

## THE VEGETAL MODEL IN CONCEPTUALISING CREATION

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**ABSTRACT.** *The Vegetal Model in Conceptualising Creation.* Our study intends to formulate a number of hypotheses about the manner in which the idea of creation has been conceptualised both in the case of the largest and most fascinating of all creation acts, namely genesis, and in the case of the creation of other forms of existence, on a number of its levels: human, vegetable, animal or mineral. Our reflections start from a number of conceptual metaphors of creation, identified in the biblical text, in order to compare them to those from cosmogonic myths, popular beliefs or folkloric texts (folktales, incantations, carols, etc.) that refer to various types of creation: the creation of the Earth or of the Sun and the periodic regeneration of time, the conception of the human being or of baby animals, the creation of familial and social relationships, the generation of speech, of feelings or of the qualities of beings and things or even of disease. Their analysis emphasises the predominance of a vegetal pattern, which constitutes a factor of coherence for various types of creation representation, seemingly extremely different. By keeping in mind what profound significance the “modest” seed, which sheltered the mystery and force of the universal creation, has had in the mythic-magical mentality, the study shows in what way this mentality has influenced the individual’s manner of understanding the world and of relating to it. Although, at first glance, it is about a micro-metaphor negligible through its dimensions, completely ignored by today’s speakers, especially after the removal of human from agricultural occupations and from nature, in general, we consider that it deserves recovering its fundamental significations. It is only this way that we will be aware of its status as a nucleus of a conceptual scheme that is intimately connected to the vegetal cycle of wheat, started by sowing and concluded not by harvesting, but by its transformation into bread. The latter, in its turn, conserves the fertilizing strength of the wheat grain, which it can return, through magical means, to the seed put into the ground the next year. In fact, even if today’s speakers have forgotten its former deep significations, it is one of the perpetual metaphors whose life continues through the daily use of linguistic expressions that encode it.

**Keywords:** *creation, cosmogony, birth, seed, germination, dough, bread, conceptual metaphor, cognitivism, ethno-linguistics.*

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**REZUMAT. Modelul vegetal în conceptualizarea creației.** Studiul nostru își propune să formuleze câteva ipoteze despre modul în care a fost conceptualizată ideea de creație, atât în cazul celui mai mare și mai fascinant dintre toate actele creatoare, și anume, facerea lumii, cât și în cazul creării altor forme ale existenței, pe diferite paliere ale sale: uman, vegetal, animal sau mineral. Reflecțiile noastre pornesc de la câteva metafore conceptuale ale creației, identificate în textul biblic, pentru a le compara cu cele din miturile cosmogonice, credințele populare sau textele folclorice (basmе, descântece, colinde etc.) care vorbesc despre diferite tipuri de creație: facerea pământului ori a soarelui și regenerarea periodică a timpului, conceperea ființei umane sau a puilor de animale, crearea legăturilor familiale și sociale, generarea vorbirii, a sentimentelor sau a calităților ființelor și lucrurilor sau chiar a bolilor. Analiza lor pune în evidență preponderența unui tipar de natură vegetală, ce constituie un factor de coerență pentru diverse tipuri de reprezentare a creației, în aparență extrem de diferite. Reamintind ce semnificații profunde a avut în mentalitatea mitico-magică „umila” sămânță, care adăpostea misterul și forța creației universale, studiul arată în ce fel a influențat aceasta modalitatea omului de a înțelege lumea și de a se raporta la ea. Deși, la prima vedere, este vorba despre o micrometaforă neglijabilă prin dimensiuni, ignorată complet de vorbitorii de azi, mai ales după îndepărtarea omului de muncile agricole și de natură, în general, considerăm că aceasta merită un act de recuperare a semnificațiilor sale fundamentale. Numai în acest fel vom putea conștientiza statutul său de nucleu al unei scheme conceptuale intim legate de ciclul vegetal al grâului, deschis de semănat, dar care a fost închis nu de recoltat, ci de transformarea lui în pâine. O pâine care, la rândul său, conservă forța fertilizatoare a bobului de grâu, pe care o poate reda, prin mijloace magice, seminței puse în pământ în anul următor. De fapt, chiar dacă vorbitorii de azi i-au uitat semnificațiile adânci de odinioară, ea este una dintre metaforele nemuritoare, a cărei viață continuă prin utilizarea zilnică a expresiilor lingvistice care o încodează.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** creație, cosmogonie, naștere, sămânță, germinație, aluat, pâine, metaforă conceptuală, cognitivism, etnolingvistică.

## 1. Argument<sup>1</sup>

The interest for understanding the manners in which the human mind works is relatively recent, taking shape more clearly once cognitive sciences and papers dedicated to the philosophy of language appeared around mid-19th century. Among the great concepts of humanity – such as those of space, time, causality, etc. – that deserve to be analysed in order to understand the

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<sup>1</sup> The present study is supported by The Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI – UEFISCDI Project, No. PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0326 /49 PCCDI, according to PNCDI III.

nature of the mental processes that the human being relates to the surrounding world, the concept of *creation* can be counted as well, in its widest meaning: that of an act through which something that “did not exist before” (DEX 1998) is created, produced, no matter its nature. Since any creation involves a fundamental act of transformation, through which the inexistent becomes the existent, the immaterial becomes a material substance, and the shapeless infinite receives a form with precise limits, the conceptual schemes through which the human, a finite being, has been able, at a mental level, to accomplish the transfiguration of the infinite, in order to control it, are worth investigating.

