

THE DER ALTE HILDEBRAND ANECDOTE AND THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF ROMANIAN FOLKLORE

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Abstract The current study highlights the European dimension of Romanian folklore by resorting to an anecdote from Grimm Brothers' collection: Der alte Hildebrand. During the inter-war period, the Estonian professor Walter Anderson studied the European alternatives of the anecdote that were available to him at the time. Ion Muşlea, a Romanian folklorist, analyzed the Romanian alternatives of the same anecdote by taking into account Anderson's conclusions. After WWII, another Romanian folklorist, Gheorghe Cernea, discovered an inter-war dramatized alternative of the anecdote in Transylvania. The comparative analysis of all these materials calls attention to the Romanian features of the anecdote as compared to common European folklore motives.

Keywords Folklore, cultural diffusion, Der alte Hildebrand, Christianity, Romanians.

Introduction

European folklore with its variations of common themes to be found around the continent fully support the European Union's motto: *United in diversity*¹. The latter is not a mere desideratum. It describes reality, at least from the perspective of folk culture. The anecdote on the unfaithful wife titled *Der alte Hildebrand* (German for *Old Hildebrand*) included in Grimm Brothers' collection was the subject of extended research initiated by the Estonian professor Walter Anderson during the inter-war period. Ion Muşlea was inspired and motivated by Anderson and, in his turn, studied the Romanian alternatives of the anecdote. Gheorghe Cernea, another

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¹ European Union Motto https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_ro

Transylvanian folklorist, uncovered a version of the same anecdote that had been dramatized as a folk play in southern Transylvania.

The current study outlines the results of the research conducted by Anderson and Muşlea, as well as the relation between the versions those two researchers considered as standard and the version discovered by Cernea. Moreover, it highlights the Romanian features of the anecdote as the comparative approach to the aforementioned versions unveils them, as well as their cultural significance.

1. Ion Muşlea, the folklorist

Ion Muşlea (1899- 1966) is a folklorist from Transylvania. He was born in Rodbav, Făgăraş. He was the son of Candid Muşlea, a school master, and of Ecaterina (maiden name: Pitiş). He graduated from the Faculty of Letters of Cluj (1922). He continued his studies between 1923 and 1925 in the Romanian School from Paris (École roumaine de Fontenay-aux-Roses). The latter had been established by royal decree and was led by Nicolae Iorga. Its mission was to refine the academic education of the best undergraduates from the humanistic faculties in Romania. Muşlea's interest in folklore dated back to the time of his studies in Paris². It was encouraged by the academician Sextil Puşcariu whom the young undergraduate in humanities considered his mentor. The letters they exchanged reveal Puşcariu's appreciation of Muşlea's "balanced and scientific orientated nature" proven while elaborating his first study on folklore: *Le cheval merveilleux dans l'épopée populaire* (1924) (French for *The magical horse in folk tales*). Puşcariu advised Muşlea to learn foreign languages and warned him about the challenges raised by comparative research on folklore: "I believe that in studies on folklore restraining imagination is very important [...] for there is no other field of research like that where the use of the comparative method can lead to dangerous misinterpretations and risky conclusions³". He also recommended that there needed to be a rigorous program to conduct systematic research in the folklore field. In 1925 Muşlea published *La mort-mariage: une particularité du folklore balcanique* (French for *The marriage of the dead: a feature of folklore in the Balkan area*), the other important studies elaborated while studying in Paris. In 1928, between June and July during a field trip sponsored by the Ministry of Cults and Arts from Romania, he visited the main ethnographic museums and archives in Central and Northern Europe.

Upon his return to his home country Muşlea got his doctoral degree in ethnography and folklore in 1927 from the University of Cluj. The title of his thesis was *The Custom of the Youth from Brasov*. That was the first doctoral degree awarded in that research field in Cluj. Supported by Sextil Puşcariu, who was monitoring the project on behalf of the Romanian Academy⁴, he organized and managed the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy between

² Cosmina Timocea-Mocanu, "Sextil Puşcariu și Ion Muşlea în corespondență", in *Caietele Sextil Puşcariu, I, Istorie literară și culturală*, ed. Eugen Pavel and Nicolae Mocanu (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2015), 337-348.

³ Timocea-Mocanu, 340.

⁴ Ibid.

