

Master Manole - a Romanian Scenario of the (Re) construction of the World

From the Folklore Tradition to the Cult Opera

PhD student Coculiana ACĂR
Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences,
"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Romania

Abstract: Located in a meeting area of the great European cultures, the Romanian people showed a permanent receptivity for the innovations of thought, selecting the elements which could be integrated into their own structures. In general, architecture is a model of the universe that it projects in the world. Therefore, we can say that the myth of the *sacred place* ascension is identified with a true cosmogony, with a creation of the world that "stands for" any other creation, including the human one.

For the Romanian tradition, the transition from mythology to legend and the cult work is defined by the archetypal - in the symbolic universe of (re) construction - the founding of Argeș Monastery by the Archetypal Master Manole. In this context, we shall only mainly follow the semiotic/hermeneutic relation of correspondence between the few sequences of the cosmic world birth, according to one of the well-known Romanian cosmogonic myths and those of the monastery foundation.

Keywords: Master Manole, cosmogonic myths, interdisciplinarity.

1. Highlights of the Creative Scenario

With the intention to configure the scenario of the (re)construction of the world through some defining highlights, the present article focuses on the type of *mythic-religious and philosophical* discourse, which we find in an explicit or implicit form and in the extremely complex work of the poet and philosopher, Lucian Blaga. Over the time, I have noticed that the originality of a people does not only manifest itself in the creations that belong to it exclusively, but also in the way in which it assimilates the wide circulation motives.

Therefore, the phenomenon of assimilation becomes extremely interesting and conclusive especially when "the assimilated themes or motives were presented to the ethnic spirit with the prestige of the intangibility, with the magical aura of the taboo thing, subjected to a special protection regime beforehand" (Blaga, 1985, p. 254). A universal mythical reason according to which the creation made by a divine Being - the "Universal Master" (RV, X, 81) who "came among the people on Earth as an archetype" and makes the world like a sculptor, blacksmith or carpenter, is associated with the Vedic poets with the theme becoming famous of the Creation-sacrifice.

The analysis of this motive can be achieved from two complementary perspectives:

- a hermeneutic approach through which the hidden meanings of the last realities involved in the creative act are revealed, able to decipher "the connotations of the symbols by which this creative act is constantly updated" (Marino, 1980, p. 30);

- a semiotic perspective - considering the myth of creation as a scenario of the world creation.

In a summary, the proposed article is based on the unifying of the two integrating concepts: the myth and the sign (the symbol) whose valences: *the ontos*, related to the reality/ the (meta) physical existence, and *the logos*, which concerns the conceptual approach, the procedural reason by which the sign is manifested, they are found in the horizon of the essential metamorphosis according to which all the phenomena of the world become what they are by virtue of the following three "dialectical laws" (Stănculescu, 2007, p. 42):

- *the law of the entropic cycle* that postulates the passage of any system of the world through the stage of entropy / disorganization → negentropy / organization → entropy / disorganization;

- *the law of continuity* which expresses the fact that no reality is ultimate since it creatively transforms the essentialized information into the context of another reality;

- *the law of reversibility* that postulates the idea that after a complex evolution each system of the world will describe a round cycle (the myth of "eternal return"), resuming its evolution from the same first beginning, but at another level of historical complexity.

Each of these universal laws is found in the historical vision of the Romanian people on becoming the world in the works of the cultural personalities such as: *The History of the Ottoman Empire* by D. Cantemir, *The Theory of Universal Undulation* in V. Conta, *The Mioritic Space* in L. Blaga, the vision of *The Morning Star* in M. Eminescu, *The Infinite Column* at Brâncuși, forms that suggest an unequalled "closing that opens" (C.

Noica). *Mutatis mutandis*, a representation of the World we will meet in the myth of Master Manole that reveals a "creation about creation" suggested through the succession of the construction moments, which means an undulating cyclicity. This profound structure, suggesting the image of the wave that is constantly born and dies, duplicates that of the spiral becoming that characterizes any processionality of the world, cosmic or human (Stănculescu, 1998, pp.31-32).

