

TABOO VIOLATION AND CHARMING INITIATION, AS EXPRESSED BY SOME ROMANIAN LEGENDS AND INCANTATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE FAIRIES

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Abstract. Within the context of charmings, as it has been recorded among Romanians, the article aims to disclose the meaning of the theme of fairies' taboo violation as a precondition necessary to gain sacred knowledge. In this regard, various certain incantations addressed to the fairies are examined, along with legends and third person accounts that underline the role played by these supernatural entities as numinous agents for initiation to the 'secret' register of knowledge through a special form of communication, which in modern neuroscience terminology might be referred to as an 'altered state of consciousness', but which, in the emic terms of magic medicine is described as a disease, namely being *taken by the fairies*. In concordance with the idea of mutual exchanges between humans and the numinous, the one who accept the fairies' authority and pay the price of being tormented by them, gain the gift of therapeutic and divinatory abilities.

Keywords: incantations and charming practices, fairies, the Table of the Fairies, miraculous water, sacred knowledge, initiation, ecstasy, taboos, etiological legends, Romanian folklore, folk religion.

INTRODUCTION

A belief widely attested ethnographically in many cultures is that the oral transmission of charms (the words and the manner of how to perform them) takes place simultaneously with the transfer of numinous power from the transmitter to the receiver. While the receiver is always a human, the transmitter can be either human or a supernatural entity. Since my interest here is on the second situation, the goal of the article is to articulate a corpus of incantations and ritual practices addressed to the fairies, along with etiological legends and narratives that recount the experiences of a specific category of therapeutic and divinatory charmers that, at one moment in their life, entered into contact with these entities who caused his or her bodily and mental disorders as a means of initiation on the other hand.

A brief review of the fairies' legendary dossier, as developed within Romanian folk culture, might be useful for a better understanding the background of the beliefs found in the incantations and the charming situation that the article deals with.

PORTRAYING THE FAIRIES IN THE ROMANIAN FOLK LEGENDS AND INCANTATIONS

The long series of names under which the fairies are known¹ amongst Romanians indicate human attitudes towards them. We find terms that express linguistic taboos: *Ielele*² [iotation of the personal pronoun, 3rd person feminine plural], *Dânsele* [the polite third person

feminine plural pronoun]; words that reverently aim to obtain fairies' benevolence], *Doamnele* [the Ladies], *Milostivele* [the Merciful Ones]. We also find terms that point to their sacredness - *Ale Sfinte* [the Holy Ones] or to their appearance - *Albele* [the White Ones]. Additionally, we find terms that express beliefs and legends about them: *Zânele* [the Fairies], *Măiestrele*³ [the Masterly], *Vântoasele* [the Windy Ones], *Fetele lui Șandru* [the ȘandruAlexander's Maiden], *Șoimanele* [the term comes from the Romanian word *șoim* meaning 'falcon', and is related with the fairies ability to fly or, maybe, to take the shape of a falcon⁴]. A further subcategory is represented by *Rusaliili*⁵, *Sânzienele*⁶ and *Drăgaicele*⁷, whose names are coincident with the name of important feasts in the religious calendar: the Pentecost (*Rusaliile*) and St. John's Day (*Sânzienele*, *Drăgaica* on the 24th of June). This underlines the fact that neither Pentecost nor St. John Feast are dedicated to fairies, but according to widespread folk beliefs, the power of the *Rusalii*, respectively of the *SânzieneDrăgaice*, are at their maximum during these days.⁸

The legendary files of the *Iele* is rich and complex; yet, their imaginary portrait⁹ remains homogenous due to a constant skeleton with the following features: they appear only in groups¹⁰ and only during the summer season; they sing or play bagpipes, trumpets, percussion instruments (especially the *toaca*, a wooden or metal board used within the Orthodox and Greco-Catholic liturgical rituals to call people to pray), bells; their music is uncommon for humans, who even evaluate them as 'the most beautiful sounds' or as noise; they rarely enter the domestic space; instead, they prefer the forest, where they dance in the air, under or in the crown of branchy trees (especially the beech, the walnut); they bathe and drink water from isolated fountains outside villages, in the forest. The water they touch and the ground under their airy dance remains impregnated with their presence. Called *Hora Ielelor* [the Circle Dance of Fairies] or *Masa Ielelor* [the Table of Fairies], the spot is marked by burnt grass or by a semi-poisonous (hallucinogenic?) and semi-therapeutic mushroom named „the fairies' spoon” (*Ganoderma lucidum*); the Fairies can move long distances flying without wings or by a vehicle (a wooden

log, a chariot); they abduct humans, lads and maiden, take them up in the air and force them to enter their dance; they also can abduct skilful young male musicians, who iare then compelled to play the violin or pipe for their dance until they are totally weakened (it seems that the *Iele* never grow tired of circular dancing).