It is certain that any attempt to understand the manner in which humans from anywhere and anytime have represented the idea of creation must begin by researching the most significant and difficult to imagine act of creation, namely genesis. No matter whether we are referring to savants, poets, philosophers or to the common man in any type of society, the founding act of the world has constituted, without a doubt, an extremely seductive challenge for the human mind. By directing to areas found “beyond the action radius of human intuition” (Marcus: 160) and obligating man to imagine what is close to impossible to imagine, such as, for instance, the primordial chaos, the creation of the universe certainly represents one of the most noteworthy nuclei for generating the imaginary. The difficulty of representing the moment of primordial creation derives as well from the fact that it is situated not only beyond any human experience, but also beyond the possibilities of human-language expressions. Since “space and time are a creation of the Big-Bang” it means that here “the word ‘before’ has no meaning” (Marcus: 160). In fact, it is believed that traditional societies have not even been capable of “symbolising the idea of nothingness” (Rudhardt: 310), the concept of chaos being an invention of modernity. It is for this reason that we consider that it is interesting to follow what solutions were found by the man from traditional mediums – who has not reflected in a systematic and sustained manner, unlike scientists, on the topic of the appearance of the universe or the appearance of life on every level (mineral, vegetable, animal and human) – in order to form a representation of the idea of creation. The analysis of linguistic data, especially of the lexical ones, can lead to the discovery of the conceptual schemes that organise the images, scenarios and symbols constructed by man in relation to the beginnings of the world or with the appearance of various forms of existence, on various levels.

## 2. Methods

The two branches of the linguistic sciences that can support such an analysis through the circulated concepts and theories are cognitive linguistics and linguistic anthropology or ethnolinguistics (EL). The former, since it supplies

us with a fundamental lesson about the mechanisms of linguistic creativity and, implicitly, about the cognitive processes through which a new concept is generally born. By demonstrating that “our usual conceptual system, which serves us for thinking and acting, is of a fundamentally metaphoric nature” (Lakoff, Johnson: 13), cognitivists introduce the notion of conceptual metaphor, also named conventional or colloquial. Through it, they show that the metaphor can no longer be viewed exclusively as a simple rhetorical ornament or as a simple process of poetic imagination. On the contrary, they demonstrate that the metaphoric transfer is not only related to language, but it constitutes the very essence of the manner in which human thinking functions, regulating the entire daily activity and structuring both the manner in which we perceive things, and the manner in which we behave in the world or in which we interact with one another. In a very wide sense, the essence of this theory is that any new concept is understood and, thus, configured, in terms of another concept (Lakoff, Johnson: 66).

The second orientation is less preoccupied by the *process*, namely by the cognitive mechanisms responsible for the appearance of some new concepts, and offers a higher importance to the *product*, following, in Humboldtian tradition, the manner in which representations of the world are reflected in the language, but also the manner in which the language contributes to the categorization of the world. From this perspective, language appears as an “element of mediation, through which a certain view of the world, as an active principle, is filtered, which imposes on thought an ensemble of distinctions and values”, becoming a type of “stakeholder” of the experiences of past generations, being however capable as well of providing future generations with a prism of interpretation of the universe (Mounin 1963: 42-43). The advantage of EL is that it saves interpretation from a purely mental grid, emphasising the role of the cultural factor in underlying language.<sup>2</sup>

The present study concentrates on the linguistic imaginary<sup>3</sup> of creation, yet we will give a minimum space to the Word metaphor as well, in order to

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<sup>2</sup> EL encourages the analysis of the manner in which a certain element is conceptualised from one language to another, in order to identify the specificity of the vision of every cultural space, and the specificity of the language of the people, respectively. Thus, EL promotes a dynamic conception of the language, showing that it “evolves in accordance to the changes that occur, on the one hand, in the reality reflected by the language, and on the other, in the system of values of the society that speaks it” (Cholewa: 14).

<sup>3</sup> We use the concept of “linguistic imaginary” in the sense described by J. Bartmiński in the Polish EL: “the assembly of fixed (stereotyped) ideas about the humans and the world, able to be reconstructed from various linguistic data: the grammar system (flexional, morphological, syntactic and textual categories), the semantic system (the word-meaning or the meaning of more complex units), the usage and the “perilinguistic” elements, beliefs and attitudes, namely all the relevant data traceable during effective communication” (Bartmiński, apud Koselak: 5). In the theoretical analysis destined to the concept of linguistic imaginary, done by us elsewhere (cf. Platon 2019), we show that, in essence, it is rather about the collective and, clearly, cultural imaginary encoded in and decoded by linguistic data.

make some comparisons. However, the emphasis will mainly fall on the vegetal metaphors used in profiling this concept. Thus, we will follow some linguistic manifestations that encode the idea of creation, especially at the lexical level, in order to see to what extent one can highlight certain conceptual schemes that underlie them and, in fact, through which these are underlined.

