

Evil Spirits and Transylvanian Beliefs as Illustrated in *The Due Term*

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Abstract

The Due Term (*L'échéance*, 1992), a novel written by Horia Liman, is, in the words of E. M. Cioran, endowed with the "poetic charm of a world both near and far". It describes the country life after the Second World War in a village situated in a valley of eastern Carpathians, Transylvania (Romania). The Oash county (to which this village belongs), still known by this name today, is inhabited by the Oshans whose existence revolves around a foundational myth involving the water fairy and a beneficial beech tree. The beech can protect the people against the evil done by humans as well as that from evil spirits, which are well differentiated. Thus, at nightfall, the forest begins to "stir with *borsocois*"; the *moroi* is seen as "a dead walkman, a vampire" who "eats the flesh of man and drinks his blood", while *varkolak* is "a large bird with human face" (p. 28) which drains the strength of arms and no longer allows the Oshan to use his knife. There is a very close relationship between this instrument that redresses human evil and sheds blood at due terms as a ritual, and the presence of evil spirits (to these, one can add the *moïma*, mainly associated with children's diseases, and the *Martzole*, women stories).

As one may expect from a novel, the village community with its traditional representatives is also involved: Varlam - the priest, Moga - the teacher, Gula - the host of "The Joyous Frog", Cuha - the baker, Bologa - the water dealer, Bordac - the gypsy fiddler, Eva Cuha - the sorceress, Mara - the dreamy or possessed young girl, Joan - the boastful young man, Bene - a young man with a strange touch of madness.

In the present paper, I propose to examine these beliefs with their symbolic value and emphasize their implications for the community.

Key words: foundational myth, the Oash county, evil spirits, knife, *borsocoï*, *moroi*, *varkolak*

Should I start from the interpretation of the title of Horia Liman's novel in order to uncover its secrets? If one remembers that subsequent to the first edition the author changed it from *La Foire aux Jeunes Filles* - 1987 (*The Young Girls' Fair*) to *L'échéance* -1992 (*The Due Term*)¹, the

¹ Horia Liman, *L'échéance* (The Due Term), Dole (F) - Saint-Imier (DH): Canvas Editor, , 1992. Horia Liman (surname Lehman), - born September 12, 1912 in Bucharest, Romania, died in 2002 at Neuchâtel in Western Switzerland - was a journalist and writer of Romanian and French expression. He wrote several novels and short stories published in 1987, as well as *La Foire aux Jeunes Filles* (*The Young Girls' Fair*), a novel republished in

question appears entirely reasonable. Because this novel is, indeed, about more than the relationship which the village community could have with the hope of its men and women to improve their lives by immersing themselves in the tradition of a fair where girls could bring about terrestrial happiness. It is, in my view, the symbol of the battle between good and evil in a peasant community of a relatively isolated region whose inhabitants still remain under the influence of old beliefs without being able to fully understand them. They are seemingly carried by their instincts, or perhaps by an ancestral voice, and the voices of reason and modernity 'embodied' by the schoolteacher do not have much force. Besides, is life overseas better in any respect? Bologa goes there and notices that, with certain differences, the battle between good and evil exists everywhere and decides to return to his country. The historian Neagu Djuvara stated in a televised interview that literature could sometimes help us to understand a particular historical age, for the literary text – permeated by the insights of its author – is able to rebuild an epoch. Horia Liman's novel may have this merit too, in my opinion. Its interpretation, supported by personal experience (the origins of the author of this study² are partly Oshan) and aided by the consultation of ethnographic, ethnological or geographical literature attempts to offer a much more complete image of a truly unique world.

Summarizing the novel

The schoolteacher Pavel Moga arrives in an isolated village community, the County of Oash, some time after the Second World War. He is given accommodation by Bologa, the water merchant, the only one among the notables of the village who is able to respect the tradition: the head of the household who receives a guest must place him in the clean room and offer him his wife, at least for the first night. Bologa does not love his wife Vanda, by whom he has a daughter, Mara, the object of all his affections. The marriage was forced by Grigor, Vanda's brother, when he learned that his sister was pregnant.

After a conflict arises between Bologa and Jacob Gula (the innkeeper), the former unexpectedly decides to go to the United States from where he returns a rich man a few years later, and believes he has thus avenged himself of Gula's arrogance. Actually, it is Mara who carries the burden of the family by her quasi-voluntary commitment to defend the tradition. Therefore Mara will persuade Joan Gula, who is in love with her, to stab Grigor. After he becomes Mara's husband, Joan will be stabbed in turn. Upon his return from the United States, Bologa is only concerned about his trade, about personal enrichment, thus neglecting his daughter – who practically remains without moral support – and, consequently, neglecting the traditions. The teacher Moga, an educated man from Bucharest, who attempts logically to

1992 as *L'échéance* (*The Due Term*). In the same year he published the novel *Les Bottes* (*The Boots*), his major work.

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connect the past to the present, disappears when he is arrested by the local authorities submissive to the communist regime. Alone and a widow, Mara feels lost and leaves the village in search of the Young Girls' Fair which proves to be only an illusion. The novel ends with her walking, barefoot, along the misty paths of the mountain.

The characters in the novel are indeed the traditional representatives of any rural community of the time: thus, besides the teacher Moga, whom people greatly respect (as proven by the fact that he has no nickname), we find the priest Varlam, also known as Inflamed Lymph Nodes (who is mentioned in the novel but makes no actual appearance), the innkeeper Jacob Gula (the Frog), the baker Todor Cuha (Soft Paste), the water merchant Bologa (the Mule), the gypsy fiddler Bordac (the Runt), Eva Cuha (the Witch), Mara (the dreamy or possessed young girl), Joan (the boasting young man), Bene (a young man whose strangeness touches on madness), and of course the governmental authorities whose seat is in Negrești.

