

## The Mythical, Fantastic and Allegorical Sphere of D.R. Popescu's Prose

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**Abstract.** The literature belonging to various genres extended mythological narrative, given that in both cases the main focus is on the narrative of events that took place in a past more or less fabulous. The extension of myth in ritual demonstrates that the message sent by the first is a truth. A convincing argument for this assumption is the fact that in traditional societies the life is highly ritualized. The existence, the experiences and pursuits are modeled after the mythical scheme. The only one that could legitimize them and could offer an entire authority is the myth because man follows his behavior revealed by myth but its consequences also. In D.R. Popescu's prose, the myth descends to human understanding and living the story is much more possible. The true meanings are deep and paradoxically, not only because it offers solutions to various problems but because it calls the archaic man to transform his condition. Hence, the myth represents a human's dream to transcend the mortal condition and to integrate his existence in a sacred universe. The mythical vitalism takes place in a system of its own affirmation and the human is showcased excessively in multiple perspectives, drawn to thresholds of experiences.

**Keywords:** myth; interspersed epic; reinvention of faith; neomodernism

### 1. Introduction

The myth, as a literary method, propose a different kind of reality, a reality denied by proletcultist writing and it is now recovered by saving power of literature, which, through camouflaged images, it regenerates a sick time (censorship time). The myth is also the creator of an anti-speech about the world that is artistic. In this context, the experiences proposed by the D.R. Popescu's novels myths announced that history has died. Thus, the myth annuls the history, denies the historicity and regenerates time. And literature, as a mythical story, has the role to reinvent in the imaginary plane the faith, in a world which, although unreal, it was possible to assume the position of rescue.

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The novel that uses the myth as a literary method operated ritually, it cured a shortage and the biggest lack, which the hero of history tried to rebalance it in his journey of initiation, it was the lack of expression's freedom, and now is the moment when the word is finally cured by the captivity. Throughout myth technique. Such myths opposed the emptiness in people. The realistic perspective rupture is completed; staging and conventionalization are both means and elements of the atmosphere, some eccentric ways of the world and also fantastic characteristics.

The importance of this neomodernist writer is regimented by the narrative construct in the fantastic area, a fantastic endowed with allegorical or parabolic features through which there are targeted the distortions and bitter truths about the human condition under communism. With their special symbolism, these mysterious, glamorous parables arouse the reader's imagination, proving its aesthetic actuality.

The events are designed as fabulous and implausible, the symbol and parable with an unimaginable exaltation in inventiveness. The symbolic thinking updates the lost meaning among the pages of party congresses, in which almost no one believed anymore but continued to alienate building an unreal world.

## **2. The Myth as a Literary Method**

The myth, as a literary method, is therefore a constant operator in the novels of Radu Dumitru Popescu, establishing allegorical "realist" novel, a novel deliberately indecipherable. The narrative is filled with symbolic signs, myths, forcing the text to undergo a process of symbolization through which, a significant, through his signifier, leads to another signifier, built inside a haul that transcends the immediate reality, to the detriment of the process of signification through which a signifier can relate to a significant.

The represented artistic world was problematical in the novel that assumes the mythical method through mythical symbol. The symbols point to another metaphysic reality, whose reviewer has indulged in a supra-reality, the one the novel is embracing. Symbols are multifaceted, only by thickening their meaning is obscured. The reality to which the symbols send the reader is hard to define. Symbols have the signs status, sending through their signifier to a second significant: history as a farce, a warehouse affected by simulacra, which the myth uncovers.

### 3. Converting the Fabulous as Myth

The mechanism of converting the fabulous as something mythical in the novels of D.R. Popescu, *F* and *Vânătoarea regală/Royal hunt* appears at the compositional level through the deployed epic, distributed on multiple cores events. Meanwhile, the investigation formula, being caused retrospectively, complicates the text, as variety of perspectives on the same epic event turns into excess; the fragmentation, installed in the narrative plane, reflects, in the ontological plane, the dissolution of the individual trapped in a world which is unrecognizable.

