

THE MAGIC OF SUPERSTITIONS AND POPULAR BELIEFS

Professor PhD Violeta NEGREA

”Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University of Bucharest

Associate Professor PhD, Mirabela Rely Odette CURELAR

“Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu-Jiu

ABSTRACT. Popular superstitions claim that a human-vampire automatically changes after death into a dead-undead or a walking corpse, as the nowadays zombies, except when it is freed of death. In the mythical concept the dead-undead has a bigger demonic power than he had in his life. The mythology of death includes an interesting part called demonology which is the most complex one in the Romanian mythology. The explanation is mainly due to the cultural impact that the early migratory peoples had on the native settled Romanians, whose mythology was mainly demonological. As the old magic folk superstitions and beliefs make the sources of all ancient sciences, it is understandable that archaic medicine was nothing but a complex of enigmatic magic formulas. Nations were controlled by the magic of superstitions and popular beliefs which have subjected them through the power of mind. The struggle between the forces of good and evil that last for centuries of civilization made man the slave of popular legitimate or illegitimate superstitions.

KEY WORDS: catharsis, demonology, demonic, undead, dead-undead, mythology, incantation.

Catharsis, the ancient concept, defines the community capacity to purify a place haunted by the undead, vampires and to destroy their evil actions on humans.

"In the Romanian language, the word "undead" comes from the Latin „*striga*” for "scream", which means "owl charming" or "evil spirit". "The Shout" cries at night and calls the name or calls on those whom it wants to destroy. The superstition is widespread, especially in Transylvania, for they say that when the "The shout" walks alone, hale and hearty children are left breathless in their swing ". [1]

As stated by Theodor Burada, the term "undead" is generally used in the Macedonian and Dacian-Romanian language, and "vampire" belongs to the Megleno-Romanian language. Ghosts are also mythical creatures, sexually inferior, which play an important role in Romanian demonology. Mythological literature acknowledges two varieties of undead: the so-called "living undead" and "dead undead" more exactly "man-undead" and "dead-undead".

The difference between them matches their malignant structure and human capacity to do evil. The undead were supposed to meet three nights annually, in a kind of vampire tricks: on the night of Sântoader, on Saint George night and Saint Andrew night, respectively. On the night of Sântoader people-undead turned into the horses of Sântoader, a kind of centaurs that roamed the community settlement for punishing girls and women who did not use to honor their holy name

day. Consequently, they were hiding away the forks, the needles, forks and loom rakes from the horses of Sântoader who might have used them to stab them with.

On the day of St. George undead-people played round dances on air over ruined church towers, abandoned cemeteries or deserted places. In Retezat Mountain, the same day was celebrated by ghosts and vampires who came from long distances, riding on tongues of birds or sweepers and grouped together in gangs. Against these the passers clawed magic circles on earth, which included powers to defend their evil.

On the day of Saint Andrew the dead who turned undead used to roam on their own and bring punishment to the people's sins. The ones who feared and acknowledged superstitions tried to defend themselves by anointing all the house entries (doors, windows, other entries, chimneys) with garlic and turning all the dishes upside down to prevent ghosts enter the house and to make them undead.

If one considers the demonology of death the most important category of undead they were dead-undead that were suppose that evil demons without taking into consideration their origin: either people-demon, born undead, or people-no demon, that become undead by dying.

Popular superstitions claim that a human-undead by birth changes automatically after death into a dead-undead or a walking corpse, in a similar way as zombie folk creatures unless he was previously released from death. In terms of the mythical interpretation, the dead-undead demon has a bigger power than he had in life.

Romulus Vulcănescu specifies that "evil or ghost is metamorphosed into a black dog." In the same work, in the chapter "The mythology of death" and the subchapter "The archetypal demons of death", Vulcănescu explains that "ghosts are the originally genuine staged, the primitive magical-mythical reflection of the human community deep changes in mentality until the beginning of the twentieth century. Poltergeists, pricolicii, tricolicii and trolls are subsequent stages, becoming more complex but, paradoxically, lowly in terms of revealing their degree of demonic funeral powers. Demonology of their involution (the undead ghost and from them to the werewolf and tricolici) corresponds to an artificial process of violent demonization that cancels all their funeral functions (...).