For the human being, the architecture is a way to discover the Universe, a model of the Universe that he designs in his own world. Therefore, "the orientation and the ritual construction of the sacred space has a cosmological value because the ritual by which the man builds a sacred space is effective in that it reproduces the Gods' work, more precisely: cosmogony" (Eliade, 1997, p. 35). Any artistic creation tends to fragmentary reiterates or quasi-integral, the making of the world. It has its origin in the archaic and traditional societies, where the human being does not behave as a passive spectator at this "cosmic show", but actively participates, with mythological rituals, in "the regeneration of the worn Cosmos and in restoring the cosmic order that is temporary," sometimes cyclical, disturbed" (Oiteanu, 2004, p.15). Cyclicity is based on the Principle of Order and Chaos, an archaic model specific to the mythical mentality, according to which, the precosmogonic Chaos contains in a virtual and undifferentiated state, all the four "primordial elements: air, fire/light, earth, water" (Cantemir, 1965, p. 22). Its action is verified both synchronously, on the horizontal of the Romanian cultural space, as well as diachronically, on the vertical of time, going from the old historical and archaeological testimonies to almost contemporary myth-ritual manifestations.

2. The archetype of (re) construction, from the legend to the philosophical drama: possible connections

In the cosmic archetype of the World Creation, any construction becomes *real*, meaning that it receives a *being*, by fixing it in a certain place that corresponds to the *Center of the World*. For the traditional societies, the dwelling was a mythical space, an *imago mundi* in the sense that any construction work symbolically reproduces cosmogony. The correspondence between the stages of the cosmogonic myth and the symbolic motives of a legendary monastery foundation is describable and thus the creative spirit of the Romanians naturally transposed the symbolic elements of the cosmogony into those of the founding legend. The special historical events by their human significance are kept in the popular mentality by their passage from history into legend and myth. The popular poet does not adapt a legend, but shows how a legend is created, in the spirit of the folklore tradition, based on a factor that later, Lucian Blaga will call it "the mythical thinking" (Todoran, 1985, p. 95). Manuela Tănăsescu in *Essay about the stages of creation* considers that Master Manole's literary work is a kind of "archetype of creation". Thus, in the well-known legend of the founding of *Argeș Monastery*, the human archetype of the divine creator, is Manole-the Architect.

Argeș Monastery develops the theme of sacrifice for creation, according to which something lasting can only be built through effort and sacrifice. For M. Eliade, the true meaning of the necessity of the creation's vitality would be that "*the legends of the building* whose significance is rediscovered by their typological integration in the cosmogonic myths, in the archaic mental structure, implies the idea that the worlds were made by sacrificing some primordial beings, and the man is creative by repeating the acts of these beings" (Bărbulescu, 1997, p. 67). Considered by some critics "a ballad anchored in the historical reality", *Argeș Monastery* is also a myth that updates in specific forms the main reasons for the foundation (creation) of the world; by myth understanding a "hermetic fiction, a symbol of a general idea" (Călinescu, 1982, p. 59). The myth of the ascension of the "sacred place" is an archetype of the human creation presented in all cultures of the world.

The distinction between myth and legend is relatively clear in the sense that the myth concerns a rather (macro) cosmic construction, spent in an *illo tempore* endlessly lost and involving characters that no one has ever touched; and the legend is a rather folkloric construction that has a relatively precise historical, spatio-temporal anchorage, in which the reality is interwoven with fiction, to symbolically explain a certain constructive genesis. For the Romanian tradition, the transition from mythology to legend and cult work is defined by the archetypal - in the symbolic universe of the (re)construction - *Argeș Monastery* founding by the archetypal Master Manole. Blaga has approached the popular poetry, the folk myth that he interprets in his own way. The drama is based on a legend that betrays more than any Slavic origin and Byzantine formation. The monastery has a cosmological and paradisiacal symbolism, an image of the Cosmos, of the Universe as a whole.

