CHRISTIAN FAMILY VALUES IN ROMANIAN FOLKLORE – PART I

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Abstract: *The present paper is not going to be a socio-psychological approach to human values in general, or to human values in the West (in a general sense, namely as opposed to an equally general East), but specifically a transdisciplinary investigation of how values deemed Christian – irrespective of their degree of universality – concerning the family are crystallized in the Romanian collective imagination as encapsulated in folklore. This is part of a larger transdisciplinary research project in which I address the issue of Christian values within the Romanian family, namely both values as transmitted within and by the family and more general views about the family (as an ultimately sociogenic unit), with a view to identifying the extent to which Christian teachings have influenced the Romanian collective imagination as filtered and transmitted at family level. The very methodology I use is largely feminist, yet it draws on psychoanalytic and theological insights as well.*

For convenience, I investigate here certain folkloric productions whose availability and familiarity to the general public may render their allusions to Christian values within the Romanian family virtually invisible, unless taken for granted. Reasons of space, however, have made the selection very difficult and have imposed the discussion of certain creations such as folktales in another paper, alongside less familiar folk creations.

Key Words: *family values, Christianity, Romanian folklore, ballads, proverbs*

We often hear ordinary people extolling, in their everyday conversation, virtues which they deem universal, human, Christian or which they simply take for granted even in the absence of any such classification. We hear much the same on television, especially when such values – here at times also called democratic – are seen as jeopardised by the misdeeds of such and such an individual, whether a lay person or a high profile politician. Why do we need such constant reference to "universal" values? Why do we typically raise the issue in contexts having to do with the infringement of their underlying precepts? Why are these values typically invoked with an air that it's only so-and-so who could have defied them, but not upright people like ourselves? The following is not going to be a socio-psychological approach to human values in general, or to human values in the West (in a general sense, namely as opposed to an equally general East,[1] which therefore also includes Romania), but specifically a transdisciplinary investigation of how values deemed Christian – irrespective of their degree of universality – concerning the family are crystallized in the Romanian collective imagination as encapsulated in folklore. This is part of a larger transdisciplinary research project in which I address the issue of Christian values within the Romanian family, namely both values as transmitted within and by the family and more general views about the family (as an ultimately sociogenic unit), with a view to identifying the extent to which Christian teachings have influenced the Romanian collective imagination as filtered and transmitted at family level. The very methodology I use is largely feminist, yet it draws on psychoanalytic and theological insights as well.

[1] See Edward Said's critique of "Orientalism" as the discourse of the West about a collective abstraction, "the East," intended both to provide a foil to the Western self-conceptualization and to legitimize Western policies of colonization.

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Admittedly, to engage with the issue of Christian values within the Romanian family indirectly, in this case by studying folklore, both has epistemic merits, given the more general "repository" role of folklore, and conceals potential dangers, especially considering the vicissitudes of folklore collection. In connection to the latter aspect, it is worth remembering that what we encounter "frozen" on the printed page or "re-enacted" in a television studio is an "item" multiply decontextualized and interpreted – read: worked on – through selection at both the time of its collection[2] and now, at the time of its dissemination either in print or televisually, and reflects values of the collector[3] as much as, however partially, values of those who were his/her informants as individuals belonging to a particular community and therefore acculturated to its values. Furthermore, any such re-enactment fails to suggest both the oral-performative character and the syncretism peculiar of any folkloric act of creation/production and performance before the community. This is, however, not the time to review the history of an antiquarian interest in folklore as it emerged with European romanticism and of its methodological vagaries up to this date, nor to study its diachronic transmission and performance opportunities.[4] Rather, I will look at the Christian family values enshrined in a number of folkloric productions, some of which are quite familiar to the large public due to their wide dissemination also with the aid of textbooks used in school, yet some of which are fairly unknown to the same public due to their dissemination mostly in print in anthologies that may seem unappealing to non-specialist readers.

For convenience, I investigate here certain folkloric productions whose availability and familiarity to the general public may render their allusions to Christian values within the Romanian family virtually invisible, unless taken for granted. Reasons of space, however, have made the selection very difficult and have imposed the discussion of certain creations such as folktales in another paper, alongside folk creations less familiar to the general public.

Mioriţa

Mioriţa, which we used to encounter in the Romanian literature class before 1990 at an early age, is familiar to most Romanians thanks to the massive dissemination of the ballad[5]

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[2] Like the Grimm Brothers, Romanian collectors and/or folklorists such as Anton Pann, Petre Ispirescu or G. Dem Teodorescu recorded much of the folkloric creations in their collections from informants currently living in an urban milieu (Pop, Ruxăndoiu 35); see also Pop and Ruxăndoiu (35-36) for a classification of Romanian urban settlements as regards folklore dissemination, as well as for a survey of contacts of Romanian folklore with similar productions of other south-eastern European peoples. Mihai Pop and Pavel Ruxăndoiu's book has provided much of the historical data for the present investigation especially regarding Romanian folklore; for a cross-cultural perspective I have consulted the entries of *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*.

