

The work of the Bucharest-based researcher explores the polyvalent and protean relationship between the field of practices and representations usually associated with the religious and with various forms of ideality as well as economy in the context of folklore culture in the Romanian space. In the introduction we read that the author's intention was to touch the "phenomenological amplitude" of the field constituted by the mentioned connections (an intimidating and relatively taboo field, especially to "lay ethnologists", as the author calls them in another work, or to those who have fallen into various metaphysical or archaic-non-historicist traps); "to offer yet another integrative key for the interpretation of some facts of folk and/or popular creativity", and "to establish" – especially for the ethnologist trained in Romania – "that the economic, seemingly gregarious or subordinate, represents an element of consciousness on the one hand omnipresent and, on the other hand, loaded with deep cultural and religious resonances, meanings, and functions" (p. 5). Also in the introduction the reader is alerted to a movement of thought that will be constantly found in the work and which consists in revealing the religious element within economic practices and, conversely, in denouncing the pragmatic, profitable aspect hidden in the core of cultural facts belonging to the religious or to some *interiority* that is generally believed to be impenetrable and invulnerable to the temptations of the economic (p. 6). A Maussian report, of course, already classicized in the West, but which has not fertilized the ethno-anthropological reflection in Romania.

The work analyzes a variety of themes – from the "classic" ones (for the local context), such as the economics of burial and child-birth, the mythology of pastoralism, the caroling, rain-bringing *paparude*, etc., but always reconfigured and surprisingly reimaged, up to new themes, rarely or not at all addressed so far, such as erotic fairs and prostitution, the sociology of poverty and begging, the economics of domestic violence or the "acquisition of afterlives" (with reference to the buying fever of eternal resting places). The author constructs his research object imaginatively and uninhibited, exploring Romanian mentalities often in relation to cultural forms and categories of sources towards which local ethnology studies still show reluctance: from films and TV commercials to newspaper articles and advertising posters to famous paintings, novels, subway carols or the cunning speech of street gamblers' "white & black" game. The work is a colorful "(factual and ideational) archipelago" (p. 5).

Equally, we have in front of us a work that critically rereads the ethnofolkloristic culture from Romania (that is, the local ethnological library), entering into a polemical dialogue with many canonical figures of national ethnology (splendid criticism administered to P. Caraman, in the context of the discussion about the son-in-law's song and the role of Roma fiddlers, at the end of which it turns out that the latter are "creators of Romanian specificity", but equally spectacular are the ones related to O. Bîrlea, A. Fochi, Gh. Pavelescu et al.), but also one that scrutinizes contemporary culture critically, moralizing, revealing (as the visionary O. Densusianu once wanted) themes, phantasms, pathologies and obsessions of the present, greatly expanding the field of ethnological investigation in the direction of highlighting and deepening modest facts, without "aura", everyday or not, but which, in the author's reading, present in their deep structure forms of irrationality or religious thought – rather perennial and trans-historical than "archaic" or "traditional".