Their fantastic embodiments, the ghosts and poltergeists are sexually created. At least this is what we find in superstitions, beliefs, spells and mythical tales. Pricolicii and tricolicii are asexual creatures that could signify that their demonology is older in terms of mythological interpretation. They can be the result of an ancient demonology of ghosts and poltergeist that enacted a newer demonology, after having lost their androgynous feature by sexuality.”[2]

Simion Florea Marian, in his study the funeral of Romanian people tells us in Chapter XXXI about the customs and traditions of Romanians to exhume dead at a certain time, as it follows: three years after the death of a child, five years from the death of a young person and seven years after the death of an old man. In some areas of the country this ritual is carried out after seven years for all the deceased of any age.

„ When a dead is found not to have disintegrated, it needs to be dug several times, on different occasions when it is also priest serviced and alms offered.

Most commonly in Moldova and the Romanian county the tradition says that, if the dead is found the face down when dug, it means that the deceased remained undead, so he needs soon that his heart be penetrated by a yew stick or that his heart be taken out from his body and used to brush all the family members to prevent them from early death.”. [3]

Theodor Burada in The tradition of Romanian people at funerals says:

"The belief in ghosts is widespread in Romania, to most of the Romanians, and also in Northern Transylvania, Banat and Hungary ... When I visited the village of Zărnești in Transylvania several women, coming from Poiana Mărului, next to the community, believed that the rain did not stop because of a dead young girl who was buried recently. They considered it a hobgoblin, and they walked to the grave and dug up the corpse, and pierced its heart, eyes and chest with iron fork and then they turned the corpse upside down and buried her again. "[4]

A widespread ritual for the wedding ceremonies in Romania is closely connected to after-death traditions. We can distinguish two different areas: the first that comprises Moldova, Muntenia and a fairly large region of northern Transylvania which comply with the custom of symbolic marriage of the dead young singles with a living person; in the second area, that comprises the rest of Transylvania, Banat and an additional trans-Carpathian region of Oltenia, the posthumous marriage partner is a tree or a lance. On the occasion, songs are played on bridal symbol of death. Such songs are confirmed by different other nations, although their range is more limited than in Romania. Some of these songs for example, the Fir tree and Dawn songs are dedicated to this tradition and are certainly traced back from pre-Christian archaic times.

The image of "mioritical wedding"¹ has the meaning of resistance against the power of evil dead "i.e. Mioritical wedding is thus a means of defending against ghosts. Until the Middle Ages, Romanians considered certain dead as Daimon², that is either protectors or destroyers of the family, genealogy, village communities, tribal community, city or the market place of the city.

The mythology of death includes an interesting part called demonology which is the most complex one in the Romanian mythology. The explanation is mainly due to the cultural impact that the early migratory peoples had on the native settled Romanians, whose mythology was mainly demonological. The local indigenous demonology was originally influenced by migratory peoples that carried out scarce social and economic relations with the local natives. Their demonology was focused on the divine protection of their burial places that indirectly contaminated them. Demonology of death reveals the Romanian side of interest on the mystery of death.

The ancient Greek and Roman mythology that indicate two categories of demons (or geniuses) higher (divine) or lower (infernal) develops in Romanian mythology into two categories of demonic creatures. One category refers to creatures that have human aspect or demonic aspect (spirits). The demonic creatures come from the dead people that were born and had a life marked equally by evil or blessed predestination. During their life and life after death, their spirit act according to their genuine character provided by their Daimon as it appear in the works of folklorists. Considering the posthumous actions against demons, it follows that their

¹ the adjectival extension of the Romanian folk ballad named, Miorita

² In religion, mythology, occultism and folklore, a demon (or daemon, daimon) is often described as a supernatural personality spirit. The ancient Greek explain the word "daimon" - demon as a representation for "spirit" or "divine power", like the Latin "genius". Some dictionaries Greek etymology of the word shows that the derivation of the verb "daiesthai" - "to divide, distribute." to distinguish between Greece and the interpretation of the current concept of Christianity, this formula is used as a "daemon" or "daimon" in instead of "demon".

unpredictable effects can be set off by rites of after death mutilation, extirpation and incineration (the heart) and, sometimes, post-sepulchral decapitation that occur within 3 or 7 years, their number was kept as fatidic.

