

Two Masters of Fantastic Prose

GHEORGHE
GLODEANU

Ion Agârbiceanu
and E. T. A. Hoffmann

*“The mine seemed as wide
as a church.”*
(Ion Agârbiceanu)

Gheorghe Glodeanu

Director of the **Nord literar** review (Baia Mare), author, among others, of the book **Narcis și oglinda fermecată: Metamorfozele jurnalului intim în literatura română** (Narcissus and the magic mirror: Metamorphoses of the private diary in Romanian literature) (2012).

ALTHOUGH HE is not one of the writers who dedicated himself exclusively to fantastic literature, his obsession for reality being always more powerful in his works than his inclination towards the miraculous, Ion Agârbiceanu (1882–1963) provided a series of creations that are undeniable successes of the genre. Moreover, similarly to prose writers such I. L. Caragiale, Gala Galaction, Cezar Petrescu or Liviu Rebreanu, the appearance of the fabulous in the narratives of Agârbiceanu might bring amazement to readers familiar with the harsh realism of the destinies depicted in “Fefelega,” “Luminița” (The glimmer) or *Arhangheli* (The archangels). “The slide” towards the unusual in the works of Agârbiceanu is however not accidental, the fantastic being but a specific means of representing the quotidian, the natural, the utterly commonplace.

In his turn, the novelist Ernst Theodor Wilhelm (or Amadeus) Hoffmann (1776–1822) is the author of a highly imaginative literary work, ranging between the fantastic and irony. This work is grouped into three cycles. Elaborated

between 1812 and 1814, the first cycle is called *Fantasy Pieces in Callot's Manner*, and it comprises the lettered fairy tales and the short stories "The Golden Pot," "The Knight Gluck" and "Don Juan." The second cycle is called *Night Pieces* (1817) and contains the following stories: "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," "The Sandman" and "The Hypnotist." Finally, *The Serapion Brotherhood* (1819–1821) contains the narratives: "The Mines of Falun," "Councilor Krespel," "Mademoiselle de Scudéry," "Master Martin, the Cooper, and His Journeyman." Among the other exceptional works of the writer one can mention the fantastical stories "The Devil's Elixirs" (1809) and "The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr together with a Fragmentary Biography of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler . . ." (2 vols., 1819 and 1821).

The element that brings together two writers apparently so different as Ion Agârbiceanu and E. T. A. Hoffmann is their inclination towards the fantastic, the subtle mix of the real with the imaginary, as well as their belief in the existence of ghosts, of spirits of the underworld, quite common with numerous peoples. Legends about mining have been a generous source of inspiration for the authors of fantastic literature, the readers being fascinated with the miraculous stories linked to the fabulous fortunes hidden in the underground. And as the mirage of money is universal, it is not by accident that a writer such as E. T. A. Hoffmann describes in the "Mines of Falun" a series of happenings that are in many ways similar to the stories told by Ion Agârbiceanu in the novel *The Archangels* or in the short stories inspired by the mythology of the Western Carpathians: "Vâlva-Băilor" (The fairy of the mines), "Valea-Dracului" (Devil's Cove) and "Duhul băilor" (The ghost of the mines).

The fantastic stories of Agârbiceanu originate from old folk beliefs about the existence of miraculous beings that can influence man's destiny in a decisive manner. Such legendary creatures specific to the mythical pantheon of the Western Mountains are the so-called "fairies of the mines." Being an ancestral activity, mining has, over time, generated a series of beliefs and customs meant to guarantee the success of the natives' toil. Among these, the belief in the existence of certain spirits which ensure the observance of customs holds a central position. According to popular demonology, "the fairy of the mines" represents a mythological representation which discloses to worthy miners the locations of the much-desired gold deposits, or on the contrary, punishes the greedy ones. From this perspective, the role of this fairy proves to be similar to the other representation of the fairy of the mines which we can find in Vasile Voiculescu's "Lostrîța" (The taimen). The reason which determines such a vision upon the world must be looked for in the way of life of the miners, in whose opinion everything in the world is animated by a characteristic spirit. Tying both their body and their soul to the earth that feeds them, the miners provide

it with life. The gold for which the miner defies the telluric forces is in its turn nothing but the fruit so generously provided by the Terra Mater (as Mircea Eliade demonstrates). The descent of an individual who belongs to the world above can nevertheless cause a serious disturbance of the depths, immediately sanctioned by that location's spirit, reason for which access to the subterranean world requires a lengthy initiation.

