

# Dying and Death in 18th-21st Century Europe



Dying and Death in 18th-21st Century Europe:  
Volume 2

Edited by

Marius Rotar, Adriana Teodorescu  
and Corina Rotar

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P U B L I S H I N G

Dying and Death in 18th-21st Century Europe: Volume 2  
Edited by Marius Rotar, Adriana Teodorescu and Corina Rotar

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# FEAR AND THE UNKNOWN<sup>1</sup>

## MARIUS ROTAR AND CORINA ROTAR

*“A book is composed of dead yet magical letters,  
which may be restored to life by one’s own life”*  
Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940)

Nicolae Iorga, one of the greatest Romanian historians, urged authors to write in a way that would confer to every potential reader the feeling that the book had been written expressly for him or her alone (Iorga, 1968, p. 55). His rule may be difficult to follow when writing a scientific text, the inherent objectivity of which leaves little room for further interpretation; yet, as an ideal, Iorga’s proposal seems most appropriate for leading the reader and his soul to new horizons, if relatively less appropriate for ensuring commercial success. In so far as it increases the chances that a scientific book may seem more attractive, this ideal has guided the present work, which tackles the subject of death and the particular ways in which we talk about it.

Its multiple perspectives on death keep the reader gripped. These perspectives come from a wide range of branches of science, societies and cultures. The texts that follow are conceived so that each reader may participate in a journey that aims to reflect upon and to analyze past and present realities of what death represents.

Mankind has tried to define death in many ways, always seeking to capture its essence. This immense effort has failed, however, for death has not only retained its fascination but has also continued to pave the way for new explanations. These elements afford of explanation both at an individual level, as Nicolae Iorga emphasizes when he exclaims “How many times hasn’t what lives within you died! And you still fear death!” (Iorga, 1968, p. 25); and also at a general level, as when Emmanuel Levinas observes that “all that we can say and think about death [...] seems to come from second-hand sources” (Levinas, 1996, pp. 26–27).

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<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by the Romanian National Council for Scientific Research CNCS-UEFISCDI, grant number 54/04.10. 2011 – PNII TE.

A striking image of death, seen as an event, can be found in a short story published in 1932 by the Czech writer Karel Čapek in his book *Apocryphal Tales*. Entitled “Lazarus”, this satirical tale traces the events following Lazarus’ resurrection: after Jesus Christ is cast into prison, Mary tries to convince Lazarus to go to Jerusalem and do something regarding Jesus’ situation. Lazarus hesitates, and eventually explains the reason for his attitude: “I’d like so much to go with you, Martha... if only I weren’t so afraid... of dying again!” (Čapek, 1973, p. 83). Čapek’s short story points directly to the core of the issue of death, which is framed by two themes which are intertwined: the unknown, and fear. We could read the entire history and evolution of humankind using this register.

The present book is a selection of the most important articles presented at the conference “Dying and Death in 18th–21st Century Europe”, for the period between 2010 and 2012. This conference, which has become a tradition, is hosted every year by “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia. The conference organizers are the local Alba County Council and “Unirii” National Museum in Alba Iulia, and the official partner is “Amurg”, the Romanian Cremation Association. Celebrating its sixth edition in 2013, the conference has gained popularity and won significant appreciation from the scientific community. Two hundred and fifty scholars from approximately thirty-five European and non-European countries have attended it over the years. The conference is fundamentally interdisciplinary, and has naturally favoured open and friendly communication between interested parties within the field. This book is the second volume of papers to issue from the conference, following the publication of *Dying and Death in 18th–21st Century Europe* in 2011. The volume aims to cover the many facets of the phenomena of death and dying. The contributions cover a range of fields: ethnography, history, sociology, philosophy, theology, bio-ethics and psychology. The subject of customs and attitudes in the face of death is covered in depth (Bogdan Neagota, Alin Rus, Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė, Aleksandra Pavičević, Gabriel Roman, Adriana Teodorescu, Kornelia Sammet, Franz Erhard, Adela Toplean, Erika Quinn, Anu Salmela, Ormeny Theodora-Eva, Constantina Buleu, Ștefan Borbély), as are the ways in which bodies are disposed of and the associated rituals (Franziska Rehlinghaus, Marius Rotar, Piero Pasini). Issues such as bereavement and euthanasia are also touched upon (Maria Xenaki, Dejan Donev, Anna Bremborg), in addition to philosophical discussions (Ormeny Theodora-Eva, Alfred James Ellar) and the complex connection between music and death (Anna G. Piotrowska). A list of the authors’ countries of origin gives us a helpful perspective on the popularity of the conference and on the continuing

development of death studies as an academic domain worldwide (Romania, Lithuania, the USA, Germany, Finland, Italy, Sweden, Poland, Macedonia, Serbia), in an epoch when death is becoming an integrated globalized phenomenon (McManus, 2013).

In his later years, Eugène Ionesco pondered the anguish of death, observing how it gradually becomes more poignant as we age and feel more acutely the need to find a cure: “I know pretty well what I would need to cheat on this deadly anguish. I would need to be very young again and full of passions. ... what bothers me more is not that I am not living my life, but that I am not able to live it. I’d rather be a child again” (Ionesco, 1994, p. 91). Thus, in talking about death studies we are talking about death scholars, who, in our opinion, are researchers who are fond of their domain and who seek to translate the meanings of death in order to offer them to the public. This is the primary reason why this book has come into being.