### 3. The Word metaphor

In modern and postmodern societies, the most invoked scenario related to genesis is the biblical one, considering the influence of the Christian culture, but also because at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the non-biblical cosmogonies had started to disappear from the folklore of Western Europe (Eliade: 134). Here, the act of primordial creation is represented with the help of an ontological metaphor<sup>4</sup> lacking in physical substance: *The Word of God* or, more precisely, *the God-Word*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *God was the Word*” (John 1:1)<sup>5</sup>. Paradoxically, despite the fact that we are speaking of the most grandiose “act” of creation, any gesture is missing from this scenario, being replaced with *utterance*. The entire world appears as being sheltered, *in nuce*, in the Word, which, although lacking in the solidity specific to material objects, can be considered a *container-metaphor*<sup>6</sup>, since it constitutes an “entity” familiar to the human experience, fitted with a beginning and an end and, thus, capable of delimitating a space found “within” from a space found “on the outside”.

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<sup>4</sup> We recall that in Lakoff’s perspective, the *ontological metaphors* are the ones through which various experiences (events, emotions, ideas etc.) are perceived as entities or as substances, so that they can be more easily referenced or quantified; they have some limits, some particular aspects, even a cause, with the purpose of “believing that we understand them better” (Lakoff, Johnson: 35-41). Or, although the word of God can be considered as lacking in materiality, we consider that its identification with God warrants us to give it the status of “entity”, meaning of an “existence that is limited (in regards to extent, importance, value etc.) – DEX 1998). We thus consider that it is justifiable to frame this conceptual metaphor among the ontological ones rather than among the structural ones, whose purpose is to explain a lesser known term through a better known one, as in the case of the metaphor: *The discussion means war* (cf. Lakoff, Johnson: 70-77).

<sup>5</sup> The quotation is taken from the *Orthodox Bible* but in the Protestant version, translated by Cornilescu (*Biblia* 2014), the identification of the Word with God is similarly formulated: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the *Word was God*” (John 1: 1), here giving priority to the Word that, in verses 3 and 4, appears as a container-metaphor, written with capital letters, that contains life itself: “3. All things were made through Him; and nothing that was made has been made without Him. 4. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1: 3,4)

<sup>6</sup> From the cognitivist view: “Each one of us is a container that possesses a limited-surface and an inside-out orientation. We project this orientation onto other physical objects that are limited as well by surfaces, and we consider them as being containers fitted with *an inside* and *an outside*” (our emphasis, Lakoff, Johnson: 39). However, even if there is no physical barrier, we impose abstract barriers, better say *imaginary*, meant to separate the inside from the outside.

Even though the biblical version has been referred to as being a noble version full of the grandeur of Creation, since it proposes its own *logos* to societies with intellectual-philosophical preoccupations as a source-entity for the entire universe, it neither seems foreign to the magical power attributed to the word in traditional societies, where philosophical reflections about the origin and meaning of existence were not a main preoccupation (Papadima: 34). Or, it is known that the archaic and traditional mentality believed in the existence of a direct causal link between the being or the designated thing and the word that designates it (Bîrlea: 67), a reason for which the simple articulation of the name of an entity could cause its appearance. This is the only way that one can explain the power of the enchantress to oust disease or the capacity of carollers to bring health and wealth through the simple circulation of the spoken or sung word (Herseni: 263). Moreover, in many carols, God Himself is brought down from the heavens by the magician-caroller, a true “technician of supernatural forces” and made to do what must be done: give fruit to the land and health to the people (Bîrlea: 262). Thus, we imagine that only the tradition of such a magical thinking made possible the appearance of a magician-God – and its acceptance by the traditional thinking –, capable of creating the world from nothing, by simply articulating the names of the things that were to be made. However, the inclination of the archaic man towards concreteness, towards the desire to sensorially check the reality of a thing is encoded into the Old Testament, where the metaphor of *the word of life* is submitted to the test of three of the human senses: “That which was from the beginning, which we *have heard*, which we *have seen with our eyes*, which we *have looked upon and have touched* with our hands, concerning the *Word of life* (Genesis 1: 1).

Still here, the succession of creation acts – the appearance of light through its separation from darkness, of waters from water, through the interposition of the sky and then of the land from water etc. –, done through the simple and well known verbal solicitation: “And God said: ‘Let there be light!’ And there was light” (Genesis 1: 3), is represented as a “substance” contained in the container-metaphor of the God-Word that, behold, could not be differentiated from the divine being that emitted it, probably in the virtue of that scheme that privileges the state of primary non-differentiation characteristic of the absolute beginning and that includes as well the solidarity between cause and effect. In turn, the elements separated through the initial articulation (the higher waters and the lower waters, the sky and the land) appear imagined as some *container-substances*, found within the container-metaphor of the Word, resulting in a telescope model clearly described in the Lakovian theory (Lakoff, Johnson: 39). Thus, the water “was swarming” with “living creatures”, and the land contained the germinal power inside, which was to sprout from within

the vegetation: “vegetation, plants *yielding seed*, and fruit trees *bearing fruit in which is their seed*, each according to its kind, on the earth!” (our emphasis, *Genesis* 1: 11). Without a doubt, the grandeur attributed to the biblical cosmogony derives not only from the presence of the divine logos as a primary source, but also from its unusual force of proliferation, through which the divine force demonstrates its omnipotence in multiplying itself in the infinity of forms of existence.