The Romanian folklore asserts that evil demons cannot be persuaded only by words and their bodies purified. They cannot be disciplined to give up their evil work, but only destroyed through violent purification rites dedicated to ghosts and demons purification. The Demons are considered living corpses after death causing terror, harm, disease and even death in the family, within a certain time after the funerals. The evil consequences were considered to clear only by the exhumation of the dead by the family members, in a ritualistic night. The corpse used to be decapitated or his heart taken out and pierced with a inflamed iron and then boiled and eaten by family members, who believed that the operation gave them power to make the ghost of the dead harmless.

In terms of mythology, death drives the soul to the spiritual world, i.e. the other world where an after-life existence will be carried out according to either sinful or decent life that the dead had on earth. The after-death integration of the soul to the community it belonged to is carried out if the due funeral rituals are regularly accomplished in good conditions. This is still the traditional belief backed by folk customs of the Romanian people.

In his writings, Mircea Eliade presents the most popular aspects of this phenomenon called strigoism. It is to outline the relationship that the ghost-dead develops to the woman-undead, Simina, and also to the painter Egor, who is known in the Romanian folklore as *Zburător*, (the flying man, or the Winged) who uses to go into young girls bedroom and seduce them.

Referring to the myth of the Winged, Ivan Evseev in the folklore symbols (p. 147) comments the following:

« The mythological dragon aspects in the Romanian folklore represent the dangers standing in the way of pilgrims love. Demon's wild Eros occurs when imbalance of desire and restraint is settled, when willingness and instinct dominate.

Also known commonly as the kite soldier, glue, evil hour, he is a ghost, a ghost that comes not from the human world, where true love can be experienced, where longing makes sorrow turn into blue song, the Winged represents chaos and death that cuts off free from intellect, under the pressure of uncontrollable erotic instincts, may be taken as a beloved and desired creature similarly as different other envoy of the underworld (poltergeists, undead, vampires, fairies, etc.).

The Winged penetrates the human cosmos borders only if a breach appears in the human personality structure ... Although he is a loving person, he remains a ghost, a "non-life" and "non-death" entity (Iosif Cheie – Pantea), that appear also as Hyperion in Eminescu's poem.» [5]

In Mircea Eliade's book, *Miss Christina*, the character bearing the same name, recites to Egor lyrics from *The Evening Star* written by Eminescu in the nights when she "visits" him: "I am the Evening Star from beyond the world ..." Egor hears her voiceless words and smiles melancholically, ... "And I want to be your bride!" When Egor tells her that she is dead, Christina replies, laughing: "Do not judge me so quickly, my love!", exclaimed Christina. ... "I come from elsewhere ... But I'm still a woman, Egor! Even though there are still plenty of love star girls, what about falling in love with me? ... I can take your frozen mind and dry your language. I can have your soul at my finger power for ever, Egor! ... I can easily charm you, and take everything

I want from you ... You will follow me like all the others ... And there are many of them, Egor ... I'm not afraid of your begging. You're nothing but a poor living man. I come from elsewhere ... You need to understand, no one else can do. ... You mustn't kill my love ... I want to get engaged with you soon and you will see me differently and you will love me then, Egor. "[6]

V. I. Propp believes that "incubii" and "sucubii" (the name that are known for the erotic demons, male and female in the Middle Ages in Romania) represent the souls of the dead: "Two of the major instincts, namely - hunger and sexual greed that are associated to the dead, can come to life due to their capacity to exist independently." [7]

Archaic communities experienced the commonly accepted vision on death as an erotic kidnapping operation carried out by the ones coming from the kingdom of the dead. The souls of the dead men pursue women, while women's souls are associated to death. The spirits from the world beyond try to seduce living women and men as well and have sex with them. The death is affiliated to the airman nocturnal visits in the Romanian beliefs. The Winged has a female equivalent, known as winged woman.