Alba Iulia, Romania, November 2013

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# **ETHNOGRAPHY**

# COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEAD AND FEMININE ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH AND SOUTH-WESTERN RURAL ROMANIA<sup>1</sup>

BOGDAN NEAGOTA

*Abstract: Our paper approaches a narrative-ritual complex, documented in some Romanian rural communities from South-Western Romania (Oltenia and Mountain Banat) and East Serbia (Timoc region), during the 20th century: some feminine magical-religious experiences with ecstatic and trance symptomatology, and the subsequent acquirement of extra-sensory qualities, such as talking to the dead (necromancy) and predicting the future (divination), performed in various forms (genuine or specialised) and on different occasions (the religious calendar feasts or on demand). The ethno-anthropological materials proceed from our field researches in Oltenia and Caraş-Severin (2010-2012) and from classical bibliography. We have tried to pass beyond the ethnographical-morphological description, and to assume the deep diachrony of phenomena. In this context, we are using historical-religious methodology as a vessel for exploring long-concealed archaic strata, otherwise unnoticed by the modern eye. Passed through anthropological-historical and historical-religious analyses, these rituals work for the modern researcher, as finest seismographs, best at understanding mental horizons underlying the religious history of profound Europe.*

## 1. Preliminary considerations

Understanding the dynamics of the cultural strata within these ecstatic phenomena requires combining specific ethnological and historical-religious methodologies, each with their approach to the synchronicity and

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<sup>1</sup> Research financed through the EU, ESF, Sectorial Operational Program for Human Resources Development (SOPHRD), 89/1.5/S/61104 (2010-2013) project for post-doctoral studies and researches.

diachronicity of the folkloric fact. Based on our field researches of 2010-2012 (in a number of villages of the Oltenia and Mountain Banat regions in Romania), and on the classical bibliography (for Timoc), we assess a working model of the magical illnesses, in which in the background are the elements of a magical-religious ideology (associated to ecstatic and trance symptoms, possession by spirits, *i.e.* female demons), as well as a series of funerary rituals and representations. Known as *căderea pre Sfânti/căderea în Sfânti*<sup>2</sup>, this phenomenon had been documented in some Romanian communities from South/South-Western Romania and Timoc (Serbia and Bulgaria), during the 20th century.

The stratigraphy is therefore comprised either of the mere juxtaposition of socio-cultural levels, thus resulting heterogeneous, or of a *sui generis* hermeneutics, in which historical, ethnic and society mingling results in inter-textual relations, between: ecstatic magical-religious experiences and complexes, *Männerbünde* rites, *i.e.* *Călușari* healing dances (in the case of the female ecstatic experiences from the Romanian Timoc) and funerary ceremonial practices (especially in Oltenia and Caraș-Severin). They are all conferring the various female ecstatic experiences approached in this paper, as narrative and ceremonial local traditions, the aspect of “diachronic inter-textuality” (Caprettini, 1992, p. 22).

Last, but not least, we aim to approach the ecstatic experiences as living phenomena by means of a double cognitive insertion: exploring both the mythical-fictional background underlying the whole rituality

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<sup>2</sup> In English, a possible translation could be the fall on (in) the Saints [female demons]/the fall amidst the Saintly Ones/the fall in the Saint Ones, *i.e.* a demonophanical ecstatic experience. The Saints, like many other names given to these feminine demons, is only an apothropaical euphemism (Neagota, 2011). From the very long list of euphemistic names of the Iele, I quote only some examples: *Șoimanele* (Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, p. 207); *Iezemele, Vântoasele* [The Windies, The Whirlwinds] (Mușlea & Bîrlea 1970, p. 208); *Dânsele* [They] (Fochi, 1976, p. 138; Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, p. 207); *Cele sfinte* [Those Saints Ones] (Fochi, 1976, p. 138), *Sfintele, Sfintele de noapte* [The Saints, The Night Saints] (Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, p. 207), *Rusalile/Rusalele* (Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, p. 208); *Milostivele* [the Merciful ones] (Fochi, 1976, p. 138), *Miluitele, Fie-le milă* (Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, p. 208); *Cele frumoase* [The Beautifuls] (Fochi, 1976, p. 138), *frumoasele* (Cantemir, 1973, pp. 342-343), *doamnele* [frumoase] (Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, p. 208), *Mândrele* (Ibid, 207); *Măestrelle, măestrelle* [The Miraculous ones] (Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, p. 208; Fochi, 1976, p. 138); *Cele nepomenite, Nemaipomenitele* [The Ineffables] (Fochi, 1976, p. 138); *Puternicele* (cerești) [The heavenly Mighties/The Powerfuls] (Mușlea & Bîrlea, 1970, 208); *Împărătesele văzduhului* [The Empresses/The Queens of the air] (Ibid.); *Fecioarele* [The Maidens] (Ibid.).

involved, and the actual ceremonial dimension. In both situations, we privilege the experiential bottom-line, of both researchers and performers, whether the latter be active, half-passive or passive. We revisit here Mircea Eliade's argument in *Folklore as means of knowledge* (1937), that is, deep into his experientialist age, on the concrete experiential foundation of a great deal of folkloric beliefs and narratives; also, on the mythical-fictional treatment over this body of personal experiences (Eliade, 1937/1943/1993, pp. 25-42). Now, whether we acknowledge Eliade's hermeneutics of concrete experience of reality, or a cognitivist semiology, of the type of Culianu's 'mind game', our proposition in favor of experientialism stays firm, and is sustained by consistent fieldwork (especially within the last decade).

This modality of approaching these magical-religious complexes aims at delineating the morphology and morpho-dynamics, while accounting for the human-bound temporality, as limitation, for both physiological memory plus age quantum of folklore bearers, and for the methodological tools of researchers. Research can only study archives, and older ethnographic descriptions, besides doing fieldwork; and then operate some kind of regressive ethnology, and methodic ethnological and historical-religious comparativism. These latter technologies can be claimed operational, because of the relatively slow rhythm of change of traditional societies of Eastern/South-Eastern Europe, along the last two millennia. Regarding the historical-religious perspective over the narrative material at hand, we face a same challenge: the textual nature of our ethnographic documents limits drastically the potential of doing anything other than morphology, over the mythical-fictional systems of the ecstatic experiences.

