

*LUCIAN BLAGA* UNIVERSITY SIBIU  
FACULTAY OF LETTERS AND ARTS

**Expressivity of language in folk ballad**  
SUMMARY OF THE PhD THESIS

Scientific coordinator:

Prof. univ. Dr. D.H.C. VICTOR V. GRECU

Ph D Student:

ADINA BABONEA

SIBIU

2012

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## Expressivity of the language in folk ballads

*„... ballad is, for the Romanian culture, at the same time a matter of folklore and history of folk spirituality and a central chapter in the history of ideas” (Mircea Eliade)*

The idea of folklore, folk art, emerges again as a refrain because there are here aesthetic values that can induce a permanent meditation. The suggestions of this art contain, as a form of maximum concentration, the essences of the spiritual life of the Romanian people.

“The weapons” of the spiritual values makers are; word, sound, stone, wood, and colours. Sound and word “floating islands in the ocean infinite of Silence” gave birth to some of Romanian soul’s treasures: folk ballad.

Speaking of the Miorita’s space “high and indefinitely corrugated,” Lucian Blaga said: “the song, as an art that the best interprets the deepest parts of the subconscious, reveals also what we call special horizon of unconscious [...].The ancestral Romanian soul is felt together with this spatial horizon of unconscious, in its deep parts”.

By walking in the Romanian villages, one can find that old rural community is being totally undeveloped and, at the same time, the folk creations, too.

Nowadays, we cannot find performers like Petrea Solcanul or like the folk musician (lautar) from Soveja.

Ballads do not have an audience anymore like in the old times and has not been famous like in the old times; the reason for this is not the **obsolescence** of the art genre but social causes. In ancient times, the performance of an epic song used to represent an artistic event, actually; in fact, it used to be the only artistic event of the village life. The epic song was the highest and the most complex form of folk art. It was carefully improved in other directions, with other targets and other results. Therefore, we believe that the creative background that represents a genuine

treasure must be studied and kept in the knowledge system. We need to take necessary steps mainly today. The last genuine peasant died long time ago and we cannot lose the soul of this nation, otherwise we lose “the eternity “that “was born in the village”.

Regardless of the evolution of a people, the scientific progress, or social transformation, folklore remains integrant part of its spirituality. It is a form of eternal art because the folklore will remain a specific way of reflecting life, expressing feelings, and creating morality. From the folk treasures, we inherit knowledge related to man, macro, and microcosmic world, real or transcendental world.

All beliefs we find in folk creations because they come from the simple man, a keeper of laws and customs, received from ancestors. The peasant of the old times, uneducated was unaltered, uncontaminated by the norms and academic principles that, by their rigor can limit creativity in its pure, ingenuous stage, as manifested in the folk work, orally transmitted from a generation to another.

An argument of our approach is related to the belief that the folk ballad is the holder of some language fact that must be valued because it is the source of the cult literature. Moreover, the folk ballad provides the possibility of contemplating a literary creation (aesthetic function), of commemorating and evocating of past, as a living history (commemorative function) and proposes heroic and moral models (moralising and educative function).

We based upon the analysis on the main folk studies made so far, and then following their model. Folk ballad has inspired many researchers who strongly have studied it. We have tried to put together these theories because they are proving, even if sometimes is contradictory, the special aesthetic value of folk creations. While analysing texts, we used the most comprehensive collections from all folk areas.

We have started our approach to define the concept of ballad and to present the categories. We have also tried to make a connection between those two groups doing research on folklore. The main support came from Benedetto Croce.

According to his theory, beauty has no distinctions and divisions and a clear distinction between folk poetry and poetry is meaningless because both are art.

The starting point in timing the folk epos we placed at the moment Alecu Russo and Vasile Alecsandri because it is not possible to try diving into stages because of the fact that any genres, no matter how old it is, gave birth to another one, to a creation with a similar structure. Moreover, we cannot know the exact time of birth though its appearance can be connected to a historical event.

