A Metaphoric Intercession in *Mioriţa* and *The Argeş Monastery*

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1. The Issue of Origins

Many of the critics who wrote about the Romanian ballads have been concerned with their origins. Adrian Fochi, for example, sees in *Mioriţa* a connection with burial practices: "Imaginea prin care se exprimă poetic *tema nunţii mioritice* derivă din cântecul executat la înmormântările tinerilor necăsătoriţi" ['The image expressing in poetic form *the theme of the mioritic wedding* derives from the chant performed at the burial of unmarried young people'] (Fochi 1964: 529). For Marcel Olinescu, the shepherd's acceptance of death is "un act de credinţă religioasă păgână" ['an act of pagan religious faith'] (Olinescu 1986: 95–96) taking us back to the Dacian messengers who were willing to die to take their message to Zalmoxis, their God. Ion Itu expresses the belief that the murder of the shepherd has ritual significance with ancient undertones (see Itu 1994: 56).

Those who wrote about the idea of sacrifice show similar concerns. Paul Brewster begins his essay *The Foundation Sacrifice Motif* by saying: "One of the most widespread of superstitions is undoubtedly the belief that the immuring of a human victim in an edifice under construction ensures its permanence" (Brewster 1996: 36). He explains the legends that continued to be told: "The discovery in later years [i. e. in nineteenth century] of skeletons at spots where immurement is reputed to have taken place furnishes grim testimony to the veracity of such legends and traditions" (Brewster 1996: 37). In his article "Master Manole and the Monastery of Argeş", Mircea Eliade believes that the foundational sacrifice has its source in a cosmogonic myth of creation: "The exemplary model for all these forms of sacrifice is very probably a cosmogonic myth, that is, the myth that explains the Creation by the killing of a primordial Giant" (Eliade 1996: 83). And he adds: "It is in this mythical horizon that we must seek the spiritual source of our construction rites" (Eliade 1996: 83; see also Eliade 1970: 183–184).

These myths and traditions may have contributed some elements to the origins of the two ballads. What I am proposing, however, is to look at the texts in the light

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of their narrative development. In this cognitive approach to literature, literary texts are mnemonic interpretations of the world. In this case I take as a model the example of *La Chanson de Roland*, which began with a historical event: The death of Roland at the battle of Roncevaux in 778. In this battle, the Frankish rearguard was attacked and annihilated by the Basques (and, according to Arabic sources, the Saracens). The encounter, from a historical point of view apparently insignificant, was taken up by folk poets, singers, and jongleurs and became a foundational epic. This development can be explained at least in part by the fact that people were impressed by Roland's behavior and by his death. Having this in mind, I assume that unusual circumstances in which a shepherd was killed and the rudiments of a story about an immurement of a woman acted as prompting of talented anonymous poets to create narratives and begin the tradition of the two stories that became our ballads. As in the case of *The Song of Roland*, there must have been a strong public support to sustain the tradition.

Menéndez Pidal explains the remarkable phenomenon of *The Song of Roland*:

> On chantait de mémoire, et le jongleur faisait travailler sa mémoire bien plus que sa plume ['One would sing from memory, and the jongleur would make his memory work much more than his pen'] (Menéndez Pidal 1960: 57).

He also writes that the numberless variations

> sont l'essence même, la vie de la poésie qui s'inscrit dans la mémoire collective et qui se perpétue à travers les générations. Cette variabilité ou fluidité du texte est le fruit de l'action créatrice de tous les individus qui ont anonymement collaboré à la diffusion et à la transmission de l'oeuvre anonyme… [are the very essence, the life of the poetry that enters the collective memory and that survives during generations. This variability or fluidity of the text is the result of the creative action of all the individuals who anonymously collaborated to the diffusion and transmission of the anonymous work…] (Menéndez Pidal 1960: 60).

Gheorghe Vrabie, speaking about *Mioriţa*, appears to propose a similar model and to emphasize the initiative of the anonymous collaborators: "Interpreţii anonimi au dat dovadă de o mare capacitate la coordonarea narativă a evenimentelor legendare, imprimându-le o axă tematică" ['The anonymous interpreters demonstrated a great capacity to coordinate legendary events imparting to them a thematic axis'] (Vrabie 1983: 8–9). Elsewhere he explains:

> Vorbind despre autorul anonim ca mare *meşteşugar* în arta de a zice balada folclorică, se impune de la sine conceptul de interpretare, în locul obişnuiţilor termeni de inspiraţie sau creaţie. [Speaking about the anonymous author as a great *craftsman* in the art of telling the folkloric ballad, it necessarily means adopting the concept of interpretation, in place of the usual terms of inspiration and creation] (Vrabie 1984: 12).

Both Menéndez Pidal and Vrabie appear to adumbrate a cognitive approach. In agreeing with the first I stress that "memory" represents not only remembering but also imagination and so I can applaud when he speaks of "creative action". As far as the second critic is concerned, I do agree with Vrabie when he insists that the anonymous contributors did not simply copy an original variant. I agree to assign a great value to the anonymous agents of dissemination, but not to discard the

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concepts of inspiration and creation. Craftsmanship and knowledge of the folkloric style are not enough. The anonymous authors in addition to having technical prowess had to be able to reach into the reservoir of metaphoric power and use metaphors to create the new visions that are evident in different variants. Every interpretation is also a transfiguration of reality or of a text. Consequently in the case of our ballads, I would propose that from the very beginning and through later developments the process is akin to a continuous creation and re-creation of the initial narrative seed.