On the other hand, the very conventions for folklore collection have undergone changes over time, so that nowadays folklorists record not only the source region of the respective folkloric piece, as happened originally, but also, since the end of the 19th century and, in Romania, since 1903 thanks to the fieldwork of folklorist Elena Niculiţă-Voronca, the name of the informant. The latter aspect might unfortunately obliterate the anonymous character of folklore.

[3] Many collectors of folklore, from Johann Gottfried Herder in his *Volkslieder* and *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1778-79) to Elena Niculiţă-Voronca in her 1903 *Datinele şi credinţele poporului român* (21) and folklorist Ovidiu Densusianu in his 1910 *Folclorul: Cum trebuie înţeles* (qtd. in Pop, Ruxăndoiu 34), traditionally aver, often in a condescending tone, both the fidelity of their transcription and the window onto the spirit of the people which folklore affords. In fact, the earliest collectors already endeavoured a vindication of their interest in folklore through the latter's definition as the output of the lowly and humble people, as Karl Weinhold did (qtd. in Pop, Ruxăndoiu 24); see also Pop and Ruxăndoiu (28).

[4] For a useful introduction to folklore exegesis and the history of theoretical-methodological approaches, see Pop and Ruxăndoiu (7-23); for a definition and discussion of the major traits of folklore, see *ibid*. (7-17 and 23-71); for a classification of Romanian folkloric productions, see *ibid*. (85-91).

[5] For an introduction to the ballad as a species of epic popular creation, see Al. I. Amzulescu's preface to *Balade populare româneşti* (*1*, v-xxiv); for a cross-cultural perspective, see Moreira (81-83).

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version recorded by Vasile Alecsandri and published in his two-volume reader, *Poezii Poporale: Balade (Cântice bătrîneşti)* of 1852-53. Indeed, very few people are aware either of its many versions, some of which are in carol form, or of the analogy between the cosmic wedding in *Mioriţa* and the central organizing trope of many mourning songs ("bocete") typical of the traditional Romanian funeral rites (Kligman 180-181).[6] *Mioriţa*'s plot is quite simple[7]: two shepherds grow envious of their fellow and scheme to murder him so as to steal his sheep.[8] The potential victim learns about the murderous plan from his magic ewe, whom he entrusts his last will, namely that, should he be killed indeed, she (*sic*) must not reveal the truth – of his death, rather than of the murder proper – to his elderly mother who will be desperately searching for him, but must tell her a pious lie: that he has married a beautiful princess and that the godparents, priests, guests, musicians and candles at their wedding were respectively the sun and the moon, the mountains, forest trees, birds and stars.

So much about the symbolic cosmic wedding, according to most exegeses available to the young people who study/studied *Mioriţa* in school. Yet several issues traditionally silenced beg attention.[9] Why should the shepherd be concerned exclusively with his mother? To begin with, why is the mother the only parent searching for him? Of course, one cannot expect a full biographical account in a popular creation of the brevity of a ballad or carol. Nevertheless, is the exclusive focus on the mother indicative of the traditional allotment of duties – such as care-giving – in the family? Is the mother regarded as the more affectively inclined parent, on the tacit template of the Marian Church, namely the *feminized* devotional and pious pole of the (Catholic) Church, as opposed to the Petrine Church, namely its hierarchically organized *masculine* leadership?[10] Is the father dead? Or is the shepherd a love child? Even more compelling appears the very paradox at the heart of *Mioriţa*, namely the pious lie in all its complexity, from euphemizing death as marriage to enlisting a magic animal companion to aid in its dissemination to the intended audience so as to justify the young man's absence and to comfort his grieving mother. Simply stated, *Mioriţa* valorizes marriage in the most apparent deceitful context, the pious lie – if motivated psychologically by filial love – and the murder whose memory it is designed to obliterate. How many of the *Mioriţa* audiences past and present would have been alert to this potential for mystification of values enshrined at the very heart of the perhaps most famous popular creation for Romanians?

Unsurprisingly, especially from a cross-cultural European and Christian perspective, *Mioriţa*'s symbolic analogy between wedding and death finds parallels in the popular creations of other peoples. Thus, a Greek text quoted by Gail Kligman (253 n. 46) has the shepherd urge his brethren that, on their return to their native village, they should announce his family, not that he was murdered, but that he has wedded a good woman. (Unlike *Mioriţa*, the remainder of the Greek text suggests a pre-eminently mundane wedding, though.) French folklore too has a text (qtd. in Kligman 248 n. 8) in which the young man urges his fellows

[6] I address the latter in the sequel to this paper. As we shall see then, unlike many mourning songs, *Mioriţa* indicates quite clearly that the symbolic post-mortem wedding arranged for a deceased unmarried young person concerns both genders, in an endorsement of the obligatory marital heterosexual strictures of traditional patriarchal communities.