The Spatio-temporal Matrix

At the time when the action of the novel takes place, the inhabitants live in an isolated region, close to the threshold which enables them to connect to another type of civilization – just like Mara who, still a young girl, "supervises" the world sitting on the doorstep. Except that the future is not built in the life outside; it is the result of an experience represented by the memory lodged inside. Whoever is located on the threshold is neither on the one side nor on the other. The "clean room" with a narrow window overlooking the valley, where Mara's dowry – "her future" (Liman, p. 42) – is kept, frightens her because she is under the influence of traditions and her steps beyond the threshold are entirely regulated by them.

Indeed, the influence of old beliefs in this region at the time was still very deep, as evidenced by Ion Mușlea in his ethnographic study³ on this border region. The Oash country is seen as an isolated area on the margins of Romania, a very little known region at the time of the investigation (the summer and autumn of 1930 and the spring of 1931) and was, for that reason, all the more interesting. The isolation of the county, favored above all by its geopolitical situation, allowed the preservation of traditions even after the Second World War. Surrounded by a mountain range which does not exceed 1201 meters on the side of Baia Mare and Maramureș, enclosed by hills to the west and opening to the south-west towards the plain (Mușlea, pp. 1-3), the Country of Oash is part of Transylvania and finally part of the "big country" (Romania)⁴.

Taking his cue from P. Claval, M. Ilieș (2006, pp. 17-18) explains the concept of "country"⁵ as representing a continuum, a living reality that encompasses the relationship

³ Cercetări folklorice în Țara Oașului, extracted from Anuarul Arhivei de Folklor (Cluj, I, 1932. pp. 117-160), Cluj: Cartea Românească, 1932.

⁴ In his study of regional geography (Țara Oașului, Studiu de geografie regională, Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006, p. 17) Marin Ilieș quotes Simion Dascălu (1359) who explains: "Transylvania is not only a country, it is the center of a country which other countries surround and are subjected to, such as Maramureș, the Countries of Bârsa, Hațeg, Oash."

⁵ The concept of "country" originates during the period of the great migrations. The width of the Carpathians to the north provided a certain protection, as the mountains could only be crossed by narrow passes. The northern location of the Country of Maramureș, a much larger and more powerful region, also assured some protection (see P. Claval, *Initiation à la géographie régionale*, Paris: Nathan, 1993). It seems that until the 5th century AD there still existed a group of Northern Dacians. After the breakup of this structure, the state-like entities called "countries", of

between perceived space and experienced space; a subjective space founded on a psychosociological basis which emphasizes human perceptions and behaviors. The perceived space is therefore the one recognized by the population as familiar, "an explored space, often trod back and forth, cut across for trade, tourism or the use of urban services, visits, etc.", while the experienced space, "ecumenical, represents the intimacy of a community, if we may say so" especially if the access to the respective location is restricted. The ancestral traditions and practices are better guarded, "the symbols of the population have as a psychogenetic effect the manifestation of the feeling of belonging to a certain space, to a certain community" (Ilieş, p. 18). The perceived space of each "country" has "symbolic coordinates, cultural, historical and symbolic limits, representations and symbolic features". It is "loaded with mental images without which there would be neither centralization nor marginality or hierarchy" (Ilieş, p. 19).

Despite all the administrative divisions more or less arbitrarily determined by the frontier location already mentioned, the Country of Oash has preserved its characteristics throughout the centuries⁶. As it was situated for a long time at the junction of three *comitats*, Satmar, Ugocea and Maramureş, people's access from one village to another was difficult but not impossible (Ilieş, p. 27). Indeed, being a border region with a rather complex history, the Country of Oash does not lend itself easily to a straightforward historical analysis. However, the interpretation of the novel encourages us to believe that the plot is set in the aftermath of the Second World War. The 1950 administrative distribution places the Country of Oash – then renamed *raion* Oash – in the administrative area of Maramureş (the seat of *raion*'s administration was the village Negreşti-Oaş and that of the region, the town of Baia Mare⁷).

Intentionally perhaps, the novel remains ambiguous as to the geographical location of the village which constitutes the center of the action. Cavnic never belonged to Oash, nor is it located near Vama; the maps show no town called Scăeni either in the department of Maramureş or in that of Satu Mare. On the other hand, the town of Baia Mare, bordered to the north by the Igriş Mountains, is still the main town of the department of Maramureş and the villages Bervenii and Carei, currently located in the department of Satu Mare, still do not form part of the Country of Oash.

more reduced dimensions, were grafted onto the general characteristics of the relief. The Country of the Oash was favored by its vicinity with Maramureş on the northern side of the Carpathian Mountains, but also with the marshy and forested territories in the west. One finds here an alternation of "volcanic hills, glacis and small depressions" (Ilieş, p. 46).

⁶ The first documentary attestation of territorial administrative units for the Country of Oash dates from the 12th century. The first villages in the area were attested in the 13th century (Ilieş, p. 29). In the 13th century, two *comitats* were constituted: Satmar and Ugocea which divided the Country of Oash into two. Thus, the upper basin of the river Tur was located in Satmar while the lower basin was in the southern part of Ugocea, an area belonging today to Ukraine (Ilieş, p. 21). After 1918, the two parts of the Country of Oash belonged to the department of Satu Mare and, for a certain period of time, to the region of Maramureş (Ilieş, p. 21). I. Muşlea informs us that at the time of his investigation the "Country of Oash was included in the department of Satu Mare and consisted of 16 villages located to the north-east" (p. 2). While the northern corridor was functional, subsequent to the opening of the Tisza river, the roads of access towards the large world allowed the development of the area (until the beginning of the 20th century). Then, and especially after the Second World War, by the reorientation of the axes of circulation, the corridor of the Tisza was annexed to Ukraine and access only became possible through the pass of Huta, which attached a greater importance to the village Negreşti-Oaş (Ilieş, p. 21), which was to become a town in 1968 (Ilieş, p. 29).

⁷ See M. Ilieş, 2006, pp. 31-35. It seems that the maps have shown the territorial division since 1947 (p. 37, G). However, a novel does not provide accurate historical data and the documents themselves may be flawed, given the turbulent historical period which has already been referred to.