The pact with the fantastic can already be seen in the novel *Strigoiiul* (The spirit), but the writer's true successes are linked to the short prose inspired by the mythology of the Western Mountains. According to popular belief, the man who committed numerous misdeeds in his lifetime and was not buried according to the ancestral ritual cannot find his peace in the afterworld and returns as a ghost, constituting a permanent threat for the community of which he was part. The motif is extremely promising for an author of fantastic literature. Despite this, Ion Agârbiceanu moves away from the traditional means of approaching the subject. What keeps coming back after Moise Mărginean's death—one of the novel's central characters—is not the spirit, but the curse uttered on the death bed. We are thus witnesses to an abstraction of the motif through the survival of the parental curse and not a physical manifestation after death. In fact, by means of the term 'spirit' Ion Agârbiceanu does not identify the ghost which returns to earth in order to persecute the living; it is rather an epithet which people use with reference to mean old men, such as Moise Mărginean.

More than in the novel *The Spirit*, where it appears as a pretext for presenting certain troubled destinies, the fantastic is present in Ion Agârbiceanu's short prose. Narratives such as "The Fairy of the Mines," "Devil's Cove" or "The Ghost of the Mines" are remarkable illustrations of the fantastic of folk origin cultivated by the writer. A feature which is common to these works is the demystification which manifests itself at the end of the accounts. The writer begins his narratives by strictly observing the specific rules of the genre. The rational censorship of the moralist is triggered only at the end of the stories; the moralist, as if scared by the daring hypotheses which he launched, retracts the narrative's premises, offering the reader a logical explanation as regards the nature of the presented events. The consequence is the attenuation or even destruction of the fantastical effect; the reader who has been so far carried through the realm of the fabulous is now brought back to reality, the latter proving to be stronger than the attraction of the miraculous.

The best example of the manner in which demystification operates in Ion Agârbiceanu's creation is offered by the narrative "Vedenii" (Visions), where a sixty-year old woman tells the prose writer, who acts as a priest, i.e. a confidant, about an uncanny encounter which she had experienced. The event happened at dusk, as darkness represents the proper setting for eerie occurrences.

The stranger that enters the old woman's house is also from the realm of the night. Judging from his gear, he seems a commonplace individual, just like any other. It is only by his voice that one can guess that he is a foreigner and much older than one might think at first sight. A second category of signs, much more revealing this time, tell about the superhuman condition of the character. This time we are dealing with a reinterpretation of the motif of death as a form of immortality: the eyes of the stranger have an icy glow, his face is white, thin and seemingly carved in stone, all attributes specific to the dead. The writer leads us into believing that the woman was visited by the creator of the world himself, who comes to comfort her after the recent loss of her daughter. Arisen from the germinal virtualities of the night, the character then disappears back into the darkness from where he came. From this moment onward the narrative voices change, the narrative being continued by the prose writer involved in the text. He destroys the uncanny atmosphere of the account, resorting even to ironic overtones. The comic turn resides in the explanations Agârbiceanu offers as to the causes of the "vision." The cause is the plum brandy that the woman loves to sip every now and then, responsible for a series of unusual visions. In fact, the demystification at the end is announced in the first lines of the story through the description of the fire that refers to the imaginary world, a symbol of an exalted imagination.

Demystification can also be found in the narrative "The Fairy of the Mines," whose starting point is also represented by the same ancestral legends about supernatural beings who rule the depths of the earth. Their actions are the equivalent of the manifestation of luck or, on the contrary, of fate, the fairy of the mines becoming a genuine embodiment of destiny. Ever since its first lines the narrative slips towards the imaginary universe by means of the description of Vasile Mârza's peculiar existence, who is suspected of having "obscure links." The character's Dionysian-like existence, his disregard for community norms are explained by "the village's talebearers" through his esoteric transactions with the fairy of the mines. Despite the exterior opulence, the miner's destiny is tragic. At a moment of acute existential crisis, Vasile Mârza accepts the pact with the Devil materialized in a malefic "female pub owner," "a wrinkled old woman with white hair, crooked teeth, a wide chin and a nose like a pepper." Taking up a central position in the fantastic stories of I. L. Caragiale, the theme of temptation is also present in Ion Agârbiceanu's account. The reason for which the miner drifts away from his primary goals is not gold, but another temptation, the love for the innkeeper's daughter. The lad's feelings are tolerated by the tyrannical mother only to the extent to which they satisfy Nițuleasa's paroxysmal hunger for gold. Vasile Mârza's dilemma resides in the oscillations between his heart's callings and the ancestral values of his occupation, which, if disregarded, turn against the one

who disrespects the ancestral customs. The end of the narrative is left open, the reader having the opportunity to interpret the tragic end of the character as a mere accident or as a ferocious revenge of the fairy of the mine. Vasile Mârza's existential trajectory takes up, in its essential coordinates, the troubled destiny of Elis Fröbom, the central character of "The Mines of Falun" by E. T. A. Hoffmann.