[7] For the Alecsandri and other variants of *Mioriţa*, see *Balade populare româneşti 2* (respectively 7-10 and 10-32). It is worth noting that of the seven versions anthologized here, only "Ciobănaşul" ("The Shepherd") – collected by O. Densusianu in Wallachia – doesn't mention either the magic ewe or the shepherd's mother.

[8] The conflict is typically rendered as an ethnic one.

[9] See Young on the scholarly consequences of androcentrism in folklore studies, although, of course, they are similar to those it has triggered in other fields of study.

[10] The Marian/Petrine Church dichotomy – patterned along gender lines, respectively feminine (or rather feminized) and masculine – has been devised by Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (Beattie 171).

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(whom unfortunately Kligman does not identify) to lie to his mother about his drowning and tell her instead that he has married the loveliest girl.

To conclude, the logic of the death-as-wedding trope not only *familiarizes* the former and thereby "domesticates" it to render the event of death somewhat acceptable, but it simultaneously *naturalizes* the wedding, so that matrimonial heteronormativity[11] becomes as inevitable – as "natural" – as death itself. The recipient community can thus perpetuate both its Christian/cultural values and its social infrastructure through the absolute valorization – although ultimately in the most problematic context – of the marriage institution so central to Christian teachings and doctrine.

Meşterul Manole

Another highly familiar popular creation and an equally compelling case as regards Christian values within the Romanian family is the ballad variously known as *Meşterul Manole* or *Monastirea Argeşului*.[12] The text is typically appraised – and extolled – for its theme, sacrifice for the sake of creation (as encountered in construction rites). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the typical wording of the theme is vague as well as impersonal enough as to obviate any interest in addressing the (non-)identity between the agent of sacrifice and its object, or the offering,[13] and also the stakes of such choice. In this paper I am concerned, however, less with the creative – or maybe merely technical – disquiets of Manole, the master mason who finds the monastery walls collapsed every morning, and more with the solution (of oneiric origin) to the technical plight: Manole dreams that the only way to stop the self-demolition of the edifice is to build in the wife or sister of one of the masons.

In the Alecsandri version, the very *circumstances* of choosing the site of the monastery, as well as the commissioning prince's discourse to the masons, are worth analyzing since they indicate the stakes of the entire building project. Negru-vodă (The Black Prince) rides down the Argeş River together with ten masons to locate *the site where there is a ruined wall*, where to establish his monastery: "Un zid părăsit / Şi neisprăvit" / "A deserted wall / left unfinished" (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 57).[14] A shepherd obligingly guides the party to the site requested by the prince for his future "Loc de monastire / Şi de pomenire" ("monastery site / for commemoration") – with a distich which occurs initially twice and then, when the edifice is completed, in juxtaposition with a description of the building, again

[11] Heteronormativity, "the hegemonic discursive and nondiscursive normative idealization of heterosexuality" under patriarchy, has played a leading role in establishing and then maintaining sex complementarity in modern times (Hird 27), itself aimed at naturalizing biological differences between women and men in terms of biological functions and thereby gender identities and roles.

[12] Like *Mioriţa*, *Monastirea Argeşului* ("Argeş Monastery," the most often anthologized version which the general public used to encounter already in school) was collected by Vasile Alecsandri in his *Poezii poporale: Balade (Cântice bătrîneşti)* of 1852-53. In *Balade populare româneşti 2*, alongside the Alecsandri version (57-66) are included another three versions (67-118).

[13] Notwithstanding the neutral phrase "officiant at sacrifices," there is but a cruel irony in the names of the two roles – *sacrificer* and especially *victim* (Bruchez 752) – typically deployed by folklorists, ethnographers, anthropologists and historians of religion.

[14] The motif of choosing the monastery site on the ruins of a pre-existing building (or rather mere derelict wall), though recurrent in Romanian ballads, is by no means universal. Eliade ("Comentarii" 94) finds it obscure symbolically, since no creative act repeats an early failed attempt, but on the contrary, starts *ab initio*, while any "[r]epetition or assimilation always occurs in a positive direction." The version recorded by Mateescu in Albeşti, Argeş County indicates that Negru-vodă, on a ride with his consort, Lady Ilinca, was seeking for "A site for a monastery / for commemoration / and for good houses": "Loc de mănăstire, / Şi de pomenire, / Şi de case bune" (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 90-92); obviously, under the circumstances he should have been least interested – ritually – in an abandoned, derelict wall. Quite tellingly, in this version the prince does not tempt his masons to contemplate the possibility of erecting a yet more beautiful monastery, but simply orders the scaffold removal for no particular reason, thus abandoning them on the roof (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 102).

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twice.[15] Yet such "pomenire" (commemoration) is ambiguous. Shall we construe it in a strictly Christian commemorative sense – namely, the monastery as a religious institution that also caters for spiritual needs such as those associated with the cult of the dead – or, contrarywise, will the unique magnificence of the edifice – "Monastire naltă / Cum n-a mai fost altă" / "Tall building / like no other" (58) – bring about renown to its mecena? (At the end of the ballad, the two likely senses overlap.[16]) The latter distich will also be repeated, with a variation, after the completion of the building, when:

> Negru-vodă vine
> Ca să se închine
> La cea monastire,
> Falnică zidire,
> Monastire naltă,
> Cum n-a mai fost altă. (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 64)
> [The Black Prince comes / to worship / at the monastery / stately edifice, / tall monastery / like no other.]