Fiction, tradition and reality

The bringing together of experienced and perceived space makes us discover that all the habitats in the Country of Oash are set in clearings, genuine small islands surrounded by vast woodlands, and that the population prefers the areas dominated by volcanic hillocks. The old houses as well as the clothes are inspired by this landscape (Ilieș, p. 27). The shaping presence of the relief, the various aspects of the community's life – in the form, sometimes, of involuntary mental representations – can be observed each time. This is what occurs in the lives of the Oshans, as illustrated by the manner in which they react to internal and external stimuli (Ilieș, p. 48), and this will emerge from the analysis of the novel.

From among the several explanations available on the origin of the term Oash⁸, I prefer as more suitable for my goal that of I. Mușlea, according to whom the name of the country may derive from the Hungarian term *avas* which means forest with large and old trees, forest with acorns or *silva prohibita* (p. 4). The most commonly found trees are the beech⁹ and the oak (Mușlea, p. 9).

The village where the action occurs does not have more than "forty *smokes*", that is, houses with a fireplace, scattered among the rocky peaks (Liman, 1992, p. 7). The term *smoke* refers to the hearth around which the livable space was built, which was more than humble in our case. The construction is 'broken' by some building components (doors, windows, the chimney) that allow communication with the outside world but also the possible entrance of negative entities¹⁰. The dwelling, the yard and the garden as well as the entire village with the river and the forest constitute the habitat of the Oshans, an area they protect and for the safeguarding of which they are able to pull out the knife. The Wild River, which causes devastation in the rainy season, plays an important part in the novel because 'the due term' occurs on this river bank. The existence of the Oshans revolves around a founding myth which involves the water fairy and the beneficial beech. Human justice is done by a specific ritual that is performed very close to the beneficial beech located on the river bank. Otherworldly justice comes from *daimons* such as *borsocois*, *varkolaks* or *morois*. The one and the other originate in the same kind of reasoning.

1. From human justice ...

⁸ Gustav Weigan supposes that it is the name of a local *voievodat*, Oaș; Alexandru Doboș associates it with the word *avas*, which means "ancient, secular forests"; others say it may derive from *havas*, which in translation means mountain; others still regard it as a derivative of *ovas*, which is also found at the root of the Romanian word *curățură*, i.e. a clearing (I. Velcea, Țara Oașului, București: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1964, pp. 14-15).

⁹ M. Ilieș certifies that the beech tree is best adapted to the climate of the region, especially in the Igniș Mountains on the side of Satu Mare (pp. 97-98). It seems that the relationship between the Oshans and the forest can be seen especially at the level of mentalities, unlike that in the country of Maramureș where wooden sculpture has thrived. The forest served mainly as shelter and food source (from the 12th to the 19th centuries), then the Oshans acquired expertise in forestry and forest development (pp. 101-104).

¹⁰ Some very interesting information that can be relevant for Liman's novel is offered by A. Oișteanu in the chapter "Antropologia locuirii tradiționale" of *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițională românească*, Iași : Polirom, col. Plural M, 2004, pp. 429-438. The chapter speaks about the human being as situated between nature and culture, the habitat as a *centrum mundi*, the borders of the house and the borders of the village, the (*u*)*topogram* – a word coined by Oișteanu to describe the *village-idée*, a model of the archaic and traditional village. This idea is also found in the first chapter of Oișteanu's *Mythos & logos. Studii și eseuri de antropologie culturală*, Ed. a II-a revăzută și adăugită, București : Nemira, 1998, pp. 153-164.

Most of the time, it is the old people who still preserve the traditions in the village where the action of the novel takes place. However, their opinions on the founding legends are widely shared by the whole community. There are some who believe that the beech tree was planted close to the Wild River on "the very same day when the first Oshan came there" by the "Water Fairy: the Vague Spirit" (Liman, p. 120). Years and names, which go back to 1523, are carved on its trunk ... Just like the *axis mundi*, this beech seems to link two worlds, ours and that which leads to the "heavenly spheres":

"The birds of the fairy nest in the branches of the tree and they lead the souls of the dead through unlimited space, in a kind of slow purification. However, the offender must prove courage and strength; he must drag himself from the place of punishment to the beech and lean against its trunk. Otherwise he is doomed to remain the prey of the *borsocois*." (Liman, pp. 120-121)

It is quite possible that the legend of the water fairy represents a mixture of legends from several nations. It reminds one of the symbolism of the beech as described by Didier Colin: during "the Middle Ages this magic tree was called the fairies' tree. In fact, our ancestors believed that at twilight the fairies drew their magic circle around its solid and bright trunk, inside which they came to sing and dance". In ancient Greece this tree had oracular value and was devoted to Zeus "who protected it from lightning during storms"¹¹. Both references are appropriate to the context because Romania is a country located at the junction of the east and the west; the Austro-Hungarian empire also left its traces in Transylvania. To this must be added the fact that the archaic custom of doing justice under a sacred tree is evidenced by historical documents both in the Romanian territory and elsewhere. Many other crucial roles have been ascribed to the circular space surrounding the sacred tree: a place for the *hora* (Romanian traditional dance performed by the youth in circular movements), a shelter for foreign travelers, a space that housed the terminally ill or the dead heroes (Oişteanu, 2004, pp. 132-133, 137,144,157¹²).

It is in the proximity of the beech tree that the due term is supposed to occur each year at the time of the harvest feast – a mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs between which the Oshans no longer distinguish, considering themselves "good Christians [...] even if one does not confess one's sins, even if one does not drink the holy water of Inflamed Lymph Nodes" (Liman, p. 122). The harvest feast is all the more important as harvest is poor in the region, given the ungenerous composition of the ground. This composition, on the other hand, is especially beneficial for plum trees: "When the wind dries the ground and the sun ripens the fruit, only the plum crop yields harvest. So, there will be an abundance of *tourtz*. It is the drink and food of the Oshans." (Liman, p. 115)¹³

During this feast the witnesses of justice are sorted into five distinct groups: "The *coconi* – as one calls the teenager boys – the little girls, the young unmarried girls, the *borese* – the married women –, the men and the old people" (p. 122). The same distinctions are observed on Sundays, at the *hora*, or in any other situation which involves the presence of the whole

¹¹ Dictionnaire des symboles, des mythes et des légendes, Hachette Livre (Hachette Pratique), 2006, p. 287.