#### 4. The metaphor of bread

In relation to the biblical scenario, the legends circulated in the Romanian traditional mediums recorded in ethnographies only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but being millennia old, bring into the foreground a version that seems, at first sight, radically different. In the majority of variants, it is not the word but the *hand* of God that becomes the protective container in which the earth is formed (equated with the world itself in popular beliefs) from a *handful of soil* removed by the Devil from the bottom of the primordial waters. The latter represent a true container-mega-metaphor, present in most universal cosmogonic myths, that contains in a latent state all the elements necessary to creation, as it will be seen in what follows. From this *handful of wet soil* or, in other variants, from a few *grains of sand*, God makes a *cake* that – similar to the women who mould the dough kneaded from wheat flour and water or similar to children who mould a mud cake in their games – He *strikes* it with his palm, *spreads* it, *turns* it, *smooths* it *out*, *folds* it and *spreads* it again, until the *cake* is as big as a bed: “...and from that soil He made a patty, put it in His palm, blew on it and tapped it with the palm. When He opens it there was soil as much as a bed. He puts the cake on the water: “Now we have land to sleep on at night”, says God” (Niculiță-Voronca: 24).

The studies dedicated to this scenario that present insignificant dissimilarities from one variant to another, insist on the fact that, here, God no longer appears as an omnipotent and all-knowing being, but in a profoundly anthropomorphised stance in which He is tired, both physically and mentally, “after” the effort of creating the word, reason for which He needs to resort to various helping characters, such as the Devil, the hedgehog, or the bee, in order to complete His creation. Furthermore, the “negative” elements of this scenario, such as tiredness, the profound sleep, the decline of intelligence are highlighted, being considered as a distinctive sign of Romanian legends, but also of South-Eastern European ones that broadly present the same characteristics (Eliade: 97). As for God’s “passivity” and “unfathomable decline”, they have been interpreted as a traditional and recent expression of a *deus otiosus*, retracted after creating the world, one of the arguments being that, in Romanian folklore and that of other peoples in South-Oriental Europe, the theme of a faraway God, who descends more and more rarely on Earth, has played a capital role (Eliade: 98).

Together with the hypothesis of a God who is unsympathetic towards an increasingly sinful world, the more “humble” (i.e. lacking in grandeur) character of the traditional mythological scenario, which privileges gesture, “manuality” is revealed as well (Anghelescu: 44). Or, such a hierarchy seems entirely inadequate in the context of magical thinking, where the word and the gesture are always seen as being complementary, being given an equal dignity, and being placed on different qualitative levels only from the perspective of the exegete. The scenarios elaborated in traditional mediums show the importance that daily experiences had in moulding the imaginary and the way of thinking, experiences in which work, as well as rest, occupied an honoured place. By invoking these experiences (especially those related to food-making), we do not intend to minimize in any way the creating role of the imagination, but rather to become aware of the fact that, no matter how imaginary it might be, it always makes use of the data from concrete experience that it reorders and reinterprets in an original manner, since, in the end, “even the most extravagant fantasies are products of the human mind, which is a part of the world and which, before getting to know it from the outside, contemplates in itself some of the world’s realities, believing that it is doing an act of pure creation” (Lévi-Strauss: 118).

The lexical elements highlighted by us in the mythological scenario presented above are part of the semantic field of the preparation of *the bread*, describing a succession of intimate acts associated with kneading and moulding the dough, a domestic activity that is very familiar to the agricultural sedentary community, fundamental to the definition of their identity profile. The taking over of such gestures from the source-domain of domestic activities, namely that of nourishment, and their metaphoric transfer in the target-domain of the creation of the world structure genesis after a well-known domestic scheme, that exploits (similar to children’s games) the similarity between the texture of the soil powder and that of the wheat flour, but also their possibility to mould them by using water (or even divine saliva, in some variants), ignoring the difference in essence. Thus, by moulding the fascinating phenomenon of genesis – unknown and thus difficult to be enveloped by the human mind – after a familiar scheme, it can become known. And what has never been experimented becomes intelligible, coherent and familiar, eliminating the source of unrest that is, generally, maintained by the lack of experience. Thus, together with the conceptual metaphor presented in the biblical scenario, of the type: *Genesis means articulating a word*, here we have to do with another one: *Genesis means the kneading and moulding of the bread*, whose foundation can be constituted by another analogy as well, the grain of wheat with the black furrow of soil where the magical phenomenon of germination takes place.

The fidelity of the reproduction of the kneading scheme emerges as well from the presence of the ferment that potentiates the miraculous growth of the mud cake, similar to the case of dough *fermentation*, although here the increase is only a horizontal *spread*, since we are at the point in which the Earth had a plane representation (Niculiță-Voronca: 32). If in some variants the dilation is ensured through the “simple” palm striking (a gesture that is absolutely coherent, since the beating was considered a magical act of stimulating physical forces, but also a ritual meant to ensure the more rapid growth of children or cattle – Evseev: 47), in others, the patty is *spat on*<sup>7</sup> (or *blessed*) and *spread* by God *in His palms*”, until it becomes big enough for both God and the Devil to sit on<sup>8</sup> (Pamfile 2002: 58). The difference consists in the fact that, this time, the ferment is not the yeast, but one of a mythic-magical nature, namely *saliva* or divine *breath*, elements that are perfectly framed both in the universal beliefs related to the excretions of body of divine beings, recognised as “universal symbols of the bipolar relationship that reunites creation and destruction” (Chevalier, Gheerbrant: 188), and the Romanian ones where the saliva<sup>9</sup> has both protective and curative virtues, being an almost universal remedy against diseases and beatings (Evseev: 422). Moreover, after the biblical model, what could be put forward as well is the hypothesis of the animation of the dead matter removed from the bottom of the seas by the Devil, with the divine breath (or with energy, according to the theories of astrophysics), since the Earth appears in popular beliefs as a living being.