1930 and 1948. While filling this position, he edited the seven volumes of the institution's *Annual*. He was also a librarian and director of the University Library of Cluj between 1936 and 1947, and he also collaborated with the Museum of Ethnography of Ardeal. He was nominated a corresponding member of the Academy in 1947. After Communists assumed power in Romania he worked as a researcher (and as chief of section) in the Linguistics and Literary History Institute of Cluj where the Folklore Archive had been resubordinated. He elaborated numerous monographies and ethnographic studies. Some of them, for example the adaptation of Hasdeu's questionnaires and his study on the glass icons from Transylvania (*The Glass Icons and Xylographs of Romanian Peasants from Transylvania*), were published after his death.

2. Gheorghe Cernea, the folklorist

Gheorghe Cernea (1898- 1965) is another Transylvanian folklorist, born in Bucharest. His parents, Gheorghe and Maria (maiden name - Codrea) were from Paloş village, Târnava Mare County – today in Braşov County). After the Great Union, between 1919 and 1922 he took summer courses for school masters in Sălişte and Deva and got his school master degree from the School for schoolmasters (Romanian: Scoala Normală) of Deva in 1924. Between 1919 and 1928 he worked as a schoolmaster in various villages from Hunedoara and Târnava Mare. In 1924 he even worked in Paloş, the village where his parents had been born and lived and where he had spent his childhood. In 1925 he applied for the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest but he dropped out a year later on health issues⁵. In 1928 he resigned from the education system in order to focus on research in folklore. In the same year he published two works that sold well: *Obiceiuri de nuntă în județul Hunedoara* (Romanian for “Wedding Customs in Hunedoara”) and *Floricele din Cohalm* (Romanian for *A collection of linguistic jewelry from Cohalm*”). They were followed by many other publications in the folklore field that were smaller in size and consisted in collections of songs and rhythmic shouts. He travelled all throughout Transylvania for years collecting folklore, folk costumes and old artefacts and he held lectures for many years on the beauty of folklore. He wrote an impressive number of monographies of the villages in the Rupea and Sibiu area, as well as of some personalities from Ardeal: Aron Pumnul, Axente Sever, Ilarie Chendi, Ioan Ursu, Ion Dacian etc. He established a museum in his home village, Paloş, and took steps towards founding an ethnographic museum in Sighişoara. He wanted to inaugurate the museum in 1948, the year when one hundred years from the 1848 Revolution were to be celebrated. Nonetheless, he was arrested and convicted to five years of prison for “owning forbidden materials” the very same year⁶. Most of his collections went into the inventory of the museums from Mediaş and Sighişoara. He was released from the Aiud prison in 1953. He reorganized the museum from Paloş and continued his field research in the nearby villages. He

⁵ Adriana Antihi, “Gheorghe Cernea- Folklorist and Ethnographer in the Târnava Mare Area”, *Revista Bistriței*, no. XVII (2003): 307-310.

⁶ Ibid.

died in Paloş in 1965. In 2008 the Ethnographic Museum of Rupea, Braşov County, was named after him. Most of his field notebooks are currently the property of this museum.

3. The anecdote about the unfaithful wife in the European folk culture

Walter Anderson, a professor at University of Tartu-Dorpat, Estonia, published the work *Der Schwank vom alten Hildebrand. Eine vergleichende Studie* in 1931. It was a comparative analysis of the available versions of the *Der alte Hildebrand* anecdote included in Grimm Brothers' collection. According to Anderson, the anecdote can be summarized as follows:

"An unfaithful wife pretends to be sick and sends her husband away to bringher a certain cure. The husband encounters a man who brings him back home in a large basket (sometimes a sack or a sheaf of straws). Meanwhile, the wife has invited her lover over. The husband is left in the house in the basket and witnesses the party his wife and her lover throw. At the end of the party stanzas are sung: first by the woman, then by the lover and lastly by the guest; sometimes the husband in the basket also sings. At the end the husband comes out of the basket and everything ends with a fight"⁷.

In more than half (almost 60%) of the 188 versions of the anecdote analyzed by Anderson, the wife's lover is the priest. Anderson believed that the anecdote originated in France in the XV century and then spread out to Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany and Slavic people.

Anderson required his potential readers to signal the presence of other versions of the anecdote around Europe than he had had available for his study with a view to publishing a future reviewed edition of his work.