Thus, "the aesthetic myth, understood as the self-sacrifice of the creator, is perfect in Blaga (...); the events are signs of destiny and, above all, they are determined by the irrepressible passion of the creation" (Popa, 2003, p. 56-58). The relationship between the creator Manole and the transcendent principle, ineffable and always silent from the context of the church's construction, can be considered an artistic expression of the transcendental censorship, justifying in this sense that "the sacrifice of creation implies - therefore - not only

transitive actions (to sacrifice something), but also reflexive actions (self-sacrifice) ”(Fanache, 2003, p. 62). The sacrifice can be interpreted from the perspective of the sophisticated perspective theorized in the *Mioritic Space* - where his fulfillment as an artist corresponds in the *Metaphor Genesis and the Meaning of Culture* and it would underline the fact that “a creation passes over lives and often devastates even the creator. *Creating* does not mean for the creator to achieve a balance. Creation often breaks the creator ”(Ciompec, 1979, p.56).

The *dream* is an important element - considered a court that governs human actions by defining itself as "an unconscious and revealing symbolic phenomenon, which reproduces a certain archetype and reflects a fundamental anguish" (Chevalier, 1975, p. 456).

For Blaga, the dream is correlated with sleep, which is the truly creative principle, of the momentary withdrawal from the empirical world into the world of essences where you meet the pure forces that animate the world. He notices the latent energies of the dark layers of the telluric existence, which tend towards updating in infinite lands by heating and spreading light. Darkness, the evil are not mere negations, they are not simply the voice of the non-being but, directly or indirectly, they form a creative principle. If, according to Freud, in the "dreams" he would find a symbolic valve "the repressed impulses" (Blaga, 1985, p. 247-248) of the individual, so in myths he would find, after Jung "a symbolic echo, the burrows of the collective unconscious : the myths would be the collective dreams of the peoples ”(Blaga, 1969, p. 301). Or, in Manole's case, the reminder of the archetype of the sacred construction, which must bear the God's image and likeness.

The creation calling becomes an ancestral commandment in Blaga's drama and, no less, a punishment: "Lord, for what unknown knowledge have I been punished for the desire to make them beautiful?" Thus the mythical meanings of the character for which the *longing for the church* does not emerge it is nothing more than the command of the eternal return to the same archetype of beginnings, thus stand out. *The time* of the action is no longer the Middle Ages, with the reign of Negru Voda (as in the ballad), but the *mythical time*; this timelessness shows that the destiny of the creator is always the same. The characters represent the spiritual forces of nature and have a symbolic character: "First" it was once a shepherd, "Second" – a fisherman, "Third" – a monk, "Fourth" – a prisoner. Their gathering from the four parts of the world to build the church "from earth and water, light and wind" is a repetition of the creation of the world.

a. Death as the basis of (re)birth, demolition as a premise of the construction

The belief regarding the choice of the place for the construction of the holy places is old in the folklore tradition. Therefore, the search, finding and fixing of the place for construction is an imperishable place where the traces of an abandoned and unfinished wall are seen, which symbolizes the chaos from which endless a (new) cosmic form is likely to be born. It is not a vacant place on which to build the *ex nihilo*, but it is about "an annihilated being that makes the chosen place look bad" (Surdu, 1993, p.144). In the drama, the masonry masters explain the futility of the construction as an opposition to the land, showing in their imagination signs that they built on a vicious earth, on a mouth of hell impossible to cover. The sacralization of the construction will be done through an essential germ: the life itself which finds its justification in the myth of the cosmic sacrifice that reveals "the need to transfer a vital principle into the newly constructed reality" (Girard, 1995, p. 289). The absence of this element as a structural binder, determines the failure of the monastery by the inability of its builders to break it out of chaos. The master motivates the necessity of the sacrifice by raising the powers of the earth to the height of the power of the sky, powers without names that "go beyond the laws of the time"; they do not represent the evil as a principle, but impersonal and obscure forces of the earth. The church is an architectural work that involves earth, numbers, technique, art in equal measure. Therefore, the reason must master the matter. The succession of days and nights, of light and of darkness have symbolic value in the sense that the presence of darkness as a factor with destructive effects on the creation causes the permanent return from the ordered (cosmic) to the disorganized (chaotic) stage. We speak in this context of the symbolism of the universal circulation.

For Eliade, "death is a direct extension, a possible starting point for a higher form of existence, despite the fact that for Heidegger it is a terminal point where" death as the altar of non-being, hides in itself the essence of life." So, "each culture has its own style and there are precise psychological processes that allow each people to achieve an original synthesis, even when the cultural elements with which they operate are borrowed" (Pop-Curcu, 2016, p. 25). In Blagian's vision, death / demolition / disintegration should not be regarded as an annulment of the being or of the existence, but a fixation of the world in the higher order. In every being the spirit of the universe is embodied, and the being in man is immortal. The world of representations is a world of appearances and only the spirit of eternity is a world of essences.

