign of mutations. The analysis of each element from the perspective of the relationship sacred-profane within the celebration context

allows us to make the difference in the performance of the two relationship terms revealed in the archaic society and in the modern society respectively.

The semantic mutation of the sacred and profane, the transfer from the relationship of difference to that of reunion of the two time qualities, reveals that the process of continuity and discontinuity manifesting in the desecration process, generally, represents a moment in the history of mentality and particularly in the evolution or maybe the involution of culture, history and psychology of a traditional collectivity.

The desecration gets abnormal dimensions with Fanus Neagu when is manifested in rural customs and ceremonials, a natural phenomenon determined by the dialectic rapport past-present and by the evolution of the people's mentality reaching the absurd and grotesque.

From the attitude of the author of a surrealist work, a certain anguish is coming out, that he tries to dominate by negation, by a fantasy released by the rigidity of the traditional social norms. In organizing the Christmas Eve's celebration we decipher a total change of contemporary man's vision on customs and traditions. In the description of the Eve's celebration we can notice the identity of a city totally different from that of the rural space. It is a total negation of tradition, being another type of symbolic code and cultural communication. The Fanusian happenings and characters in the novellas or short stories make known some customs specific for the land and at the same time show mentalities and behaviours revealing other dimensions of their existence (family relationships, erotic relationships, social relationships), a whole rural universe but also urban which leads also to the Braila swamps and fields. The landscapes are a true pretext being the space with which God was generous, giving mysterious places as gifts but full of everything desired by ordinary simple people with universal destinies.

Fatality and also changeable climate of the Baragan dominate these people's destinies.

CHAPTER IV

1. Events and destinies

Fanus Neagu's heroes exist under the sign of a reality characterized by picturesque and bizarre, tragic and comic, sensational and grotesque features.

The Danubian world lives under the fate's mark, good or bad, knows to enjoy any life's pleasure, drinking, eating, and seeking a better place of living. However over all things and human hopes there is an harbour that would not let the happiness light come down. The Danube guides their destiny, the tragic pushes them to sin while their life passes because this is the law of nature. People's hard destiny is doubled by the violent behavior. Their dramas are natural, their reactions normal, only the way in which they are presented is different. Heroes are made of ordinary facts but the author manages to turn these simple things into real destinies. Joining the everyday events, the heroes' natural desire for entertainment and pleasure, parties rich in wine, all these destinies.

Fatality and also the changeable climate of the Baragan, dominate these people's fates. The author presents his world to us as it is – real, without omitting anything, the world with good and bad. All his characters are built in a certain way, typical, unique and original in order to mirror the world making up his universe.

The heroes' portraits are achieved with great finesse, sensitivity, using a special language, accurate in detail. Both positive characters – lovers, and those negative – thieves, bandits, crooked benefit by a successful portrayal, depicted with the psychologist's sharp sense as well as the creator's artistic mastership. The negative characters are outlined by perfect use of argotic language, by violent reactions and sometimes triviality or absolutely grotesque. Fanus Neagu is the writer who created spectacular images, sometimes even artificial, developing the reader's imagination. The language registers, the artistic and narrative techniques, the figures of speech are shocking, everything being new, spectacular and unknown. The powerful spirit and deep insight can be seen in all his work. Out of ordinary he builds something unexpected and extraordinary. The facts present in his books occur in a simple ordinary and sometimes rudimentary world but the writer's creative power gives them the value of destiny.

Ability is the author's reference mark; he succeeded in his own style, to combine the