Most critics would agree then that there is no copying. However, by bringing up the issue of origins, many have implicitly assumed that an original variant must have existed in some form, the seed that was planted in the imagination of the first singer or singers. We do not know how advanced the original variant was, but while it probably was not as advanced as the variants we have today, it must have been a creative narrative and a mnemonic product of inspiration as well as craftsmanship.

2. The Role of Fate

The folk creators while talented lived in a universe where similar stories issued from popular imagination and common beliefs and consequently they incorporated some of those beliefs in their work. And the dominant belief that emerges from the two ballads, one that modulated the universe of the singers in overwhelming fashion, is the belief in fate. To repeat Hektor's words in *The Iliad*: "No man is going to hurl me to Hades, unless it is fated,/ But as for fate, I think that no man has yet escaped it" (Homer 1951: 6.487-6.488). Reading the ballads we reach a tragic understanding that human beings make extraordinary efforts to come to terms with their fate over which they have no control in the physical world.

What I would like to explore is the role of fate and the attitude of the main characters in these two ballads and the relation between their behavior and the language of the poems. I wish to recall the concept I advanced in my 2000 article on *Miorița*: The metaphoric generating impulse in this ballad delineates a divorce in the cell of reality, life pulling toward language and ritual, and death heading toward physical failure and dissolution. This mitotic division is associated with a separation within the shepherd's persona between actor and spectator, that is, between the level of action and the level of speech (see Babuts 2000: 6). I believe that this separation could clarify a great deal of the difficulties in the interpretation of both poems.

This is especially clear in *Miorița*. When the shepherd speaks with the lamb, what he says, all the instructions for his burial, can only have meaning after his death. He tells the lamb to relay his request to the two murderers to bury him by the sheepfold so that he can hear his hounds and to place beside him the following:

Fluieraș de fag,	One small pipe of beech
Mult zice cu drag;	With its soft, sweet speech,
Fluieraș de os,	One small pipe of bone
Mult zice duios;	With its loving tone,
Fluieraș de soc,	One of elderwood,
Mult zice cu foc!	Fiery-tongued and good.
Vântul, când a bate,	Then, when the winds blow,

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Prin ele-a răzbate	They'll play on them so
Ş'oile s'or strânge,	All my listening sheep
Pe mine m'or plânge	Will draw near and weep
Cu lacrimi de sânge!	Tears, no blood so deep!
(Amzulescu 1967: 8–9).	(Snodgrass 1993: 13, 15)[7].

Although at the end, the ballad's verb tenses are in the future, the shepherd's eloquent speech gives the impression that the events in his vision are already occurring or have occurred. This assumption is warranted by the movement of our imagination, which brings the future on the stage of the present. Such transposition is not unprecedented: we encounter it in *The Iliad* in the scene beside the Skaian gates, when Andromache pleads with her husband to stay on the ramparts rather than go out to fight and be killed: " 'Dearest,/ your own great strength will be your death, and you have no pity/ on your little son, nor on me, ill-starred, who soon must be your widow' " (Homer 1951: 6.406–408). Already at this point in time she envisages her widowhood and we, as readers, have no trouble doing the same because we know it did happen. Hektor himself in his answer foresees the future: " 'For I know this thing well in my heart, and my mind knows it:/ there will come a day when sacred Ilion shall perish'" (Homer 1951: 6.447–6.448). What these words do is translate the inevitability of what is fated. It is important then to bring them into the equation of meaning when we think of the tendency of critics to tax the shepherd with passivity; and that is because one can hardly accuse Hektor of passivity. Andromache foresees Hektor's death and her widowhood and urges him to be cautious. Hektor acknowledges Andromache's divinatory powers and knows that no man escapes his fate:

> No man is going to hurl me to Hades, unless it is fated,/ but as for fate, I think that no man has yet escaped it/ once it has taken its first form, neither brave man nor coward (Homer 1951: 6.487–489).

Like Hektor, the shepherd, in similarly dangerous circumstances, accepts his fate, but unlike Hektor does not speak of fighting. And that is why *Mioriţa* is an epic song with a lyrical content: the role of fate creates an epic dimension but the ballad is not a regular epic because there is no fighting in it. Not in most versions. The prevalent expressions are "If this omen's true / If I'm doomed to death" (Snodgrass 1993: 13); or "De m'or omorî" ['If they kill me'], or "Dac'o fi să mor" ['If I should die']. However, there is a version from Dobrogea collected by Brăiloiu, in which the shepherd says "De n-o să pot răzbi/ Şi m'or omorî" ['If I cannot prevail/And they will kill me'] (Fochi 1980: 79). I adduce this example in which the shepherd alludes to a defensive stance to strengthen the idea that he does not necessarily mean to say that he would not defend himself, only that he believes the omen to be true and he accepts his death.

[7] We note in the original Romanian the image of the sheep weeping tears of blood. The image recalls a remarkable resemblance with the biblical image of Christ on the Mount of Olives, where "in anguish of spirit he prayed the more urgently; and his sweat was like clots of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22.44–45).