The *kneading* scheme is not missing from the context of other types of creation either. For instance, a *kneading* incantation from Oltenia shows that even human feelings, such as love, can be in turn kneaded. By conserving the lexical elements that are among the most archaic, this incantation maintains the old meaning of the verb *to knead*, that of “to conceive”, showing that love can be created after a unique pattern, which explains as well the appearance of fruits or baby animals: As dough *is kneaded* in the kneading trough,/Honeycomb

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<sup>7</sup> Spitting the patty in this mythical frame could also be a consequence of applying another scheme that is familiar to the traditional man, who was accustomed to spit in their palms when getting started on something very difficult (Gorovei: 253). Or the other way around: read in an Eliadesque key, the peasant’s palm spitting would repeat the primordial gesture of the divine being.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that, in the variants cited by us, God’s tiredness does not seem to be caused by the effort of creating the world, as Eliade stated, but rather it precedes the kneading of the mud cake, made with the purpose of ensuring a resting place for the two cosmocrators, tired from walking on the moving waters. Thus, another conceptual metaphor can be identified here: *the genesis means the creation of a resting place* (a *bed* or even a *chair*, after other variants presented by Pamfile in *Povestea lumii de demult/The Story of a Long Ago World*).

<sup>9</sup> We have to mention that there are as well cosmogonic scenarios in which the earth itself comes from the divine saliva: “God spat in his palm and from this spit the earth was made.” (Pamfile 1913: 26).

in oil,/So too should (one's) heart conceive.../As the apple is conceived in the apple tree/As the pear is conceived in the pear tree/As the cherry is conceived in the cherry tree/...As the plum is conceived in the plum tree.../So too should (one's) heart conceive.../As the foal is conceived inside the mare,/ As the calf is conceived inside the cow,/As the kid is conceived inside the goat,/As the lamb is conceived inside the sheep,/As the baby is conceived in the cowry,/So too should (X's) heart conceive... (Bîrlea: 122). In fact, this incantation reveals with great clarity that, in the traditional mind, the human being had an organic connection with the vegetal and animal universe, being born in the same manner and submitting to the same laws of evolution. The image of the people who *spring* from the earth together with the wheat sowed by God (Niculiță-Voronca: 139) or the one of the symbolic rebirth of those under a spell: "(X) to jump, /Spring,/Proud and clean,/Like the Mother of Christ that gave him." (Gorovei: 217) are extremely telling in this sense.

The undisputable connection between dough and the mystery of creation is revealed as well by a magical practice to influence the fruitfulness of fruit trees recorded in Moldavia. When a tree in the house garden would not bear fruit for many consecutive years, the man would threaten it with cutting, simulating the gesture with an axe, while the woman, with her hands full of pound cake dough kneaded the night before Christmas Eve – a celebration that itself marks a sacred time of creation, in the sense of the magical renewal of time and all cosmic forces (Evseev: 14) – would grab the tree with her hands and would smear it with dough, while enunciating the following incantation, whose efficiency no one doubted: "as my hands are full of hanging dough, so it (the apple tree) too to bear fruit next year" (Gorovei: 224). Thus, on the basis of contact magic and of magic through similitude, the fertilising power of the dough, in which the germination force of a much smaller reality was concentrated, namely the grain of wheat, is transferred onto the fruit trees, thus ensuring their revitalization.

As a result, it is no wonder that the kneading of the bread was chosen as a conceptual scheme of creation, since the *dough* itself functions as another *container-metaphor* that shelters the mystery of universal creation. It is capable of transferring the power of fruitfulness specific to the wheat onto all other fundamental levels of existence, no matter whether it is ripe or unripe, since through ripeness<sup>10</sup> its capacity of transferring its power onto the animal or human kingdom is neither diminished nor annulled: proof that, during Epiphany, the *cow cake* is ritually prepared from the first dough made for

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<sup>10</sup> Some authors believe that the burning (baking) of the dough in the oven is the one that "animates" the loaf (Ghinoiu: 51), a hypothesis that to us seems less plausible, since the use of seeds and of the unbaked dough to transfer the germinal power to other levels of existence shows that they as well were considered ideal containers for the sacred spirit of the wheat.

knot-shaped loaves, and given to cows for them to give plenty of milk, but also “for bearing”, more precisely: “to *breed*, meaning to calve” (Pamfile 1997: 270).

The human kingdom does not remain outside this sphere of influence either: the ritualistic knot-shaped loaf was used on a large scale in all practices from the nuptial ceremonial frame with the purpose of stimulating the fertility of the young couple. The gesture of breaking the loaf above the head of the bride (Ghinoiu: 114) entirely confirms the faith in the existence of a germinating power preserved in the baked dough that ensures the continuity of generations. Its sphere of influence extended however to the social level as well, contributing to the creation of new relations at the human level or in strengthening some older relationships. Thus, it is omnipresent in all rituals meant to consolidate networks of social solidarity, based on food communion, whether they regard: the newly constituted family that jointly consume the ritual loaf during the nuptial ceremony together with the rest of the wedding goers (Ghinoiu: 114); the spiritual relatives, such as brethren who, lacking a blood connection, jointly consume this loaf (Platon 2000: 132-143); the midwife or godparents who receive the loaf as a sign of the endurance of their connections of kinship of the soul; the participants in a funeral ceremony, where the food communion appears as a sign of solidarity between the living before death etc. A linguistic proof of this power of creating interpersonal connections attributed to the ritual bread is the expression “to be in one bread”, used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century petitions for the married young men who were not separate from their families, but lived in the same house (Platon 2000: 134). If we add to the few examples mentioned here the universal custom of receiving guests with bread and salt as a sign of creating a friendship relation as well, we better understand the creating virtues attributed to the dough (and its joint consumption) by the human being.