Pleased with their work, the prince tempts the masons still standing astride the scaffolds, inquiring whether they would be able to erect him yet "another monastery / for commemoration, / much brighter and more beautiful" than the present one: "Altă monastire / Pentru pomenire / Mult mai luminoasă / Şi mult mai frumoasă" (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 64). Their *proud* affirmative answer (which repeats the question verbatim) troubles the prince, even as the latter won't ponder it much but will order the scaffolds removed, thus abandoning the masons high on the walls, prey – as other versions make it explicit – to the elements and their growing hunger. The masons' attempts to imitate Daedalus – by making up light plank wings to land them safely onto the ground – fail as lamentably as Icarus's endeavour to reach up to the sun: their bodies will unfailingly be smashed to the ground. With one notable exception: Manole simply drops dead to the ground as soon as he hears the fading voice of his dying wife still penetrating from where she was walled in.

Therefore, at stake in the building of the monastery is *pride* – the deadly sin which hamartiology opposes to the virtue of humility Christians are exhorted to embrace – which by the end of the construction project will also have ensnared the masons. Furthermore, like any autocrat, Negru-vodă lures the masons to engage in his project by alternating the promising of rewards – wealth and ennobling, "Că v-oi da averi, / V-oi face boieri" – and the proffering of threats, should they fail to meet his demands, the latter, amazingly, couched precisely in terms of the sacrifice – live walling in the foundations, "Iar de nu, apoi / V-oi zidi pe voi, / V-oi zidi de vii / Chiar în temelii" (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 58-59) – which Manole dreams will permit the successful completion of their commission. With each new instance of the building collapse the threat will be duly renewed. This is the background of collective angst against which Manole dreams that a whisper from above – "şoaptă de sus" (60) – of divine inspiration, we may infer, announces him the solution:

> ... orice-am lucra,
> Noaptea s-a surpa
> Pîn-om hotărî
> În zid de-a zidi

[15] Ballads – and not only the Romanian ones – are famous for their reliance on repetition (Moreira 82).

[16] Nonetheless, the ballad is primarily concerned with *remembrance* of the building across the centuries, as we can see explicitly at the end of the version recorded by Pamfile in the village of Ţepu, Galaţi County: where Manole falls to the ground a fountain springs and the text carved on its walls *mentions* ("Să se pomenească") the story, the very subject matter of the present ballad: "o mîndră fîntînă, / Cu apă puţină, / Cu slove săpate, / Cu slove din carte! / Să se pomenească, / Boieri dumneavoastră; / Dacă nu era, / N-aveam ce cînta!" (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 112-113).

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Cea-ntăi soţioară,
Cea-ntăi sorioară
Care s-a ivi
Mîni în zori de zi,
Aducînd bucate
La soţ ori la frate. (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 60)
[Anything we'll build / will collapse at night / until we resolve / to wall in / our first wife, / our first sister, / who will show up / tomorrow at dawn / fetching food / to her husband or brother.]

Manole urges his brethren to take an oath to keep the secret – namely, not to warn their families[17] – so as to make sure that someone will come to the building site and be sacrificed: "Pe ea s-o jertfim / În zid s-o zidim!" / "To sacrifice her / and wall her in" (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 60). One cannot miss in this instance of *Bauopfer* (building sacrifice) the echo, however differently cast socially, of the vetero-testamentary account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac so as to demonstrate the patriarch's devotion to God.[18] If Abraham is exhorted, and consents, to kill his only son as a human offering (Genesis 22:2), thus relinquishing all hope to see his name carried over to the next generation, in the Romanian ballad the object of the sacrifice is, just as inevitably, the only person who would have come to feed any of the masons: the woman – wife or sister.[19] Not the one *explicitly* dearest or most precious will be immolated here – in a double sacrifice, physical, of the victim, and mental, of the one who accepts the sacrifice terms in anguish – but only she who is "destined" socially to sacrifice herself daily for her family's subsistence and well-being, and who will endure any hardships and withstand any harsh weather – the flood and gale which Manole begs God to send – only to fulfil her duty to feed her husband (or brother). In a supremely and cruelly ironic twist of fate, Ana, Manole's wife, is pregnant,[20] which thereby complicates the terms of the sacrifice – and this not exclusively relative to the biblical precedent.[21]

The motif of human sacrifice for the completion of an edifice is neither peculiar to *Meşterul Manole*, nor purely Romanian, but as part of construction rites has circulated as much in Europe as in the East, in Africa, America or Polynesia (Eliade, "Comentarii" 69-78): the sacrificial practice of "interring adults or children in the foundations of new buildings or under city gates and bridges as peace offerings and as a means of protection, spring[s] from a