Thus, the chapters “have the independence of a novel, cropping kaleidoscopic reflections, symbolizing a world that had lost, during blindness, the coherence” (Berechet, 2009, p. 43). Moreover, there are narrative fragments with no connection to the novel’s subject, just the same as, in the world from which the novel is cropped as an esthetic product, the events were foreign to the humanity. This is the main base of “Frumoasele broaște țestoase/The beautiful turtles” from *Royal hunt*: “Throughout the foggy garden, the frogs moved equally and as reliable as ever and on their way and dozens of candles burning grind like mist in the bud, near the ground, passing through it like torches, scattering it” (Popescu, 1976, p. 106) ... and everything started from a trivial requiem, which becomes shockingly because the widow decided to stick candles on the shell of turtles.

This type of structure in which time expands, the narrative lines started breaking being overburdened epically; it is possible only due to the myth. At a first glimpse, the impression was one of overburdening, “the novel retrieved the aesthetic abundance, superlative rhetorical through hyperbole trends which conferred the note of strangeness, on the one hand deceiving the vigilance of censorship - events seemed like they never made reference to the present time - while, on the other hand, precisely this enigmatic context, allowed a conspiratorial decoding” (Berechet, 2009, p. 44).

In *The beautiful turtles* the oneiric is substituted with grotesque, and in the main focus returns the Law problem and the restoration of the truth. Thus, Tică Dunărințu is only in an early stage of his approach, namely, the investigation, future stages of restoring justice to be materialized later.

The fact that the investigation never takes over and that perpetrators are never caught could be that this may be an end in itself, but according to Gh. Glodeanu, “it is about an epic convention able to facilitate triggering a story, or more stories. D.R. Popescu apparently only appropriates the novel action schemes, stopping at its problematic phase investigation, disclosure fault bringing the restoring of the natural order, of the law. Labyrinthine narrative strands are interwoven but in such a manner that the aspiration to the absolute truth is becoming about the progressive discovery of some partial truths, which gets us closer to the dreamed ideal, without this ideal being ever reached” (Glodeanu, 2010, p. 4).

The short story *Marea roșie/The Red Sea* is anthological, it appearing alongside the most successful pages of fantasy prose ever written in Romanian literature. D. R. Popescu is successfully handling the overlapping technique of timelines, proceeding like Mircea Eliade in *Douăsprezece mii de capete de vite/Twelve thousand heads of cattle* or like V. Voiculescu in the short story called *Lipitoarea/The leech*. Thus, the writer cultivates ambiguity, the narrative acquiring that specific ambiguity of fantastic narratives.

Moreover, the different spiritual mood of the protagonist in the events is expressed graphically by the expression: “In your head the time is tangled, some days go forward while other days ...” through which D. R. Popescu proves himself to be a creator of atmosphere. Suffering an automobile accident, the narrator-character stops a car in which he finds out with amazement that two elderly ladies are plotting the murder of Horia Dunărințu, which is being missing for years. Then, the narrator is invited to tea. Forgetting his lighter and the cigarette in the apartment of the two women, he goes there back the next morning and finds out – for most of his stupor – that they died savagely stabbed twelve days ago! The ending remains open, leaving the reader the freedom to choose whatever happened. The sensational element does not constitute just a free act, the fantastic is always a unique way through which the reality is reflected.

In the auctorial discourse is inserted the discourse of a second witness, not involved in the story, the cousin of the prosecutor Tică Dunărințu, which tells the discourse of Horia Dunărințu, an actor involved in the story. The story in a story technique obscures through agglutination of the narrative perspectives, subjective and limited, creating confusion.

The scene is relevant because it makes relative the life-death report, real-unreal. Moise is a character that belongs to that *mondo cane*, for which the conscience of limit is annulled. He imagines himself immortal, commits crimes, ignoring the fact that only death could ever annul the limits. The entire text establishes an imprecision poetic of ambiguity, a feature specific to postmodern literature and of the myth as a literary method. When there are missing information about a character, the narrator comes with a multitude of assumptions.

The discontinuous narrative discourse, the digressions, the furthering from the subject and total obscuring of the novel present in this novel an indeterminacy, an intrusion of a supra-reality that installs itself in full reality. There is nothing certain and the questions remain open, such as how Dunărințu died, how the history dies?

The narrators' stories, as participants in the events or as second witnesses, not involved in the story, offer just as much of partial truths: Horia Dunărințu killed himself, Horia Dunărințu is abroad, Horia Dunărințu is killed and buried in the belly of a horse, Horia Dunărințu was pushed in the river by Moise, he was eaten by wolves or is a monk under the name Paisie.