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Of primary significance is that once death is accepted, the future veers into the path of the present and is transfigured to acquire a new and deeper meaning. So Eliade is right when he speaks of "a new meaning on the ineluctable consequences of a destiny in course of fulfillment" (Eliade 1970: 252). We need to see that the intervention of fate is decisive in transposing the coordinates of the future onto the stage of the present. We have the impression that the shepherd's vision of the future is in fact taking place now. And the extraordinary discovery is that in *The Iliad*, this impression is even stronger: it goes past belief and reaches the status of a fact. When Andromache returns home she discovers the following:

> And as she came in speed into the well-settled household/ of Hektor the slayer of men, she found numbers of handmaidens/ within, and her coming stirred all of them into lamentation./ So they mourned in his house over Hektor while he was living/ still, for they thought he would never again come back from the fighting/ alive, escaping the Achaian hands and their violence (Homer 1951: 6.497–6.502).

In comparing this lamentation of the handmaidens to the sheep that weep tears of blood for their shepherd one can see the focus on the overwhelming power of fate. In a variant of *Mioriţa* from Moldova collected by C. Zamfir, at the end of his address to the ewe lamb, the shepherd says it clearly: "Ş-apoi pe mine iar mă-ţ plânge/ Mă-ţ plânge cu foc/ Că n-am avut noroc" ['And then you'll grieve for me also/ Will shed bitter tears/ For I had no luck'] (Fochi, 1964: 904). And luck inevitably depends on fate.

3. The Division in the Cell of Reality

But the consequences of fate's power involve a compelling corollary, what I called a division in the cell of reality, two forces that define human existence. One of these forces is, as we have seen, fate subjecting the human being to the laws of being mortal; the other is language that allows the hero to become spectator to his own life, and to speak and promote his view of events. Thus in the same scene of *The Iliad*, Hektor prays: "'Zeus, and you other immortals, grant that this boy, who is my son,/ may be as I am, pre-eminent among the Trojans'" (Homer 1951: 476–477). The irony is that his son is killed by the Greeks before he could reach the warrior age; similarly the shepherd is killed before he could marry an actual woman. The glory of Hektor emerges not just from the fact that he fought valiantly to the point that he could be proclaimed by posterity as the quintessential defender, but also from the fact that he could step aside, assume the role of a speaker, and speak about his life and death as a spectator. The body is dead, but language preserves the words and deeds of the individual in the memory of those around him and in the pages of the epic. Similarly, the shepherd is fated to die, but as a speaker his words in the ballad make it possible for him to ascend to unparalleled heights and overcome the cruel destiny. In the minds of future generations, the ballad is his life after death.

When we turn our attention to *The Argeş Monastery* we are faced with a very different narrative, but we can still identify the consequences of the division in the cell of reality. Eliade maintains the necessity of the sacrifice:

> To last, a construction (house, technical accomplishment, but also a spiritual undertaking) must be animated, that is, must receive both life and a soul. The

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> "transference" of the soul is possible only by means of a sacrifice, in other words, by a violent death. We may even say that the victim continues its existence after death, no longer in its physical body, but in the new body – the construction – which it has animated by its immolation (Eliade 1996: 83).

He adds that "human victims are also immolated to assure the success of an undertaking" (Eliade 1996: 83). Eliade's statement is clear and undoubtedly right, but it represents the point of view of the people that are in power, the sacrificers, it does not take into account the victim's opinion. We may recall what Nietzsche pointed out: "The sacrificial animal does not share the spectators' ideas about sacrifice, but one has never let it have its say" (Nietzsche 1983: 210, Bk.3 sec. 220). Again that is true, but what distinguishes our ballads is precisely the fact that they allow the victims to make a statement in their death and to assert their opposition to what in effect is barbarous and inhumane concept and practice[8].

Moreover, and this is significant again, both Manole and his wife do live after death, but not in the stone and mortar of the monastery; they live in the ballad that celebrates their life and death. Their physical bodies died, that was fated, but the language that they used and that has been reproduced in the poem lives to celebrate their lives. Similarly, in Euripides, after the initial fear and reluctance to die, Iphigenia says to her mother: "It is determined that I must die: but to do so gloriously – that is the thing I want to do, clearing myself from all taint of baseness" (Euripides 2002: 317). And her glory is to be henceforth associated, in the tradition, with the victorious Panhellenic expedition against Troy.

The victims are afraid of death but they also fear a disappearance into oblivion and thus hope that at least their memory will live in the minds of those left behind. Another compelling example is that of Cassandra, the Trojan prophetess, who accompanies Agamemnon on his victorious return home, as his slave, and foresees her impending death:

> Alas, poor men, their destiny. When all goes well/ a shadow will overthrow it. If it be unkind/ one stroke of a wet sponge wipes all the picture out;/ and that is far the most unhappy thing of all (Aeschylus 1953: lines 1322–1330).

The sponge is the instrument of oblivion, but in Aeschylus as well as in our ballads, language intervenes to counteract its nefarious consequences.

The first thing to note in the *The Argeş Monastery* is that supernatural forces are at work and that they constitute the presence of fate. The first element is the abandoned wall: the fact that dogs bark at the wall is an indication of something out of the ordinary. The next circumstance is that whatever the masons build by day collapses by night. Of course, the most important element is Manole's dream,

[8] Mircea Eliade concludes his article "Master Manole and the Monastery of Argeş" referring to both *The Argeş Monastery* and *Mioriţa*: "It is significant that these two creations of the Romanian poetic genius have as their dramatic motif a 'violent death' serenely accepted" (Eliade 1996: 87). This article, like many of Eliade's works, contains erudition and insights, but in the matter of this particular statement I cannot agree. For while it is true that in *Mioriţa* the shepherd accepts his death as something that has been decreed by fate and that he cannot avoid, in *The Argeş Monastery* neither Manole nor his wife Anna accepts the immurement without protesting, even though their opposition is doomed in advance.