[17] Many versions show that the masons do not keep their oath when they return home. On the contrary, not only is Manole singularly determined to keep his oath (as anyway he won't go home at night), but he sends his wife a message to ask her to fetch him breakfast on the morrow, even though he couches his demand in such terms as to render her efforts virtually unsuccessful from the outset. Nonetheless, the request is not intended to determine her to stay at home, but rather intimates that an initiation trial is ahead whereby his wife will demonstrate her heroic virtues, namely that she is indeed *chosen* to "ensoul" the building. Such is the case of Caplea in the version collected by G. Dem. Teodorescu in August 1883 from Petrea Creţu Şolcan, the famed fidler from Brăila. The obstacles in her way are not elemental in nature, but chthonian all through: an impenetrable thicket which will trip her up and force her back home to cook another meal, and subsequently a she-wolf and a "scorpie," namely a female dragon (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 76-80). See Eliade ("Comentarii" 129) for an interpretation of the obstacles as analogous to the trials in a rite of initiation.

[18] See Eliade (*Myth of the Eternal Return* 108-110) on the importance of the Abrahamic sacrifice to inaugurate *faith* in a Paelo-Semitic world otherwise used to the ritual sacrifice of the first born.

[19] The versions I am acquainted with never mention a daughter, perhaps as the masons are assumed to be too young to have one able to walk on her own.

[20] In other versions Manole's wife is already the mother of an infant whom, as she laments while being walled in, she cannot now suckle; eventually, either she or Manole will entrust their baby to the fairies and the elements as a surrogate parent (*Balade populare româneşti 2*, 83, 101, 115).

[21] In Genesis 22, Abraham is rewarded for his devotion – for his willingness to sacrifice his son at Yahve's request – with the promise that his family will procreate so much as to come to conquer, and reign over, the cities of his enemies (Genesis 22:17). Yet, it is hard to match this promise with the next one, which extends the scope of blessing to the entire world, thus: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:18 NKJV).

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fear of anything new or doing an act for the first time" (Bruchez 751). The very notion that an ideal could only be attained through sacrifice has become quasi-proverbial in daily social and verbal interaction, although, according to Mircea Eliade, we could glimpse here an archaic metaphysics which "claims that nothing can last unless it is endowed with a 'soul' or is 'ensouled'" ("Comentarii" 65; see also *Myth of the Eternal Return* 20).[22]

Yet what concerns me in the case of the Romanian ballad is not the topos of "heroic" sacrifice for an outstanding accomplishment[23] – itself debatable – but the person who will always already be the object of sacrifice within the family, the woman, all the more so as, socially, the recurrent notion of sacrifice correlates positively with that according to which the woman – or, archetypally, the mother – ought to sacrifice herself for her family, as indicated by domestic gender identity and roles under patriarchy East and West over the centuries.[24] And if the systematic sacrificing of the disempowered and disenfranchised bears such a clear Christic similarity, it is equally true that society appears to be singularly indifferent to both the demand for sacrifice proper and the individuals who are systematically called to sacrifice themselves as this is supposedly their destiny.

My interpretation has been instigated by the observations of Dominican theologian and priest Edward Schillebeeckx in his *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, as well as by feminist theologians' critique of the ethically problematic model furnished by Christian doctrine and teachings as regards the relation between those in power and the disenfranchised, as reviewed by Grace Janzen. Writes Schillebeeckx about the Christian extolling of sacrifice, especially when decontextualized and transformed into a cult:

> Cradle and cross were an initiation into the "suffering Jesus": a helpless child between ox and ass and a Jesus who goes staggering up to Golgotha.... However authentic this experience may be, here *the Christian interpretation of suffering enters a phase in which the symbol of the cross becomes a disguised legitimation of social abuses, albeit to begin with still unconsciously*.... "Suffering in itself," no longer suffering through and for others, took on a mystical and positive significance so that instead of having a critical power it really acquired a reactionary significance. Suffering in itself became a "symbol." (Schillebeeckx 699, my emphasis)

Or, as feminist theologians Joanne Brown and Rebecca Parker have noted, there exists:

> a startling relationship between the Christian doctrine of Jesus' suffering at the behest of his omnipotent Father with a glorification of both power and suffering that can easily result in battering and abuse of women and children by men who claim the right to dominate. (Janzen 500)[25]

To revert to the legend of Argeș Monastery, it is noteworthy that texts centred on the motif of a "foundation sacrifice" – and this does not concern exclusively Romania – never

[22] On the other hand, Eliade ("Comentarii" 109) insists that "[o]nly ritual death (violent death) is creative, for the simple fact that it terminates a life which has not yet fulfilled all its possibilities." Sacrifice, rather than accidental or biological death, is the one capable to trigger the *force* which "not only enables the 'transmission' of life, but also ensures the permanence of all new creation it has generated" ("Comentarii" 109).