4. Muşlea's analysis of the Romanian versions of the anecdote about the unfaithful wife

Muşlea went along with Anderson's requirement and, in his turn, asked his collaborators to the Folklore Archive to relay information concerning the spread-out of the anecdote on the unfaithful wife in the Romanian territories. When he wrote his study, Anderson only had two versions of the anecdote from Romania, one of them in the Hungarian language and the other in German, which is why it was assumed that the anecdote circulated only in Transylvania. In 1933, thanks to the materials received from his collaborators, Muşlea had 22 Romanian versions of the anecdote (counting the two already mentioned by Anderson and another one published under the title *Spuma de mare (The Sea Foam)* in *Ion Creangă* magazine, in 1912). He published the study *Variantele româneşti ale snoavei despre femeia necredincioasă*⁸

⁷ Walter Anderson, "Der Schwank vom alten Hildebrand. Eine vergleichende Studie", *Acta et Commentationes Universitatis Tartuensis (Dorpatensis)* BXXI, no.1 (1931), quoted in Ion Muşlea, "Variantele româneşti ale snoavei despre femeia necredincioasă", 197.

⁸ Muşlea "Variantele româneşti ale snoavei despre femeia necredincioasă". *Anuarul Arhivei de Folklor*, no. 2 (1933): 195-216.

(Romanian for: *The Romanian Versions of the Anecdote on the Unfaithful Wife*) in the *Folklore Archive Annual*, no. II (1933) in which he corrected Anderson's statements on the circulation of the anecdote and analyzed the features of Romanian versions. He continued receiving versions of the anecdote from his collaborators after the volume was published, so he issued a sequel by the name of *Alte variante românești ale snoavei despre femeia necredincioasă*⁹ (Romanian for: *Other Romanian versions of the Anecdote about the Unfaithful Wife*) in 1935. Thus, the number of recorded Romanian versions of the anecdote reached 43, rating as the second highest after the German variants (80), and more than double the Ukrainian forms (18) used by Anderson. The distribution of the Romanian versions by the provinces and counties that existed at the time is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1:

Distribution of the Romanian versions of the anecdote about the unfaithful wife

Seq.	Province	Distribution by counties	Number of versions in the province
1	Transylvania	Alba-1, Hunedoara-6, Năsăud-1, Sibiu-1, Turda-2	11
2	Maramureș	Maramureș-1	1
3	Crișana	Bihor-1, Satu Mare-1	2
4	Banat	Caraș-1	1
5	Oltenia	Dolj-2, Mehedinți-2, Vâlcea-1	5
6	Muntenia	Ifov-1, Muscel-1, Olt-2, Vlașca-1	5
7	Dobrogea	Constanța-1	1
8	Moldova	Baia-1, Botoșani-1, Covurlui-2, Fălciu-1, Neamț-3	8
9	Basarabia	Ismail-1, Lăpușna-3, Orhei-1, Soroca-3	8
10	Bucovina	Câmpulung-1	1

The analysis conducted by Mușlea on the Romanian versions highlights their relation with the variant considered original by Anderson, as well as some particular features.

Thus, in most Romanian versions there also four characters: the husband, his wife, the lover and the husband's accomplice (the informant); very rarely there are two informants. The lover who is a priest is mentioned only in two versions from Transylvania (the ones that were also available to Anderson) and in one from Banat. In one variant from south Basarabia, the

⁹ Mușlea, "Alte variante românești ale snoavei despre femeia necredincioasă". *Anuarul Arhivei de Folklor*, no. 3 (1935): 169-176

lover is the cantor and the whistleblower is the priest, Muşlea believes that it could be a matter of substitution. In all Romanian versions, except for the one from Maramureş, the husband is brought back home in a sack. In 24 variants, the accomplice is a fiddler (or a person who can play an instrument). In some versions, the acolyte is the devil itself. In nine versions the husband is sent to the seaside, in four of these alternatives of the anecdote the Black Sea is specifically indicate. The nine versions are from Transylvania (two), Moldova (three), Maramureş, Muntenia, Basarabia și Crişana (one per region). In some variants, the husband is sent ot the Danube river: Oltenia (three) and south of Transylvania (Sibiu, one). Muşlea contradicts Anderson’s assertion that the version in which the husband is sent to a river with curing properties is the original anecdote. In this respect, he shows that out of the 188 variants he identified, the man is sent to the seaside in 24 of these, whereas there are only 16 versions mentioning the river.

Muşlea highlights that the cure asked by the wife in the 26 Romanian variants of the anecdote he analyzed is *sea foam* and that detail is only encountered in one other Serbian version of the anecdote. His counter-argument to Anderson’s statement that *sea foam* refers to the mineral by the same name is that the recipient in which the husband is asked to bring it is a skull or a pitcher. As the Romanian folklorist also underlines, the sea foam is also an element mentioned in Romanian evil-spells.

