

BOOK REVIEW

„HOMO MAGICUS” –  
A SOCIOANTHROPOLOGICAL READING OF THE WORLD

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Nicu Gavriluță, *HOMO MAGICUS. Camuflaje, mistere, soteriologii [HOMO MAGICUS. Camouflages, Mysteries, Soteriology]*,  
Iasi, Editura Junimea, 2020

*Homo Magicus. Camouflages, Mysteries, Soteriology* is a book that we can easily attribute to the direction of a socio-anthropological approach to the religious phenomenon which the already well-known sociologist and writer Nicu Gavriluță has accustomed us to. Without denying for a moment the concerns that have consecrated him in the field and in the readers' preferences, the sociologist from Iasi returns in 2021 with a new volume published at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Publishing House in Iasi to provide us with an exciting, promising and up-to-date topic. The magic, in its camouflaged, mysterious and saving hypostases, is the focal point of the book around which the entire construction revolves.

This time, the author brings to our attention the magical fact as a new reading grid of reality. Thus, magic is not just an object of study, it turns into an instrument for reading and interpreting the world in which we live. This hermeneutical formula is not entirely new. It is inspired by the writings of Eliade and Culianu and adapted to current contexts and phenomena. Thus, two are the meanings that the term magic acquires in the volume *Homo Magicus*: the one of playing the phantasms and the one of unusual attraction, fascination.

Nicu Gavriluță's goal is to draw our attention to the fact that life and everything they inhabited by it has another level of interpretation and understanding. In this case, it is located beyond what is quantifiable and measurable. We are, therefore, in the company of a bold socio-anthropological approach that brings attention to the role of hermeneutics in knowing and understanding the world.

*Homo Magicus* is such because, as evidenced by Nicu Gavriluță's book, it is inhabited by sacredness and mystery. It is magicus because the world he lives in

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is a truly fabulous, magical one. It is also magical because it manages to penetrate reality beyond appearances, beyond its visible fabric. Yes, man is so and not otherwise because in his essence flickers a divine spark and is fascinated by the miracle of this world.

Thus, all the texts contained in this volume become true pleas in favor of an appointment of this kind: *Homo Magicus*.

A great lover of books and reading, Professor Gavriluță opens the volume with a text dedicated to the book. In a way, for those who know him, the chapter "The Magic of the Book and the Alternative Worlds" is also a public devotion to the relationship between the author and the magical world of books. For many they constitute themselves as veritable vehicles of spirit and imagination to fabulous alternative worlds, they can become an intercession to the absolute. "(...) the book written in ancient Greek ceases to be an instrument of didactic training. It becomes an Epiphanic reality (...)" (pp. 34-35).

Then the magic of reading is complemented by the philosophical understanding of magic in the chapter "Magic in Hegelian Philosophy". Although less well known this preoccupation of the German philosopher, it demonstrates that the spirit objectifies in the world in the surprising form of the magical or revealed religions. Presenting itself as a "direct religion," magic draws its sap from the reality of the human spirit and is "a primal hypostasis of the camouflage of the spirit in history." (p.49) Or, such an understanding proposed by Hegel invites a return to certain philosophical perspectives taken up and mishandled by exegetes.

Even the most secular current phenomena do not remain untouched by contamination with magic. For example, in "The magic of the new secular religions: political correctness and woke ideology" Nicu Gavriluță explains why the most popular expressions of secularism exert today a magical attraction and fascination. Camouflaging old and essential myths of the human condition (*the myth of the confrontation between good and evil*, the myth of the golden age), these ideological writings of a late marxism on Western soil *rebreath suffering*, fetishize vulnerability, *redefine the world* and *rediscover the vitality* of ritualistic participation in social rebirth under a new ideological cover.

Magic is not to be understood as a perfectly autonomous phenomenon, but is part of the existence of a complex suitem, of a "participational universe", in the expression of John Wheeler. The sociologist from Iasi also proves that the current separation between science, religion and magic is contradicted by Isaac Newton's project of total science and by a fascinating work with a strong transdisciplinary imprint, *The Atom. An Endless Story. A Transdisciplinary and Transcultural Incursion*, signed by Simona Modoreanu, Alina Gavriluț, Maricel Pop, Gabriel Crumpei.

On the other hand, this complexity of the world extends beyond the living or lived experience. The journeys of the soul into the great religious traditions and the experiences of the limit of death scientifically analyzed compose a fascinating perspective on a universe extended beyond the limit of the visible. For

Nicu Gavriluță this unusual translates into what he calls to be “The magic of life after life”.

The probing of the underworld and the attraction to the unseen is a constant of the human spirit, observes Professor Gavriluță. The fact is visible in science through the theories of n-dimensionality (Jim Al-Khalili, *Black Holes, wormholes and time travels*) philosophy, history and religion (I. P. Culianu, *The Historian's Kit for the Fourth Dimension*) in literature (M. Eliade, *The Secret of Dr. Honigberger*), film, etc. It is not only about imagining and conceiving (mathematically or not) an alternative, multidimensional space, but also about a new epistemic placement on another scale of man and the visible ones. Thus, from the perspective of the theory of complexity, Nicu Gavriluță considers that “the people of the third millennium will really take a step forward only if they understand religion, magic, folklore but also life itself – as well as the human mind itself – are nothing but three-dimensional fragments of a cosmic puzzle game. The real reality goes far beyond the conventional frameworks of this world.” (p. 146) It can be the subject of study, of devotion, it can arouse attention and stimulate the imagination, but at the same time, the same hidden face of reality can be subject to speculation, arbitrariness and imposture. “The magic between spell and sparrow” is a chapter that captures both the survival of the magical by camouflaging it in novel contemporary forms and practices and, through it, an incessant reverence of the world. And here the intellectual from Iasi captures the fallen forms, the kitsch, the pathologies of the magic in the world having as main argument the book of Camelia Burgehele, *From spell to sparrow*.

In order to be as convincing as possible in his statements, Nicu Gavriluță exemplifies successfully and with inspiration the survival of magic in the world by analyzing the fascinating world of automotive technology. The winged horses of the old mythologies today take the face of some brilliant technical specimens of horsepower. The migration of magic into technology (autonomous cars, those that respond to voice commands, that change color or that reconfigure their shape, etc.) and the attraction it exerts is a sign that magic is silently and efficiently frequenting us. Undoubtedly, it also betrays Nicu Gavriluță's passion for sophisticated cars and mythology. After all, the two are not excluded but live together in a discreet harmony.

The last part of the work includes three chapters that, in a more serious register, draw attention to the spiritual crisis of the Romanian village, to the need for sacrifice and miracle. All these themes appear as a true corollary of the whole endeavor. This is because the traditional spirit and especially the traditional countryside constitutes itself as a true keeper of an inexhaustible spiritual resource in which the religious, the magical or the imaginary or alternative worlds represent a living ferment of life.

Job's lesson, masterfully interpreted by the well-known French writer, Rene Guenon and brought up to date by Professor Nicu Gavriluță can be a key to interpreting our daily experiences. Many of them stand under the sign of banality

and some easily glimpse the magic of this world. Life, after all, is an endless cycle of destruction and births in which one cannot deny the presence in countless ways of the “invisible ritual of cathartic and founding lynching”. The veterotestamentary sequence of Job's sacrifice indicates an *ancient path of the ungodly* that repeats itself paradigmatically from time to time. It shows us that, not definitively, the logic of the functioning of the world escapes rational patterns and approaches the miracle. And that's really magical.