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revealing to him that a sacrifice has to be made. It is here that Manole had a chance to oppose the forces of fate by rejecting the message. He tried afterwards to thwart the machinery of fate by praying to God to send rain and wind to stop his wife on her tracks. But the fact that in spite of his love for his wife he did not oppose the idea itself constitutes the real tragedy in the poem. One has to assume that his compliance with the dream's directions is part of the overwhelming power of fate. Still, it is precisely the immurement of his wife that has the cathartic appeal for the readers and represents the power that energizes the language of the poem. And the highest point of dramatic tension, the point at which the narrative reaches its climax, is the moment Manole prepares to hurl himself down from the roof and hears the muffled voice from the wall:

– Manoli, Manoli, Meştere Manoli! Zidul rău mă strânge, Ţâţişoara-mi plânge, Copilaşu-mi frânge, Viaţa mi se stinge! (Amzulescu 1967: 66).	"Manole, Manole; Good Master Manole; The wall's crushing me; My breasts cry hopelessly; It's crushing my baby; Life's snuffed out of me!" (Snodgrass 1993: 37).

The text conveys a musical resonance, and is fraught with the humble appeal of a woman who realizes the magnitude of her predicament and sends, before dying, her last message to her husband and to us. The tragedy is that in this metaphoric universe modulated by music, the human condition is ruled by the laws of the far-flung empire of fate. Manole's wife, Anna in the Alecsandri variant, knows that there is no way out, and she does not attempt physically to run from the wall (she could hardly do so), nevertheless she does not go quietly to her death. In the early stages of the building of the wall, when Manole suggested it was all a joke, "Că vrem să glumim" ['It's just in fun'] Anna believed it, but as she gradually realized what they were doing, she said, "This joke's no good, love". There is no doubt that she does not want to go along with the game. Her protest is as eloquent as it is humble. Her words are tinged with the knowledge that the wall and the hand of fate are upon her[9].

Manole's case is also remarkable, for although he follows the directions given to him in a dream, when he sees Anna coming he prays to God to intervene and send first a rain and then a great wind to stop her. To no avail. Another example of woman's determination and love for her husband. When she reaches the building site, Manole "half insane" goes through the motions of preparing her for the sacrifice. His mental agitation reaches a climactic frenzy at the moment when he

[9] There is no room here for a discussion of the acceptance of death by other sacrificial victims, but it is worth mentioning that in *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, Iphigenia makes both physical and moral efforts to fight against her executioners (See Aeschylus 1953: lines 238–245). In Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*, after the initial protest she does accept her fate, but here are her words addressed to her father that express her feelings opposing the sacrifice. She kneels before her father and entreats him: "As a suppliant I lay my body at your knees, the body she gave birth to. Do not kill me before my time: to see the light of day is sweet. And do not compel me to look upon the Underworld" (Euripides 2002: 297).

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hears the muffled voice of his beloved from inside the wall. He becomes weak and dizzy:

Manea se pierdea, Ochii-i se-nvelea Lumea se-ntorcea, Norii se-nvârtea (Amzulescu 1967: 66).	Manole sank, weak All his sight spun, twirling, The great clouds were swirling And the world turned, whirling (Snodgrass 1993: 37, 39)

Manole abandons this life a defeated man. However, it is at this point that the whole world seems to get involved in his tragic death and redeem his love for his wife. What happens is that nature itself participates in dramatic fashion to mark the accomplishment of his destiny and transforms the spot were he fell into a small fountain with salt water "fed by weeping". This event is not something superfluous something added as an afterthought, it is the very essence of the ballad. Speaking about *Mioriţa*, George Muntean calls the ballad "a hieroglyph of Romanian spirituality … synthetizing elements of fairy-tale, legends, laments, doinas, carols …" (Muntean 1986: 89). Perhaps, then, as an emulative gesture to rival the miracles that happen in fairy tales, the miraculous spring in *The Argeş Monastery* becomes a symbol that reinforces the legacy of Manole and Anna's love in the eyes of spectators and readers. Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga writes: "Manole has gone out of time and has attained, through sacrifice and achievement, to the stage where the dialogue with men ceases and death becomes transfiguration" (in comments to "Master Manole", 1976: *Caiet).* And she is right, there is transfiguration, but the dialogue with men, both spectators and readers, has just begun. The lives of Manole and Anna have ended and their bodies are dead, but the language they left behind both in the symbolic spring and in the words of the ballad continue to cultivate and enhance their image. The ballad is also a symbolic spring.

4. The Universe of the Ballads

A discussion about the kind of universe that emerges from *Mioriţa* has pertinent implications for both poems. Arguing against the idea of funerary rituals, Eliade writes:

> In the "Mioritza" the whole universe is transfigured. We are taken into a liturgical cosmos, in which Mysteries (in the religious sense of the term) are brought to fulfillment. The world proves to be "sacred", though at first sight its sacredness does not seem to be Christian in structure (Eliade 1970: 251).