The same chapter could be read as a story with ghosts, in the fantastic folklore register. This myth refers to other fantasy novels such as *Domnișoara Cristina/Miss Christina* by Mircea Eliade. The scenarios of stories with revived deaths in which there was described the pleasure of killing, the terror or destruction, restore the image of the legendary Cain for which the assassination became a ritual.

The ghost characters are building an epic narrative that is “aggressively” (Roznoveanu, 1981). The guilty consciences that justify any sordid space don’t recognize any limits, they just experience the evil coming down like an exorcism exercise until its absolute limit.

Chaos must be consumed so in order for the ordered cosmos to be restored: Ieremia betray Moise and Gălătioan, Lilica marries her husband’s assassin, Celce is refused the right to die and Moise play all the mythological roles of Evil (the Minotaur, the Sphinx, Mephisto, the Devil). To be reborn, the history had to die first. Ţebea became a chronotop of devouring these mythological elements, from the nighttime register of fantasy. The myth is viewed as a tunnel through which the transition from Chaos to Cosmos is realized. The transition is, by the law of nature, circular so that the return to origins is imminent. It is obvious that constantly this return is sought and there is a need to relive the Cosmos order, the primary order.

#### **4. The Narrative Transition**

The necessity of transition through myths is the cosmic time that accomplish the circularity feature. Following this circular time, the furthering from the center is realized even deeper. When the climax of this furthering is reached, the tectonic plates are moving allowing the primary place to be in the front, a mythical canal called also the canal of a balance that is restored.

The writer has a wonderful gift of unusual invention, of an agglomeration of limit situations, all acceptable in the symbolic and allegorical meanings plane. To the writer there is no common reactions, capable to define a common humanity. The individuals are at a very low point of degradation or at a very high point of a soul nobility.

According to Gh. Glodeanu, the narrative is not in a pure state, the stories converge, they metamorphose into one another, aspiring to a total dreamed reality (Glodeanu, 2010, p. 2). In the author’s conception, the novel should always ‘start from the man’, mirroring him in all his complexity. Thus, in the center of *Royal hunt* there will be the issue of human condition, the affirmation of the truth and Justice. The pretext that triggers the narrative is somehow found and this time it is in the Tică Dunărințu’s desire to find out the truth about his father’s disappearance, the entire novel taking the shape of an investigation.

In the avalanche of bizarre consistently situations, the grotesque adjoins the sublime, the comic adjoins the tragic and the purity adjoins the aggressive vulgarity. In these conditions, the boundaries between normal and pathological disappear, the reality violates the fantastic world. The characters have no longer the clear perception of reality, they hardly distinguished the truth from the false. Their continuous pleasure to discuss transforms into argument and the argument elevation is beside the mystifying inclination (Leonte, 1974, p. 14).

Just a few Romanian writers currently make use of modern techniques of the novel with the same boldness and effectiveness as D.R. Popescu. Without incurring a precise reporting on any particular work, the novel *Royal hunt* enrolls in the territory of a prose which, since Andre Gide, is performed entirely outside the traditional patterns, refusing the continuous narrative flux, preferring the discontinuities, the rupture, the fragmentation, practicing digression, the time inversion, going away from the subject until the total loss of it – to return at some point unexpectedly at the starting point – assembling episodes with no seemingly affinities.

It is, more accurately, about an investigation-novel, a file of disparate evidence, designed as a mirrors system that reflects an historical sequence from all the angles, a sequence captured in a certain space. By giving up the narrator's unique perspective, ubiquitous, the logical succession of the situations, the classical order, this story is at the antipodes of traditional epics. It does not recall any austere, severe architecture from the Rebreanu's novel.

And yet, the prose respects de tradition of *Ion/John* and *Răscoala/The Uprising* much more than any critic book about Rebreanu about its construction aspect, because the bonding feature is realism. Operating with totally different means, D. R. Popescu obtains, *mutatis mutandis*, analogous results, its purpose being the investigation of human processes in a given historical period and geography, surveying a moral and a social climate (Micu, 1974).

## 5. The Mythical Perspectives

Taking a different perspective, in *Royal hunt* the author ranks very methodically the antecedents of his characters and avoids explanations, just as he is reluctant in analyzing the inner reality or the social one to motivate the crimes. The characters' identity in itself remains necessarily uncertain.

The novelist subtly leads the investigation to the threshold of evidence and sometimes he suggests a true plot's threads, designed and executed flawlessly. But at the same time, he is careful to make the information of epic plane relative, to insinuate doubt even on some happenings palpable as the trip in the car with the two sisters from *The Red Sea*: was it a real journey or a dream?