beautiful with the ugly, the poetic with the grotesque and absurd, the natural with the bizarre. He brought both the simple man and the city intellectual to the foreground of his works, with all their experiences containing sins, confessions, pains and joys. His world likes parties accompanied by the specific Danube humour; they treat suffering at the pub; love is consumed with the sweetness of youth but sprinkled with physical and verbal violence; if the rural space is missing, he rapidly creates an artificial rural universe. His heroes often wander through all the country, anywhere and everywhere, by their free will or not - but longing for water, for, the swamps, snails and reeds they always come back home. The trivial, monotonous, obscure and with no future leaves a shadow over the Danubian village. The people's wishes are minimum, they are satisfied with almost nothing, however they hope something better, somewhere... Although tormented, characters are not hopeless and their destinies manage to go on. Negative characters are outlined with enough colour and punished from the beginning by making their portraits. They are communicative characters, loving life and adventure, voluble and having an original philosophy. The author's world is the real one, representing his universe, the main feature being confusion. This confusion includes the bizarre, the tragi-comic and the picturesque, aesthetic categories defining the heroes' behavior. Once with the development of the events and heroes' destiny, these categories are added the grotesque, picaresque, dramatic, magic features, all these being decoded by a deep and objective analysis. The environment in which they live marks their behavior and way of thinking, always trying to self-improve. Fanus Neagu took and used what was natural in human existence: verbal violence, cruelty, primitivism, woman, love, humour, loitering, all topics and motifs met in other great writers' works: Panait Istrati, Cezar Petrescu, Liviu Rebreanu, Ion Creanga. The essential topic of Fanus Neagu's work is undoubtedly the Danubian peasant's life. The man of these places, friendly or destroying, seems to order the events, experiences, feelings and illusory hopes met day by day. We are not surprised by the exceptional, the ordinary is associated with simple man living without great expectations. It is this simple man with whom the writer empathies, succeeding to make a destiny out of a common experience lived by his hero. This creative capacity of Fanus Neagu is the distinctive mark of the '60s generation literature. We see events and macabre characters following their merciless fate. The heroes guide themselves after their own laws. Their life spans according to their fates. Events are exposed in an objective way, from the writer's perspective and vision. It seems that this objectivity has a moralizing character. The tragic feature breathes out of the events course and the fate follows its thread. The trivial is present also in the Fanusian novellas and short stories, being decoded from the traditional folk elements/motifs. The

characters' limit situations are upgraded correspondingly, are caused by some hard experiences and lead to dramatism.

Fanus Neagu surprises with a subtle and definite analysis of the existential dramas, of the simple people's fates in the rural area, as well as of the destiny of the city intellectuals and, especially, that of the artist. The individual, generally, irrespective of the space he belongs to, having a plasmatic flexible structure, does not agree with the rigorous canonic typologies. His characters are modern by their adventure spirit and by their will generating the dramatic and tragic situations. They are natural, a normal feature of these people marked by a high existential pressure; they are exalted, with a harsh vitality, living in perfect communion with nature.

By the ample construction of the characters, by the greatness of gestures and nature manifestations, the Fanusian prose breathes the air of force, robustness, colour and liveliness.

CHAPTER V

1. Motifs and symbols

In the previous chapters regarding the atmosphere, events and heroes' destinies in Fanus Neagu's prose we focused on the rural world in the Baragan and Braila swamps as well as in the city world with people's experiences, customs and beliefs. In the development of the stories we observe beliefs, rites and gestures, and magic performances which remind us of ancestral myths and symbols. We will not approach the theoretical problem about myths, about the relationship with myths, *in extenso*, in order to avoid an ethnographic or anthropologic sense for our discourse. However, we will make some general references and considerations on these matters to stress, as much as possible, the connection of myths and symbols, particularly, with literary themes and motifs.

The issue of the myth, ritual, rite and the relationship between them represented in the course of time a subject of the compared history of religions, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, ethnography or cultural history, each science adopting proofs that might correspond with their own research necessities. Nevertheless we will refer only to aspects leading generally to literature and arts.

When referring to myth and its relationships with the rites, legends, fairy-tales and customs there appear symbols belonging to an ancestral reality but also to arts and culture.

In this respect the study of myths and symbols by ethnologists or philosophers in different stages of history of civilization and belonging to different cultures – universal or local, among which the Romanian one – shows that in the structure of a myth or in the meaning of a symbol, we discover the same peculiarities of the archaic thinking that marked the imaginary world. When the myth ceased to manifest itself as *modus vivendi* in the social evolution and human mentality it withdrew from the daily life reality, leaving its place to scientific knowledge while the mythological vocabulary became an asset of the art, enriched with new aesthetic and artistic symbols. Therefore, both myth and symbol are laicized and by demythization get a poetic structure. Thus a performance bi-univocal relationship between myth and symbol is remarked, which in the historical evolution transfers into artistic image and metaphor, the persuasive power of symbol being equal to that of the myth. In the course of time, archaic symbols transfigure the artistic domains, reaching other culture areas, in other languages and codes, acquiring the form of signs symbols laicized and institutionalized. The

historical and/or comparative analysis of this aspect affirms the permanence and cultural persistence as well as the large circulation of symbols. Most of these symbols are matrixes present in the people's collective subconscious and became patterns, models for creating the symbols of all the products of the collective imagination of humankind.