The bet on the wife’s faithfulness (the accomplice’s head versus half of husband’s household) is only mentioned in two variants from Basarabia, whereas it is a common motif in the Romanic and Greek versions analyzed by Anderson, as Muşlea indicates. The end of the anecdote is tragic in two of its alternatives (in one of these the wife is killed, while in the other it is the lover who is murdered).

Muşlea mentions a composite standard stanza recited by the woman in the Romanian versions, namely¹⁰:

I’ve sent my man to the seaside/For sea foam/ To anoint my back/ May the devil kill him on the way!,

with the variations:

May his name return to us/ May his body stay dead and, May everybody keep being alive/ May only Matei never return alive!.

In eight of the 11 versions from Tranylvania, the wife’s stanza ends with an obscene line that substitute the wish she makes in the other versions that her husbands does not come back.

The accomplice’s standard stanza as analyzed by Anderson is of this form: “Oh, you hiding in the basket (sack), hear yee what’s being sung here”¹¹, usually followed by the challenge to beat up the lover. Such challenge are only sometimes encountered in the Romanian versions. The composite standard stanza proposed by Muşlea for variants of this kind is as follows:

¹⁰ Muşlea, “Variantele româneşti”, 207.

¹¹ Ibid.

*Listen yee my sack/ How the crippled is dancing/ Grab yee hatchet/ And start cripple's chopping!*¹²

In the other versions the lines are: *I shall untie the sack/ You shall meet the devil!*¹³ and they may be or not accompanied by the encouragement to start a fight, and that makes the last line more relevant. According to Muşlea's analysis, the standard Transylvanian version of the anecdote includes the accomplices' stanza mentioned by Anderson. In the standard version to be found in Wallachia, Moldova and Basarabia (the „munteano- moldoveano-basarabeana” form)¹⁴, the stanza starts with *I shall untie the sack...* Muşlea believes that the version from Olt region is distinct from the other ones since stanza starts with *I shall untie the sack* are followed by the encouragement to start a fight and the husband is sent to the Danube River for wife's cure.

As Muşlea indicates, the line *I shall untie the sack* is common in the Romanian folklore. It is present not only in the anecdote, but also in proverbs, as Anton Pann's, I.C. Hîntescu's, Ispirescu's and Zanne's collections of the XIX century prove. Probably, initially the proverb illustrated an anecdote. It could have been the one about the unfaithful wife in which the devil is mentioned as an accomplice (according to Muşlea, there are such versions), or another anecdote from which the latter borrowed the lines. As Muşlea mentions, it is also possible that the proverb was simply attached to the anecdote and there is no other relation with any other anecdote or any other version of the anecdote under analysis. The introduction and the dissemination of the lines in the case of this specific anecdote was made easy by their shortness, simplicity and ease to remember as a result of the rhyme employed.

Anderson had shown his surprise to find that in the Romanian versions he had available the husband was sent to the seaside (or even the Black Sea) or to the Danube River, which suggested Romanians' connections with the Polish and the Ukrainians. The versions that Anderson had analyzed came from the south of Transylvania and that might have been the source of his doubts on the influence of the aforementioned people on the content of the anecdote, Muşlea observes. As the latter shows, the borrowing could have been made through Maramureş or Bucovina, but not through Basarabia. Most of the versions from the latter region do not mention the sea foam, hence they could be a direct borrowing from the Ukrainians, but there are three of them containing the line *I shall untie the sack* in the accomplice's stanza and most likely these may have come from the Romanian provinces lying in outer Carpathians, and not from the Ukrainians.

The Serbian versions are considered by Anderson derived from the Romanian ones. The argument presented by Muşlea in favor of this position are the variants from the Olt area (from the neighboring region, in other words) which had not been available to Anderson. The mentioning of the sea foam by one of the Serbian versions is an additional argument that it is a borrowing from Romanians.

¹² Muşlea, "Alte variante româneşti", 174.

¹³ Muşlea, "Variantele româneşti", 210.

¹⁴ Muşlea, 210.

Anderson had few available versions from the Balkan area available (two Serbian and one Albanian). According to him, "One of the reasons that prevented the anecdote from spreading to the various smaller European peoples seems to be its stanzas, which, obviously, do not make translation an easy task. It should be noted that out of the 188 texts, there are only five that are told in Lithuanian, Greek, Albanese, Tschuwasch and Maltese Arabic which are not Romanic, German, or Slavic languages. These troublesome stanzas must have been the cause for which the Basques, the Celts, the Lethonians, the Caucasian or the Fino-Ugric peoples did not dare to tell the anecdote"¹⁵. Muşlea shows that Romanians, in their turn, are also in a peculiar position. Even surrounded by peoples whose languages were not of Latin origin, they still have versions of the anecdote with stanzas similar to the original variant. "That is an interesting feature of Romanian, especially from the perspective of their folklore: they cannot be classified by race criteria, but based on their geographical position. They are part of South Eastern Europe and they remain the only people of Latin origin in the area; while living among Ukrainians and the Slavic peoples in the south, they borrowed motifs from the former and gave them away to the latter, as it happened with the anecdote under analysis"¹⁶ highlights the Romanian folklorist.