Relativity and doubt are pushed up upon the victims' destiny. The only certainty is that in the natural order of events there was a malevolent force that slipped making everything worse. In *Royal hunt*, the epic plan is doubled and sometimes absorbed in the symbolic plan. The allegory and the symbol are made with realistic details and the real fact is invested with symbolic value.

A permanent osmosis between the realistic presentation and allegory. The boundary between them is, if not non-existent, very labile that every detail has a double function, simultaneously realistic and allegorical. In *F*, this technique of relativity is more cumbersome, the osmosis keeping its entire sense. In *Vânătoarea regală*, the writer realizes the absolute relativity, all contours that could lead in one direction or another, to a symbol or to a realistic presentation, being circumvented elegantly.

According to Lăcrămioara Berechet, "the chapter *Două sute de ardei/Two hundred peppers* projects a fabulous scene in a supra-realistic manner: the narrator, locked in a coffin, reconstructs the assassination of Horia Dunărințu and his own death sentence. Unraveling from a contaminated history of evil was performed ritually, through a death, which then was followed by a second birth" (Berechet, 2009, pp. 47-48). In the same register it can be cited another scene from the *F* novel where a character, an ex-torturer, decides to live in on the top of a poplar. This image recalls the Passion Time, only the mythical text tries to make a euphemism, manipulating its own instruments of evil. The role of the saints on a pillar is taken by the torturer image. The narrator intervenes in the text through a credible comment, pointing out the lecture on another direction, one of a credible landing, highlighting the mythical upside down world: "He's like all of us. If we're all crazy".

Regarding the myths about hunting, these belong to the darkest period of human evolution in which the man didn't know yet the agrarian rites which would order their existence according to solar cycles that repeated harmoniously. Hunting is linked to „the most atavistic instinct, the survival through the murder act. In the imaginary field, the myths about ritualistic hunting have the role to heal human fragility. The dangers that a hunter must go through to bring necessary food transform the hunting into a ritual that resolves the fragility's human condition in transcendence. The hunter would receive signals of shamanic powers; he was capable to travel to worlds beyond our own only to come back with the power taken from the spirits' world. The shaman hunter viewed his hunting as an equal in a spiritual plan and in order to defeat it the hunter had to transition to another stage of spiritual evolution" (Berechet, 2009, p. 51).

In the world proposed by *Royal hunt*, the hunter is "a weakened demon in the chaos world that he lives in, he is a hunter that hates its killing and kills driven by a perverse pleasure to demonstrate his power" (Berechet, 2009, p. 51). In addition,

the hunter adds a tragic attribute to the semantic label, being the hunter that did not even predict its own tragic condition.

According to Lăcrămioara Berechet, Moise “lives by the pleasure to hold captive the hunted animal, he is a hunter that hates freedom, a hunter that cannot reach the transcendence because he hates and fears the heights. This hunter invented another pleasure: the pleasure to identify itself with the hunting fear, he is a human hunter. This pleasure rescinds the ritualistic dimension of hunting; it transforms it into a grotesque farce in which the hunter imagines that can play the role of a director that can change the history on a scene that gives him the props. The writer creates the image of a killer hunter, the one that lives from the pleasure to kill, to destroy, just from the pleasure to barbarize the world, a prototype of communist society or any form of totalitarianism” (Berechet, 2009, p. 52).

The hunt seems at first just a play, a farce, a show in which the players assume their role. In the end, the game drives its players and destroys them. In the text, hunting is an allegory using symbolic language from the necessity to unite the plans, to transgress the reality to the mythical.

Being a symbol of search, of knowledge, hunting articulated a symbiosis of general psychosis, a craziness of guilt and deflection. Thus, in the D.R. Popescu’s novel there is inoculated the idea of rabies to justify the collective murder and this image is eschatological. The world that dies announces the cosmos.

Through the overburdened technique, the dramatism of this sad and desolate world is converted into grotesque. So much atrocity creates sometimes the impression of a sinister farce and seriousness but the author miraculously manages to divert the attention from the profound dramatism that his prose reveals through picturesque and sensational. Even the violent deaths are mediocre in a history manipulated by fools. People learn through myth, as a literary method, to communicate magically in the Darkest Age. The first saving lesson is that death is a new beginning and you cannot move forward without this ritualistic experience.