Water is often used in the Romanian people's traditional practices, in certain rites of crop stimulation, when by magic ways they try to invoke the rain, but also in the rites of stopping rain when it is destructive. Water obviously has benefic but also evil power. It is an ambivalent symbol and is present under these two hypostases in Fanus Neagu's works. The symbol becomes motif while motif goes to ancestral symbols. The Danube waters gather all local people's experiences. The Danube with its banks, gravel, flow, curves is a constant element of water symbol, is the inhabitants' life itself. The people's destiny blends with the Danube flowing, with the mystery and with the violence, with the iniquities. The Danube is endowed with human features because it is life itself in all its hypostases.

There are wonderful representations of the Danube, when beautiful, calm, when ugly, mean like experiences lived by the man related to Her. The author is in ecstasy before this source of life but also denies it because of the iniquities caused to the inhabitants where She is the mistress. The language in the descriptions of the Danube alternates between sublime, poetic and grotesque. There is an undoubted interference/communion between living and word. The Danube, with the whole frenzy, being either a quiet loving friend or a hostile being, concentrates in its flowing the mysteries of the universe: time, life, death. Obviously and undoubtedly, though indecipherably, water is one of the essential elements from which the universe was made in the peoples' cosmologic myths. It is a complete picture of the Danube where mingle meditation, love for great mysteries, for mythic and fabulous living through this wilderness with all the symbolic values of the archaic world, and of the modern world too.

Water is life giving but also destructive when heavy rains destroy crops, it is destroying when it does not come though it is expected like a benefaction; but the drought is drought and water is itself subject to non-blessing.

The life giving water is associated with the *well* as a symbol and literary motif.

Knowing these beliefs and rites, Fanus Neagu brings to foreground of the novella "The Well" the motif and symbol of this place in the life of rural community and an essential element of archaic and traditional spirituality as such. The central theme of the narration is the communion between the well digger and the beneficial water in all practices.

The shortage of water – a life source – generates feeling and emotions marked as dramatic. Waiting for water changes the initial suffering and disappointment into an almost psychic non-equilibrium.

The Danube, the islet, the river, the well are symbols and motifs taking us to the same essential element of human existence, WATER, with its complex symbolism, as profound as difficult to decode, however generating meditative thoughts about life and death.

Another constant motif in Fanus Neagu's writings is the Moon expressing profound symbolism and giving mythic thoughts. Therefore we discover a new relationship/interdependence and/or interference between myth and symbol, between myth-symbol and artistic and/or poetic imagination.

In Fanus Neagu's vision, the moon is a motif and clearly a symbol, endowing it with human features because it is both protector and confident of heroes' deep feelings though they seem to be only basic gregarious spirits. The characters perform in conformity with the freedom principle.

It is not by chance when the moon shines at night at moments when the characters live their love passionately, unpermitted or unaccepted by those around them, when they behave in a bizarre way hiding their frustrations. The moon plays the game of death and regeneration, of the ever return to the ecstasy and superabundance of life from an ordinary and tern existence.

CHAPTER VI

1. 'The world of atmosphere' in short stories and novellas. Examples

The introduction of the issue approached by Fanus Neagu in his writings, from their atmosphere to topics, motifs, symbols from the syntagmatic perspective imposes, in our opinion, a presentation from the paradigmatic point of view in order to catch from ensemble to detail, from general to particular the subjects of the narratives that have been text-frames in the previous chapters. The aspects analyzed in the previous chapters in ensemble vision are reset in each of the novellas and stories in particular. As a result, any research on Fanus Neagu's work implies an interpretation of the type general-particular or particular-general, the two hypostases guiding to the outlining and defining finally the ensemble. We will try, as much as possible, to reach this aspect by analyzing/presenting some of the writer's narratives that reach the absolute superlative.

This world is made up of plenty of elements (spaces, characters, clothes, gestures, behaviours, objects, beliefs, legends) presented in their approximate togetherness and are subject to a mythological interpretation, being obvious the insertion of a series of mythic archetypes transferred into fairy tales, legends, beliefs, superstitions. A dominant pragmatic characteristic of all atmosphere texts is that they admit a mythological interpretation, meaning that in their profound structure are always integrated a series of mythic archetypes.