The mechanism of the atonement victim justifies the presence of the religious at the origin of all human societies, being at the base of any structure being the only one that can interrupt the process of destruction. Through the rite the destructive forces are calmed down, which is why the death sentence must have a collective character for the sacrifice to fulfill its virtues. Through the ritual sacrifice all the members of the community

with the atoning victim are replaced and at the same time it is a substitution of the original victim. Because on the community level, there is no life that does not start from death, death can appear as the true deity, the place where the most beneficial and the most evil are met. If, in the folklore tradition, this sacrifice could seem a conformation to a superstitious practice, without the awareness of the necessity of the sacrifice for a sustainable work, Blaga increases the action of his piece precisely at this point, by an act of great dramatic tension, from which it appears that the *sacrifice of the woman is a different formulation of the self-sacrifice*.

In this context, the sacrifice becomes an ethical necessity, for which the myth remains a revealing metaphor of profound significance for the human's creative destiny. From the roots of this type of original thinking the philosopher himself will start, when he will build his own (re)constructive work. Or, in other words, the anthropocosm "does not cease to exist, after being sacrificed, only in appearance. For he continues his existence in the worlds that were born of him and that lasts because he, through his violent death, has enlivened them" (Eliade, 1992, p.106). Each death thus becomes an integration through semiotic continuity; for, in this context, "something" stands for "something else", generating a new code of meaning; the ritual death also triggers a force that not only makes life possible, but "ensures the permanence of the new creation that gave birth to it" (Eliade, 1992, p. 114). The cycle of the world is evoked by the ritual of the periodic construction and demolition of a temple. The architectural gesture is a replica of Creation.

b. Semiotic hypostasis of archetypal (re)construction

The myth of the ascension of the "sacred place" is an archetype of the human creation presented in all the cultures of the world, in general, the Romanian one, in particular. The architectural gesture reproduces that of Creation, just as any construction is a projection of the universe, and for this reason, repeatedly uncontrolled, it is a ritual gesture that cannot go out of the world order. Therefore, the ruins, as human settlements that could not last, are fateful for a construction that is an act of creation (...). but it seems more like "a predestined archetype, a totemic center that cannot be replaced" (Kernbach, 1994, p. 313). In *Master Manole's* literary work, the existence of the ruins leads us to a relative non-existence, to a permanent transition into nothing that leads to a becoming for becoming, without any purpose. In order to overcome this sterile pendulum, the architect's intervention is postulated. It loses its very being, it merges with the authentic being (the construction) and forms a triadic scheme like the unity of opposites; but these are no longer in the anthological relation, of categorical contrariety, but of mere otherness.

The ballad from which its sources draw is the echo of a "cosmogonic myth and an entire archaic metaphysics, which states that nothing can last unless it has a "soul" or is not "breathed" (Eliade, 1992, p. 114). Manole understands that in order to get out of the process of becoming entangled, a sacrifice is needed, of a woman (their wife or sister); a thing revealed in the dream through which a bridge is established between the human being and the sacred, divine law. Through death, in the Romanian folk ballad, Ana has become a wall of the monastery, Manole himself will metamorphose into a spring. However, the wall and the spring are found at the same ontological level. In this direction, I. Culiănu's hermeneutics meets with that of M. Eliade as follows: "A human can live in more forms, through more cosmic levels, than we manage to imagine within the limits of our modern consciousness" (Eliade, 1992, p. 114). In Blaga's drama, the *motive of the "game"* in the scene of Mira's building is mixed with "*the liturgical theme of ritual sacrifice: a loved being must be built in order to ensure the permanence of the exalted work*" (Bălu, 1997, p. 81). In Blaga's play, the call of the earth - in the image of the woman-church - fulfills the creative destiny of Master Manole.

The philosophical myth of Lucian Blaga, (re)built on the basis of the Romanian legend of Argeş Monastery, totally sublimates the ethnographic in the artistic by dramatizing the idea of the maximum sacrifice imposed as a necessity by the artist's conscience, the free creator of his work.