¹² The particular tree that A. Oişteanu refers to is the maple, but the significance of *any* tree is implicit in his remarks.

¹³ Besides plum trees, cherry, bitter cherry and walnut trees were also cultivated. In addition to *tzuika*, the Oshans engaged in trade with dried or fresh fruits - I. Muşlea, pp. 8, 14, M. Ilieş, pp. 175-176. As Horia Liman describes it, *tourtz* is a kind of "brandy of almost 90% alcohol content".

community. In addition to being witnesses, the inhabitants of the village are also active participants in the ritual by accompanying the dance of the knife with the "*Ai tzoura!*" – not a cry of joy or approval but one meant to boost and excite (the exhortation takes the form of an exorcism, and it will soon be able to maim, disembowel, reinforce the power of the ancestral oath). *A due term!* That is the harsh law of blood, ruthless and unquestioned, which for centuries has made of each Oshan a dispenser of justice" (Liman, p. 122). All nature takes part in it: the sun with his scorching rays is challenged by the wind, "but it was a flame that would slap the cheeks and inflame the brain". During the dance the young men gulp down glasses of "*tourtz*" and the rhythm becomes "devilish", the guts burning, the heads whirling: "*Ai tzoura! Hop! [...] Hop! Hop! Hop! Who will be favored by fate?*" (p. 123). The songs in the country of Oash, the *tzipurituours*, are "improvised shouts of joy or hatred"¹⁴ [...] a loud, deep, rolled cry, similar to the rumbling of the storm when echoing inside a cave," a "howl" while the land is trampled: "*Three knives, three I have on me / One for moima, one for thee*" or "*Oh! knife, knife, knife / The more you bleed, the more beautiful you are / Let's cut the enemy to pieces!*" (pp. 124-126). The *hora* of the youth on similar occasions is completely different from the *dantz* of boys and girls. It is part of a ritual where life and death are at stake. Bordac, the "fiddler", gives the first cue: "*The reaping*" says he, and Mara after him: "*The reaping requires blood.*" She is followed by Joan: "Let us finish with it!" and finally by Grigor: "Let us finish with it then!" (Liman, pp. 127-128), because "He who cannot boast a *scratch* on his face, chest, arms or belly is not an Oshan. He who refuses death is not an Oshan" (Liman, p. 124)¹⁵. The Oshans "have little regard for their

¹⁴ A remarkable book on the Ochan song – an essential book for those studying traditional folk music – is co-authored by Jacques Bouët, Bernard Lotart-Jacob and Speranța Rădulescu: *A tue-tête. Chant et violon au Pays de l'Oach, Roumanie*, Coll. Hommes et musiques, Coll. de la Société française d'ethnomusicologie IV, Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 2002; Romanian translation: *Din răputeri. Glasuri și cetera din Țara Oaşului*. București, Institutul Cultural Român, 2006. The authors highlight the characteristics of the music of Oash as compared with Romanian folk music in other regions. Even nowadays the local interpreters insist that a difference should be made between the music of Oash and other folk music: "folk music [...] observes fixed and predictable structures; on the other hand, the music of Oash is not so rigid; the musician does not learn by heart how to reproduce it as such with each performance; he re-invents it to some extent during the interpretation" (p. 74). The Oshans are still impregnated with their culture. Their music, of a "disconcerting strangeness", is usually perceived as "savage/wild": "generally, it is necessary to sing with much force in the acute tonality. [...] before chanting the verses of a vocal *dant*, the Oshan singer produces a long acute cry with an extremely tensed chest voice. It grows into a howling effect that is difficult to achieve properly. [...] In short: to be a real Oshan, one must know to howl properly" (pp. 20-21). I cannot help citing Constantin Noïca on the Ochan song even if I have only been able to find the Web quotation, without the exact bibliographical source: "There are *tzipouritours* from the Country of Oash in which I see the sum total of our culture with its passage from nature to the spoken word and artistic expression. The initial cry is still natural: if you wish, it is something like the female's or rather the male nightingale's song, a song which the biologists tell us is not sung for the poets but only so that the bird announces that it took possession of a territory and that the others should let it live there as it wishes. But our cry – which is also a way of saying: listen, brothers, make room for me in the world – is then expressed in spoken words, the verse, the *logos* becoming thus, in only one breath, something else. It is transformed into a song that could last until the end of the world." (<http://www.oas.ro/>)

¹⁵ "Pride is a characteristic of the Oshan. His sensitivity as well as vulnerability are closely related to it, hence the legendary quarrels and confrontations among young men at the *hora*. One does not like how the other dances and the knife shines and the blood flows; one even comes to murder. As if apologizing, the Oshan will tell you with an air that points to fate: 'It's the blood that orders!' There are *tzipouritours* which reflect well these swings of mood, and in some of them the knife is referred to with accents which recall the quick and vengeful temperaments of other regions: *Three knives in the belt: / One which shouts, one which cries, / One which wants to eat meat.*" (Muşlea, 1932, p. 14)

bodies" but are "careful with their souls" (p. 120). The wrestling takes place in the bushes; it is not seen, only heard. The dispenser of justice must show himself at the end to announce: "I was favored by fate." He then washes his knife in the river so that "the girls can remain pure" and "the ground be rich in crops the following year – because from time immemorial, so they say, blood helps the resurrection of the soil" (p. 122). One hears the "death rattle of slain cattle" – and Grigor meets his death. Just like on other occasions, the authorities could not find the culprit; the participants in the ritual kept the secret because to make the culprit known was "to renew the chain of hatred" (p. 125).

What are the reasons for this particular confrontation between Grigor and Joan? It is the offence the former brings to the latter when making advances to Mara. Mara herself, observing "an ancestral rite", puts the knife in Joan's hand when assuming that Grigor takes a romantic interest in her. The girl's move is preceded by the spell which she casts together with Eva Cuha, the witch, in the room with herbs. It leads to otherworldly justice. The magic spell does not target Grigor – although Mara does ask Eva to light a candle of curse for him as well (Liman, p. 118) – but Gula, father and son, and asks for blood.