Romulus Vulcănescu in his Romanian mythology writes that "the Winged is not a vampire. He is not a demon of death. He does not suck the blood of his victims, but he kills to make them undead. The activity of the Winged is only an erotic dream. The marks he leaves after his visit on his potential target are whipped feelings, psychotic disorder, and sometimes neurasthenic type of epilepsy, a typical syndrome of hyper sexuality. "[8]

The short story *The Snake* begins with a charm for love, but the core of the epic story is centered on the marriage plans made by Solomon family for their sister, Dorina, a young girl highly licensed, but not yet finding her destiny... The host in the Hot village, "a poor village thirty kilometers away from the capital ", invites himself to Dorina's family together with some other friends of captain Manuilă. They go together to the monastery of Căldărușani where they are waited for by Zamfirescu's family. But they are stopped by a young man on their way who is recommended as Sergiu Andronicus, as a professional airman who is going to wonder them.

The stories in the novel *The Snake* comprises an instruction, which, if breached, unexpected troubles would follow. Similarly as the son of a king cursed by the evil fairy, the snake cannot turn back into a man, but under the rule of the night. More than that, the mere uttering of his name by Dorina would waste the chance to see each other for nine years. Getting inside into the world of the fairy tale, the heroine becomes Ileana Cosânzeana and prepares for the wedding. She is guided by the dream to a glass palace where "women were dressed as in old times, men make gimped yarn clothes, long swords and helmets." [9]

The journey difficulties represent the natural hardships to communicate specific to the beings belonging to different universes. Her road is a temptation corridor, a schooling way that gathers several mysterious characters trying to persuade her to give up preparing. But the dream is persistent in guiding the girl similarly with the story of the Holy Friday of the young bride who resists good advice, throws the snake skin (pigs, deer, etc.) into the fire so she waists her chance to marry and she has to start the long way of nine years back to meet him again. And here is the fateful number nine that appears as the figure of the supreme power on human destiny.

Now we can understand the true role of collateral and prediction in the game in the woods. It is a way to override choice. "She chose. She is given the golden apple and the potential bride accepts it. "The experience of her dream ends in a failure, for the breach comes into force

when Dorina utters the forbidden word -"snake". The dream, however, has the role of reporting events in the real plan making the perfect fusion between the two realms.

The short story begins with the incantation of love, which is re-affirmed in the snake episode and introduces us in the atmosphere of myth and folklore. The incantation is referred to as it follows:

"Popular terminology delineates clearly enough the species, although some regional misuse is applied. Words like magic, spell, incantation are used when referring to practices performed for a magical purpose or medical response (often magical-medical) while incantation refers only to literary text which is related to it, even if, sometimes, it encompasses and accompanies practices as sorcery, magic, spell when incantations have meanings ... For millennia, incantation was the only instrument people used to face diseases and natural disasters, a simple device to involve into the fabric of events beyond ordinary powers of man... "[10]

Lots of love incantations are known in which "destiny" is expected to result from chasing the evil spirits, guided by the devil. Incantations for the destructive Mother of Forest or against robbers, or incorrect judgment and a wide category of inverse incantation (called "ripper" or "loose") are directed against magic made with the intention to cancel its harmful effects.

The incantations are usually performed by women, but sometimes by men without making any difference in its achievement showing that there is no distinction between the two sexes. That means that the basic knowledge of the incantation content is sufficient for making it work, without any additional ritual and magical practices carried by priests, although sometimes it is believed that women practicing incantations owe their capacity to their relationship to the devil. Folklore tradition claims that their knowledge is developed in exchange to the erotic relations they take up with devil.

The incantation is based on the ancient belief in the power of the uttered word in a particular context to accomplish the ritual completely, by the lyrics of commonly featured carols which include curses and generally accepted folkloric consequences. Like the carols, the incantation embodies a desire that needs to be fulfilled at any price, which may be not necessarily positive, but also negative, often deeply harmful, going to the extinction of the persons concerned.