And Lucian Blaga, for his part, writes: "Moartea, prin faptul că e echivalată cu o nuntă, încetează de a fi un fapt biologic, un epilog; ea e transfigurată, dobândind aspectul elevat al unui *act sacramental,* al unui prolog" ['Death, by the fact that it is made equivalent to a wedding, ceases to be a biological event, an epilogue; it is transfigured gaining the elevated aspect of a *sacramental act,* of a prologue'] (Blaga 1936: 120–121). Blaga thus adds to the impression that we are facing a world where supernatural occurrences are not only happening but are to be expected. Ion Itu appears to move in a more extreme direction when he believes that with the wedding

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the ballad has gone beyond the "mioritic" or human register: "Suntem trecuţi, va să zică, într-un registru în care realitatea turmelor şi realitatea oamenilor nu mai pot fi active" ['In other words, we have entered a register where the reality of sheep flocks and human reality can no longer be active'] (Itu 1994: 54). I believe, however, that the wedding draws its metaphoric power precisely because it has its roots in the reality of men and flocks, and in the reality of what the wedding represents for a young man who had hopes and dreams. The impression that we are facing a transcendent milieu does not deny or should not deny the reality of what we see and experience. And Itu's impression may only confirm indirectly that the effect of the metaphoric language is to transfigure nature and to oppose it to the physical death.

In what way, then, should we understand this world where nature evinces mysterious powers to contribute to the enhancement of human condition and mitigate the dire consequences of fate? Do the words "sacred" and "sacramental" accurately reflect its meaning? Perhaps we should see the universe in both ballads as being modulated by a vital principle with a tinge of religious spirit that requires unreserved reverence. The presence of guests, fiddlers, and priests at the "mioritic" wedding, for example, offers resemblances to an actual village wedding. So while the wedding unfolds in the dimension of myth, it still preserves its links to reality. It is remarkable then that while the stylistic resources of the folk singers are employed in the service of adding a touch of otherworldly to landscapes and events, their final brushstrokes complete a realistic picture of the Romanian countryside. The dynamics of the union of language and nature while containing some imaginary strands, it nevertheless creates a belief that the universe of the ballads represents an authentic reality.

Ion Itu appears to have chosen a somewhat different path. He believes that the reality of the site the Prince and the builders are searching to build the monastery is "o realitate mitică" ['a mythic reality'] (Itu 1994: 143). He distinguishes, in the monastery, a dwelling: "În el convieţuiesc, într-o armonie firească, două lumi complementare: lumea de aici, a ciobănaşului şi a pădurilor de alun de la marginea râului curgător … şi lumea de sus, a împăratului ziditor şi a apelor neclintite din veşnicie" ['In it live together, in a natural harmony, two complementary worlds: the world here below, the world of the shepherd and of hazel tree forests on the banks of the flowing river … and the world on high, of the emperor builder and of the stable eternal waters'] (Itu 1994: 147). Since he speaks about the monastery, I assume that the second of the two worlds represents a Christian spiritual world.

In the variant of *Mioriţa*, published by Vasile Alecsandri, it is true, we enter a world where a mythic realm rises from an every day Romanian countryside: "Pe-un picior de plai,/ Pe-o gură de rai" (Amzulescu 1967: 7) ['Near a low foothill/ At Heaven's doorsill'] (Snodgrass 1993: 11). What it creates is a metaphoric relation between the real and the otherworldly. And it begins by evoking a mountain area and a path with the word "plai" and then projects the path to "o gură de rai" a 'Heaven's doorsill,' in Snodgrass's rendering. We can call this beginning a mythical realm, but clearly what is understood is that we are led to a real mountain, but one that underwent a metaphoric transfiguration. Although the narrative begins in the realm of the mythic waters, it still flows in the bed of the real.

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In a comparison of *Mioriţa* with the Korean song "Arirang", Jeong Hwan Kim explains the word "plai" as follows: "Acest plai devine un spaţiu simbolic, prin care se reflectă eternitatea şi permanenţa poporului ..." ['This foothill becomes a symbolic space which reflects the eternity and permanence of the [Romanian] people …] (Kim 2013: 39). The remarkable insight does not, however, contradict the fact that the symbolic foothill has its roots in the soil of the real. In the abstract, Kim explains that both poems "arrive from the real life to the spirituality of transcendence, and [are] connected organically with the problems of daily life, identity and existence" (Kim 2013: 33).

The ewe lamb herself represents an oracular source of knowledge that functions in the register of myth. The crucial factor in her appearance is that she has the gift of speech. What is amazing is the fact that a reader is not likely to ask, how is it possible for a lamb to speak? While in a fairy tale one would not think to ask because such things are to be expected, here, it is the strength of the poem's narrative movement that makes it unnecessary to ask. And it is the dynamics of the real that allows the shepherd to turn to language to invoke a future and to assign a new meaning to his destiny.