*May your mouth be chained
May your gums bleed
Instead of eyes may you have cavities
Instead of the nose - an abscess
May your throat become a stinking clot
That never ceases to stink
May your skin be gangrened
And your bones broken one by one
Your belly glued to your spine
And your legs paralyzed
Viscous cancer
Villainous hunchback
Venomous snake (Liman, p. 106)*

2. ...to otherworldly justice

The voice of justice which Mara is drawn to is that of blood, and it refers to the belief in evil spirits. Bene, the son of Eva Cuha, witnesses the magic spell. The blood oath has bound him to Mara since childhood and the young girl persuades him to grab his kit bag and knife to protect her. Stuttering, Bene announces at the beginning of the novel that a bird with a human face – a *varkolak* – has sucked his blood, "it has sssu... it has sucked the fforce of my arms sss ... so that I cccannot handle thththe knife... aaany more Iiit was ... so iiiiit was a *varkolak*" (Liman, p. 28). Thus Bene needs a knife to be a man and his mother, Eva Cuha, agrees because her son "had come to fight the *varkolak*" (Liman, p. 36). The identity of the Oshan merges with his kit bag and knife:

"[...] as soon as he arrives in this world, one puts in the cradle of the newborn the kit bag. When he is in the coffin, the kit bag is not forgotten so that it will accompany the Oshan on his long journey to the hereafter, to the afterlife among angels or demons of all kinds.

'Mother, give me the kit bag to get dressed!' Without it the Oshan is undressed. The bag hits the hip from the time the little boy starts walking. And the pocketknife is to be carried for

practice until the time comes for the real knife. The knife is a sign of bravery. The young man sings his first song with pride:

*Here it is
again.
I'm not afraid,
I have my knife."* (p. 26)

The importance attached to the knife is confirmed by I. Muşlea¹⁶. From Chevalier and Gheerbrant's dictionary we also learn that the knife is an "active principle that alters passive matter". In the tradition of many peoples, it has the power to remove "evil influences, which seems to be related to one aspect of the symbolism of iron. The symbolism of the knife is frequently associated with the idea of judicial execution, death, vengeance, sacrifice (the armed hand of Abraham at the sacrifice of Isaac)". It also is a phallic symbol (1974, p. 306).

For the Oshans, it is indeed a judicial execution, the participants in the ritual of the *due term* are in the hands of fate and the secret of the retributive murder has to be kept afterwards. The human being thus becomes the instrument of a heavenly trial since, as I have already pointed out, the Oshan's major concern is to safeguard his soul. The knife sheds blood to allow the continuity of life. But the culprit who does not have the strength to drag himself from the place of punishment to the beech tree "and lean against its trunk is condemned to remain the prey of *borsocoï's*". This is Grigor's case.

The second legend which the elderly tell to the young, and which involves a malignant spirit, also refers to the double symbolism of the beech. It is for this reason that the tree is named the tree of the *Old Boar* or of the *Old Bloodthirsty Man* "perhaps because the people who had been punished seldom managed to reach the imaginary ladder of its trunk. The number of slashes that tattooed its bark testified to too hard a test" (Liman, p. 121). The symbolism of the wild boar itself refers to isolation, loneliness (in Latin, the animal was known as *Porcus singularis*) as well as "unbridled primitive instincts", "irrepressible impulses" which can sometimes help people out of apparently hopeless situations (Colin, p. 484).

The *due term* does not necessarily imply bodily wrestling. The evil can be overcome by evil spirits as well: "the dishonor of a girl was punished in the village woods where the culprit remained all night in the clutches of the *borsocoï's* who sucked his blood" (Liman, p. 120). If he is punished by humans, "the offender enjoys a kind of leniency" (Liman, p. 120).

The action of the novel makes us infer that Mara, and even Joan, are under the influence of evil spirits; they become their instruments. Unlike most Oshan women who, according to I. Muşlea are "generally small and often plump" which "does not mean that they lack beauty" (p. 12), Mara remains fragile. In order to keep Bene at a distance from his daughter, Bologna "makes up" an explanation by saying that his wife had forgotten to "light the torch in front of the house and rub the door, the window and the chimney with garlic. As a result, the *varkolak* sucked the milk of her breasts and robbed her of the power of breastfeeding" (Liman, p. 29), an explanation which is perhaps not far from the truth. As a little child, Bologna's daughter had suffered from an

¹⁶ An integral part of the Ochan's outfit is the kit bag. The boy is first given one at the age of three or four. The kit bag differs: one for Sundays and feast days, another for working days. It accompanies the dead man in the coffin. If one asks what an Oshan should be wearing, the answer one receives is: "a shirt, a pair of *gaci* and a kit bag". The kit bag is made of canvas, has different dimensions, and is embroidered with thread of various colors. In this bag the Ochan keeps his knife, which he never parts with - even the children have a very small one - sometimes the pipe, the lighter and money (*op. cit.*, pp. 11-12).

ill-defined illness, since any "disease of the stomach or chest, or a certain something which seizes somebody – and especially a newborn or a small child" (Liman, p. 29) came under the generic name of *moima*, probably a shortened form of *molima* with the sense of "contagious disease". To cure her, Mara's mother repeated three times a day an incantation for beneficial purposes which she had learned from Eva Cuha¹⁷:

Moima, moimee
Bolo stained
In walnut shells,
In the Red Sea thrown.
Hish, moima from there
A large spindle will arrive,
Will reach you,
Will pierce you. (Liman, pp. 29-30)

The interpretation of this incantation allows us to make two connections: the word *bolo* recalls the French term *bolomancie*, that is "divination by arrows"¹⁸, and the word "spindle" – linked to lunar symbolism by "the law of 'eternal return'"¹⁹ – refers to a piercing object created with the aim of destroying or transforming. The *moima* will enter the nut shells – the walnut tree having the gift of prophecy and being related to the symbolism of the cosmic egg (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, p. 679) – and the sea²⁰ where the shells are thrown is red: it represents "the belly where death and life transmute one into the other" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, p. 831). As a result of the incantation, the evil force is destroyed and the good settles in. According to folk tradition, any disease was "a partial or total disorder in the body of a human being caused by a supernatural force, a demon or a demigod – a divinity good and bad at the same time, who follows certain goals"²¹.