### **5. The metaphor of the seed**

Returning to the comparison between the biblical and traditional scenarios of genesis, it must be stated that, despite the differences highlighted above, they seem to us to be unified, in fact, from a cognitive point of view, by a unique conceptual scheme, through which at the origin of the world there is always a container-metaphor meant to limit the inseparable and not yet manifested forms of a future existence. No matter whether the chosen container is of a material or immaterial nature, what is important is that man felt the need to select a familiar model from his daily existence, projecting it onto the primordial creation in order to limit limitlessness itself, so that his mind could envelop it. As it has been already noticed, these primary metaphors can contain, in turn, other container-substances, capable as well to generate various elements of existence

or even to self-generate, by taking various forms. As previously mentioned, in the New Testament the chosen container-metaphor is the God-Word that today, after the invention of the concept of nothingness, we can easily imagine as “living” in the primordial abyss and which, being inhabited, loses some of its grandeur. However, nothing else is mentioned here as existing outside it. In turn, in the Old Testament version, God’s spirit does not live in an empty space but rather, similar to cosmogonic myths, He floats above the primordial waters, given from the beginning, and which exist independently from the divine will: “The earth was without form and void. Darkness was over the face of the *deep*. And the Spirit of God was hovering *over the face of the waters*” (Genesis 1: 2). The water thus appears as a true first-rate container-mega-metaphor, endowed as well with germinal powers. However, it generally contains as well another container-metaphor, no less important, that could be, for example, the *cosmogonic egg* that floats on the Primordial Ocean, mentioned in some myths from Siberia and Central Asia (Eliade: 113), symbolically similar to the God-Word.

By respecting the same conceptual scheme, the Romanian variants propose another container-metaphor that deserves attention, namely that of *the seed of the earth* removed by the Devil from the bottom of the seas (thus existing there independently from divine intervention). Although it seems as quite a “humble” micro-metaphor through the negligible dimensions of the selected object, the *seed of the earth* has especially impressed some mythologists. Despite recognising “some correspondences with the Chinese myth of the “living lands”, which self-develop from their own substance, they have seen in it a purely Romanian creation, “an original mythologeme” created by the “the fantasy of the Romanian mythogenesis”” (Kernbach: 194). No matter how flattering it would be for us to take on the invention of this metaphor within the Romanian space, the comparative mythological research highlighted more than “some similarities” with Asian myths, namely even the existence of the same linguistic expressions with Caucasians (Eliade: 96).

Beyond the natural disappointment caused by the lack of uniqueness of the Romanian expression, the identification of the same metaphor in such a space – which makes the hypothesis of a migration of the mythologeme in question less likely and very difficult to control – presents a not at all negligible advantage: the confirmation of the functioning of a unique conceptual scheme, configured after a vegetal model that is well-known to sedentary populations, namely the germination scheme that explains the appearance of life at the vegetal level. Fascinated by the mystery of the germination of the seed placed into the earth and watered with blessed water, man appealed to a natural phenomenon, visible to the naked eye, closely followed especially by those whose fate truly depended on the sprouting, emergence and growing of sowed

crops. Ethnologists have spoken as well about this logic of germination and regularity, noting that, in the Romanian mythical view, the earth “was not created *ex-nihilo*, but rather it created itself” from the seed of the earth, a true germinal endlessness” (Crețu: 229). Beyond the beauty of the image of the self-development of earth from within itself, an approach to the modern astrophysical conception about the dilation of the universe has been noticed as well” (Kernbach: 195), a fact that makes us reconsider the “naiveté” and “simplicity” of mythological thinking.

The intuition of ethnologists about the importance of the mother-seed is confirmed linguistically as well. Language shows that the germination scheme applied in the case of *Genesis* served to the conceptualisation of other types of creation, at the level of all kingdoms: human, animal and even mineral. Thus, in the language circulating in the rural mediums at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *human seed* appeared as well, an explicit metaphor recorded by Vasile Tudor Crețu, with the meaning of “type, kind of human” (Crețu: 230), similar to the *human dough* metaphor, which has the same meaning. And the known *seed of a people* metaphor, considered a fundamental concept for the traditional Romanian mentality, shows that man has conceived a “bio-social cycle” model (Crețu: 230). The lack of descendants, meaning the *fading of the seed of a people* (Ghinoiu: 139), was otherwise considered one of the hardest curses, sterility being metaphorised in popular beliefs after the vegetal model as well, such as: *fruitless poplar*, for people who did not have children, or *weed* (the most invoked one being *pigweed*), for barren women (Ghinoiu: 139). The seed of a people can travel detached from the concrete organ that ensures the reproduction and for which a similar metaphor is otherwise used: *the man's seed*<sup>11</sup> or even *the woman's seed* (DLR: 1874), reminding of the manner in which wheat *manna* (the fertilizing principle of grain crops) travels in the vegetal world. It was believed that it runs from the path of the harvester and finds refuge in the last wheatears, from which they will create a chaplet. After the chaplet is watered, sung and disenchanted with the help of certain ritual songs (Evseev: 104), it is taken to the host's house, where it is kept in an honoured place until next Spring, when its grains will be sowed in order to ensure the abundance of the next harvest. Similar to the spirit of the wheat, hidden in the seed grains, the *seed of a people* also concentrates the familial nucleus that, “analogically to the vegetal revitalization, it never fades even though, inevitably, its generations are continuously renewed”. For this reason, one was able to formulate the hypothesis that the idea of the continuity of