Folk epos is impressive because of numerous topics, by revealing the importance of these chants in the spiritual life of the Romanian people. The epic song represents behavioural models in typical situations, influencing the human destiny, connected to moments of man's life (birth, marriage, death), jobs (shepherds, constructors), rebellious people against injustice of all kinds, etc. the epic song has a social, educational function, making different genres of ballads that, on their turn, represent different stages in the evolution of human mentalities and aspirations. Another concern of us is related to the folk language and the ballad rhetoric. Starting from the general idea that stylistics analyses the style, Benedetto Croce legitimates, in the respect of the identity between language and poetry. Eugen Coseriu starts from the functional theory of Jakobson severely criticised by him. On the other side, Coseriu has a new vision on the poetic language, defined as "functional plenitude of the language – or simply the language"<sup>1</sup>.

The thesis of identity of the language with the poetry is proved philosophically through discussion concerning the essence of the language and the essence of the poetry as a creative activity. Language is like art, meaning that it is a subject being objectified.

Poetic language and folk language represent as reported to the national language, a common feature: they belong to the liberties opened by the language system.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugen Coșeriu, *Introducere în lingvistică*, Cluj Napoca, Editura Echinoc, 1995 p. 43.

The basic idea found in all the studies about folk poetry is that this is an open work, permanently subject to changes and improvements. The art of colporteurs are the ones who made harmony between language and topic. The folk poetic language has its roots deeply in the spoken language of communities and the anonymous poets are becoming great artists of the language.

Unlike the other genres of folk creations, we can notice the predominant use of figurative language in ballads. Poetic images that are only the result of metaphorical thinking and the expression of common language belong to folklore with the valences of the folk language.

Iorgu Iordan brought a major contribution in studying the folk language. In his research over the Romanian language, he intensely examines the aspects revealing the idea of the development of the contemporary Romanian language based on the folk language. Iorgu Iordan highlights the features of the folk language by analysing the language used by classical writers seen as dialectal writers influenced by folklore. The author reveals the folk character of the language used by Creanga or by Sadoveanu.

The whole work of Iorgu Iordan focuses on the development of the Romanian language in order to continue its evolution, by considering that the folk lexical material, dialectical or argotic elements have to attract writers because the work is a resourceful source less exploited enriching their vocabulary.

Pavel Ruxandoiu says that the literary folklore is integrated „to the general systems of cultural values belonging to an ethnic community”<sup>2</sup>. The author presents again a problem discussed by both the folklorists and the literary historians, namely “the autonomous value of the poetical text in folklore.” Without denying the integration of the literary text in the general folk fact, Pavel Ruxandoiu pleads for the possibility (and validity) of separating the folk (literary) text as research object”, because “the words that make it are embedded in the text not only with the semantic

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<sup>2</sup> Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Folclorul literar în contextul culturii populare românești*, București, Editura Grai și suflet – Cultura Națională, 2001, p. 166.

values of the current usage but also with a semantic cultural meaning outside the text <sup>3</sup>. The aesthetic side of folklore cannot be separated from the features of traditional mentality. For this reason, we cannot be limited only to the implementation in the universe of folk poetry; the opening to cultural anthropology is appropriate.

In an era dominated by mythological thinking or by heroic mentality, the authentic event could be conceived at first, at mythical or heroic level. In later ages, the event could have been thought strictly historical, the integration in a poetic vision accomplishing later by a long series variants.

Cultural identity of each people is reflected by the myths and the legends that accompanied it while development. Owing a folk trend and orally transmitted, myths were collected and transformed in epics that represent veritable monuments of old cultures and belong to universal culture treasure.

Some of these “stories,” “sacred narratives,” carriers of mythic meanings transgressed reality, were settled in writing, taken, and processed, opening an important chapter of folklore.

Since folk creations are the vivid expression of rural life, images and symbols come from the very substance of them, i.e. mythology. Poetic communications are evaluating in carols and ballads to the symbolic mythological image.

Conceived by the old rhetoric as “ornaments” and by the literary aesthetic as “itinerant formula”, Gheorghe Vrabie considers the folklore images “an expression of a metaphorical thinking”<sup>4</sup>. „As the great poets, as great as Eminescu or Blaga, Goethe, the authors of a metaphoric system, in the oral versified creations, in the same manner, we find a world of images distinguished by plasticity placed in a certain rhetorical system ”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Gheorghe Vrabie, *Din estetica poeziei populare române*, București, Editura Albatros, 1980, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

We have discussed about the research of Mircea Eliade, Lucian Blaga, Tudor Pamfile, Romulus Vulcanescu. This approach cannot be seen purely theoretically but as a careful analysis on the theories being validated in interpreting the folk act from all perspectives. Reported to the cult creation, the folk creation has specific features. Folklore is an emanation of the entire people's soul, the act of creation is very full of mystery. As the cult literature, the folk creation is individual but different from the creator's attitude and from community where he belongs. Creation belongs to the group, owner of an artistic language that is being crystallized. Our approach is to find finality: revealing language expressivity of the language in the Romanian folk ballad.