We thus come to the other evil spirits present in *The Due Term: moroi, varkolak, borsocoï*. R. Vulcănescu's classification introduces them in the category of daimons – the Latinized orthography of the Greek δαίμων (daimôn). "By *daimonology* we understand the treatment of daimons from the point of view of archaic or traditional *mythology* while by *demonology* the treatment of demons from the point of view of the Eastern Orthodox Christian religion" (Vulcănescu, p. 299). The difference between *daimon* and *demon* consists in the fact that the former is a bivalent being and represents an ontologically dual personality specific to the presence of the opposites in the universe: "the daimons act within the framework of a freedom

¹⁷ The poetical and magical incantations which communicate directly with the instrument of evil use imperative and enumerative verbal forms supposed to remove the disease from the human body. We meet here the spatial variables/the settings which will take upon themselves this disease. The mode of expression is imperative-enumerative rhetoric. Given these characteristics, such incantations belong to the category of magical poetic structures of Romanian folklore that use imperative and enumerative verbal forms. See N. Coatu, *Structuri magice tradiționale*, București: Editura BIC ALL, 1998, p. 161.

¹⁸ See <http://francois.gannaz.free.fr/Littre/xmlittre.php?requete=bolo>

¹⁹ The spindle of necessity, in Plato, symbolizes the necessity which reigns at the heart of the universe. The spindle rotates with uniform motion and causes the rotation of all the cosmic bodies. It indicates a kind of automatism in the planetary system: the law of eternal return. One can, for this reason, relate it to lunar symbolism (Chevalier et Gheerbrant: 1974, p. 471).

²⁰ The sea itself is an image of life and death, a symbol of fertility, of the subconscious, of purification (Chevalier & Gheerbrant: p. 623).

²¹ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română, III-a*, București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1987, p. 316. ,

conceived in the spirit of order relating to the creation by cosmic demiurges while the demons act in the spirit of anarchy, of destruction of all that has been created by the spirit of the Good" (Vulcănescu, p. 309). The evil spirits mentioned above are bivalent, they represent the struggle of opposites aiming to create a balance in the universe. T. Pamfilie argues that *striga*, *varkolak*, *moroi*, *the malignant one*, and *vampire* are equivalent negative spirits and claims that the attempts made to differentiate between the meanings of these terms were unfounded (p. 118 and sq.). However, the Oshans of the novel do distinguish between them: at nightfall, the forest begins to "stir up the *borsocois*"; the *moroi* is represented like "a dead creature walking, a vampire" who "bolts down man's flesh and drinks his blood", while the *varkolak* is "a big bird with a human face" (Liman, p. 28) which sucks the arm's strength in order to no longer allow the Oshan to handle his knife.

The *moroi*, continues T. Pamfilie, is found everywhere in Transylvania as well as in the western parts of Muntenia and Oltenia. R. Vulcănescu includes it in the category of anthropomorphic daimons (natural phenomena and facts are ascribed deliberate movement, feeling and even thinking) which are to be differentiated from anthropozoomorphic and zooanthropomorphic daimons such as the *varkolak* (Vulcănescu, pp. 303-304). *Moroi* is an Indo-European term²² whose root may be linked to Mara, the heroine's name. This young girl torments her parents and was born in a family with problems. Initially Vanda, the future mother of Mara, does not want to become romantically involved with Bologa, because: "Love begins with the eyes, and my eyes see an ugly man" (Liman, p. 14). But one summer afternoon, surprised by Bologa while doing her laundry at the river "wearing a cotton blouse that allowed a glimpse at shapely breasts and milky skin, she looked no more discreet than her strong thighs largely exposed as her skirt was up almost to waist". Therefore, they will "clear the forest" together, after Vanda asks: "And what about the *varkolaks*? " and Bologa replies: "It's not the hour. They only come out at sunset" (Liman, p. 15). "From a devil's egg, a devil is born," said Vanda before agreeing to become Bologa's wife. She marries him without a dowry, another situation that will haunt Mara afterwards – so much so that she will, to some extent, take the place of her mother in the house. The "clean room" with her dowry will haunt Mara (it is for her a "cold room", a "cursed room" (Liman, p. 43)) and rightly so, since at her own marriage she does not receive her dowry and this marriage is not successful either. Mara ends up, however, by releasing her parents. Her father seems to get along well with her mother after the girl's departure even if, in order to show it, the narrator is satisfied merely to record Bologa's remark about Vanda's broom: difficult to handle, it will have to be replaced by another one made of straw and bought from Negrești.

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The term is also present in Albanian: *mora* - "horrible dream", the Slavic languages: *mora* - "horrible dream", Russian: *kilimora*, French: *cauchemar*, Old English: *marnt*, medieval German: *mahr*, modern German: *mara*, *mahr*, Lithuanian: *maras*, Czech: *murama*, Latin: *mors*. As a demon, the *moroi* belongs to the category of spirits which in ancient Greece were called *Ephialtes* and *Satyrs*, and which the Celts called *Dussi*. In the Romanian daimonology of death, the *moroi*s are infernal beings – specters of the children who, according to the old beliefs, died in abnormal conditions (born with their feet first, suffocated in their beds, having drowned while being bathed, etc.) or, according to the Eastern Orthodox belief, the newborns who had died before being baptized. The *moroi*s are a kind of second-degree *striga* who torment their parents during sleep – their mothers in particular – by causing them nightmares. For this reason they belong to the category of demons that the Latins called *incubus* (R. Vulcănescu, *op cit.*, p. 303).