Human contacts with the *Iele* are ritually mediated through verbal formulas (e.g. “Let your dance increase”) and by diverse taboos: to step on their spot, to sleep under their trees, to drink water from isolated fountains,¹¹ to answer when they call you by name, to divulge their songs. The violation of at least one of the taboos is punished by bodily harms (paralysis, arthritis) or mental injuries (hallucination, epilepsy, dementia). And, conversely, appropriate behavior maybe rewarded. The benevolent or maleficent profile of these entities is equivocal. They might be assigned with a justicial role placed under divine authority: „they are sent by God to punish evil humans”– or they might be „subordinated to the devil” (Muşlea and Bîrlea 2010: 202). They can repair what they themselves damaged and they can both receive proffer gifts.

Attested among Serbians, Bulgarians, Greeks (Pócs 1989:49) and the Romanians, too, is the following ritual method to recover a human who has been punished by the *Iele*, namely to come back after one year to the very place – fountain, tree – where the patient previously violated at least one of the the above mentioned taboos (Muşlea and Bîrlea 2010: 208). The curative ritual is performed by specialized charmers. ”When they see a bushy and scorched branch of a tree, people say that the Beautiful Ones dance there and nobody steps under that tree, because their table is there and they harm anyone who steps there. Those who are crippled ask a charmer to place a table at that tree and they sleep there”. To this table the *Iele* are invited. If they accept the gift and “the glasses on the table turn empty and the honey breads are eaten, the *Iele* give himher vitality” (Bîrlea 1981: 57–58) and cure himher through this incubation-like ritual. The ritual involves the voicing of certain incantations that describe the symptoms of the disease, the earlier event when the taboo was violated, and the offering ritual.

Here is an example recorded at the beginning of the 20th century from Iconia Crâsta, Caraș Severin county (South West Romania):

It is entitled *The Holy Ones*. It is used for strong headaches caused by the fact that someone, in an evil hour, stepped on the Windy Ones' [spot] and disturbed their Dance [the spot they dance]. The charmer [a woman] keeps in her right hand a burning candle and in the other hand a bunch made from nine sorts of flowers placed in a pot filled with water.

A plecat N.	<i>There went N</i>
Pe cale	<i>On the road</i>
Pe cărare,	<i>On the path</i>
Pe drumul cel mare.	<i>On the big road.</i>
La mijloc de cale	<i>In the middle of the path</i>
S-a-ntâlnit că ăle sfinte,	<i>He met the Holy Ones,</i>
Cu ăle milostive,	<i>The Mild Ones,</i>
Cu ăle curate:	<i>The Poor Ones:</i>
Cu vânturi albe,	<i>White winds,</i>
Cu vânturi galbene,	<i>Yellows winds,</i>
Cu vânturi vinete,	<i>Purple winds,</i>
Cu vânturi viorinte [sic!]	<i>Violet winds</i>
Cu vânturi pestrițe,	<i>Mottled winds,</i>
Cu vânturi frumoase,	<i>Beautiful winds,</i>
Cu vânturi necăjite,	<i>Downcast winds,</i>
Cu vânturi flămânde,	<i>Hungry winds,</i>
Cu vânturi setoase.	<i>Thirsty winds.</i>
N peste ele călcă,	<i>N stepped</i>
Masa li-o răsturnă;	<i>And overturned their table;</i>
Dar ele săriră,	<i>But they came,</i>
De pământ îl trântiră,	<i>Knocked him to the ground,</i>
Picioarele i le frânseră,	<i>Broken his legs</i>
Mâinile i le rupseră.	<i>Broken his arms.</i>

Dar N. Se cânta,
N se văiera,
Maica Sfântă Maria
Din cer îl auzea
Și pe scară
De ceară
Se scobora,
La N. Sosea,
În poală-l sprijinea,
sus mi-l ridica,
De ălea sfinte-l scutura,

D-ăle milostive,
D-ăle curate,
De vânturi albe,
De vânturi galbene,
De vânturi vinete,
De vânturi viorinte [sic!]
De vânturi pestrițe,
De vânturi frumoase,
De vânturi necăjite,
De vânturi flămânde,
De vânturi setoase
Mi-l scutura

Și-n glas mare striga:
Nu te cânta
Nu te văiera
Că-i aici Iconia!
Iconia descântătoarea

*Cu oală nouă venea
Și cu apă din râul Iordan;*

Cu apă te spăla,

*And N was whimpering,
N was crying.
Holy Mother Mary,
heard him
And went down
A ladder
Of wax
And came to N,
Took him in her lap, În
Lifted him,
And shook the Holy
Ones off him,
Off the Mild Ones,
Off the Pure Ones,
Off the white winds,
Off the yellow winds,
Off the purple winds,
Off the violet winds,
Off the mottled winds,
Off the beautiful winds,
Off the downcast winds,
Off the hungry winds,
Off the thirsty winds,
I shake it off*