Summing up, Muşlea believes that the Romanians could only have borrowed the anecdote from the Ukrainians. Additionally, the people from Basarabia borrowed it from the Romanians and not directly from the Ukrainians since the motif of the sea foam is mentioned in two of their versions, and the line *I shall untie the sack* in one of the variants. As for the Serbians, they borrowed the anecdote from the Romanians. There are two distinct versions of the anecdote in the Romanian territories. One of these is in Transylvania and is very close to the standard version of Anderson. The other is from the outer Carpathian areas and contains the accomplice's stanza with the line *I shall untie the sack*. The latter also has a version characteristic of the Olt area in which the husband is encouraged to beat up the lover. The motif of the sea foam as a cure required by the wife is another important contribution made by Romanians to the anecdote. Another contribution is the introduction of the fiddler as an accomplice. The devil as an accomplice is a Romanian contribution too, especially since, as Muşlea views is "*Romanian peasants believe that whenever a wife is unfaithful to her husband, the devil is always present*"¹⁷.

5. The theme of the unfaithful wife in a folk play identified by Gheorghe Cernea

During one of his field trips Gheorghe Cernea recorded the staging and the representation of a play called *The Sack with Food (The Wife Who had a Lover)* in 1949 in the village of Ticuşu-Vechi. Cernea obtained a copy of the script that had been probably made by one of the author's nieces. In this respect, he mentioned on the last page of the notebook containing the

¹⁵ Walter Anderson, "Der Schwank", quoted in Muşlea, "Variantele româneşti", 215-216.

¹⁶ Muşlea, "Variantele româneşti", 216.

¹⁷ Muşlea, 216.

script the following: "The play was transcribed by the student Maria Pascu (No. 296) in the 9th grade, Rupea Highschool on 27 February 1956. Ana Pascu is an author of plays, she is a peasant whom I met during my trips around the country. She is 62. The play was performed in Ticușul Vechiu in 1949 in the community hall in front of a large number of people. The play was very successful. The part of Ilie was performed by the author herself."¹⁸ The script is a dramatization of the anecdote about the unfaithful wife and there is a note at the end stating: "Written in 1938 by Pascu Ana, No. 274, Ticușul Vechiu village, Făgăraș County, Șercaia administrative subdivision". I found the school notebook where the play script was transcribed when Gheorghe Cernea's field notebooks were taken over by the Museum of Ethnography of Brașov. I participated in these activities as an external collaborator of the museum.

There are nine characters of the play performed in 1949 in Ticușu-Vechi: Ilie, the fifty year old husband, his twenty year old wife –Leana, Leana's thirty year old friend –Reveica, two servants: Rozica and Traian, Carolina – a gipsy from the tent-dwelling gipsy branch, Alixandru – Leana's twenty seven year old "poor and a virgin" unmarried lover, Marian- Reveica's twenty seven year old lover, and Liță – the fiddler.

In the play script, Leana complains to her friend about her hardships with her old and grumpy husband. Reveica suggests her to ask for doctor Carolina's help and send him away to bring her sea salt as a cure in order for her to bathe and get well. Ilie departs dispirited but he encounters Liță who sheds light on Leana's reasons for pretending to be sick. The latter suggests that he accompanies Ilie back home and hides him in a sack so that the husband can witness the party thrown by his sick wife. Meanwhile, Leana is cooking for the feast and sends her servants to the theatre, while Reveica brings Alixandru and Marin, their lovers since they were not married. Then Liță arrives and leaves his sack that allegedly contained food behind the door. The party begins and the participants shout as follows:

Leana: Today I'm gonna party and dance, /Because my mutton head husband/ Has gone today to the seaside/ To bring me salt,/ To cure my back.

Reveica: Should my mother-in-law know that I'm dancing today,/ She would tanner my skin/ And snitches me to my husband,/ So that he grabs my hair.

Marian: A wife with a lover/ is betrayed by her gait./ She walks slowly and determinedly,/ With no fear of her husband.