The cursed treasure motif is quite common in Romanian fantastic prose. Agârbiceanu approaches it with an obvious moralizing intention in the story "Devil's Cove." Educated in the spirit of the Transylvanian School writers, for whom literature is never only mere indulgence but also an important means of education, the prose writer wants to convince his reader of the fact that fortunes earned illicitly bring along all sorts of adversities, reason for which man must do everything in his power to keep away from the temptation of money. This was actually the message of Ioan Slavici as well, and the beginning of the short-story "Moara cu noroc" (The lucky mill) is emblematic in this respect. The epic script of the account presents the tragic story of a young man called Gherasâm. In order to win the heart of a rich village girl he descends into Devil's Cove—a variant of the descent into the Inferno—in order to return with the treasures lying there for centuries, but is slain by his rival. The supernatural dimension of the events is kept within the text up to the end, but the demystification is eloquent for the reader. Moreover, beyond the mystery atmosphere characteristic for fantastic prose, Ion Agârbiceanu's narrative also presents a series of analogies with the novel *Baltagul* (The hatchet) by Mihail Sadoveanu, a masterpiece of the mythical novel genre. Here we are faced with a (pseudo)detective tale, with the woman that starts in search of a killer, the dog whose role is to lead her to the crime scene or the sudden disappearance of the hero into a cove.

The narrative "The Ghost of the Mines" also deals with the miners' beliefs in the existence of certain mythical creatures—true embodiments of telluric forces—who reward the skillful miners, or on the contrary, punish the greedy ones. The account follows the pattern of a story within a story, whose unity is provided by the presence of a common folk motif. The central character of the events is a merchant whose name is Ispas, who temporarily embraces the mythology of the Western Mountains. But the slightest disturbance—represented within the narrative as a business letter—is enough for the entire fairytale-like and mystery framework to crumble. The spell is definitively broken, thus marking the return to the lesser quotidian activities. The insignificant businessman becomes the involuntary witness to a series of extraordinary accounts, eventually turning from confessor into storyteller. Just like the travelers who stop at Ancuța's Inn, Ion Agârbiceanu's heroes meet in a pub. The refuge in the intimate space of the inn marks the protagonists' exit from the quotidian and their gradual integration into another time, a mythical one. The company of the miners and

especially the old wine create a specific atmosphere, untying tongues and facilitating confessions. Once intimacy is achieved, yarns start spinning seemingly all by themselves. The open strategy of the account allows for roles to change permanently, listeners turning into storytellers and vice-versa. Every miner has his own mysterious story, because every one of them has experienced something out of the ordinary underground. Such extreme experiences, capable of marking an existence forever, are also the encounters with the fairies of the mines.

The series of accounts is opened by Ion Vintilă. He talks about the signs by which the true miner recognizes the presence of gold: "There are signs. But not everyone can see or hear them." Indeed nature speaks to those who know how to decipher its mysteries. Living in its midst, after a long process of initiation, the miners come to know even its most hidden mysteries. Petre a Rarului also talks about certain arcane signs: "There are signs which, if respected, help the miner not to work in vain. So I follow the signs in order to go where the gold is, and it is by signs that I turn from where work is in vain." The first person singular narrative accurately reflects the intensity of feelings and provides authenticity to the account. Thus, Ion Vintilă, "a huge, frowning man," tells a story about his encounter with the fairy of the mine at Faur. The epic line of the events is then picked up by Petre a Rarului, to whom the spirit of the depths first appeared as "a light, white smoke" (a feature of the good fairy), then took the shape of a "tall old man with a long silver beard." The Hamletian apparition announces the miners that their toil is in vain, since gold is missing in those places. The writer skillfully directs the effects, his arsenal replete with all props required for a show which is based on the exploitation of the exterior sensational fact. Here is, for example, the depiction of the mine dominated by the mysterious spirit: "Towards the center of the mine we stood still, frozen. There was a bright, blinding light. The mine seemed as wide as a church. And in the middle of that church there was the old man we had seen. His eyes were closed, his right arm raised, and we could hear a wind-like whisper, and then we heard, 'there's none, there's none, there's none!', repeated three times in the clearest, most human-like voice." The interesting fact is that we can find a similar description in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Mines of Falun." Eventually, the third narrator, Manoilă, refers to the occult powers of the Night Patron. The latter shows himself to the former in the shape of a "general" followed by two aides: "And right there, on top of the hill, there came a general, at full trot. His clothes, the bridles, the stirrups were all gleaming with the purest gold ever. And one could not hear the horse's trot, as if it did not touch the ground."