Furthermore, beyond the various analytical and interpretative levels (historical, sociological, cultural, psychological etc.) that can help circumscribe a "religious fact", what remains is *the human experience* that, at least in our case, is a magical-religious experience of the sacred (Eliade 1937/1943/1993, pp. 39-40). For our research, this axiom has an extremely important corollary: the fundament of the narratives on the *căzătoare*<sup>3</sup>, on those *luți din căluș* (Pop, 1998, pp. 77-86; Benga & Neagota, 2010, pp. 133-157) and on those *lovți de gurbane*<sup>4</sup>, contains concrete human

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<sup>3</sup> In English, the translation of *căzătoare* could be "fallers" or "fallen down women", covering the ecstatic and the preponderant female character of this experience of sacred.

<sup>4</sup> *Hit by the Gurbane* is a neurophysiological disease with magical-demonic etiology (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922, 1, pp. 35-40; Neagota, 2012; Ambruşan, 2012).



experiences that are, nevertheless, indirectly accessible for the researcher. Within these experiences of the sacred, the researcher has an exclusively narrative access: the self-referential stories of his interlocutors and the referential stories with distinct degrees of fictionality (Neagota, 2013, pp. 63-88; Benga 2013, pp. 89-100). During the magical-religious therapies of the ecstatic/neurophysiologic symptoms that are regarded as pathological, the ethnologist is allowed to mediate narratively, too (Benga & Neagota, 2010, pp. 199-205), and, in some cases (when the therapies respect the calendar and when it happens that the researcher is present), to be co-present, as a witness, at the healing ritual/ceremony (Neagota, 2012).

We made these preliminary observations in order to circumscribe, from the start, the exclusively narrative nature of the ethnological material that we have now concerning the main character of our study – a female *ecstatic* from a Banat village of Caraș-Severin. This does not relativise her credibility, but nuances the procedure of the terrain research (centred on thematic and (auto)biographical interviews – the life story) and the following analytical and interpretative methodology. The fact that more than 50 years have passed between the events retold and the interview, obliges us to take into account the fictionalising mechanisms of memory, too – mechanisms that could have turned the initial story into a mythified/fictionalised narrative, according to the parameters of the local cultural tradition. Because of this, we had retaken the interviews on three successive years, repeating the questions and stimulating the flow of the involuntary memory.

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As in the case of other folkloric magic-religious complexes, in which ecstatic, trance and possession elements are present, *căderea în Sfinte* is seen by the researcher at the narrative level. There is a cognitive threshold, beyond which the researcher's access is being restricted to only a narrative mediation (Benga, 2005): we can hear the story, more or less detailed, we can hear the tale of an experience, we can discern the fictional syntax of the narrative-collocutor, yet we cannot access the direct, unmediated, real experience of the narrator.

The shared presence of the researcher in the ritual performing is impossible in the case of events taken place in *illo tempore*, recorded into the passive memory of long duration of the collocutor; yet it is possible and desirable in the case of rites which take place with calendrical incidence and regularity (Benga 2009, pp. 49-65) – *i.e.* the sacrifice of the lamb or of fish for the *Sfinte*, in the case of the *Gurban de sănătate* [*for*

*Healing/for Health*]<sup>5</sup>, or which arise in a certain calendric stint over the year (*Whitsuntide* for example), but only following daemonic epiphanies or daimonophanies of the kind of the *scosul din Căluș* [*taking off the Căluș*].

I must confess that the phenomenon I am about to speak, belongs to some obsolete social-economic and mental structures of the village of Goruia, and of other villages in the district of Caraș-Severin. From the interviews we have conducted in three villages, two Romanian (Goruia and Gârliște), and one Carașovean [Croatian] (Carașova), in which I have insisted on the *căderea pre Sfântci/Sfinte*, I have managed to circumscribe a certain experience of the sacred, more or less institutionalized at the level of popular religiosity, through the status of the charismatic witch, *vrăjitoarea din Sfinte/căzută în Sfinte* [the sorceress fallen amidst the Saintly ones], which was still relatively frequent in between the world wars, but which has entered definitively into reflux in the post-war period, in the context of the traumatical transformations suffered by the Romanian rural society during the Soviet period. The collocutors who knew more data on the phenomenon of the *căderea pre Sfântci* all have ages covering 60 to 90 years.

My starting point in this research, which I have then extended to other regions, has been the tale of a *căzătoare* of Goruia, Ana lui Ion Sfera [Ion Sfera's Ana], as it was told by her daughter, Rachela Beceneagă, during our meetings in the years 2010-2012.

## **2. Ion Sfera's Ana: The Story of a Căzătoare of Goruia, Caraș-Severin**

Let us move, then, to the synthetic account of Ion Sfera's Ana (born Bălu), the *căzătoare din Sfinte*<sup>6</sup> of Goruia, Caraș-Severin (cca. 1895-1972). Ever since her birth, she showed signs that predicted a particular destiny for herself: her mother had wanted to have an abortion because all the children she had before Ana had already died, but she could not terminate the pregnancy. Ana Sfera was born prematurely, after seven months of pregnancy.

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<sup>5</sup> We speak of the dates to the Gurban allocated, by local communities of Rudari, a transfrontier Romanian-speaking population, from South Romania (Oltenia and Muntenia), Timoc (Serbia and Bulgaria) and from other South-East European regions: be it for healing or for endearment/for fun: St George in the new style (23rd April), St George in the old style (6th May), and Ascension.

<sup>6</sup> "Falling Woman on the Saints" [Demons]/"Female Faller on the Saints" [Demons]

Later on, around 1914, one evening, while watching the cattle grazing in Valea Lalii, together with an old woman from the village, Ana accidentally steps or lays *on them* [*pre ieli*], *on their table*, *on the table of the Saints Demons* [*pre masa lor*, *pre masa Sfintelor*]<sup>7</sup>. She feels a strong weakness, nearly fainting, and is then taken home by her father, called there on purpose. During this time, Ana Bălu shows the first repeated ecstatic symptoms: hearing an unknown voice, from her very experience – when she laid *on them* [*pre ieli*] and, afterwards, having visions of the *Saints* [*Sfinte*], which appeared to her and asked for submission, menacing with punishment.