Mara also seems to have in her something of a *varkolak*, "a daimonic being, half man and half wolf" (Vulcănescu, p. 304)²³ or "a large bird with human face" (Liman, p. 28). As I. Muşlea has argued, these properties of the *varkolak* are equivalent to those of the *borsocoï*: "In the Country of Oash this name is used to describe both the women who take the milk of cows [...] and some *striga*, although I have never heard the latter word among the Oshans. The question of the fate of the man who becomes a *striga* after death is very seldom raised [...]. The *borsocoï* of the Oshans is the *striga* while alive, the child that the wise woman recognizes at birth to be destined to become a *borsocoï* 'on' such or such animal – very often on the wolf, more rarely some fish or a bird or something else [...]"²⁴. We may recognize a Ruthenian influence²⁵ in this widely spread belief, even if the etymology of the word suggests a Hungarian connection (p. 27). "Bird with a human face", Mara drinks Bene Cuha's blood. The latter's encounter with the *varkolak* occurs on "a sunny winter day" at the time of a crazy descent down the toboggan which projects Mara and himself against a beech tree. Blood flows down Bene's chin and Mara,

"unscathed, frightened like a little frightened bird, white as snow, contrasting with the blood, petrified at first, then setting in motion, a sort of hesitation, a kind of chimera, approaching, leaning towards him, touching his juicy lips, sucking the wound and blood, imperceptibly at first, without hurrying at all, without hurting him, almost like a caress, very gently, then more and more eagerly, suddenly greedily, without spitting, drinking blood with her eyes closed, made translucent by solar radiation" (pp. 43-44).

Mara will be described like this repeatedly – with translucent white skin in the sunlight – at crucial moments. The morning when Jacob Gula announces that he would also sell water – which marks the beginning of the quarrel with her father – Mara appears "clothed in white, her face marked by insomnia, with transparent skin and the hallucinated air of a ghost from beyond the grave", her nostrils quivering "as when a savage animal sniffs the scent of blood" (p. 44). Moga notices the extreme whiteness of Mara's skin (an unusual feature for girls in the countryside) at the moment when she tells him in an inflexible voice that she intends to kill Joan Gula to avenge her father. At the time of a later conversation with the teacher, at dawn, nature seems to participate in her plan to kill Joan and to leave for the Găina Mountain to attend the Young Girls' Fair: "The pale dawn lent Mara's face the whimsical pallor of calcified rocks." The sky changes colors as if these very hues "attempted to represent the dance movements preparing a punishment. The horizon started to become a huge vibratory field. [...] Sometimes the young girl showed a calm assurance, sometimes she was as if in a dream, bathed in diabolic impulses. Moga found her elusive, exerting a subtle unexplainable charm whose existence was discovered bit by bit, not without apprehension" (Liman, pp. 73-74). At a meeting with Joan near the Wild River, Mara's face is pale again and she openly acknowledges her intention to kill him. The

²³ Also known among the Bulgarians as *vurkolaku*; according to ancient tradition, he ascends to heaven to bite the moon or the sun, thus causing eclipses (pp. 303-304).

²⁴ Here is what we learn from the narrator: "As for the *borsocoï*s, ever since the world began, they have never left the Country of Oash. They strike as an arrow flies through the air, and drink the milk of cows making them sterile. The *borsocoï*s are not female but they have an udder and a black tail at the end of the udder. They are carried by the winds during the night only, until the cock crows." (Liman, p. 30)

²⁵ The Ruthenian influence is confirmed by J. Bouët who argues that, subsequent to the domination of the *voivodat* of Maramureş during the 14th century, beginning in the 16th century and up to 1918 "Ruthenian then Slovak settlers arrived, to be followed by people coming from Maramureş (all very quickly assimilated)" (*op. cit.*, p. 29).

white skin is also there at the time of the magic spell which takes place in the presence and with the participation of Eva Cuha. This last example seems especially important to us: Mara's collaboration with Eva Cuha recalls the fact that the magical powers of virgins reach a maximum of intensity when they become the assistants of a witch²⁶.

Mara deals with blood on several occasions – she is, as we have already seen, the instrument which causes the death of Grigor and Joan. It is she who, "all dressed in white", pulls out Joan's knife so that the latter kills Grigor. When Joan is killed, Mara no longer participates in the ritual – a different one this time – because "the challenge is addressed to the whole village": by buying the clearing, the young man has coveted the common good. The due term takes place close to the *Old Bloodthirsty Man*, without witnesses. The oldest villager asks the offender to choose three Oshans. For this last trial, Joan has put on his Sunday clothes: "his loose trousers, his long white shirt fastened with a leather belt, his straw hat decorated with beads, and his brightly colored kit bag" (Liman, p. 200).

Grigor's death represents only a preamble. He is not without guilt: although he is the man who makes Bologna amend his ways by forcing him to marry Vanda when pregnant with Mara, he himself displays an unethical behavior that far exceeds that of his brother-in-law. Mara wants Joan's death, which does not make the latter any less responsible for his own fate. In the chapter that recounts his punishment by means of a flashback, the young woman remembers that even if at times she believed she had the upper hand, Joan intimidated and dominated her. She had heard that it was for him to discover the source of water, that he was born "with a caul", that he knew the Ariesh river, whose waters are reddened by gold and by the girls who can make love without constraint and who "wash away their lost virginity by diving into the water" (Liman, p. 195). Mara also knew that if she had done some scheming, Joan had done some scheming too. In the folk tradition, the person who was born with a caul or ate it became an evil spirit. Mara's memories may constitute extenuating circumstances, they may to some extent decrease the culpability of her acts and point to the fact that she has only been an instrument in the hands of destiny. The spell is not necessarily motivated by hatred but by a sense of justice: for having offended her father, Jacob Gula should lose what he holds most dear. The floods which are triggered by this evil spell threaten to destroy the village. Mara falls ill and keeps repeating: "No, not that! I do not want that!" (p. 107). Her intention of destroying Joan is restrained by the thought that the young man knows the Ariesh river and may possibly be the very one she hoped to meet on the Găina Mountain and marry. Joan also observes the traditions. The words that Mara addresses to him before their marriage are very daring; however, his reactions are decent because their conversations take place in relatively public spaces. When alone, beside the Wild River, the young man dares not touch her as he knows she is protected by the river fairy. Mara claims not to love Joan²⁷; however, she wants to have a child by him, defying fate which predicted the opposite. To accomplish her goal and to make Joan love her again, Mara makes two attempts: in the morning she enters the river and invokes the young girls' fairy to grant her fertility, forgetting that July – placed under the sign of the Crab – is an inauspicious month. She

²⁶ See Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, *Teoria generală a magiei*, translated by Ingrid Ilinca și Silviu Vulpesu, (Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie, « Année sociologique », 1902-1903), Polirom, col. Plural, 1996), pp. 36-37.