THE SAME mirage of riches hidden in the depths of the earth can be found in the well-known short-story “The Mines of Falun” (1818) by E. T. A. Hoffmann. Unlike Ion Agârbiceanu’s creations, in the case of the famous writer of “The Devil’s Elixirs,” the narrative has two significant and complementary moments. In antithesis what follows, the first narrative sequence depicts the mirage of the sea, then the author insists on the fascination of the mountain. The text opens with the arrival at the Swedish harbor of Goethanaborg of a wealthy ship from the East Indies. A true romantic writer, Hoffmann proves to be a powerful creator of atmosphere and frequently uses antithesis. The account insists upon the discrepancy between the celebration upon the ship’s arrival and the desolated state of mind of one of the sailors. The writer highlights the opulence of the party, where beer starts flowing, cups are emptied one after the other, and dancing is heated in the company of beautiful libertine girls. The only one not taking part in the collective intoxication of the senses is Elis Fröbom. Hoffmann portrays the sailor as “a pleasant, slender boy, about twenty years of age.” The latter’s grief is about to disturb the noisy, collective enjoyment of his comrades. His fellows appreciate Elis’ courage, but they reprove him for the fact that he does not drink, and for this reason they threaten him with the punishment of the spirit of the waters, Näckén. The latter’s name is uttered now for the first time, the demon Näckén being a counterpart of the fairies of the mines, the spirits of the depths. Elis’ grief is explained by his fellows through the fact that he originates from the village of Nerika, where the inhabitants are grumpy and do not really know how to enjoy themselves and their lives as sailors. The inn as a place of miraculous encounters, the woman as temptation, the mirage of money are recurrent motifs with both Agârbiceanu and Hoffmann. Paradoxically, the gloomy Elis is not happy for having escaped the treacherous seas. Moreover, he is not tempted either by alcohol or by libertine women, always ready to cheer him up for a few coins. The character carries along a deep sorrow and wants to put an end to its life. From his confessions we find out that his father, also a sailor, had been swallowed by the sea, while his brothers had fallen on the battlefield. The great blow he receives upon his return from the Indies is the news of his mother’s death, who had died in poverty, waiting for him, about three months prior. This is the reason why the sailor, now alone in the world, cannot take part in the “all too noisy games and enjoyment of his fellows.” Materialized as an old miner, the spirit of the mines helps the hero overcome an extremely difficult existential moment. In this context, the earnings brought along after the journey at sea seems to be in vain. Moreover, the character no longer feels any fascination for far-away lands and can no longer dedicate his life to an endeavor that turns into a futile and pathetic toil. Discovering Elis’ “profound and thoughtful” soul, his “naïve and pure” heart, his “quiet and voluntary” compo-

sition, the mysterious character urges him to give up the “harsh and wandering lifestyle” of sailors in order to become a miner in Falun. The arduous labor of miners is appreciated because it forces nature to reveal its mysteries.

It is interesting that for Hoffmann both the sea and the underground abyss represent mirrors of the skies, i.e. access to divinity. In order to convince the young sailor to change his profession, the mysterious old man describes the mines of Falun as a court of miracles, a realm of fabulous riches: “He talked of the mines of Falun, in which he said he had worked as a boy; he described the great main-shaft, with its dark brown sides; he told how incalculably rich the mine was in gems of the finest water. More and more vivid grew his words, more and more radiant his face. He went, in his description, through the different shafts as if they had been the alleys of some enchanted garden. The jewels came to life, the fossils began to move; the wondrous pyrosmalite and the almandine flashed in the light of the miner’s candles; the rock crystals glittered, and darted their rays.” By means of the old miner’s stories, Elis discovers the magic of the subterranean world, barely heard of until then. As it usually happens with romantic writers, the dream in Hoffmann’s works turns into a novel means of anticipating reality. Moreover, the dream becomes for Elis a supreme promise, namely the one that only at Falun will his aspirations materialize. The dream-like imagination comes to demonstrate the hypothesis that the world below does not represent anything other than a mirror-image of the sky. The earth becomes translucent, and the character has the revelation of a mineralogical paradise in the heart of the mountains. Elis signs a novel Faustian bargain with the old miner, which grants him access to the underground heavens. The only thing he is asked for in return is to remain faithful to the queen to whom he has vowed allegiance, the supreme goddess of the abyss.