In Lucian Blaga's opinion, the Romanian language has created an inner rhythm simultaneously with the rhythmic creation of our space. Folk literature (compared to the cult literature) limits the renewal by norms imposed by tradition. Several pairs of oppositions are making differences between the folk literature and the cult literature: oral/written, anonymous/known author, collective/individual, traditional/renewing, variants – as finished works/ variants – as stages in the development of work. Two of these pairs, namely collective/individual and traditional/renewing made the researchers to be aware of the proximity between folklore and language, on one side and cult literature and speaking, on the other side. Folk poetry has been creating an own system of signs, as a source for some models form different generations. In oral literature, the improvement of this system of signs takes place in the compositional structure and connected to means of expression and versification. Without skipping the main elements, the pillars of the Romanian folk creation, the ballades Miorita and Mesterul Manole, we have tried this demonstration on several texts originating from different regions and with different themes in order to convince that the linguistic models created by the folk literature are generally valid. Beyond the purely linguistic demonstration, our intention is to highlight the beauty of language, the harmonious sounds of the song of "saying (zicere)".

It is known that the folk language has been a source of inspiration for the Romanian classic writers as proved by the works of Eminescu, Blaga, Arghezi,



Sadoveanu, and Creanga, etc; but they successfully climbed up in the ivory tower of national culture and stimulated us to fight for the beauty of our language. For this reason, we have reanalysed the cultural model of folklore: it has always provided eternally valid necessary values. Repetitions in the folk act represent proofs of cultural model. Even if time passes, people's mentalities, and the cultural model created, remain the same.

Studying folk texts, in our case – ballads, gives us important information concerning grammar and semantics used in the Romanian language hardly found elsewhere. These texts are a support of the analysis on the phenomena occurred in the evolution of language. They help us to understand the general mechanisms of language, where the authenticity has a key role. The epic song has a special status in the literary folklore as the orality is manifested more clearly in the narrative works in verses, where the author has also the role of a performer. While performing a ballad, there are specific features related to the style and the expressivity indicating the type of the text. The perception of a folk creation is unique. Orality requires, on one hand, the compliance with internal limits (how the content is submitted, what is the purpose, what circumstances) and on the other hand, it provides with absolute freedom to the colporteur. The folk language is regarded according to the linguistic aspect. It also has a psychological substrate and emotional and symbolic function.

Folklore is not individual, isolated. It is a social fact that comprises all the mythical, religious, aesthetical beliefs of the traditional community.

When performing, a colporteur has no necessary time to think too much to the way of “saying” the ballad. He is forced to use a certain flow of words and to keep it during the whole performance. Therefore, it is necessary for him to use the default vocabulary in order to create a certain technique. In this respect, he composes more easily and the audience, the receiver, listens to a work with a stylistic effect. We have been trying to prove this thing by analysing rhetorical figures (parallelism, anaphora, dialogue, enumeration, interrogation) or semantic rhetorical figures (metaphor, comparison, symbol, personification, epithet, allegory). We have also used the euphonic figures indicating the expressivity of

verse. We also found that there were many linguistic forms migrating to dialectal areas (for example, from Transylvania to Moldavia or to Muntenia). Phonetic, grammatical, lexical phenomena from the folk texts have less local features but generally available to all Romanian speakers.

Through this analysis, we have tried to present the folk language in the context of the folk ballad because here, we are finding its magical, educational, and aesthetical power. They are three features giving expressive force to the folk language. Far beyond their background, folk ballads confirm the status of a stylistic treasure of the Romanian language, treasure needed to be recovered for its values. Mihai Sadoveanu uttered in his speech at the Romanian Academy that these magical springs of water of life are needed and found by those who sing and feel as belonging to this nation and to this land.

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