“My mom went with the cattle (in Valea Lalii – n.n.). My mom. And my mom laid on them [*pre ieli*]. Up on a hill she laid on them. And when she laid on them [*pre ieli*], my mom could not come back home anymore. She had hardly been brought back home. (...) And then, she kept telling, went on telling, they [*ieiele*] came to her, to my mom. And they said she should do this and that, if she wouldn’t obey them, the *iele* would harm her. (...) Yes, there was an old woman with her. A woman, she wasn’t that old either. And she said: let’s go home! And then, when she wanted to get up, she said: ‘Go and get Dad, I can’t walk home anymore! I can’t anymore...’ And then, when she got home, it was over. But nobody knew she had fallen on the dear *iele*. They took her to all the doctors. And then she tackled the magicians, too, what else could she do? And then, they came back before she was taken to the doctor, came in a dream, vanishing. And then she told her dad, ‘dad, I ain’t ill, I fell in the Valea Lalii, and I heard something, I was told something, but I know nothing’. And only then did her father go and quit going to the doctor and went... Then it happened to her...” (V. R. Beceneagă, 18.02.2010)

She is vainlessly carried from doctor to doctor, without getting better, as her illness is of a different nature:

“For she fell *on them* [*pre iele*]. She laid *on ieli/them on them* [*pre iele*] when she went with the cattle. Parents went with her to many doctors, and everywhere else they could go...” The *Saints female demons* [*Sfânticili*]

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<sup>7</sup> In Şirineasa, if somebody, disregarding the age, steps by mistake on *the little table of the Saints* [*măsuța Sfintelor*], on *the hearth of Gurban* [*vatra Gurbanului*], is *mutilated, marked or hit by the Saints Demons* [*pocit*, in Romanian] and, as a result of a divinatory diagnostic, as *reading in the grains* [*datul în bobi*], *intuitively* [*pe încercate*] or *oneirically*, he will have to do *small tables* [*mescioare*] by himself – tables with small pittas and fish offered to *the Saints demons* [*mescioare pentru Sfinte*] and *lamb from Gurban* [*mielu de Gurban*], at least for three years (Neagota, 2012; Ambrușan, 2012).

“took all her strength away. That’s why she couldn’t make it anymore. That’s why her father took her to the doctor.” (Idem)

The real diagnosis, followed by an efficient therapy, is given by some old women from the village that consider her *fallen on the Saints female demons* [*căzută pre Sfântci*]. She is then taken to the magician Anuța lui Jurca, from Gârliște, who disenchants her and gives her health back, taking in exchange her incipient ecstatic powers:

“And my dad had gone, her dad, to all of them..., all of the doctors, everyone and everything. But they did not find any cure. (...) And then, dad went to a magician. And he said: ‘I go there to try.’ And that magician knew that my mom *had fallen on the Saints* [*o căzut pră Sfinte*]. And she tried to break it.” (Idem)

“She had this gift ever since she was a maiden, given by God. And her parents tried, took her to all the doctors – they didn’t go by cars, like nowadays, because there were no cars, they went there by cart, they knew of a man, a cart, and went with the cart to that man, and the doctors could not tell anything. And she just withered all of a sudden. She couldn’t eat anymore, and nothing more. She was like dead. And then they thought, somebody had told her dad: ‘Listen, let’s do it differently! You go [to Anuța], that was the name of the female magician from Gârliște, Anuța, see, go to Anuța, in Jurca... in Gârliște!’ And then, at night, my mother dreamt that the ieli told her she would acquire a great gift, only when the other one died, as she had taken the first one’s gift.” (V. R. Beceneagă, 19.02.2010)

After the healing and the temporary loss of the ecstatic potential, Ana Bălu comes back to her daily life. She marries Ion Sfera and has four children. Nevertheless, her biography is broken down by dramas, with two dead children: for the first one – the boy who died at 8 years of age – Ana Sfera asks for the services of a *căzătoare* from Ciuchici, in order to speak to him. This had happened before the death of the magician Anuța from Gârliște who, through her magical therapy, had healed her, but had also taken the gift of talking to the dead away from her.

Around 1943-1944, when Anuța Jurca dies, Ana Sfera’s *falls* begin: the first *fall* is unexpected, happening on the village road and lasting for six weeks, while she stays in trance, without speaking and eating anything. She is even subjected to the procedure of needle biting for testing her vital reactions.

“So, when she was away/lost, a man bit her with a needle to see if she was dead or alive. For she didn’t know about her anymore. *And, when he bit her, did she feel?* How would she? She felt nothing.” (Idem)

The family and her daughter Rachela go as far as preparing the funeral, thinking that she would never come back/recover from this illness: “And then we bought funeral clothes for her: she’d dying, she’s dying...”

“That was it... for six weeks she talked to nobody, she was away all that time. She didn’t even eat. We said she would die, we prepared the clothing, for she was about to die and all the rest. And all of a sudden God brought back her gift, for she said she was hungry, and asked for something to eat. (...) Then she fell, after that old woman had died. Then she fell... and then she fell like that. For the girl was telling me, my girl: what’s going on with mom? For she’s had it again. Let her, I say, for now she’s got work to do with the *ieli* again. Yes...” (V. R. Beceneagă, 18.02.2010)

During those six weeks, teenage visions came back to her, with the Saints showing up inside the visions so that she could talk to them.