In *The Argeş Monastery* it is true, God answers Manole's prayer and sends rain and wind into the world, but even this supernatural intervention has the aura of the real: "Fierce rain, foaming, swirled/ Into small streams gushing/ Till great torrents rushing,/ Made the waters swell" (Snodgrass 1993: 29). The metaphoric power of language creates the marvelous and the miraculous, but it also allows us to visualize a real rain. The Prince and his retinue searching for a site to build meet with a shepherd tending his flocks. This realistic detail would have been common and perhaps it still is. Immediately we are told about the uncanny behavior of the dogs, which bark at the wall and "howl as at the dead". They appear to have extrasensory perceptions and know there is something malevolent in those unfinished walls. Supernatural powers are clearly introduced in answer to Manole's prayer to bring rain and wind to stop his wife[10] and at the end when a spring gushed forth at the place where Manole fell. Supernatural forces infuse the very structure of the universe in the ballads with miraculous powers but they do not annul their compelling reality. An eloquent example of the strength of the realistic tonality in *Mioriţa* appears at the beginning of two variants from Moldova cited by Fochi:

Se-aude, se-aude,	Hear, hear,
Departe la munte,	Far on the mountain,
Gomăn, gomănaş,	Familiar clamor
Glas de buciumaş,	Sounds of a shepherd's horn

[10] I find one interesting detail in the Pamfile variant, in which Manole says to his wife: "–Taci, mândruţa mea,/ Că Dumnezeu vrea/ La el să te ia" ['Do not speak my love,/ God wants/ to call you to him'] (Amzulescu 1967: 114). Does that mean that Manole's fate and his wife's fate were linked to God's will? But if God wanted to have the wife sacrificed why would He send rain and wind to stop her? Perhaps in speaking this way, Manole wants to console her. It is just a formality. Another puzzling detail occurs in Teodorescu's variant, where the poet says that when Manole was about to jump from the roof God punished him and he fell to his death. Why would God punish Manole? Perhaps we may allow for the possibility that Manole had a choice whether to accede to the dream's directive. It is true, however, that in other variants these questions do not arise.

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De trei ciobănaşi, Gomăn, gomoning Oile pornind... (Fochi 1964: 904 and 906).	Of three little shepherds, Clamor, clamoring The sheep on the move …

The familiar sounds of the clamor and of the shepherd's horn accompanying the movement of the flocks are so perceptually strong that it would be impossible not to believe in their reality. In referring to Fochi's research and pointing out a proof of *Mioriţa*'s vitality, Eliade speaks of "*its capacity for adaptation to geographic and regional realities*: the names of characters, rivers, mountains, etc. reflect the areas in which the variants are recorded" (Eliade 1970: 240; original italics). And that is another factor that reinforces the impression of the real. To this I would add that the interaction between the protagonists is such that the dynamics of even the most unusual occurrences reinforces their reality. What can be more unusual that an ewe lamb that knows the future and speaks or more distant than the circumstances of Anna's immurement?

Yet, I believe that for a village audience, the words and the dynamics of the interaction among the characters would sound familiar. I quote below a few lines from a lamentation[11] of a mother for her son who died at the age of 21. The mother is at the cemetery and begins by asking her son to come out of the grave so that she could see him again: "Ieş la mine, ieş afară,/ Să ce vadă muma iară" ['Come to me, come out,/ Your mom to see you again'] (Lifa 1998: 23). Then she recalls some happy moments:

Muma mult s-o bucurat Că puiu s-o însurat. Ş-o fost muma făloasă, C-o adus, puiu noră-n casă. Dumiedzău s-o îndurat, O ficuţă dă i-o dat, Dar după patru ani dă dzâle, S-o dus puiu dî la mine (Lifa 1998: 25).	Mom was very happy When my child got married. And mom rejoiced, proud That he brought home a bride. By God's mercy He had a little girl, But after four years, My child went away from me.

My prosaic translation is hardly suited to render the tenderness and music of the original, but here are the things I notice. Like the old mother of the shepherd, who uses the diminutive "ciobănel", the mother here uses the endearing word "puiu" or child (I do not know a better English equivalent) even though her son was a grown-up. She addresses her son, but speaks in such a way that what she says is meant also for a larger audience. This again does recall the mother in *Mioriţa*, who searches for her son and describes him to "one and all". More importantly here the

[11] Gheorghe Lifa, who is no longer with us, collected and published many of these lamentations called "bocete", that is lamentations performed at wakes for the dead persons or heard in the cemetery. Although they exist in other Romanian villages, Lifa's collection is from my native Uzdin, a Romanian village in Banat that was part of former Yugoslavia and is now in Serbia. As a kid, and on one occasion even later in life, I heard some of them and I can say that in the words of the women wailers or mourners these lamentations become very moving.

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mother begins her lamentation by asking the son to come out of the grave. From a practical point of view the mother knows very well that this is not possible, but the request is familiar to those who hear her and for them what she asks is something they understand very well; in their universe this is not "fantastic".

In another piece described as a song of dawn, three women shout to feminine beings in the sky, which in the tradition are conceived to represent dawn. The song is related to the dead person that is on the table at that house: In this case the dead person was 23 years old:

> Colo sus la ceri/ Este-un noricel,/ Dar nu-i noricel,/ Îi un sufleţel,/ Tot a lu Gligore./ Dă să să scoboară,/ La măicuţa-n poală/ Să să givănească.
>
> High above in the sky/ we see a small cloud,/ But it's not a cloud,/ It's a little soul,/ It's Gligore's soul./ Trying to come down,/ To his mother's lap/ And talk to her (Lifa 1998: 127).