Alixandru: If only Ilie stayed at the seaside/ Until Pentecost day!/ Green leaf and thorns of haggberry,/ Then me and Leana could love each other!

Liță: Listen thee, my sack/what your sick is saying/ Come out of the sack with the stick/ And cure the sick!. Liță also says: I shall untie the sack/ You shall meet with the devil!, then Ilie comes out of the sack and

¹⁸ The notebook is in "Gheorghe Cernea" collection of the Ethnographic Museum of, Section: Monograph notebooks - Ticușu-Vechi.

beats Leana up by asking her cry out and say: “He who will do what I did, let her happen to her as it happened to me!”.

The script of the play seems to be the combination of a west European version of the anecdote, with the standard Transylvanian variant, and with a Romanian version from outer Carpathians. The author's frequent trips support this assumption argumentatively. According to the other villagers, Ana Pascu used to travel a lot in order to bring merchandise (fabrics and other manufactured products) from Poland and Bohemia in order to sell them (this job was called in the local dialect *hănzărit*).

Thus, the description of Alixandru, the wife's lover in Ana Pascu's play resembles the typology of the Catholic priest. That could be attributed to the theme of the priest lover that is encountered outside the Romanian territory. Alixandru is a bachelor, poor and a virgin. The cure required by the wife is sea salt – a motif commonly mentioned in the versions from west Europe, and not sea foam – the motif characteristic of the Romanian variants. The servants who are sent to the theatre is a theme that resembles an urban version of the anecdote that most probably had been heard by the play author somewhere else and not in Ticușu-Vechi.

Unlike the versions analyzed by Mușlea where, according to the folklorist, there are a number of Romanian innovations in terms of themes and motifs, the play *The Sack with Food (The Wife who had a Lover)* only presents the motif of the fiddler. The sea foam, as I have already shown, is missing, and there is no place for the devil given the realism of the plot.

On the other hand, the play versions of the anecdote contain both the standard message present in the standard Transylvanian variant identified by Mușlea (the line attributed to the wife and to her lover), as well as the lines from the outer Carpathians versions, attributed to Liță, the fiddler.

6. Discussions: the Romanian features of the anecdote

6.1. The lover is not the priest. The existence of priests and monks who did not observe their celibacy vows and longed for and were appreciative of women's presence was common knowledge in Western Europe during the Middle Ages¹⁹. There were priests and even popes who had lovers and children and whom they took care of quite in the open. Therefore, such situations became known to the parishioners and it was not difficult for these to become motifs of anecdotes.

There are only a few Romanian versions in which the lover is a priest (the anecdote versions from Transylvania that Anderson had had available, another variant from Banat and, possibly, as a substitution case, a variant from south Basarabia in which the priest informs the husband on his wife's whereabouts). This difference between the Romanian versions of the anecdote and those from Western Europe reflects Romanian's unassuming attitude, as well as the high status the priest had in Romanian communities despite the disgruntled saying: “Do

¹⁹ Juliette Bourdier, "Travels Through The Dark Realms Of Medieval Clerical Fantasies: Sex And Erotica In The Infernal Testimony". *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, no. 48 (2017): 21-48.

what the priest preaches and not what he does". Even if Romanians may have borrowed the anecdote from Western Europe, they modified it by changing or not mentioning the lover's job. However, they did not attribute him priesthood. That is not a sign of bigotry. Romanians do not shy away when mentioning the devil. Such references can be found in the wife's lines when she expresses her wish that her husband does not come back (*May the devil kill him on the way!*), and especially in the version found in Wallachia, Moldova and Basarabia that includes the accomplice's threat: *I shall untie the sack/ You shall meet the devil!* Thus, Romanians, especially those from outer Carpathians, do not flinch from mentioning the evil one. But that is completely unrelated to references to priests' morality. Concerning priest, they do not really dare to present him as negative character.

The different attitude towards priest as lover in the Romanian and German versions of the anecdote (most of the anecdote's variants analyzed by Anderson, namely 80 of them, come from Germany) can be explained as the result of the different timeline when the two peoples were christened. Apostle Andrew, the spiritual patron of Romanians preached, according to oral accounts, in Dobrogea. The adepts of Christianity could be found on the territory of Dacia long before the withdrawal of the Roman troops in 273 A.D., and the mass christening of the population took place in the IV century, according to historian Constantin C. Giurescu, based on the archaeological artefacts and writings discovered from that period²⁰. On the other hand, Saint Boniface, the apostle of the Germans, cut down the sacred tree of god Thor from Geismar in 723 A.D. Romanians' respectful attitude towards priests could be the consequence of a longer and more profound relation with the Christian spirit and its impact on their consciousness.