“She was a maiden, yes. She was not married. (...) She had the gift, but couldn’t bare like this, as the magician broke her down. And when the magician had died, she regained her gift.” “And then, the female magician died. And when the magician died, my mother fell again. And when she fell, I told our neighbours: Come and see what’s going on to her! For she says nothing more, she speaks no more, she doesn’t want to say anything else. And she didn’t even eat anything. And then, when the neighbours came, one of the women said: ‘Shut up, for she had fallen on the Saints again!’ And then, when the bell struck twelve, she started to speak *to them [ieli]*. And the hearth was full of people, when she spoke *to them [ieli]*. My mom spoke *to them [ieli]*. And then, I said: ‘God, why is she like that? For, I say, I don’t know what else to do with this woman.’ For six long weeks she had been lying in bed...” (Idem)

In this state of *loss*, she has ecstatic visions, where she speaks to the *Saints* and is submitted to tortures by them in order to be fully obedient; afterwards, she is obliged to choose her daemonic patrones that she shall obey for the rest of her life, *i.e.* the series of *Saints* mistresses:

“But she told me so, that they had tortured her, lifted her through the fir trees, did to her... People heard about it, too, not only when she talked about it, see...” “I can’t know anything to tell you how it was. Only that I know she had fallen and, when she had fallen, she told people she was among the fir trees, that if she didn’t obey they would beat her and...”

That's what I know, see, that it happened to my mom, she fell *on them* [*pre ieli*].”

“She spoke, people heard her telling to the *ieli*: ‘Leave me alone and stop torturing me, stop beating me, I’ll do as you say!’ And then they asked her: ‘Now how do you want it? With the clean ones or the unclean ones?’, they said. Then my mom said: ‘I don’t want with the unclean ones, I want with the clean ones.’ There are two types of *Saints*: some that do evil, some that do God’s will, too. And my mom was in them for long years. (...) She was into and with God’s word, for she didn’t want hers, for ten maidens were good and ten were crazy. And she wanted with the good ones, not with the evil ones. See, now, I know that my mother had fallen!” (Idem)

Asked to say who the *Saints* are, Rachela the old woman said to me, explaining it to me in a Christianised hermeneutic reasoning (of the type *interpretatio christiana*):

“The *Saints* asked with which maidens, which maidens she wanted: either with the clean ones, or with the unclean ones. They call themselves clean and unclean. Those are the *Saints*. (...) Those are the ten maidens. The clean and the unclean ones are mentioned even in the Gospels.” (Idem)

As a consequence of choosing the *the Clean Saints* [*Sfântcili Curati*], Ana should wear only white clothes<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, she receives a dispensation from her daemonic mistresses, as a result of mourning her two deceased children:

“She might have seen them, she might have, for they had told her to wear white clothes. Then she said she couldn’t wear white, as my family is dead, my children are dead. And then: it’s alright like this, too! This I show she told me when she woke up. Yeah...” (Idem)

Back then, during the first *loss* [*în pierdere*], around 1943-1944, women from that village or from neighbouring villages came to her house, hearing that she is *fallen in the Saints* [*căzută în Sfinte*], having the purpose of asking for Rachela’s help – the daughter of the *female faller* [*căzătoare*]. She accepted to put the photos of the soldiers disappeared on the Russian battlefield under her *lost* in trance mother’s head and,

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. the obligation to wear white, clean clothes in the case of the patient and of the *Gurban priestesses*, when the three preliminary *mescioare*/small tables are taken away (with fish and small breads/*pânișoare* like pitta, with sugar/honey), before the proper *Gurban* takes place.

afterwards, a few minutes later she started talking to them in a low voice, transmitting messages from the deceased ones.

“But she asked me, when coming to our place: be good, let me only put my child’s photo under her head! Then she said: look, I say, put it! And when she put the picture, two minutes later she was talking to him, with the one whose photo she had been given. And when she put the picture, she said: What happened to you? How did you die? Like that, I fell from the horse while riding, that man said to my mom. And then he said: Tell my mom that I fell from the horse! And be sure I am dead. That child died on the battlefield. And she saw many others. More people she saw like that. And then I told her: I’m not going to give up, as she goes through too much torment and she could die so. And then I let them more. And she said everything, everything... They came to her, while she was in that loss of self [*în pierdere*]. Yes. Yes, she said how it had all happened to them, how they died, how... everything.”

“She told the story. And the people said the ones in the hearth, who came to see her in the evening, to hear her telling. And if you gave her a photo, to put it under her head, she spoke to the man, the man in the photo.” (Idem)

In addition, Ana Sfera practised the *sign reading* [*datul în sămn*], i.e. telling the fortune in the money, with a coin into a glass of new water [*apă neîncepută*]<sup>9</sup>:

“And she gave, like this, a sign, yes, when she woke up after six weeks, when she woke up of that illness, a woman came to her, upset, and that woman asked her: ‘Be kind, be kind, and do something for me if you can! For look how things are: that and the other thing came to our house.’ And then she said: ‘I can’t do it. I can’t do that!’ And then she stood still, sat on a chair and said: ‘Maybe you have some money? Give some money’. And when the woman gave her the money, she started telling things [reading] from the money. From that money she told her. She told her everything that had been happening to the woman and how it had happened. And from then on she told her again, like that...” (Idem)

She used to tell the fortune *in grains* [*în bobî*] and in the finding of the foretold fated one [*pre scrisă*]<sup>10</sup>:

“And then, she kept telling, she once told it in writing for some youngsters... Girls used to come: Come and tell it to us in writing, Ana, so

<sup>9</sup> Relating to the first divinatory technique, one remarks the isomorphism with the necromancy in a glass of water, practiced by the Old Rosa of Gamzigrad, Timoc.