Clearly a cloud is not a soul and it cannot come down. But again this is an expression of belief that nature can participate and transfigure the reality of death. Although they are very different in scope, these lamentations and songs appear to show a certain affinity with the world of *Mioriţa*, where a lamb speaks and birds are fiddlers at the shepherd's wedding. As far as I know, the village from which these songs and lamentations were collected does not have any variant of *Mioriţa*. What I claim then is not any specific relation in the creative development of the ballad. Rather, I point out that these excerpts emerge from a world in which real people use their imagination to negotiate the transition from everyday to the mythic dimension of the otherworldly. In fairy tales, people, objects, landscape, and animals bear the mark of the fantastic. In the excerpts we have seen and especially in our ballads this is not the case. The mythic realm emerges as a corollary to the strong and compelling human desire to overcome the consequences of fate and to reach a modicum of victory through the medium of language and metaphor. That is why the mythic strands in the two ballads appear bathed in the light of everyday reality.

I would agree to see in each of the two ballads two worlds, but I see them in a different light. The realistic world of the Romanian countryside, and the dynamics of the realistic exchanges between the shepherd and the ewe lamb and between Manole and his wife act as a foundation to the world's mythical dimension and thus render it familiar. What is remarkable then is that in *The Argeş Monastery* physical death, the mark of the real, issues from the theme of a myth, which is infused with the power of fate, while in *Mioriţa*, the triumph of language and nature, the metaphoric intervention, emerges from the reality of the drama and of the surrounding nature. And the mythic dimensions of the world are created by the metaphoric intervention of language in the wake of the original reality of death. However, one has to proceed with caution here, because the myth of the foundation sacrifice may have been originally just as real as the murder of the shepherd. And if so, then, Anna's immurement is no longer a myth and the mythic dimension is created like in *Mioriţa*, by the intervention of language and nature. This circumstance I believe is applicable and reinforces the affinity between the two poems. However, regardless of how we view immurement, we cannot fail to see that in both ballads, the two worlds, the real and the mythic depend on each other, may even interpenetrate. I conclude that the

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metaphoric grandeur at the end of *Mioriţa* and the depth of the mythical horizon in *The Argeş Monastery* are founded on landscapes and dialogues that echo the known and are endowed by real people and by the authenticity of their love.

Moreover, my central claim, with reverberations on an ontological level, is that in both ballads the division in the cell of reality remains in effect, stronger than ever. The shepherd, Anna and Manole (and the nine masons) die and their deaths pull toward the destruction of the physical body, whereas life moves in the direction of language and metaphoric miracle. The authors and the singers of the ballads created a universe with physical and spiritual dimensions in which the fate of individuals is to die but in which the ontological level allows the intervention of language and nature to transfigure their life and death. This universe is thus created by imagination but it reflects the real universe in which language and its metaphoric resources are operative. After all, our actual universe does contain in addition to physical reality also people's imagination, feelings, and thoughts. Both, in the actual universe and in the one created in the ballads, the mythic and the real vibrate in unison, but language takes the initiative especially when death occurs and the individual can no longer act. This intervention may not always be favorable (we are all familiar with the villains of history) but in our ballads it is.

5. The Effect of the Metaphoric Intercession

What I see, then, in both ballads is the fact that nature intervenes in favor of human beings and against the antagonistic fate. *And it is essential to understand that nature's participation and contribution issue from a union with the metaphoric energy of language.* This union appears as an act of metaphoric intercession to preserve, through images of the natural world and through words, the memory of human beings for posterity.

In *The Argeş Monastery* the rain and the wind, and the miraculous spring contribute to redeem Manole and his wife. The appearance of the spring where Manole fell is a good example that shows how language and nature act in unison to intercede in favor of the protagonists and to interpret and define their destiny.

In *Mioriţa* the effect of the metaphoric intercession is most clearly seen towards the end of the poem when the shepherd conceives of his death as a cosmic wedding. The landscape, the birds of the sky, the sun and the moon, firs and maple trees, and the high mountains as well, all participate in the act of celebrating the shepherd's wedding. He tells his favorite ewe lamb to relate his wedding to the other sheep:

Că m-am însurat Cu-o mândră crăiasa, A lumii mireasă; Că la nunta mea A căzut o stea; Soarele şi luna Mi-au ţinut cununa (Amzulescu 1967: 9).	Say I've gone to marry A princess – my bride Is the whole world's pride. Say a star fell, bright, For my wedding night; Sun and moon came down To hold my bridal crown (Snodgrass 1993: 15).

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The overwhelming impression is that the whole cosmos participates to transfigure his death into the sacrament of marriage. The shepherd who must die before having a chance to get married envisages his cosmic wedding as a triumph of the metaphoric field over death. The fact that the shepherd asks the ewe lamb not to tell his old mother that at his wedding a star fell is clear indication that the initial description of the wedding meant to describe his death. And I agree with Petru Caraman who points out that this allegory does not conceal death: "nu numai că nu-i aşa, dar ea o dă şi mai mult pe faţă, insistând asupra ei!" ['not only it does not do so [does not conceal death] but it discloses it well, insisting on it!'] (Caraman 1983: 86). The purpose of the allegory, then, is to express the shepherd's love for a bride he would have wanted to have and an appreciation for the natural world he lived in. His consolatory victory is thus a gesture of annulling the consequences of a cruel fate. This is what Eliade has emphasized also, namely that the shepherd "transmutes" his misfortune "into a majestic and spectacular sacramental mystery that, in the end, *enables him to triumph over his own fate*" (Eliade 1970: 254). Comparing *Mioriţa* and the Korean song *Arirang*, Kim also speaks of a victory: "Acceptarea morţii înseamnă ideea unirii cu natura în concepţie panteistică şi victoria in faţa morţii" ['The acceptance of death means the idea of union with nature in a pantheistic conception and victory in the face of death'] (Kim 2013: 39). The difference is that I emphasize not a pantheistic or a purely sacred impulse but the intervention of language in creating the union with nature. To understand the full impact of this symbolic strategy one can think of the way death (or any bad encounter) has been seen, in a historical perspective, by people, mostly farmers and shepherds, in Romanian village[12]. Through the intermediary of his sheep, the shepherd opposes fate and appeals to the people of the village, especially to those who would preserve his memory and sing about his life and death to join him in this enterprise.