In an intermediary stage of generating the text, the myths turn to fairytales and legends. This intermediary textual structure may be involved abusively in the atmosphere literature, in order to be reconstituted by the reader in the reception process. It can also be explicit, so in an atmosphere text the reader may find fairy tales and legends. These may be socialized, well-known in a cultural space, may be some collective creations long forgotten but now rediscovered or known in a wrong way until updated in this text or may represent unique creations, belonging a text issuer. The last example does not refer to actual fairy tales and legends, but to works created following the latter's pattern and characterized by the fact that both characters in the text and the issuer are related to them as to some authentic fairy tales and legends.

The steppe echo

The story text is completely concentrated on the magic role and ritual gestures of some spirits included by the system of beliefs / superstitions of the Romanian spirituality. In the archaic and traditional thinking these spirits are supposed to participate in the everyday life and respond to certain wishes of people, communicating with them; however we see a plan of reality that alternates with the magic plan.

In the Fanusian text, the elves and goblins are spirits-characters, being endowed with the attributes from the archaic beliefs. Moreover they bear a metaphoric name expressed by a precious stone with a certain symbolism, loading them with magic features. Thus the myth becomes a symbol and a sign and turns into an artistic image eventually.

Myth-symbol-sign-story, all these are manifestations of ancestral spirituality, on one hand, and of creation and artistic imagination, on the other hand, in a writing undoubtedly proving the talent of a writer with deepest unique vision over the world and its mysteries. An original philosophy approached in a perfect literary creation. Reality-dream-fantasy all join and impress by experiences and message. The atmosphere releasing mystery, fantasy, reality and/or dreaming is to be found again in the Braila swamps, in the steppe and Danube plain. The islets and islands hide spirits which can come out in order to protect or destroy. It is not by chance that we meet the belief about elves and dwarfs, migrating from myth to symbol and then to motif, in the works of the writers belonging to those spaces.

It is a world of atmosphere that we accept together with its fantasies and whose mysteries we try to solve, but it impossible to understand its essence. Aesthetically and artistically these works are outstanding and the simplicity of the narrative discourse is a profound philosophy of life. Supernatural is also the atmosphere where the main performer is the witch and the ritual act is the spell.

Withdrawing from the community's moral values, especially from the ethic norms of the archaic and traditional societies, and being in contradiction with them, the witch, in my opinion, is what sociology and psychology name abnormality and/or deviance. We approach these phenomena because the archaic and traditional mentality stores in old beliefs, customs, proverbs and legends what the Romanian people imagine regarding different forms of abnormality. Furthermore, by these phenomena of abnormality the old order is broken and the principle of the world turned upside-down is to be observed. In all these manifestations we decipher a Romanian socio-cultural imaginary containing dreams, reveries, fantasies, myths, utopias and ideologies. Strictly connected with the imaginary is the issue that focuses on the

approach and research of mentality, representations, cultural matrixes as well as individual and collective consciousness.

The Christmas tramps

In developing the story we witness the performance of beliefs and rites in two hypostases: in the first part the action takes place by ancestral rules, while in the second we participate in a party, actually Christmas' Eve in a new different world in which everything is dissipated.

In the first part the whole atmosphere is dominated by mystery, wizardry, incantation, the main performer being the witch whose practice, gestures and clothes remind us of myth and symbols.

The second half contains '*the world of atmosphere*' painted as something bizarre and nonconformist. The people implied come from anywhere, gathering and having fun in the tavern 'The blond heifer'. They drink, joke, and make fun of everything, even of the sacred Christmas 'Eve. There is nothing sacred in the celebration; everything stands under the mark of degradation or maybe an apparent degradation. The characters came, enjoyed themselves, then left and not accidentally one of them addressed the others using the words 'Christmas tramps'. There are gestures, behaviours, language related to kitsch, to the lost man or maybe the man hiding thus his frustration towards the world changing. The rude and many times trivial language is the expression of some characters' degrading nature, laughing in a tragic-comic manner at the revolution events. Not incidentally Clown Nino is introduced, as a character opposed to 'deceitful fish' and 'stor sturgeon' The mysterious world coming from myths is leaving while the myth destroying world is coming, seeming to have nothing remained from the older one.

It is irrefutable the philosophic profoundness with which Fanus Neagu observes the world in its becoming. In spite of the controversial manifestations it is a 'small masterpiece', mastering a perfect art of 'saying'. The end of the story with Caterina's memory about madam Alexianu's parties as well as the foreground scene with the gesture of catching and shooting the stor sturgeon, but not anyhow, reveal another symbol of the fish and sturgeon, obviously leading to those bizarre characters' mentality and their attitude for disapproving of the old beliefs.