[23] Eliade ("Comentarii" 65-66, 78-86, 104-109) assimilates the rites, legends and ballads concerned with the construction sacrifice to the cosmogonic myth. All such discursive practices, he argues, are grounded in the archetypal logic of the human act of creation which, in turn, *repeats* the very act of divine Creation *ab origo*; that is why humans must "ensoul" every creation through a foundation sacrifice. As Eliade insists in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, "any sacrifice is, in turn, the repetition of the act of Creation" (11; also see 20-21, 30, 35).

[24] Eliade ("Comentarii" 81-86) correlates the motif of the sacrifice of the wife or child with the demand to "ensoul" human creation – in an imperfect imitation of divine creation – by sacrificing either s/he who is nearest and dearest to one (as an avatar of self-sacrifice) or that which can confer permanence to creation, namely *the child* as a symbol of absolute beginning. It is disconcerting to remark, as Eliade unfortunately fails to do, the similarity between such vicarious "self"-sacrifice and the paradigmatic "self-sacrifice" of God the Father through the actual sacrifice of the Son – the same Deity, yet another Person, according to Christian orthodoxy.

[25] Also see Janzen (499).

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even allude to the possibility of the physical sacrifice of any of the masons (unless we subscribe to Eliade's view of vicarious sacrifice through symbolic substitution, which I do not find persuasive). Self-immolation may have offered a model in certain cosmogonic myths, such as the Indian myth of the primordial being, Purusha, in the *Rig-Veda*, but its replication in the human act of creation – as appropriated by men and never acknowledged of women through childbirth! – is inconceivable, perhaps also since human creation proper was originally held in little esteem in Christian patriarchal society.[26] On the contrary, in all versions concerned with the "foundation sacrifice" the person who is to be sacrificed belongs exclusively to the category of the disenfranchised and/or marginalized: the woman, the child, the stranger, the war prisoner – virtually the same social groups which Moira Gatens has noted are excluded from the Western model of representation in "the body politic," as allegedly incapable of forfeit and self-sacrifice!

I do not intend my observations in the margin of *Meşterul Manole* to detract from either the merits of Mircea Eliade's commentary on it or the ballad's symbolic and aesthetic value.[27] On the contrary, the merits of relating the ballad to the cosmogonic myth (or "anthropocosmic", as Eliade calls it) are self-evident. The *human–house–cosmos* isotopy – or their *homology*, conducive to the human/microcosm–universe/macrocosm "homologation," in Eliade's terms ("Comentarii" 126) – is apparent in the mythology and rituals of many peoples ("Comentarii"113-127), articulating as it does an "obsession with the *real*" which concerns "placing humans within the real" through their symbolic placing "in the 'centre of the world' or by offering them for a shelter a house which was at the same time an icon of the Universe and of the primordial Being" ("Comentarii" 124).[28] What may indeed be objected to Mircea Eliade's archetypal analysis is only its vision of stasis, otherwise typical of all structuralist approaches. Their ahistorical and apolitical bias may reveal – in the concern with the archetypal dimension of the underlying myth – precisely the obliteration, in the explanatory discourse, of the very *logic of exclusion from or inclusion in representation* (cf. Gatens).[29] A feminist look at the archetypal explicatory account of Manole's wife's fate will reveal precisely the elimination of woman, sometimes undissimulatedly violent, as here, from the mechanics of representation and implicitly from what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan defines as the Symbolic, namely social reality as mediated discursively and structured around the Law of the Father.[30] Submissive wife and caring mother, Ana/Caplea faces the fate of an entire human category: she is the pivot of successful building – at the cost of her life – even though hers is only a secondary or supporting role, namely the ancillary condition of the

[26] Despite its Christic echo, Eliade's assimilation of sacrifice of the dearest with self-sacrifice in the cosmogonic myth ("Comentarii" 80) is consistent with the universalizing bias typical of structuralism, which conveniently overlooks the historico-social context, with its political assumptions and implications.

[27] The Romanian ballad's impact is hard to overstate. We should only recall Lucian Blaga's drama *Meşterul Manole* (1927), whose dramatic personae list ends with the following note: "Locul acţiunii: pe Argeş în jos. Timp mitic românesc" / "Setting: down the Argeş River. Mythical Romanian time" (Blaga 318). For Blaga, the legend constitutes a landmark in the process of Romanian ethnogenesis.

[28] Through human imitation of a primordial divine act like Creation, "which is a *real act*, since it is sacred," any "sacrifice coincides with the originary space and time when theophany, or divine manifestation, occurred" (Eliade, "Comentarii" 109). "[S]ymbolically speaking – he [man – *sic*!] has *recreated* Creation, cosmogony, through each and every act oriented to the real" (110, author's emphasis).

[29] I use *representation* in its double sense discussed by Spivak (275): as rendition in a particular medium, or re-presentation (*Darstellung*), like in art or philosophy (in subject-predication), and as speaking or acting on behalf of someone else, whether an individual or a group (*Vertretung*), like in politics (within state formation and the law).