<sup>10</sup> On this topic, see Olteanu, 1999, pp. 549-593 and 2005, pp. 47-86.

that we see then whom we will dream about. And for the ones who were told by her those things, it happened like that. And when she did it to my child... ‘Mom, let’s do it in writing! Alright, do it...’ Look, when she told it him, she said: ‘Woman, this child is getting married. But he won’t wed a girl from the village. He’ll take a girl from abroad. And he’ll bring a mother, too, when he brings the girl. No, stop saying that, you’re just saying things...’ But this I show it turned out to be. A woman from Tigvanu Mic came to Goruia, and stuck to him, and he took her as a wife.” (V. R. Beceneagă, 19.02.2010)

In the mean time, she knew well the local disenchantment repertoire [*d’i diochi, d’i izdat, d’i șarpi la vași* etc.], but also the magical practices for regaining the fertility [*mana*] and of the pre-marital magic – the cut of the willow tree [*tăierea salciei*] for the foretold fated one [*ursită*]: “She disenchanting for any illness. And her disenchantment was effective. (...) *They [Ieli]* gave her the powers.” “She had that gift from God.”

“She fell like this on them/ieli, on the dear ieli she fell again. They knew, if the woman had troubles with the cattle, with the sheep, with... they had done it. They came to them because the *muroni*<sup>11</sup> had come to the sheep and ate their lambs, so that people from Gârliște, Carsova came, do I remember well?... (...) They came to the sheep, turned into *muroni* and the sheep died. The lambs, not the sheep. (...) I only remember that she said you should disenchant against the *muroni* for the sheep. (...) I couldn’t know that. Ohh, if I had her gift, if God had given me only a quarter of it! Like my mom was.” (V. R. Beceneagă, 03.2011)

*The falls* repeat at irregular intervals, especially during Spring feasts, mostly during the Whitsunday [*Rusalii*] and the Midsummer Day [*Sânziene*].

“And she lived many years... so many times, during feasts, she fell. For they/ieli came back to her. (...) Yes. During great feasts. Easter, Whitsunday. Then she fell. Then I said to my folks: ‘Now, pay attention, for now she shall fall!’ Then she used to lay lost for three-four days. *And then she could speak to the dead?* Yes, yes. Then she spoke.” (V. R. Beceneagă, 18.02.2010)

She is no longer sought for by women willing to talk to their own deceased relatives, especially as the war was over and the first harsh years of the communist regime followed. On the other hand, Rachela, her daughter, does no longer accept for somebody to take advantage of her

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<sup>11</sup> Demons or sorceresses which are stealing the animal fertility (*mana*, in Romanian).



mother's ecstatic *losses* for necromatic purposes, due to the fact that the mother had specified she wanted to be left alone when she *was lost* [*iera în pierdere*]: after each *fall* [*pierdere, cădere*] in which she had to contact the dead, she was "torn into pieces" because she had to wander searching the souls of the dead, in the places where they were.

Her death comes naturally, around 1972, as a loss from which she can no longer awake:

"[And when she died, back then, in that year when she died, did she see the Saints again, did they take her again?] No, no, no. She died in three days. In three days she died. [Didn't she struggle/suffer?] No, no. It was, because here we do a praznic/feast, at... and I said to her: 'Don't go to the feast anymore, it's a shame!' 'No! Look, right now, I'm going.' And then, my daughter came to me and said: 'Mom, mother is dying.' 'Shut up, I say, for you know what happens to her!' 'No, this time you should know she's dying!' And that was it. She fell [ill in bed] on Friday, when she went to the feast, and on Friday I shouted at her: 'Mom, what are you doing?' 'I'm not feeling too well.' 'Come on, I'll take you to my place!' I used to live here and she lived in another house. 'Noo... So that I stay next to you, so that nothing happens to you, for why didn't you... No! It's not the time yet! Not yet!' After that, my daughter came to me once more on Saturday morning: 'Come, mom, let's take her to your place, mother is dying!' And I took her... my daughter was a strong woman... she carried her in her arms and, when we reached the courtyard, to get here, she passed away in her arms.' 'Ohh, girl, I say, she's dying! Come, I say, I grab her legs and you take her by the head and we take her home.' And, no sooner had we laid her in bed, when I lighted a candle for her and he was in the head of the bed. And he was telling her: 'Old woman! What are you doing, old woman?' Look, he tells me: 'Is it that the old woman is dead? Is it that the old woman is dead?'" (Idem)

After her death, Ana's presence continues in an oneiric dimension, directed towards the same old woman Rachela:

"Well, if my girl came to me, this, my mom in my dream, when I dreamt my family and she said: 'Mom, I say, come and take me at once!' 'You still have to live.' (...) She said she wouldn't take me. (...) All of them, all of them I dreamt one evening, only that I haven't told you. I told it to my godmother. I told her that I went to sleep and, in the morning, at dawn, I fell asleep, and that all of them had come to me. The whole family. And then I told Petru: 'Petre, what a dream I had!' 'What dream, mom?' 'Your dad, and your mom, and... and your uncle, and... my children.' I asked one of them: 'But there, this one, who's this beauty?' 'She's your daughter.' 'Yes, she says, for my daughter was smaller, not that big.' 'This is Florinca, your daughter.' Then I dreamt that... and dad, and my dad...

old man Belu (moș Belu), whom I didn't dream...(...) And then I told mom... I was afraid, too, you know: 'Mom, mom, I say, why did you come? Maybe you came to take me away? That's why you all came to me now.' 'You still have to stay.' How much longer, I don't know....(...) That's all she said. And once again I dreamt her, she spoke to me again, and I dreamt her telling me: 'Mom, I say, are you here to take me away?' 'You have many things to see.' And from what I saw in that dream, many things I have buried. And that's what she told me in her dream.'" (Idem)

### 3. Căzute în Sfinte, Căzuți în Sfinte from Caraș-Severin<sup>12</sup>

The case of the *căzătoare* [*female fallers on the Saints demons*] of Caraș-Severin is far from being an isolated one. The interviews realised in Goruia (2010-2012) and Gârliște (2012) offered me a series of data for a fragmentary reconstruction of the network of necromantic ecstatic women living between the two world wars and right afterwards in the Mountain Banat (South-Western Romania).