At the beginning of the magic, in the prayer part supernatural forces are invoked to intervene directly and immediately. Various elements interfere with magical powers, usually limited to certain categories of works (Christian divinities, mythical stars: the sun and the moon, water and fire) that act as a "tool for social education and moral enlightenment." [11]

The two primary supreme powers, water and fire are miraculous as they preserve remnants of ancient cult of the domestic hearth of the sacred water and fire. The fire appears mainly associated with an erotic messenger that has the power to transform himself into a snake. In a different version, the fire fails to back the messenger's function, whereas a simple belt has the faculty of generating the fantastic reptile that is able to convert destiny.

The fire which is metamorphosed into a dragon snake will become completely obedient to pleasure and fear as well and make himself a terrifying entity.

The Snake has an important role in the incantation; he is the one invoked to go and bring the destined / the destiny that was wasted on the "road". He is one of the most important symbols of human imagination. The universality of mythology highlights the tenacity and the versatility of the ophidian symbolism. The snake is the animal subject of the verb "concatenate" with

reference to vipers, a typological archetype that aims to reach different meanings, sometimes contradictory. This myth of snake can be classified into three categories: the symbol of triple timing transformation, fecundity and the ancestral survival.

The magic produces divination, an ancient phenomenon in the archaic life of the peoples and which has borne written information about the past 6000 years, from Egypt and Mesopotamia. In antiquity each village had its symbolic miraculous statue, tree, or a cave and there was no person not to wear a talisman of his own.

It is acknowledged that the magic of superstitions and popular beliefs are the basis of all sciences including the early ancient medicine which was originally nothing but a complex of enigmatic magic formulas. People were also accustomed to resort rather to witches and fortune tellers than at magistrates to catch robbers.

The kings, the officers the officials of great empires appealed regularly to riddles to find out from them the destiny of their country and the destiny of the people they were ruling. The nations were controlled by magic superstitions and popular beliefs which subjected them to the control of the power of mental domination. The struggle between forces of good and evil has lasted for centuries of civilization in which man was the slave of popular superstitions unjustified or accurate.

ⁱ the adjectival extension of the Romanian folk ballad named, Miorita.

ⁱⁱ In religion, mythology, occultism and folklore, a demon (or daemon, daimon) is often described as a supernatural personality spirit. The ancient Greek explain the word "daimon" - demon as a representation for "spirit" or "divine power", like the Latin "genius". Some dictionaries Greek etymology of the word shows that the derivation of the verb "daiesthai" - "to divide, distribute." to distinguish between Greece and the interpretation of the current concept of Christianity, this formula is used as a "daemon" or "daimon" in instead of "demon".

References:

- [1] Romulus Vulcanescu, Romanian mythology, Ed. Romanian Socialist Republic, Bucharest, 1987, p. 301-302.
- [2] Ibidem, p. 533.
- [3] Simion Florea Marian, The Romanian funeral, (ch. XXXI) Publisher Saeculum IO, Bucharest, 2008, p.134.
- [4] Theodore T. Burada, Traditions of Romanian people at funerals, Publisher Saeculum IO, Bucharest, 2006, p.97.
- [5] Ivan Evseev, Folkloric symbols, Ed. Facla, 1987, p. 147.
- [6] Mircea Eliade, Miss Christina, Ed. Tana, 2007, p. 129.
- [7] VI Propp, The morphology of the fairy tale, Ed. Univers, 1970, p. 241
- [8] Romulus Vulcanescu, Romanian mythology, Ed. Romanian Socialist Republic, Bucharest, 1987, p.273
- [9] Mircea Eliade, The Snake, Ed. CARTEX, 2013, p.209.

[10] Theodore T. Burada, Traditions of Romanian people at funerals, Publisher Saeculum IO, Bucharest, 2006, p 84.

[11] Minodora Otilia SIMION, *A new hedonism in Oscar Wilde's novel the picture of Dorian Gray*, Annals of the „Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu Jiu, Letter and Social Science Series, Issue 1/2015, „Academica Brâncuși” Publisher, p. 55.