Hoffmann proves to be more romantic and more inclined to dreaming than Agârbiceanu, who was born in a different epoch and had a different profession. After three days of hesitations, the character heads towards Falun, guided along the way by the mysterious appearances of the unknown old man, who seems to be a spirit of the underground rather than a common miner. Also significant is the fact the city of Falun is located between two lakes, which suggest the close interweaving of Elis’ two professions. Instead of the dreamt paradise, the huge, threatening entrance into the mine provides an apocalyptic image, a huge gate of the Inferno. The diabolical vision is also maintained by the stuffy, sulfurous vapors which rise from the depths as from a “hell-broth, whose reek poisons and kills all the green gladness of nature.” The description brings back to the reader’s mind certain bookish references, especially the one in Dante’s *Inferno*. The mine resembles a marine monster which lies down with its mouth wide open, ready to snatch its victim. The reference to folk beliefs

returns when the writer evokes the story of an old sailor who, being seriously ill, has visions of the monsters from the depths of the sea, a vision which anticipates the imminent demise. Hoffmann's repeated associations between the abyss of the sea and the camouflaged depths of the earth is interesting. The abyss that opens in front of Elis resembles a dried seabed, and the miners that just come out of the pit seem like "terrible demons," "black worms" which try to dig their way up to the surface. The initial anxiety caused by the opacity of the mine is overcome when the hero makes the acquaintance of the workers from the depths, proud men with kind faces. The honest and bright joy that animates the whole crowd is in great dissonance with the noisy and chaotic joy of the sailors. Discovering them in this humanized condition, Elis no longer thinks of miners as brutes crawling inside the galleries. If in Agârbiceanu's works the gold mines represent the supreme embodiment of wealth, in Hoffmann's works we deal with silver and copper mines. The terrible fear of the depths is overcome through the love for Ulla Dahlsjö, the daughter of Pehrson Dahlsjö, the master of the location. The writer insists on the portrait of the girl, who is one of the beauties of the region. The miner's love is triggered suddenly when he realizes that Ulla is the girl that had appeared in his dream and saved him from the world of Oneiros.

This is the moment when the character, torn by a pungent pain, blesses the destiny that brought him to Falun. The happiness that overcomes him makes him live a joyful dream, the confusion between the real and the imaginary being extremely frequent in the works of fantastic prose writers. The character struck by Cupid's arrows no longer finds it difficult to give up "the sailors' unbridled life" in order to join the miners. The angelic image of his loved one makes Elis forget the fears of the depths and the terrible miner's toil. His motherland is no longer "the treacherous sea," but "the city of Falun and its rich mountains." The character is nevertheless warned about the fact that one of the ancient beliefs in the region says that "The mighty elements with which the miner has to deal, and which he controls so bravely, destroy him unless he strains all his being to keep command of them—if he gives place to other thoughts which weaken that vigor which he has to reserve for his constant conflict with Earth and Fire." Elis' mining career is glorious as long as he is fully committed to his work. The projection into the fantastic is achieved through the miraculous encounter with the spirit of the mines inside the mountain. The spirit takes the shape of the old man who had encouraged him to give up sailing and move to Falun. The spirit reproves him for having taken up mining only for the sake of a girl, and that he puts no heart into his profession, reason for which, one day, he might be punished by the prince of the metals he disrespects. The same mysterious character informs him that the beautiful Ulla will never be his. The old man's words

are extremely harsh and have a obvious premonitory quality. Elis finds out that the uncanny character he met is old Torbern, who had lived in Falun one hundred years before and whose legend was extremely vivid amongst the miners. It was said about Torbern that he had some magical powers that helped him discover the richest hidden deposits. Moreover, they believed that he had signed a Faustian bargain: "With the mysterious power which dwells in the bowels of the earth and creates metals." For the sake of ever growing earnings people did not take into account Torbern's grim predictions, and the mine collapsed on Saint John's Day in 1687. Through his deeds the old miner becomes a counterpart of the fairy of the mines from Romanian mythology, i.e. a character that rewards the worthy miners by indicating to them the richest deposits, and punishes those who do not love their profession. And this after the character himself was turned into a legend after the terrible cave-in of the mine.