Mystery and magic elements, wizardry and belief in beings-symbols, characteristic for archaic and traditional communities disappear in the moment when the fortune-telling, incantation, spell making and unmaking do not manifest as 'modus vivendi' and in the

individual's and community's life and get a 'commercial' character, practiced from the hero's need to survive. In such situations we witness a conflict between 'what magic and ritual meant' and 'what they have become'. We can interpret it as a dysfunction, but also as an involution of the mentality or another hypostasis of the individual's and/or community's mentality or as a reality generated by existence itself at a certain time. From this perspective we highlight the happenings experienced by Lisca, the story's heroine.

Lisca was forced to leave home, her father and brothers' hut on the bank of the river because she refuses to work with them on the brickyard, her husband being at war. After having been beaten by her father, Lisca starts 'walking through the village with her slimy cards and shell, making both men and women giddy'. She would foresee only joys, which often did not come true. Her fame dissolved when she foresaw a great joy to a woman whose son drowned in the river. The news spread all over and nobody wanted to let her tell the fortune. She became a member of an occult community, making a crime and turning aside from normality. However, her deeds are neither abnormal nor deviant because she does not belong to the criminal group. She does everything for surviving; it a deviation which can be understood and accepted in a certain way from our perspective. Moreover, the community itself accepts her for her charisma and hence the trust given to her. There is nothing like a witch's behavior, everything seeming normal and natural.

The happening brings again the conflict with her father and brothers. It is clear that Lisca's deed is imposed and she is forced to obey to her father's despotic attitude in order to stop the conflict. After some time, Lisca takes back her habit of telling fortune for women, but now the ritual gesture (but not magic) is manifested in an unintelligible incantation, her means being the 'sieve' and a 'pair of scissors'.

The harsh fate follows the beautiful young gypsy, Lisca. One woman asks her to make an incantation with the sieve to learn information about her husband. A drama is born in the gypsy's soul. While the exterior conflict with her father and brothers disappears there rises the inner conflict intensifying the narrative. Lisca lives hard moments because she knows that once again her incantation was a lie; the sieve could not tell anything. The writer was a fine analyst of the man being in a limit situation, describing a memorable image of Lisca's state of mind.

Lisca lives the drama of a woman who must accept the harshness of living imposed by father and family and, wishing to exceed her condition, practices gestures that are beyond rules, rather deviant in attitude, but becoming neither evil nor lost. Her tragic destiny is under

the curse being known that the unwritten laws of the archaic gypsy community did not allow their women to tell their own fortunes or their relatives’.

It is a grandiose narrative, a perfect creation representing as in a film scenario ‘a broken piece’ of the reality of a hard life, of a tragic destiny. The tragism and the dramatism are melted in a sublime description of Lisca’s experiences on one hand, and also of the readers, on the other hand.

And even if they initially get to know it partially and superficially, later they will discover and decode constituent elements and will understand it as such.

CHAPTER VII

1. Themes in Fanusian novels: continuity, unity in diversity, themes and motifs

The publication of the first Fanusian novel '*The Angel Cried Out*' (1968) surprised the public and drew the attention of the literary critics for the original prose writer, although well-known for his outstanding talent shown in his short stories.

The other three novels published up to now are '*The Beautiful Madmen of the Big Cities*' (1976), '*The Solitude Chair*' (1987) and '*Great Lady Dracula's Lover*' (2001). The novel '*The Angel Cried Out*' was received positively continuing the successful direction begun with his exceptional short prose. There are not few examples of prose writers who, though excellent with their techniques in short stories and novellas, failed or did not register spectacular results using them in their novels. Writers Gib I. Mihaescu and Vasile Voiculescu are much better in their novellas than in their novels. The same happened with Stefan Banulescu and other '80s prose writers.

After having read all Fanus Neagu's works, from chronicles to stories and to novels, and analyzing details and syntheses, it comes out the continuity of the world of specific and unique atmosphere at all levels, from themes and motifs, to language and onomastics.

So, in this way, this unique space in Fanus Neagu's writings becomes a main character of all his creation, from stories to novels.

This space was dealt with in one the first chapters of the present work. We defined this space 'that home' with which the individual is in permanent communication. Considering this essential aspect of the work, Andrei Gligor underlines the symbolic value of the 'axis of the Fanusian world', as a result of the deep analysis of the three novels that approach different issues.