[30] In the process of subject constitution in the Symbolic order, according to Lacan (50-51, 215-222), women have to comply with the androcentric model in order to "exist" at all; otherwise, they are denied any signifying presence (namely one bearing on the signifying process) and accordingly they remain alien to this order.

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Virgin Mary.[31] All this occurs in a text perfected aesthetically and central to the colective spirituality of one of the European peoples which, Eliade ("Comentarii" 129-130) constends, should have most needed, historically speaking, the cosmogonic myth of "creative death." Moreover, due to the Christian assimilation and transfiguration of the idea of creative death, the cosmogonic myth of ritual death has been *salvaged* (in Eliade's terms), namely it has been restored to its originary significance, through analogy (albeit not identification) with Christ's Passion, and has been validated as central to Romanian popular Christianity ("Comentarii" 129-133). Supreme irony indeed.

The proverb

Although paremiographers are not agreed on an acceptable definition of the proverb, the genre is broadly regarded as a "concise traditional statement expressing an apparent truth with currency among the folk" (Mieder 661). Defined more inclusively, proverbs are "short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorizable form and that are handed down orally from generation to generation" (Mieder 661). Due to their currency, brevity and often memorizable wording (through rhyming patterns and puns), proverbs should provide a pre-eminently central vector for opinions that have attained collective acceptance and which therefore afford one a glimpse of the collective imagination of a people, in our case of the Romanian outlook on Christian family values.

It is certainly in order to insist here that, as Wolfgang Mieder argues, "[p]roverbs in actual use are verbal strategies for dealing with social situations": accordingly, they "become quite significant and alive once they are used as a strategic statement that carries the weight and authority of traditional wisdom" (662). True, such strategic role they share with other folkloric productions, such as mourning, wedding orations and ballads, to name but a few, even though each genre also has its own specificity. A further word of caution: "[a]s speech acts, they [proverbs] must be viewed as part of the entire communicative performance," in that "[o]nly the analysis of the use and function of proverbs within particular contexts will determine their specific meanings" (Mieder 662). Yet in its blessing – formulaic castigation of moral defects, and popular wisdom sometimes applied to particular contexts to reveal a more general meaning – also lies its curse: the genre is both impersonal and has a remarkably old pedigree as well as history of loan translations[32] (Mieder 664), if one should only think of the ancient Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian traditions, such as the vetero-testamentary Book of Proverbs, which may render the proverb less pertinent to an analysis of specifically Christian values disseminated within, and aimed at, the family.

For all that, one particular case is worth looking at: "Bătaia e ruptă din rai" (loosely: "Beating is made in heaven," the Romanian equivalent of the English "Spare the rod and spoil the child"). Unlike its English counterpart, the Romanian saying obviously obliterates the "beneficiary" – who will be beaten? – as well as the agent – who will apply the (corrective) castigation? Nevertheless, an axis of authority can be inferred relatively easily: within the family, the agent of correction is typically the wielder of power, thus the father and only by assimilation to him or in his absence, the mother, while the target is the child. Beyond the family, the power relation sets off against each other the (traditionally male) teacher and the young student. Yet the generational interpretation does not rule out the gendered dimension: in the domestic sphere the beneficiary is traditionally the woman, since proverbs are intended to endorse, not undermine, societal values. This being the case, the

[31] "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word'" (Luke 1:38) in the Annunciation episode (Luke 1:26-38).

[32] On loan translation, namely "the direct translation of a foreign proverb into the 'borrower' language," see Mieder (664).

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Christian-folkloric legitimation of beating which the proverb offers might well trigger nowadays a protracted polemic vis-à-vis the Christian-patriarchal values of traditional Romanian society, in so far as the wisdom of this proverb connects the Christian aspiration for perfection and a happy eschatological end – doubly hinted at by the supposedly "heavenly" origin of beating and its likely aim – with the most appropriate means to teach one a life that steers clear of transgression and sin, ultimately of the deadly sins. To put it otherwise, the proverb contends that beating can ensure the right moulding of the individual under, implicitly, the caring eye and corrective hand of a God-like father (figure). How can one dispute the wisdom enshrined in a proverb which both through its genre and through its *argumentum ad verecundiam*, the reference to heaven, inspires authority?

Let us compare the Romanian saying with its counterpart in other cultures. French has two versions: "Le bâton sort du paradis" ("The rod is made in heaven") and "Une bonne raclée, c'est que du bon pour l'éducation" ("A good beating is good for upbringing").[33] Although only the latter is explicit about the educational value of beating, thereby implicating the beneficiary, the child, both versions legitimize violence and, in the former case, will do so in terms similar to the Romanian proverb, in an instance with cross-cultural resonance.[34] On the other hand, the English "Spare the rod and spoil the child" sounds dryly pragmatic in its reference to the pedagogic principle of physical coercion/correction applied for upbringing purposes.[35] German culture articulates a relatively vague principle as regards both the agent and the beneficiary: "Der Erfolg kommt nach dem Versohlen" (literally, "Success comes after belting") is a saying which derives from the verb phrase "jemandem den Hintern versohlen" (literally, "to belt someone's behind").[36] Whereas the German verb phrase only implicates the direction of application of the harsh punitive-educational measure – by the person in authority, probably the parent (most likely the father) or teacher (in the past, primarily male) to the disempowered, namely the young individual – the saying proper recalls the Romanian version through its indirect recourse to authority, here articulated as a *social* desideratum – as everybody strives for success – without any hint, however, at the actual actors engaged in this power game.