At the beginning, Rachela Beceneagă, my best interlocutor on the topic of the feminine necromantic ecstasy, denied the existence of any *căzătoare* [*female fallers*] in the region: "There were no others. I don't remember of any others who might have been. Only her." (V. R. Beceneagă, 19.02.2010).

Later, she remembered the fact that her mother, Ana Sfera, after the premature death of her 8 year-old boy, went to get help from a necromantic woman *that had fallen from the Saints* [*căzută din sfinte*], a *sorceress* [*vrăjitoare*] from Ciuchici (Ciuchiși), in order to speak to him (V. R. Beceneagă, 3.03.2012). It happened during the period when her ecstatic powers had been neutralised by Anuța of Gârliște's magical therapy.

Then Baba Rachela spoke to me about two ecstatic sorcerers [*vrăjitori*] from the same village, both of them previously fallen *in the Saints* [*în Sfinte*] who, in the moment of the daemonic election, would have chosen *the Unclean ones* [*pre ali Năcurati*], thus acquiring magical powers for charms making (black magic – *legarea de farmece, boscoane*). We are talking, first of all, about Anuța, *the sorceress* [*vrăjitoarea*] from Gârliște, *fallen on the Unclean Saints* [*căzută în Sfintele Necurate*], the one who is presumed to have stolen Ana Bălu's ecstatic gifts the moment she cured her (V. R. Beceneagă, 02.2010, 03.2011). Afterwards, there's a reference to moș Nincu, a *sorcerer* [*vrăjitor*] from Gârliște, *fallen*, him too, *in the*

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<sup>12</sup> *Women Falling in the Saints* [Căzute în Sfinte], *Men Falling on the Saints* [Căzuți în Sfinte].

*Saints* [în *Sfinte*], when he was in the army [la cătane], and who chose *the Evil ones* [pre ali *Nebuni*], too (V. R. Beceneagă, 19.02.2010, 03.2011). People used to say about him that he keeps *the Unclean one* [*Necuratu*], i.e. the Devil, in the glass of water when he disenchant (P. Ghiga, 4.03.2012).

Lena Văcărescu, *the charms' unfolders* [*desfaceri/dezlegări*] specialist of Goruia, used to tell me: "Long ago, more people used to fall due to this. Now they don't practise it as much anymore" (E. Văcărescu, 18.02.2010).

She mentioned two *female fallers* [*căzătoare*] known when she was young, a *sorceress* [*vrăjitoare*] from Bozovici and one from Sălcele:

"I have heard this was in Bozoviși. My mother-in-law told me, that a woman like that fell in the Saints and the doctor came and gave her an injection. And she says that she fell like that again, and she would have asked them to leave her alone, not to give her more injections and not to bite her anymore. To leave her alone. Like this, they were afraid she would die and. (...) Then, one woman, in Sălcele, right there next to Bozoviși, that one no. That one... she was alone. And when she fell, there was no one. Well, she saw something in the grains, like that, she saw. Well, but could not tell/guess nothing at all until she went to the priest. And when she went to the priest there, the priest read her and she guessed/told. In the grains, in this, but confusing... confusing, not clearly. (...) Yes. You are not allowed to touch her, to bite her. She is gone. Her soul is gone. (...) Three days." (E. Văcărescu, 18.02.2010)

During the field research in Carașova, in a Carașovean ethnic community<sup>13</sup>, focusing on the *Stag with the Saint Ones* [*Cerbul cu One Bože*], in February 2012, I found out about other necromantic *female fallers* [*căzătoare*] from the region, but without any more details offered by one of my female interlocutors, Lina Urdășița: Baba Rosa from Carașova (my interlocutor's aunt), who considered the *Saints* [*Ăle*

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<sup>13</sup> The Carașoveni or Cârșoveni [Krašovani, Karašovani] represent a Southern Slavic population, Roman Catholic, speaking the meridional Torlac dialect or the old Croatian language (according to some linguists from Croatia). "The immigration of the Croats to Romania was the result of three successive waves. The first wave immigrated in the 13th-14th centuries from the North-Western part of Bosnia, and they were known as Carașoveni Croats, or the Croats from the Carașovean basin. They settled in the Northern plateau of the Caraș River, near Reșița, in seven villages with compact population, in proportion of 92-98%. Carașova, the oldest of the seven villages, is recorded as an official cartographic fact since the 13th and 14th centuries, and the others beginning with the 16th century." (<http://www.icr.ro/bucharest/the-continent-of-romania-romania-s-national-minorities-27-2006/the-croats.html>)

*Sfinte/One Bože*] as a source of her magic powers, a necromantic sorceress [*vrăjitoare*] from a village next to Caransebeș and another one in Mehedinți.

An important piece of information that I could not extend by means of other interviews, reached me during an interview taken in Goruia, on the occasion of the funerary fires of Holy Thursday [*Joimari*], called *Luminișche* [little bonfires for dead people], in 2012. My interlocutor, Anghelina Benghia, an old woman over 80, told me about her aunt, *teica* Maria, who had confessed to her that she had been *tormented by the Saints* [*chinuită de Sfinte*] in order to surrender [pentru a li se *preda*], but that she did not agree. As a result, she fell ill during main feasts, as a victim of the *Saints* she has refused (A. Benghia, 11-12.04.2012).

Finally, Păun Ghiga, 78 year-old, from Gârliște, only knew vague details concerning the necromantic women and, under these circumstances, he extrapolated the term *căzătoare* to other magical technicians: for instance, a *sorceress* [*vrăjitoare*] from Răcășdia and Radu Pavel, the ex-forester in Goruia, who used the gun to *untie* [*să dezlege*] through magical methods those who are bewitched (P. Ghiga, 4.03.2012).