The author of the study analyzes the essence of the Romanian village characteristics, initially pointing out Lucian Blaga's conception and ending with the subjective rebuilding of the native place.

Taking into consideration Sebastian Moraru's notices and Fanus Neagu's extatic communion with the Danubian world, we could make the analogy between the conception of village-idea to the matrix-space in the Fanusian work, thus naming it space-idea. Far from giving ethnographic implications referring to these insertions in our paper, we appreciated as appropriate the presentation of these observations to stress once more the essence of Fanus

Neagu's work: the Danubian world between reality and fiction, the space as leitmotif and main character.

Moreover, this aspect is mirrored in an absolute concordance in the issue diversity of the three novels, different in their themes but unitary through the presence of the Fanusian world axis. In the world of the matrix-space we decipher a series of beliefs and customs leading to myths, even if the village suffers a more or less visible desecration, accepted or not. In these coordinates the image of the Fanusian matrix-space is visible. Hence we can see the return to myths and symbols turned into literary motifs with their own symbolism. This aspect generates another coordinate of the unity of the Fanusian novels beyond the thematic diversity. Some of the motifs have been presented in the synthesis chapters, others will be dealt with when referring to each novel. However it is necessary to approach certain motifs that irrefutably lead to the unity of the novels, farther than we discussed up to now.

An important element of the unity of the vision about the world is figure 3, as a universal symbol. There are heroes and events in the novels occurring under the sign of this sign.

In the novel *'The Angel Cried Out'* the tragic shadow follows the whole novel, that opens and ends with the father's and son's deaths; the angel cries out three times and twice he announces an end. At Epiphany, obeying the custom, 33 swimmers dive in the water to grasp the cross. The family that leave Plataresti for Dobrodjea in exile are 13 in number and the number of the peasants is 39 (numbers compound from basis of 3). Gica Duna's destiny develops under the sign of figure 3 and is accompanied in the course of his life by 3 wives. Ion Mohoreanu comes back to Plataresti in 3 years after the war.

In *'The Beautiful Madmen of the Big Cities'* there are 3 heroes (Radu Zavoianu, Ed Vardana, Raminski). Their strange friendship and their bohemian and extravagant life style stand under this mark.

In *'The Solitude Chair'* 3 characters (Saltava, Leb Betleem, Gil) have a discussion in the atmosphere of Flamingo Pub, becoming the main heroes of the novel.

Another characteristic of the unity of novels in their issue diversity is the presence of two characters who by names seem different, however they react synonymously. We refer here to the clown/buffoon and madman.

Besides being a circus comedian, a person entertaining people and making them laugh (clown/buffoon) or being a person mentally alienated (madman), the two characters have other features that make them draw together and be alike. Furthermore, symbolically, the term madman refers to different categories of people possessing characteristics that could place

him clearly outside society, but some of them having no symptoms of psychic malady. Thus, a folk legend says that there are three types of madmen: one who had everything and loses everything unexpectedly, another one who had nothing but inherits everything without transition and mentally ill madman, though there may be another one, the fourth – who sacrifices everything to acquire wisdom, the exemplary initiate.

In the Romanian socio-cultural imagination the madman – the village madman, the fool, the dumb – is any person who is not able to integrate himself economically and socially in the community: he has no family, his behavior is bizarre and eccentric, being suspended.

We rediscover the two hypostases of the characters giving Fanus Neagu's novels an element of continuity in '*The Angel Cried Out*' (the clown/ buffoon) and in '*The Beautiful Madmen of the Big Cities*' (the madman).

In '*The Angel Cried Out*' the hero playing the clown is Che Andrei, participating continuously in a carnival. He is marked by liveliness that makes him a resonance box of the world complexity; he is a rebel, but also a dreamer, a thinker for whom life is a bridge between death and birth.

In '*The Beautiful Madmen of the Big Cities*' the heroes' life is marked by carnival-like fun, by extravagance, by non-accepting the social norms, by non-conformism. Their behavior is ethically characterized by taunt, slander while their attitude is a beautiful madness and not incidentally the title bears a special symbolism. In a certain way, the heroes wish in their madness to be free from the laws of society, to impress and to feel the good and beautiful in their own way. Maybe it is a release of the wise intellectual, of the initiate.