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<sup>11</sup> For the genital organs of animals a similar metaphor was used as well. The popular beliefs speak of a practice to favour pregnancy that consisted in the consumption of a *rabbit* or *doe rabbit seed*, obtained through the drying and grinding of rabbit balls (Marian: 15).

human life, structured by family and one's people, was derived from the "millenary observation of the repeated and wholesome sacrifice of the seed in order to annually give fruit" (Crețu: 260).

*The manna of the crops*<sup>12</sup> presents other by-products as well, such as *the manna of the food*, *the manna of the field* or *the manna of the flowers*, together with *the manna of the cattle* or *the manna of the bees* (Evseev: 252), a fact that attests the transfer of the vegetal principle to the animal level as well. Furthermore, *the manna of sheep milk*, also called *fruit* (from the Lat. *fructus*, which means "crop, gain"), a word that subsequently was replaced by the Slavic word for *fruit* (*rod*) – *sheep's fruit* (Șăineanu: 309), proves as well the profound mental anchoring in the vegetal pattern. The proof that the manna of the milk is autonomous is represented as well by the fact that it could be transferred, estranged or stolen by witches or other malefic forces, as it emerges from formulations such as *the taking of the manna* or *the taking of the fruit*, designating magical practices through which the *fruit of the earth* is stolen, and which are described in the ritual texts pertaining to them as well (Evseev: 252).

The exceptional fertilizing power of the manna of the wheat acted, certainly, at the human level as well, positively influencing the abundance and well-being of the entire household, while during the winter the wheat seeds are symbolically sowed in the yard, house, church or even clay pots, with the purpose of propitiation (of well wishing). The act of sowing from this area of the sacred time is considered as a mythic-agrarian reminiscence that proves the creation-beginning of the year binomial (Crețu: 260).

At the same time, the metaphors for illegitimate children, such as *love child*, *weed (child)*, *nettle (child)*, *from the fields* (Ghinoiu: 150) or the ones used in the name day of folktale heroes, such as *Spic de Grâu (Wheatears)*, *Pipăruș Petru (Hazelwort Peter)* or *Florea Înfloritul (Flowery Florea)*, encode an archaic representation about the vegetal origin of life, according to which children are miraculously conceived by ingesting certain fruits (apple, pear etc.), wheat or pepper grains or even by simply smelling a flower (Chiper: 79-86). Only by virtue of a metonymy that assimilated the seed of the fruit can we understand the regenerating virtues of the golden apples from folktales, which contained the remedy for certain diseases and even the elixir of eternal life, by growing

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<sup>12</sup> In Christianity, the concept of manna has been associated with the bread of life and Holy Communion, considering that in the Old Testament it is named "heavenly bread", a kind of nourishing substance fallen from heavens in order to feed the Jews found in the desert. In Romanian beliefs, Gh. Pavelescu considers that *manna* represents "the most general idea as a geographical extension and, at the same time, the oldest category and one most characteristic to the magical thinking of Romanians", being portrayed "as a *spiritual agent*, as an active force or substance of things, which generates and maintains the fruit", of the abundance of grain crops and of the productivity of animals (apud Evseev: 252).

younger, bringing back the dead and even enlightening the mind (Oişteanu: 57), but also the gesture of heroes to transform the palaces of the three dragon brothers (gold, silver and copper) into magical apples in order to transport them and, then, “sow” them again on the other realm, where they miraculously reappear.

Moreover, the action force of the germinal scheme is extended to the level of social and familial relationships as well: after the joint consumption of an apple a spiritual kinship relationship can be born, of the brethren type (Platon 2000: 22) or social imperative is miraculously solved, namely the annulment of the difference between the son of the queen and that of the handmaid, the latter being conceived through the accidental consumption of the apple peels used by the queen to get pregnant (Platon 2000: 23); the consumption of some twin fruits that determines the appearance of twin pregnancies (Marian: 51). In addition, the synonyms used for the child, such as *fruit*<sup>13</sup>, *offspring*, – the last one, used today depreciatively, etymologically meaning “fruit” as well (from the Sl. *plodŭ*) – or *offshoot* or *sprout*, reflects the same intimacy between the destiny of the human being and the vegetal universe.

The speech germin is contained by a container-metaphor of the seed as well. Thus, *the seed of speech* both explains the activation of speech and ensures its more intense and uninterrupted flux (it should be observed that the idea of continuity is maintained here as well), especially when, similar to the wheat seed, it is “watered” with a drink since Romanians are familiar with the drunk man who “has the seed of speech” (Bîrlea: 70-71) or even the *seed of quarrel*.