Is such proverbial beating *the* solution to misdemeanour as fathomed in (pre)modern times? Is the "heavenly" vindication of beating Christian or Romanian alone? Perhaps a partial answer to the latter query can be found in the Book of Proverbs:

> [11] My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
> Nor detest His correction;
> [12] For whom the LORD loves He corrects,
> Just as a father the son in whom he delights. (Proverbs 3:11-12 NKJV)

Such wisdom – encountered in deed, not just in words, at every turn in the Hebrew Bible – would perhaps explain the vetero-testamentary ethics responsible for the saddening story of Job.

While admittedly one proverb does not suffice to comprehend an entire genre – as suggests the proverbial swallow which alone cannot make a summer – the one discussed here

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[33] My gratitude to associate professors Dorina Donea and Sergiu Miculescu for the linguistic clarifications.

[34] There is, however, no Italian equivalent to the Romanian proverb. In her comparative study of Romanian and Italian proverbs, Oana Sălișteanu notes the glaring absence from Italian culture of proverbs which legitimize violence, especially the matrimonial one. Many thanks to assistant professor Marinela Vrămuleț for bringing this study to my attention.

[35] A relatively remote version of the Romanian proverb occurs in the Spanish saying "El padre para castigar y la madre para tapar" ("The father for castigation and the mother for protection"), which strictly defines along gender lines the role of parents in their children's upbringing. Thank you to Ms Adelina Vartolomei, MA for the linguistic clarification.

[36] Many thanks to associate professor Maria Muscan for the linguistic clarification.

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can at least offer a caution. Wisdom as encapsulated in folklore may be a fine topic to address, but it is not necessarily and self-evidently the right path to take in life. Proverbs are, after all, notorious for the violence they extol and for circulating ideas and stereotypes of a society that is never benign to all their members (or non-members) but is rather inclined to silence those marginalized and demonized on various grounds. Or else how could we account for an English saying like "A bridle for the tongue is a necessary piece of furniture," whose domestic reference frames an implicit story of the domestic – if biblically sanctioned and socio-politically pervasive – silencing of women? Likewise, how could we account for a modern piece of wisdom like "A man is as old as he feels, and a woman as old as she looks," so candid about one of patriarchal society's gendered double standards, as is the not so contemporary "A worthy woman is the crown of her husband" (with no reciprocity)?

Conclusion

Though extremely brief, the folkloric corpus in this investigation can indicate certain aspects pertinent to my larger research project on Christian family values. In order to grapple with them, however, a brief historicization is necessary. On the one hand, before the 16th century (the "birth date" of Romanian folklore) popular creations had provided an interface between the community (as a social macro-entity) and family (as the concrete milieu for individuals in their formation years and throughout their lifetime, which nevertheless functions as a domestic replica of the social macrocosmos) able to mediate both the (social) outlook and power relations in society. In most cases analyzed here, the immediate situational context is the family. On the other hand, the moral values – in a broad (social) sense or in a narrow (Christian) one – which folklore crystallizes and promotes necessarily reflect the imperatives of the age as well as of the patriarchal culture that generates and disseminates it. Accordingly, we may find in diverse folkloric genres and species the Christian valorization of social virtues such as selflessness, just as, in cases we investigate in the sequel to this paper, we may also notice the castigation of the deadly sins, especially when they are manifested within the family, whose morals and even existence they threaten.

Even the brief analysis undertaken here suggests, however, that certain Christian virtues such as the propensity for self-sacrifice are gender specific. Simply stated, especially women are expected – or rather tacitly persuaded to accept as natural – to manifest such virtues when (a member of) their family is at risk. There is no intimation that a man will adopt the Christic – "emasculated"? – condition for a comparable cause.

Provisionally, then, I would like to argue that in Romanian folklore family values – doubly legitimized by patriarchal society and Christianity – will insist on the necessary compliance of individuals with biblical models such as establishing a family and observing domestic hierarchy. Folklore's famed conservatism permits popular creations to become an inventory of virtues and transgressions which society has classified thus and subsequently imposed as the respectively positive or negative yardstick for individuals to measure their conduct against. The traditional oral and collective performance of diverse folkloric creations, as well as the ways of their generation and intergenerational transmission (in the sense of "learning" how to perform them), affords the practical context within which to disseminate the carefully designed pattern of values – using a template that strives to resist change both aesthetically and in terms of the moral imperatives it enshrines.

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