The beautiful madmen seem to have Trif - The Madman as a patron saint. And so, drinking wine, the essence of the heroes' life in the novel, changes into a unity element of the Fanusian novels, actually of the whole work (we refer to the ecstasy caused by wine).

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusions

- Besides Augustin Buzura, Petre Salcudeanu, Constantin Toiu, Marin Preda, Mircea Ciobanu, Dumitru Radu Popescu, Stefan Banulescu, Sorin Titel, great representatives of the '60s generation, Fanus Neagu is another coryphaeus, remarkably illustrating in his works the Baragan Plain, the place of his childhood.
- The prose writer builds up a bridge between old and new, between past and present, while the epic genre is created in a modern form, mirroring the social reality, stressing its banality.
- The matrix-space is outlined and presented in a special way, being dominated by mystery where man manifests himself freely in his simplicity.
- The language is used as a code though it helps with the decoding of the narrative conflict; the metaphor is essential in the exceptional images and the word contains multiple values and meanings, all of them marked by symbol.
- The village is a mythic universe and so is the city where the peasant will be replaced by the intellectual.
- The historical truth is opposed to the truth expressed by the individuals who walk on an initiating road in a closed world and their violent character influences their life and way of thinking.
- The narrator proves an extraordinary talent in creating enjoyable fantasies, being considered 'an artist of the word'.
- His works outline a unique topos, that of the Danubian lands, with performers who are not able to decide their own fate, being just simple people trying to go beyond their condition; they obey rituals and believe in signs, figures and hazard elements.
- The writer builds a world of atmosphere in which the matrix-space, with its unique and mysterious nature reverberates in the performers'soul, while their experiences are in an interdependent relationship with the coordinates of the matrix-space.
- The 'world of atmosphere' in the Fanusian writings is a kind of binder between the short prose and novels. From this perspective we can perceive the continuity elements from stories to novels.
- The moon is a frequent motif in his work, as it is in Eminescu's poems.

- The world painted is authentically Romanian, in which people participate in the celebrations and traditions of their forefathers. The performance of the customs and beliefs was not accidental, their presentation being done from Fanus Neagu's vision.
- There are amazing images describing the preparations for the three major events in man's life: the birth, the wedding and death, being mixed with those for the Christian holy days.
- Fanus Neagu does not have a special technique of the construction but he makes his stories alive, being appreciated by critics and reminding of Ion Creanga.
- The stories do not have an epic thread clearly outlined, the narrator being dominated by the fiction of his mythic vision.
- His novels have a strong, realistic construction and in most part epic, while the tragism comes from a hopeless world, somber, with its own strict rules.
- The step from the story to the novel is achieved masterfully, revealing the writer's vocation with a well limited territory, a sentence enchanting with metaphors, that is an original style.
- Literary motifs abound in his work while the oral style is achieved at the highest level. They direct us to myths, to the sacred and not incidentally we point out the relationship myth-symbol-motif-story.
- The chapters including the holidays, traditions and the authentic life of the Romanian village are rigorously construed.
- The performers are directed from one side to the other, but they always come back to their native places, these events pointing out to the writer's spirit of adventure. The coming back is like a rehabilitation of the alienation. Thus we observe an essentialization of the native place, of the home, of here versus, there, far away. The writer's permanent thirst for new places and customs as well as for unknown people is very clear.
- Nature becomes an important character in the action, but independent, witnessing and participating in all happenings. The Fanusian man's communion with nature is indestructible suggests the relationship between micro-cosmos and macro-cosmos.
- The development of the events together with the world of atmosphere in the Fanusian works play an important part in defining the various aesthetic categories that become coordinates of the heroes' behavior, from ordinary or ritual gestures to language use.

We may discover either the sublime and poetic, the beautiful, good and truth as well as the grotesque, bizarre, ugly, irony and trivial.