*And she shouted
“Don’t cry”,
Don’t whimper,
Because Iconia
[the name of the
charmer] is here,*

*She came with a new pot,
And from the
River Jordan,
She washed you withater,*

<i>Cu florile te stropea,</i>	<i>Sprinkled you with flowers</i>
<i>Și genunchii Domnului pleca,</i>	<i>And she knelt in front of the Lord,</i>
<i>Pentru N. se ruga,</i>	<i>She prayed for N.</i>
<i>De Sfânta Maică Maria,</i>	<i>She prayed to the Holy Mother Mary,</i>
<i>D-ăle sfinte,</i>	<i>To the Holy Ones,</i>
<i>D-ăle milostive,</i>	<i>To the Mild Ones,</i>
<i>D-ăle curate</i>	<i>To the Pure Ones,</i>
<i>Și de ăla frumoase:</i>	<i>And to the Beautiful Ones:</i>
<i>De Doamna Ogrășteana,</i>	<i>To the Lady Ogrășteana [the name of the flowers in the branch],</i>
<i>De Doamna Bugiana,</i>	<i>To the Lady Bugiana,</i>
<i>De Doamna Golopăra,</i>	<i>To the Lady Golopăra,</i>
<i>De Doamna Trandafira,</i>	<i>To the Lady Trandafira,</i>
<i>De Doamna Ocheșoaua,</i>	<i>Lady Ocheșoaua,</i>
<i>De Doamna Vioreaua,</i>	<i>Lady Vioreaua,</i>
<i>De Doamna Semenica,</i>	<i>Lady Semenica,</i>
<i>De Doamna Jalea,</i>	<i>Lady Jalea,</i>
<i>De Doamna Plăcințaua;</i>	<i>Lady Plăcințaua;</i>
<i>Câte flori pe munte,</i>	<i>As many flowers as they are in the mountain,</i>
<i>Dvoastră vis (sic!) și mai multe,</i>	<i>There are more for you”.</i>
<i>Ne-am ruga aplecat pentru N.,</i>	<i>We would like to pray for N.</i>
<i>Să faceți bine și ascultați,</i>	<i>And please listen to me,</i>
<i>Și-l iertați;</i>	<i>Please forgive him,</i>
<i>Că iel v-o fi ieșit,</i>	<i>Because he probably did something wrong to you,</i>
<i>În cale v-o-ntâlnit,</i>	<i>He met you on his way,</i>
<i>Cu picioarele v-o fi călcat,</i>	<i>He trampled you,</i>
<i>Masa v-o fi răsturnat.</i>	<i>He overturned your table.</i>
<i>Și voi i-ați luat smaga,</i>	<i>You took away his power,</i>

I-ați luat puterea, Picioarele i-ați frânt, Mâinile iați rupt.	<i>His vigour, You broke his legs, You broke his arms.</i>
Acum faceți bine și ascultați,	<i>Now, be good and listen to me</i>
Mi-l iertați, Cu Sfânta Maică Maria să veniți, Leac să-i aduceți, să mi-l chitiți:	<i>And forgive him. Together with the Holy Mother Mary You should bring his remedy, and fix him</i>
Cu capu la cap, Cu gură la gură, Cu mâni la mâni, Cu vâni la vâni, Cu inimă la inimă, Cu sânge la sânge, Cu smagă la smagă, Cu picioarele la picioare, Să-l chitiți mai frumos de cum a fost, Cum chitește albina Fagurul și samarul,	<i>Head to head Mouth to mouth, Hands to hands Veins to veins, Heart to heart, Blood to blood And legs to legs. With feet to feet. Fix him better than he was Fix him as the bee fixes The honeycomb and the load.</i>
N să rămână curat, Luminat, Ca aurul străcurat!”	<i>Let N remain clean, And shiny Like pure gold.”</i>

And the charmer ends with the *prayer of the diseased*, a consecrated prayer worded on behalf of a sick person:

Cruce-n cer, cruce-n pământ	<i>Cross in the sky, cross on the earth,</i>
De la Dumnezeu cel sfânt.	<i>Cross from the Holy God;</i>
Cruce-n casă,	<i>Cross in the house,</i>
Cruce-n masă,	<i>Cross in the table,</i>

Cruce lui N în așternut	<i>Cross in the bed clothes of N,</i>
De greu somn păzește-l,	<i>Guard him from bad sleep,</i>
De duh rău ferește-l,	<i>Guard him from evil spirit,</i>
Sfântă Maică Mărie ajută-i,	<i>Holy Mother Mary help him</i>
Și-l scoate din boli grele,	<i>And take him out from serious diseases,</i>
Din beteșuguri rele,	<i>From evil afflictions,</i>
Din postul păcatelor,	<i>From the fasting sins,</i>
Tuturor,	<i>All,</i>
Amin!	<i>Amen!</i>

(from Hodoș, 1912: 66–68).