As in other works by Marin Marian-Bălașa, this one is also impressive, rigorously theorizing and speculatively creative, but without leaving aside the factology/*ethnographic evidence*. It is just that since the same ethnographic knowledge, which until recently used to provide apparently unshakable certainties and definitive verdicts, is now churned throughout the author's interrogative device, it proves itself to be a porous and vulnerable ensemble. In this sense, the work does not just offer "another key" for the reading and interpretation of cultural facts, but *several keys*, depending on the historical-anthropological condition of the examined topic. Far from being driven by apodictic and hegemonic impulses, the author's discourse is open and ecumenical, honestly preferring high stakes problematizing rather than artificial solutions, *possible* and *plausible* hypotheses rather than "absolute truth". This hermeneutic wisdom derives not from an epistemological option for the superiority of the *plausible*, but from lucidity, from the deep scrutinizing of the investigated fact, resulting in an understanding that recognizes the complexity of the connections, conditionings and interdeterminations of all given cultural objects. Understanding this, the author rejects all over-simplifications. Among the interpretations that can be integrated into *the realm of plausibility*, I would mention those circumscribed to the *economy of Eros*, *erotic fairs*, *prostitution* and rain-makers *pparude*, or those related to the fiddling phenomenon ("*Wedding without fiddlers*", *musical exhibitionism*, *beating*, and *The Fiddler: the leap from servitude to excellence*). In the mentioned sections one can find many problematizing examples that prove the heuristic force of the *plausible*, but also many "theatrical twists", i.e. revelatory reasonings, combining anthropological erudition, dialectical rigor, psychoanalytical suspicion, and empathic imagination. Thus, the suicide of the stolen wife, who prefers the death of a life on foreign soil and in the company of a man of another nation, would rather express a masculine desire, an expression of the elementary desire to destroy the good that you cannot possess; the Halmagiu wife-kissing fair would be less of an innocent postmarital rite, as postulated by nationalist-communist ethnology, but rather a masked form of sexual flexibility, an opportunity for the young wife to experience erotically – even if physically only by kissing – multiple partners, i.e. a cultural mechanism for hormonal and phantasmatic self-regulation that allows inadmissible pleasures and satisfactions under the shelter of moral judgment; and prostitution per se, as a profit-

driven practice, can be a manifestation of independence and financial self-determination in the context of a patriarchal, violent and misogynistic society. The *paperude* ritual, involving dance, nudity and monetary remuneration, appears in the author's analysis more like a rural striptease show than as a religious, mystical act that would seriously intend supernatural effects. Finally, in Marian-Bălașa's analysis, the Rroma fiddlers' virtuosity would also be a consequence of their eternally vulnerable status, of always being in danger, a fact for which they had to always find eccentric solutions at hand to entertain their masters/employers. The unorthodox violin execution techniques, perhaps that of playing not with the bow but by using a horse hair tied to a string, may be even due to the delicate situations in which the fiddlers will have found themselves, of playing with an instrument damaged as a result of a beating. Also revealing is the observation that recognizes the Rrom violinist as a sorcerer or "numinous character", the only one who masters the art of controlling the others' emotions, the only one who possesses the ability to offer others joy, and therefore to facilitate solidarity and everyday life escapism.

It must be emphasized that the author's hermeneutic attitude is not only at the antipode of recent and even current folkloristic commentaries, which frequently and massively elaborate along the given landmarks of *circulation-typology-genesis*, exasperatingly descriptive, with outdated philological or protohistorical complications. This discursive paradigm is contested here, often explicitly, through open, frontal, spectacular interactions. These disputes concern not only the meaning of some interpretations or cultural facts, but also aim at theoretical principles, issues considered "universals" or "cornerstones" of local ethnologies. Such an example can be found in the chapter *Recompensa fidelității* (Fidelity reward), in which the researcher questions the principle that equates the density/frequency of a folklore piece with its age, i.e. its archaicism: "At the beginning of the 1980s versions of the Milea Ballad were known to folklorists as spread all over Romania. This thing proving the very old age of the text. Because only a very old text can have such a general and intense spread. Yet, to me this interpretation and explanation is childish, being based on the hollowed hypothesis that everything old persists and that frequency and multiplicity unmistakably mean antiquity" (p. 57).

The *Eye of the Devil and God* is in many ways a demanding read, for it is as intellectually spectacular as it is discharming. But healing from illusions does not mean nihilism. The committed and empathetic tone, sometimes of revolt and exasperation (see the chapter *Small introduction to the economies of domestic violence and alcoholism*) eloquently reflects this. Basically, the book is about Romanian mentalities and ethnic psychology, that is, about exactly that world in the middle of which the author and the readers to whom he addresses lead their existence. This world is addressed directly on the last pages of the book: "The man's only true emancipation or superiority is produced exclusively through the effort of conscience which, on the one hand (on an intimate level) proceeds to cast away the acquisitive, profiteering, miser or consumerist demons, and which, on the other hand (on a social level) professes on a daily basis a compassionate humanism" (p. 604-605).