Mirela Roznoveanu observes the eclectic compositional structure of the novels written by D. R. Popescu, realized by overlapping registers: mythological realism, naturalism, grotesque, absurd. Thus, “the novel that assumes as a narrative formula an investigation constitutes in a compositional manner from an amount of testimony, a cluster of events, actors and auctorial perspective.

The narrative plans reflect disharmonies of the conscience, an amorphous history which cannot set its limits” (Berechet, 2009, p. 55). “Discontinuities, level ruptures, exemptions from all sorts from normal, anchoring in eccentric, the mixture of dramatism and grotesque, of sublime and hilarious, all of these serve to compose a world where everything is upside down and where there are no rules nor criteria” (General dictionary of Romanian literature, p. 132).



The sound of these myths and symbols that decrypts or deepens the mysterious senses of a various themes, the ways in which the narrative is constructed, are elements that echoed the talent of Dumitru Radu Popescu who managed to create a world that belongs to him, a world that could only bear one name only: Neomodernism.

Beyond the symbolic relief of narratives, so marked sometimes, beyond the excursions, so frequent, in the poetic fantastic sphere, the D.R. Popescu's prose is not poetical, it is an epic prose oriented to moral explorations. His novels are, above all, chains of facts, creations, a dense matter that the writer controls as a rigorously builder.

Every short story has a subject, a conflict, and even there are some blur outlines that get involved, those dissolutions from the immediate reality, to rise in a fantastic sphere, underneath the fabric is thick sustaining strongly all the construction. So, the writer relies on epic events, he carries the film of events that converge towards a moment of culmination only to solve itself, according to their inner logic. However, the writer doesn't restrict himself to pure imagination; the ultimate sense of his short stories is moral observation, the study of a psychology and mentality (Dimisianu, 1967).

Mioara Apolzan defined the vision originality upon the Romanian countryside in D.R. Popescu's prose through another classic of literature, Liviu Rebreanu. The author observed that in *Ion/John* or *The uprising*, with all the conflicts of the man, the village is graphically represented as "a coherent world, ruled by biological and social laws, verified by a very long tradition, in which the connection between characters is one of a casualty, of a psychological, temperamental and social motivations etc." (Apolzan, 1979, pp. 133-134).

The character is coagulant, namely the focal point of the universe, which gives it meaning. The stability of village world comes from the architectural balance, a closed structure of the novels (spherical construction, symmetry between beginning and end), but also from the objective author, from the calming and soothing perspective, his omniscient conscience. The sense of the tragic (a component of prose Liviu Rebreanu is the note of gravity) results not so much from a balanced vision of the writer upon the universe but from the conflicts.

Thematically, Mioara Apolzan observes that the novels refer to a village life in the years after the Second World War, a period of profound social, historical, political changes in society. The transition from one type of civilization and another, with individual and collective trauma, with acute or underground conflicts, constitutes the entire space of D.R. Popescu's prose: "The investigation, the debate become adequate modalities to penetrate into a confusing world, removed from its balance, a culpable word that sees its old values turn to dust and in this upside down world,

the signs of dislocation are embodied through suspension of valued criteria” (Apolzan, 1979, pp. 133-134).

## 6. Conclusions

*Royal hunt*, being a novel, actually it consists of several epic blocks, arranged in a conglomerate. One side or the other might miss without total unity to suffer. Also, many of the sections of the novel may have an autonomous status, rotating around its own axis. Therefore, the novel can be approached as a platform of optional fragments.

*Royal hunt* is the author’s inclination to a prose which can be seen as shocking and incorporating epic violence, a prose of “a bizarre obstinacy, searched everywhere, in the events lived by the characters, in their attitude, reactions or even their names. To the characteristic sensationalism of the narrative, there is also added the macabre of a back novel. In *Royal hunt*, death holds the lion’s share. There are a few characters who survive and just simple exceptions that do not come in contact, in any form, with the vast universe of death. The book is full of cemeteries, crosses, tombs (which sometimes hit the road), horrible crimes (raped and killed minors), dead sliding through the grass with its face up and each of them having a candle on their chest, dead leaving from their own grave, some dead that raised (several times) or speak” (Lupu, 1987, p. 107).

As a conclusion, the fiction of an “obsessive decade” dominates very clichéic the novel’s imaginary from the ’60 projecting through allegory or symbols a dystopian reality dissimulated behind a demonized past.

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