Beside the children raised from fruit or flower seeds or the seed sprung from the seed of speech, lyrical texts speak as well of the possibility to sow other abstract and invisible essences as well, such as *luck*. Most often, this is metaphorised as a flower (Chiper: 228), since it could be *sowed*, *planted*, *harvested* or it could *dry out*, in case it is not cared for. Human feelings such as love do not remain outside the germinal scheme either, since it could be sowed as well, as in this incantation: “I don’t sow hemp for linen for a shirt, ‘cause I have that, but I sow a path for the betrothed, so that I dream of him and in reality see” (Niculiță-Voronca: 65), while metaphors such as *the seed of hate, insult or evil*, recorded in the DLR, significantly extend the domain of influence on other feelings and ideas (especially since, in turn, both feelings and ideas *take root*).

Beauty itself is represented in carols as *gems* that have been sowed between the antlers of the deer (Crețu: 283), which shows that, despite its toughness and immobility, even the mineral kingdom entered without issues

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<sup>13</sup> The synonymy *fruit - new-born child* is present in the popular beliefs recorded and published by Elena Niculiță-Voronca at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “God was walking the Earth, when it was still clean in the world. But then, after losing His girls and women, killing their *fruit* and hiding it in the earth, God climbed into the heavens”. (Niculiță-Voronca: 132).

under the incidence of the germinal model. The proverb about the lucky man stands as proof: “If the man has luck, even if he *sows coals* they still bear fruit” (Gorovei: 381) or the beliefs about the *seed of stone*, which in legends is equated to *the sand* thrown by the Unclean One with the thought of growing and transforming the entire earth in stone so that “people would not have what to eat” (Niculiță-Voronca: 30). Although paradoxical for binary logic, which excludes complementariness, the container-metaphor of the stone as a shelter for the fruitful germs is perfectly coherent in the context of the magical-symbolic mentality, where ambivalence is natural. The traditional man is entirely familiarised with: folktales such as *Omul (The Man)* or *Fata născută din piatră (The Girl Born from Stone)*; incantations that conserve the archaic image of the *growth from stone* of plants, animals, people or even diseases, as in the incantation for *deformity* (paralysis/palsy): “White birdie,/With a white wing,/From stone you have gawn,/With clouds you have fought/Three drops from you have fallen...” (Teodorescu II: 74); carols that, by taking on pre-Christian elements of an age-old solar cult (Herseni: 235), have imagined even the birth of Jesus from stone after the model of the Sun born from stone: “Next to an unwritten stone/Leru’s God/ Kneeled sits the Virgin Mary/To birth a child of stone./A son of stone she birthed indeed ...” (Kernbach: 345).

## 6. Conclusions

Our study was devoted to an intimidating concept that has been discussed and re-discussed throughout time in all mediums, at various levels of depth, in connection to which one can merely formulate plausible hypotheses, since the appearance of life in the universe continues to remain a great mystery. In fact, through its very nature, any act of creation contains a dose of magic, inevitably associated to the process of transforming the uncreated into the created or the inexistent into the existent. In this context, our study does not pretend to have formulated new hypotheses, meant to contribute to the reduction of the unknown dose, but it rather confined itself to detect certain constants meant to better clarify the manner in which the human mind has conceptualised the idea of creation. Although there are philosophical and literary works that, certainly, have circulated exceptional, novel and surprising metaphors, yet known to a restricted number of initiates, thus having an ephemeral life, we have chosen to lean on certain linguistic stereotypes. More precisely, we were interested in the conceptual metaphors present in everyday language that have withstood time. Being created in traditional mediums and institutionalised through their intense circulation, their acceptance and daily usage seem an indication of the fact that they corresponded to certain universal thinking schemes and needs. In fact, although we have given attention, for comparison purposes, to the

biblical metaphor of the word as a source of creation, our reflections concentrated, in the given restricted space, on the vegetal model, whose conceptual nucleus is constituted by the container-micro-metaphor of the seed: the one that, in fact, has encoded the information of an entire evolutionary process that has not yet been entirely elucidated.

Contemporary scientists, such as the biologist Francis Hallé cited by Bouvet, consider that the vegetal universe is farther from the human one than the animal one, since the identification of plant organs is not always easy, and their functions are not always evident (Bouvet: 36). By contrast, traditional sedentary communities, with a magical mentality, have certainly had a different perspective, feeling intimately connected to the adventure of the wheat grain, as well as to its germination and growth into the sacred bread, laid on the table and covered in a clean, undoubtedly white towel. Therefore, this cycle seems infinite to them: it is initiated by sowing, but it is not finalised by harvesting, still continuing at the level of the bread, which, in turn, conserves the fertilizing force of the wheat grain, returning it next year, through magical means. Thus, even if the postmodern society perceives the animal world as being much more familiar, recommending us to anthropomorphise plants in order to better relate to them (Bouvet: 36), we could easily imagine that the traditional man would have ironically smiled hearing such an atrocity. He did not only anthropomorphise the vegetal universe and the rest of the life forms, but he phytomorphosed himself, considering that through his veins runs that vegetal sap, encapsulated in the seed, and that his destiny is identical with the one of the wheat ears (Ghinoiu: 47). The fact that the seed metaphor dominates, even today, our creation-related language is a precious inheritance from the traditional human, whose profound meanings we have forgotten; yet, a minimum reflection could help us bring them back to the surface of consciousness.

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