At the same time, the reduced number of versions in which the lover is a priest could be the result of the organic joy that is characteristic of Orthodoxy. In this respect, Dumitru Stăniloae, one of the greatest theologs of the 20th century believed that the salient feature of Orthodoxy is its focus on the luminous dimension of the Gospels, that is on the Resurrection²¹. For Orthodox people, according to Stăniloae, the Resurrection is more important than the Passion. From this orientation comes the constitutive, defining joy of Orthodoxy. Lossky, in his turn, at the end of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*²² mentions the very same joy which is intimately connected to the redemption dimension of Resurrection. In this respect, he calls Easter night "the feast of faith". The sociologist Peter Berger, also notes: „Orthodoxy, in contrast with the West, focuses more on Easter than on Good Friday, on the Resurrection as the focal point of the cosmic drama of redemption. Once again the dogmatic formulations may be the same or very similar, but they are animated by very different forms of piety. The West (Catholic as well as Protestant) has developed a deeply penitential piety, steeped in a gloomy consciousness of guilt and sin. By contrast, the East has been fixated on the figure of what Gustav Aulen (a Swedish Lutheran theologian) has called Christus Victor, the triumphant

²⁰ Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor, vol. I.* (București: ALL, 2015).

²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, "De ce suntem ortodocși", *Teologie și viață* I (LXVII), no. 4-8 (1991): 15-27.

²² Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, trans. Vasile Răducă (București: Humanitas, (2010).

conqueror of both sin and death.”²³. Romanians’ priest is messenger of this joy and that is the source of his joviality that brings him closer to common parishioners. In such a context, to attribute an immoral behavior to the Orthodox priest is less tempting and less prone to generating outrage than in the case of severe preachers of the redeeming Passion. The likelihood of such attribution decreases even more if the priest has a lot of children, is rather poor and works in agriculture just like his parishioners. Consequently, Romanians did not assign the role of lover to a priest either because they did not dare or because it was not outrageous enough.

6.2. The sea foam as a cure. The sea foam was not borrowed as a motif by the Ukrainians because their versions of the anecdote did not include it. Since it is mentioned by Romanian incantations, Muşlea is entitled to consider it a Romanian contribution. The presence of marine elements in the aforementioned anecdote, as well as in incantations and carols is not justified by borrowings and thereby that turns attention to the experience Romanians have had in relation with the sea. The previously mentioned sea foam, the sea otter, the bull swimming in the sea (carrying the holy child’s cradle between its horns) or the monastery on the sea isle mentioned in the carols of the Romanians from Transylvania make the hypothesis according to which all these elements mirror the memory of people’s retreat from advancing water one on which a folklorist, anthropologist or a historian wants to think responsibly for a moment. Ioan Sorin Apan, a physicist and an undergraduate of Orthodox theology studies who was irremediably devoted to Romanians’ folk culture, tried to corroborate Ryan and Pitman’s thesis concerning the location of the Biblical flood with the help of Romanian Christmas carols²⁴. According to Ryan and Pitman²⁵, 7600 years ago the Black Sea was a freshwater lake separated from the Mediterranean Sea by a rocky wall similar to a dam. At the end of an glaciation, as a result of the significant increase in the volume of oceans and possibly after an earthquake, the dam collapsed and the water of the Mediterranean flowed into the lake. Within a year the volume of the Black Sea water could have reached nowadays’ level. In this context, the people dwelling on the shores of the lake hurriedly retreated towards the hills and mountains trying to save themselves from the advancing water. According to Apan, Christmas carols preserve the memory of this event. The healing power attributed to the sea foam in incantations and the anecdote under analysis might be thus explained.

6.3. Diffusion routes. Gheorghe Cernea’s field notes present the theme of the unfaithful wife in a play with known author performed in front of the Romanian community from Ticuşu-Vechi, South Eastern Transylvania. The play performance is described as a community event, but this does not imply by default that the anecdote was not already well

²³ Peter L. Berger, “Orthodoxy and Global Pluralism”, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 13, no. 3 (2005): 437-447.

²⁴ Ioan Sorin Apan, *Taina cerului. Astronomie și folclor* (Bucureşti: Creative, 2015).