#### 4. Floarea Dumitrașcu, a necromantic technician from Cioroiși, Dolj

**The story of initiation.** There are at least two versions of this story. In one of them, told by a woman from the village, a woman who had learning difficulties/had been speech impaired ever since she was a child, Floarea, was, like many other children from rural areas, a *sui generis* shepherd of the family's sheep. One day, when she was on the common with the sheep, an *Old Man* with white beard [*Moșu*] came and spoke to her<sup>14</sup>. From that moment on, she started to speak and she also received from that man the gift of talking to the dead during her trances (Benga, 2011).

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<sup>14</sup> The figure of the Old Man with white beard, called with the generic name *Moșu* and considered to be the God is attested also in the interwar Oltenia and Muntenia, especially in the tales of the folk prophets, as Bănică Doleanu from Cassota (Buzău) – in 1928 (Macarie, 1930; Urzică, 1993, pp. 153-159, pp. 160-166), Vasilica Barbu from Tudor Vladimirești (Tecuci) – in 1937 (Minunile din com. Tudor Vladimirescu [s.a.]. Urzică, 1993, pp. 220-237) and especially Petrache Lupu, the Saint from Maglavit (Dolj) – in 1935, famous in the 30s (see, inter alia, Antal, 1935. C. Cerkez [s.a.]. Ouatu [s.a.]. D. Roman [s.a.]. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor [s.a.], pp. 39-40, pp. 42-43, p. 127. Gelu, 2010, pp. 13-80. cf. Urzică, 1940/1993, pp. 167-219).

The second version is quite different. When she was 13 year-old, she went in the orchard to bring some plums, and she didn't return. Her sister found her later, in the orchard, in an unconscious state. The doctors were unable to help, but a priest provided an alternative diagnosis: she had received the gift of the sorceress:

She was 13. One evening, they sent her to get some plums from the garden. The girl left, but never came back. They waited for an hour or two. They found her fallen in the garden, without consciousness. When she woke up, she wasn't the same. They took her to all kinds of doctors and old women, nobody knew what she had. Until when, taken to a priest, she was "read in the book" by him and told that her illness does not have anything to do with the doctors, but is "given by the magicians". Since then, Floarea started to communicate with the dead (Stăiculescu, 2003).

From that summer on, she started to *fall* unexpectedly, first on the occasion of some important spring religious feasts (Easter, Ascension, Pentecost etc.), and to talk to the dead. She did this only while in a state of trance.

At the beginning, these states of trance were sudden, and those who wanted to contact some deceased in their family, had to come to Floarea only during these feasts, when she was in trance [*în pierdere*]. Then, little by little, Floarea started to professionalize herself, and to get induced into states of trance each time somebody asked for her help in order to speak to a certain dead person. So she became a kind of technician of the trance, able to self-induce these altered states of consciousness. The economical background of this profession is very fragile (about 5-10 lei for one necromantic session – 1.5 or 2 euros), so any financial explanation of her trances is useless.

In the perception of the villagers, there are two stages of her ecstatic career: first, one that is more authentic, when her trances were unexpected and fortuitous, expressing a mystical vocation. The second, marked by the professionalization of this ecstatic vocation, showed up when she started to self-induce the altered states of consciousness, on command – when the client arrives – and it is less credible for many people. From our point of view, this moment of passing from fortuitous trances to controlled trances is very important for the understanding of the mechanisms of professionalization and institutionalization of the ecstasy as a paradigmatic religious experience.

In addition, there is one more aspect, belonging to the Christian ethics. For the local common sense opinion, it is a sin to call the dead, also because she is bringing them with a *fire horse whip* [*bici de foc*], implicitly troubling their afterlife.

The messages of the dead transmitted by Floarea regard personal aspects (the circumstances of the death, if it was a suspect one, parts of the near future etc.) and funerary rites (if he died without candle, the family has to perform some rites; if he needs something or if he's well).

She married at the age of 43 and her husband died after 4 years of marriage. Her mother-in-law uses to speak with her dead son, through Floarea, from time to time:

“Ten years ago they got married. Back then he was healthy, he didn't have any illness. And things were going well with them, as Floarea earned from talking to the dead. I remember that precisely on the Friday before their wedding some people from Germany arrived. They were so content, that afterwards they sent packs with all sorts of wonderful things, clothes and beautiful stuff...” The old woman talked then about how her son got ill and died. And that, for the last six years, since he left her, she had been speaking to him through Floarea. “You think that only once? All the time! When I miss him, I ask Floarea to call him. We talk for endless minutes. The first time – I remember even now – told me he was sorry and asked me to forgive him for not visiting the doctor. And to take care of Floarea, not to leave her alone... The nostalgia goes away, but it is not as if he were alive. You don't see him anymore, he's not next to you anymore.” (Stăiculescu, 2003)

**The necromantic technique.** Lying in bed, Floarea closes her eyes and gets induced by herself into the trance by sleeping. Meanwhile, the client, sitting on a chair next to the bed, takes her little finger until she enters in communication with the desired dead. Then, the customer asks some questions, and the ecstatic technician answers in the first person, as if the dead were speaking through her:

“She lays in bed, on one side, and closes her eyes. The man sits on the chair next to her and holds her little finger, until the connection with the dead is done. Floarea focuses well, she does not move. You can cut wood on her for she wouldn't move. She doesn't hear and doesn't see. And, suddenly, she starts talking. I mean the dead starts, but through her voice. The man asks questions, what he wants to know from the one gone by to the other realm. Asks about what he did in his life, things he never knew. Floarea tells him everything and I repeat her words so that he understands... Sometimes, he finds out things he would not have believed... Then, when it's over, she stays still and, for about five or ten minutes, you couldn't say if she's dead or alive. When she wakes up, everything is like at the beginning, as if nothing had happened...” (Stăiculescu, 2003)