The fairy's predictions seem to come true when Elis finds out that Ulla is about to marry a wealthy merchant. Acknowledging the fact that he will never know earthly happiness, the young man signs a pact with Torbern, this local spirit, promising that he will work hard without ever seeing the light of day. The short-stories talk about the existence of two riches, which represent equally powerful temptations: material riches and spiritual riches. Many times material riches become an obstacle for attaining spiritual riches. Descending into the underground the miner again has the vision of the queen of the depths, who not only reveals herself to him—as the enchanted taimen does in V. Voiculescu's work—but also embraces him. The young man is brought back to the world above and, moreover, is promised Ulla's hand in marriage, but he remains nostalgic of his magical love. After the encounter with the mistress of the underground kingdom of rocks and metal, earthly happiness no longer satisfies the central character, the mine becoming both a paradise and an inferno. Once he steps back into the underworld everything looks different. Elis discovers the richest deposits without much toil and is ever more fascinated by the treasures hidden in the underground. Paradoxically we witness a reversal of the situation: the paradise is underground, while life in the upper world no longer tempts the young miner, although the beautiful Ulla—the woman of his earthly aspirations—awaits him. Only Elis understands the mysterious signs that the queen of the underworld gave him and talks ever more about "the glorious paradise which glowed down in the depths of the earth." The wedding of the two youths is set for Saint John's Day, a day with grim meanings in Falun, because it is then that, one century before, the mine had collapsed and Torben disappeared. Paradoxically the hero leaves his bride on the wedding day in order to give her a gem, "the cherry-colored sparkling almandine, on which the tablet of our lives is graven." The hero experiences the revelation of the existence of the

miraculous almandine in a dream, a treacherous dream meant to lure him underground again. The mine collapses swallowing the foolish young man forever, the accident being explained through the fact that the miner had betrayed his calling for an ephemeral love. The writer insists on the reactions of the crowd upon finding out the terrible news of the cave-in, who believe the mine has taken its toll.

The epilogue of the narrative is extremely interesting as it talks about the power of faith and of love. The events happen 50 years after those presented above, when the perfectly preserved body of young Elis is found in the underground. In order to soothe the abandoned fiancé's immense pain at the loss of her lover, old Torbern, this uncanny local spirit, promises to Ulla that she will see poor Elis again, still in this world, on their marriage day. This is the reason why old Ulla visits the mine every year on Saint John's Day. If they could not be together in their lifetime, the two lovers—novel embodiments of Romeo and Juliet—unite their destinies in death, being buried together. As in Mircea Eliade's prose, the true wedding is not on this earth, but takes place only in heaven.

THE COMBINATION between the real and the supernatural, the theme of temptation, the pact with the devil, the motif of the cursed treasure, the mine as infernal realm, the motif of the spirit, the belief in the existence of mythical creatures able to influence the miner's activities, the presence of miraculous signs by means of which underground treasures can be identified represent some of the aspects that link two masters of the fantastic prose such as E. T. A. Hoffmann and Ion Agârbiceanu.

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Abstract

Two Masters of Fantastic Prose: Ion Agârbiceanu and E. T. A. Hoffmann

The element that brings together two apparently different writers such as Ion Agârbiceanu (1882–1963) and E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) is their inclination towards the fantastic, the subtle mix of the real with the imaginary, as well as their belief in the existence of ghosts, of spirits of the underworld, a belief quite widely spread among numerous peoples. Legends about mining have been a generous source of inspiration for the authors of fantastic literature, the readers being fascinated with the miraculous stories linked to the fabulous fortunes hidden in the underground. As the mirage of money is universal, it is not by accident that a celebrated writer such as E. T. A. Hoffmann describes in the “Mines of Falun” a series of happenings that under numerous aspects are extremely similar to the stories told by Ion Agârbiceanu in the novel *Arhanghelii* (The archangels) or in his stories inspired by the mythology of the Western Carpathians: “Vâlva-Băilor” (The fairy of the mines), “Valea-Dracului” (Devil’s cove) and “Duhul băilor” (The ghost of the mines).

Keywords

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