²⁵ William Ryan and Walter Pitman, *Noah’s Flood. The New Scientific Discoveries About The Event That Changed History* (New York: Touchstone, 2000).

known by everybody. It could have been just the staging of an already known anecdote. In this case, its novelty resides in the transformation of the anecdote into a play by somebody who was travelling quite often around Europe. The existence of commercial routes and preoccupations of the population in South Eastern Transylvania can explain the versions of the anecdote collected in the area, that are close to the one considered by Anderson as the original. Transylvanians, Poles and the Czechs do not share common borders, but some of the former would frequently travel to Poland and Bohemia.

The script of the play as it was written by Ana Pascu supports, as already highlighted before, the hypothesis according to which some Western European elements were accessible to the author during her trips around Europe. Her job also defends the assumption that she must have had access to the Romanian versions of the anecdote, and that is all the more correlated with fact that Muşlea's quest initiated at the beginning of the '30s must have activated the collective memory and channeled Romanians' interest for the anecdote about the unfaithful wife²⁶.

Ana Pascu's contributions to the content of the anecdote are innovative regardless of whether she just focused on a well-known Romanian anecdote transforming it into a play and adding foreign motifs (non-Romanian or outer Carpathians Romanian) to it, or whether she introduced a new topic to the other villagers. The play she wrote based on the anecdote is a new and intentionally chosen cultural form. What Cernea did was to witness and write about the echo of an event that has diffusion potential.

As I have already showed, Muşlea, in his turn, supported a diffusion thesis in order to justify the spread of the anecdote in the Romanian territories and its version. Nonetheless, the variant on which he focused requires/allows for reconfigurations. Muşlea did not pay much attention to the fact that Anderson had a version of the anecdote that was in German and came from Transylvania. Hence he did not look for similar versions (the collaborators to the *Folklore Archive* only sent versions in the Romanian language) and that is reflected in his studies. Nor did he use correlations when analyzing the significance of the existence of a standard Transylvanian anecdote different from the one found in the territories from outer Carpathians and yet close to Anderson's standard variant. The German colonists settled in the territories in the south and north-east of Transylvania almost 1000 years ago. Therefore, at least as well as from Ukrainians, the anecdote could have been spread in the Romanian communities by those colonists. The hypothesis according to which it was the Saxons who disseminated the anecdote is rather debatable and yet hard to entirely ignore. Moreover, the assumption that the anecdote is attributable to a French juggler from the XV century should be reviewed; similarly, the origin and diffusion of folk motifs in Europe during medieval times are topics that allow revisiting. The anecdote could have reached Transylvania through Saxons' means of communication with German areas. That is a diffusion thesis worth advancing as an alternative/addition to that proposed by Muşlea.

²⁶ Daniela Sorea, "Argument pentru integrarea europeană prin cultură", *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Seria Sociologie*, no.1 (2001): 79-82.

Conclusions

Any of the observations or hypothesis presented by this study can be further researched and developed. Their main focus is the circulation of folk motifs in the European cultural areas. Romanians are part of a continuous process of borrowing, relaying and transformation of their own cultural products. The Romanian versions of the anecdote shows that this people have their own cultural voice that is anchored into their ethnic specificity and which sings in a collective play as part of the continental symphony. Additionally, the discovery of the dramatic version of the anecdote by Cernea shows Romanians' open-mindedness and natural receptiveness towards European cultural trends, as well as their employment of efficient means of relaying those currents.

Der alte Hildebrand, the anecdote included in Grimm Brothers' collection is nothing but the expression of one of the many common European cultural motifs. If the male initiation groups²⁷, the ceremonies held at the end of harvesting the crops²⁸, the spring plant masks²⁹ were thoroughly researched, they would reveal the same diffusion network, as well as the local borrowings, innovations and particularities. At the end of this study, it is worth making one last methodological observation. Anderson reached several conclusions based only on two of the variants of the anecdote (one in German and the other one in Hungarian) which Muşlea managed to improve by focusing on 43 variations of the same anecdote. The latter proved that the anecdote was spread out all throughout the territories inhabited by Romanians. He also indicated the distinct features of the Romanian variations as compared to Anderson's standard variant. That is a good example of the traps posed by an incomplete approach to a topic, as well as of the importance of conducting field research in a responsible manner. Additionally, it reminds the validity of requiring rigor and applying epistemological methods when conducting research in humanities.

²⁷ Alexandru Surdu, *Junii Braşovului* (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1992).

²⁸ Ion I. Ionică, *Dealul Mohului: ceremonia agrară a cununii în Ţara Oltului* (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1996).

²⁹ Bogdan Neagotă, "Băbăluda din Buru, Valea Arieşului. O descriere etnografică", *Orma. Revistă de studii etnologice și istorico-religioase*, no.10 (2008): 17-48.