3. Argeş Monastery, an archetypal construction of the Romanian spirit

Originated from an ancient superstition, according to which the durability of a construction consists in the building of a human being, the mentioned theme has a great spread also to the Balkan peoples, but the origin of the Romanian variants lies in the fact that only here it is about the construction of a monastery (and not of a bridge, of a city, of a palace), which justifies the conception according to which "the architecture of a country is perhaps the most accurate expression of its history, which gives a safer intuition of the past and a more authentic consciousness of a civilization" (Cantacuzino, 1977, p. 152). The symbolic construction of the myth of Argeş Monastery suggests, on the one hand, the need for spiritual unity of the human from all times and places, and on the other hand, the unity between the values of the Romanian popular spirituality and those of the later religious creation.

The eternal hesitation and inconsistency in repeating the creation either as determined fatalist of transcendence or as chosen, assumed and performed by the human through the free will has its origin in the

interpretation of the nature of the creative passion. The creative passion, as an intimate resort in assuming the sacrifice for the accomplishment of the creation, acquires a double meaning in the master's acceptance: on the one hand, he assumes it as his own, and on the other hand, he understands it as being descended from nothingness into the being itself. In Master Manole's myth, poetically reconstituted by Blaga, the call of the body sacrificed in the wall of the monastery is the call of the building demon of the genius of man who, in the religious mentality, is handcuffed by the feeling of the limit. The sacrifice is inevitable, as a folkloric motive, and it is demonstrated in the play by the fact that the master completes an unknown guilt; it is the fault of the creative destiny that causes "the depersonalization of the being, the alienation of oneself" (Bălu, 1997, p. 179). The human cannot find an answer because divinity does not respond to an enigma whose determinants lie within the human.

The creator tries to destroy his work, the gesture having different meanings in Blaga's work: on the one hand it can be interpreted as the fear of the human creator of death, and on the other hand, that any perfect ritual construction implies not only the construction of life through the sacrifice of life, but and the cyclical inherent of death. The end of the piece departs from the folkloric vision through the significance given to Manole's death in accordance with his own philosophy on the limits of knowledge and on the human creation. *Master Manole's Drama* by L. Blaga presents events that happened in an unspecified (eternal) time, from which one can deduce the significance that the Creator's fate can only be achieved through sacrifice. This feature makes the mentioned drama a parable about *Creation, Sacrifice and Destiny*. By re-editing the eternal return to the primordial vocation, Manole will, with the help of the masters, realize the *church* - made of primary elements - as a diminished image of the Universe redeemed by sacrifice.

Conclusions

Starting from the idea that "the most secrete part of the identity of a culture is entrusted to its mythology" (Détienne 1898, p. 1), L. Blaga restores the original meanings of the myth, by the fact that the symbolism of the construction is culturally accepted and revalued because "the sanctuary as *imago mundi* and Center of the World is already attested in the paleo-oriental cultures in Mesopotamia, Egypt" (Eliade, 1995, p.190). The monastery is a cosmological and paradisiacal symbolism, an image of the Cosmos, of the Universe as a whole. The dispute between the structuring and the destructive principle, the struggle between good / cosmos / and evil / chaos found in the construction of Argeş Monastery, justifies the mythical tension between the chaotic luciferic ego and the loving light of divinity.

Blaga has an organic vision of the universal culture. For him, myths are the oldest and give value to the creations of mankind and to each individual people. The destiny reserved to human is to feel the need to reveal them, thus becoming "creator, and namely the culture creator. Culture is a necessity of its existence" (Creţu, 2008, p.12). In Blaga's work, "Manole is the type of the absolute artist, the mythical symbol and prototype of the creator, he is firmly convinced that the great creations involve the sacrifice of some lives" (Gană, 1976, p. 233). The adhesion of a people to one or the other of the mythical scenarios, to one or another of the exemplary images, says more about his deep soul than a large number of historical events. Considering the original meaning of the myth in Blaga's conception, the building of Argeş Monastery is understood as a projection of the historical fact during the Romanian mythical time, trying to explain an ancient magical ritual in which the human is passionately involved.

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