And the dynamics of this appeal has its raison d'être not only in rural areas. When reported by witnesses, which is most of the time, death with its phenomenological relation to martyrdom transcends the limits of the real and reaches an exalted metaphoric level. Thus it is that in three works of Western literature, *Becket* by Jean Anouilh, *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot and *Une Mort Héroïque* by Charles Baudelaire, the spectators share in the recognition of Becket and Fancioulle's (the mime's) achievements against the background of their impending death. In my analysis of Baudelaire's prose poem, I asked the question: "How can failure [that is death] confer upon the mysteries of religion and upon the mystique of art their most enduring prestige?" (Babuts 1997: 84). And the answer I offered is that "The martyr and the artist confront death, succumb, and fail to complete the immediate task at hand. Yet, in the eyes of those who are still living, the apparent failure turns into triumph" (Babuts 1997: 84). In *Mioriţa*, the shepherd is destined to die before his time. His death can be considered a failure, a defeat, on the action level or the level of fate. But on the level of language, it is his testament and the interpretation of those who are left behind that give meaning to what happened. The

[12] In my native village, when someone died as a result of an accident, for example, I would hear expressions like "aşa i-o fost să-i fie" ['that's how it was meant to be'] or "aşa i-o fost soarta" ['that was his/ her fate'].

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passion of his mother who is searching for her son is ample proof that the shepherd is loved but the mourning of the sheep also hints at the people in the villages who would grieve for him. Similarly, after succeeding in building the monastery, Manole is fated to die, but those who have seen him and his wife die or have heard the story and nature itself confer upon them the nimbus, the radiant light of martyrdom.

The level of fate and the level of language appear to face each other in an antagonistic stance. They appear so especially when the physical body dies and life gravitates toward language and meaning both as interpretation of, and opposition to, what is fated. Thus the act of intercession begins to take shape and form in the creation and dissemination of the story of the shepherd and the coming to life of the ballad. In *The Argeş Monastery* the only spectators, the journeymen, are not sympathetic to Manole and Anna's plight, but that is because of the fact that the alternative would have had them in danger. We can be sure that those who witnessed the immurement including those in the prince's retinue and of course those who heard about it, would be moved by it. It is worth mentioning in this respect the following: Krstivoj Kotur analyzes the corresponding Serbian ballad of *The Building of Scutari*, and points out "How the moral judgment of the collective [Serbian] people develops concerning the family of the Mrnyavcheviches" who were instrumental in sacrificing the young wife of one of the brothers (see Kotur 1996: 142). As the ballad is disseminated the foundation sacrifice is seen in a new perspective and the sympathy for the victims is doubled by condemnation of the perpetrators[13]. In reading our ballads, the feeling that accompanies the narrative is both one of sadness, thinking of the death of the shepherd, of Anna and Manole, and also one of triumph in the cathartic wave of recognition of our mortality. We may recall Pascal's dictum:

> Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble that that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this (Pascal 1958: 97).

The insight is applicable to both poems[8]. And so is this statement by George Muntean:

> both the common people and the intellectuals recognize in this masterpiece [*Miorița*] of the popular genius their own way of existing in the world and the most efficient retort they can give to destiny whenever it appears hostile and tragical, as it happens so often (Muntean 1986: 86).

[13] Vuk Karadžič recorded a Serbian ballad that narrates a similar foundation sacrifice and sent it to Jacob Grimm to see it. Grimm, who liked it very, sent it to Goethe. The latter "was disgusted by what he considered the barbarity of human sacrifice" (Karadžič 1996: 3). His reaction suggests that he took the side of the victims.

[8] In a very different approach, Sharon King offers the idea that perhaps the primary theme of *The Argeş Monastery* is "the conception of art: what its limits and limitations are, and what they should be. The ballad seems to value and applaud the artistic creation of the monastery … But ultimately, it makes it clear, there is a high price to be paid for such great art" (King 1996: 100–101).

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We as readers react with sadness in seeing the death of the shepherd, of Anna and Manole and recognize in their fall our own predicament in the universe. The ballads delineate the capacity to triumph over the implacable fate.

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Abstract

Analyzing *Mioriţa* and *The Argeş Monastery* from a cognitive point of view, we discover in each a division in the cell of reality. Life pulls away toward language and ritual; death heads toward the dissolution of the physical body. The individual is defeated by his or her fate, but what remains behind, for posterity, is the language that preserves his or her memory. And nature's participation issues in the form of a union with the energy of language and appears as a metaphoric intercession in favor of the victims of fate.

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