²⁷ He stops loving her when he learns she cannot have children, and his violence is likened by Mara to that of *Martzolé* (Liman, pp. 153-154). *Martzolé*, or Tuesday-evening, is a sly and wicked old woman who surveys the houses in the village every Tuesday evening to see if the women worked – because according to folk tradition women were supposed to rest on Tuesday evenings, to honor her. Tuesday-evening's punishments are quite severe, sometimes even causing the death of the person surprised while working. See *op. cit.*, pp. 102-107.

is supposed to make this gesture in October – by diving in the water up to her shoulders under the red sun when the day is declining – or in May under the sign of the Taurus, "which connects water and earth", as Eva Cuha explains. Instead, Mara should now go to the forest at night, discover the deadly nightshade (belladonna²⁸), light a fire of twigs, undress and dance around the "poisonous plant", "alone with the motionless trees under the distaff of the moon who spins silver threads all over the earth", then tear the plant off, put a coin in its place, hold the root in front of her belly and whisper "with her eyes closed, going around the fire in dance steps:

Belladonna
I ask for charity!
Belladonna
Take pity on me! [...]
Assemble the sap of the forest,
In my locked belly ..." (Liman, pp. 159-162)

This second attempt is as unsuccessful as the first, the young woman being terrified by "a *noctule*" which she likens to a *borsocoï* and which makes her run out of the forest. Having surprised her attempt, Bordac tells her: "It is better to live with the trees, the earth, the *borsocoï*s. Humans are beasts, my little one!" (Liman, p. 164). The gypsy man is seen here – as in the folk tradition in general – as very familiar with these negative entities that haunt the night. Being himself as black as night, they cannot hurt him²⁹.

Her duty accomplished, Mara finds no place in the community. She leaves her village on the night of St. John's Feast – at the same time both a Christian and pagan celebration, the latter honoring "the sun at his zenith, at the highest place in the sky" (Liman, p. 217). During this night the skies open and everything becomes possible; it is a celebration of the universe, a symbol of hope, a time when fairies that are both benevolent and malevolent can make their appearance³⁰. By a strange coincidence, Mara arrives at the Young Girls' Fair, a festivity usually set on the first Sunday after St. Elias' Feast (which in the pre-Christian tradition marks the celebration of the solar divinity, once again connected to heat and blood). After this, Mara disappears "in the distant mists" led by the desire not to abandon her dream.

Conclusion

²⁸ Based on a very extensive bibliography, A. Oișteanu's *Mythos & Logos ...* describes belladonna and other plants that have hallucinatory effects as well as their uses in the Geto-Dacian, then the Romanian folk traditions. Belladonna is gathered according to a magical ritual that is similar to that performed when collecting any other plant with magical and healing properties: there are magical and ritual gestures meant to protect the humans from a non-mediated contact with the sacred plant as well as protecting the virtues of the plant itself. Belladonna is an anthropomorphic and androgynous plant, and has aphrodisiac and fertilizing powers (pp. 36-46).

²⁹ T. Pamfilie mentions that there are regions where Romanians assimilate the gypsies to the *moroi*s and expect them to be able to cast the evil eye because they have black eyes. See *op. cit.* pp. 118, 121.

³⁰ The feast is also known as Sânzien (the name comes from a flower, the bedstraw, gathered for this occasion), and is often related to the story of the *Iele*, entities that folk tradition believes to be positive and negative at the same time. One is not supposed to work on this feast day; it is also believed that the plants collected in the fields (all kinds of herbs) early in the morning have healing properties during the whole year. (See T. Pamfilie, *op. cit.*, p. 232). The dual status of the *Iele* is also presented by M. Olinescu in *Mitologie românească*, București: Editura 100+1 Gramar, 2004, pp. 343-346.

In its entirety, Horia Liman's novel abounds in elements that mingle folk belief with everyday life – a sort of cosmic integration of the human being. The great achievement of this novel consists in the fact that its author has managed to capture and render in a subtle and insightful manner the mentality of this small community in northern Romania at a time of important historical changes. It is a time when people experience the transition towards another type of mentality. Bologa seems better able to adapt because he had travelled abroad and had seen how things happened outside his village. However, his temporary disappearance can equally be related to another Oshan tradition referred to by I. Muşlea: when a young man is defeated in a no-weapon fight, he no longer finds his place in the village and chooses to go to the mountains to regain his strength and take revenge upon returning (p. 14). Mara and the majority of the other inhabitants live in a closed world, the same world in which their ancestors used to live. Will it remain closed as long as the age-old beech represents the *axis mundi*? It is Bologa who tells the villagers that there is another method to do justice instead of pulling out the knife: the sabotage, according to the model of the "mafiosi", the "gangsters" in Chicago. The villagers also learn to better satisfy their material needs. Is this a better lifestyle? The novel does not give an answer. The title, *The Due Term*, seems to represent a warning – one addressed to the reader this time. What is the result of this choice at this beginning of the millennium? The ambiguity of some place references – the association of more or less remote and vaguely situated regions with accurate geographical locations, the evocation of supernatural entities supposed to haunt the place – leaves the response open. The fact that Moga tries to dispel the community's profound belief in certain myths or legends is sometimes rendered ambiguous by his attempt to revive others, whose story he prefers to leave unfinished. Let us say, as he does, that "One should not stifle the gleam of hope" (p. 79) and that "happiness lies in the illusion" (p. 221). What the novel conveys to the reader may be both real and imaginary at the same time, endowed with the "poetic charm of a world both near and far" as E. M. Cioran used to say. Mara invites us to follow her footsteps in the misty highlands even if she disappears to avoid distressing other people – or is it simply because she is a being of secret spaces?

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