- Although the writer is 'rural' in essence, he blends the traditionalism with modernism, exploiting the 'story-in-story' technique, while the matrix-space, the Baragan, gets other dimensions and an original and unique symbolism.
- The performers willing to speak participate in the narrative built with an amazing talent by the writer who creates something thoroughly innovative.
- The symbols and parables aim at defining a novel of existence, without a rigorous construction. The unity in diversity issue is expressed by the symbols directing to the magic elements (notice figure 3), to a pre-Christian and Christian (figure 3; the symbol of wine, the buffoon, the clown).
- The human feature is present in the critical and unhappy situations and quite often in a picaresque way, giving the story a specific colour.
- The novels depict the events of a collectivity in a well limited space, living a real drama and wishing to challenge history.
- Modernism is present in inserting the fabulous character in daily life, in choosing the oracular formulas, in turning to the unlikeness.
- There are symmetries and numbers with divination values (we remember events and destinies marked by symbolic figure 3). The performers do not succeed in individualizing themselves and live their life with exaltation, fantasy, with no identity but with limited ritual regime.
- The thieves' portraits in this 'confused world' are outlined and defined in a unique way owing to the slang masterfully used by the novelist.
- There are to be found old implications of the epic genre that creates an imaginary 'geography'.
- His novels develop polyvalent themes – erotic, rural, mythic – where the author's message is powerful, with balladic narratives where reality is presented rhapsodic, combining the plan changing and framed stories.
- 'The beaus' are not intellectuals, their origin is clear, being peasant's sons who preserve their customs, and also being the possessors of a creation drama.
- Using the technique 'theatre in theatre' he includes a novella in the novel.
- The heroes' desires are ordinary and they are prone to a weakness to what is spectacular, reacting by theatrical gestures and words and their life is bathed in much

alcohol and violence, with an uncommon appetite for swear words and ‘coloured’ language.

- The tutelary star – the moon – marks the heroes’ existence both positively and negatively, having the power in some cases to make the people lose their minds or even their life.
- The characters bear their belief on their shoulders, certifying it but without recognizing it.
- The exception is represented by smell, but the uniqueness by the olfactory reality.
- The ‘confused’ performers feel a certain revenge pleasure, culpability, and they are also hopeful in spite of the psychic and physical torments they are subject to.
- The way to the Fanusian novel is open undoubtedly by his stories that suit the conditions towards the end of the sixth decade and the beginning of the seventh.
- There appears the notion of king, a king who is to be overthrown by everything is new, he is obeyed no more, while the conflict between old and new is expressed sentimentally and erotically.
- The stories have a simple epic though correspondingly dosed, the sequences being remarkable and integrating in the narrative whole.
- The writer is a supporter of the modernization of the Romanian prose, as it comes out from the presence of the realistic thread in his works, illustrating the social phenomenon characteristic of that time – the migration to the city.
- The heroes are minutely psychologically studied, bringing to surface their inner feelings and their behavior.
- The political issues are marked in the Fanusian prose, evoking the trauma of the people tormented by terror, by physical and psychic sufferings.
- The heroes’ physical features reflect their nature and live in a true communion with nature; their steps in life are guided by hope.
- The woman is aggressed in many ways, bearing the mark of humiliation. In the writer’s vision the woman’s image is controversial. Her portrait is outlined at different levels (behavior, simple gestures, wild passion, clothes), made up of lights and shadows. She is both angel and demon.
- We meet characters like ‘picaros’ that are attracted to travels, adventure and wandering, curious to investigate the unknown world (Ion Mohreanu and Adrian Zogafi).

- Another characteristic of the modernity is the open end of some of the stories, while the ambiguity from the literary point of view is expressed by the erotic conflicts and psychological growing-ups.
- The crowd is depicted as a whole with the same interests and hopes, identified with the environment in which they live.
- They have clearly a predilection to religion but also to pagan practices; they like incantations and wonder making herbs.
- The events occur rapidly, before important religious holidays – Christmas, Easter, Saint Mary's Day, Shrove Tuesday – good occasions for expressing hope and drinking alcohol.
- Finely depicted artistic images contain the devastating effects made by collectivization on peasants; their behavior changes radically, reaching human degradation, while the notion of friend or neighbor disappears and each of them avoids any contact or movement because the fear of being turned up floats in the air.
- The equivalence author-narrator-character is confirmed, being used the narrative speech in the first person and autobiographical elements which give the impression of authenticity.
- Hazard rules the world that belongs to Christian and pagan rituals, illustrating the two faces of existence, the inner and the outside, that will mix at a certain moment.
- The writer manifests the realistic character in most cases, having an abrupt beginning and characters rigorously built, sacrificed by destiny, learning to face life, to adapt themselves and to find solutions for survival.
- Conflicts vary: between generations, erotic, psychological, hero with divinity, hero with nature, the end being tragic most frequently.

Key-words:

plain, Braila space, Danube swamps, nature, matrix-space, grotesque, sublime, time, customs, tradition, celebration, rituals, fate, moon, star, myth, wine, violence.

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