The entire charming performance, which includes the incantation and the prayer, is charged with the positive sacredness placed under divine auspices of God, of the Mother of God and of the holy cross. In this regard, it is not meaningless to notice the double role assigned to Virgin Mary as both intercessor between the charmer and the Fairies and as the figure with authority over the windy Fairies.

Another variant, recorded in the same region and in the same period as the previous one, is more focused on the gifts offered to these Fairies:

Iar a plecat N	<i>There went N. on the path</i>
Pe cale	<i>On the large road,</i>
Pe un drum mare	<i>On a big road</i>
Și s-a întâlnit	<i>And he met</i>
Cu vânturile-n cale.	<i>The winds on his way.</i>
Vânturile l-au învăluit	<i>The winds surrounded him</i>
La cap l-au amețit,	<i>And dizzied him,</i>
Puterea i-au lua.	<i>They took away his vigour.</i>

Iar descântătoarea pentru
N s-a rugat
Și vânturile le-a cinstit:
Cu 9 lumini,
Cu 9 pâni
Cu 9 crețari,
Cu 9 ulcuțe,
Cu apă din 9 vaduri.

Voi, vânturi mânioase,
Pe N să-l lăsați curat,
Că N s-a sculat și v-a cinstit;

Voi, vânturi mânioase,
La cap să-l desmeticiți,
Că el v-o cinstit:

Cu 9 lumini,
Cu 9 pâni
Cu 9 crețari,
Cu 9 ulcuțe,
Cu apă din 9 vaduri.
Că el o fi greșit

O fi smintit,

Jocurile v-o fi spart,

Blidul vi l-o fi vărsat.

Vânturi frumoase,
Vânturi curate,
Vânturi mâniate,
Să faceți bine
Să-l lăsați curat,

*And the charmer
[feminine] prayed for him
And honoured the winds:
With 9 candles,
With 9 breads,
With 9 coins,
With 9 loaves,
With water from 9 fords.*

*You, wrathful winds,
Leave N clean,
That N arose and
honoured you;
You, wrathful winds,
Clear his head,
Cause he honoured you
with:*

*With 9 candles,
With 9 breads,
With 9 coins,
With 9 loaves
With water from 9 fords.
Because he would have
done something wrong
He would have
disturbed something
He would have
broken your dances
He would have spilt
your dish;*

*Beautiful winds,
Clean winds,
Wrathful winds,
Be good,
Leave N. clean,*

Că el v-o cinstit dela
Dumnezeu!

*Because he
honored you from God!*

(Hodoș, 1912: 69).

To the same ritual of setting offerings on the Table of the Fairies, and to the beliefs enclosed in it, points an incantation included in a Codex written at the end of the 18th century and kept by the Romanian Academy, MS 1517 (f.44); the text was published and commented upon by Emanuela Timotin, who considered it probably “*le plus ancienne incantation roumaine contre des (...) fée*” (Timotin, 2007: 433).

Pentru dânsăle. Adecă eu (cutare), bine-m pare pentru venirea dumneavoastră și iată că postesc 3 zile de vineri dumneavoastră, i iată că vă fac masă mare, adecă pentru vinirea dumneavoastră. Și mă rog, orice voiu fi greși, să mă iertați. Că de acu pre mă voiu păzi, ca să nu vă răspunzu. Și când voiu mai greși, să mă iertați, că sânt robul lui Dumnezeu și pe urmă al dumneavoastră, eu (cutare).

For the Shes. Namely me (this one) I am glad for your coming and, behold that I am fasting three days of Friday [for] you, and behold that I prepare a great table, meaning for your coming. And I (this one) beg you to forgive me for whatever I might have been wrong. Cause for now one I will guard myself in order to avoid answering to you. And when I would be wrong again, forgive me, because I am the servant of God and, secondly, of yours, I (this one)

(Timotin 2007:443).

This version is much more simple than the other examples recorded from the oral milieu around one hundred years later. Secondly, the use of the first person can be noticed, as if the very victim speaks and acts in hisher own behalf, while in the later oral charms use of

the first person indicate the mediator charmer, who, in turn becomes a character integrated in the story narrated by the incantation. All these charms share a reverent attitude towards the Fairies, explicitly expressed by closing formulas that state the charmer's (and the patient's) subordination to them. Consequently, the *Iele* are not expelled, as in the case of other charms against fairies or evil spirits, but implored to forgive and to cure, as *Merciful* as they might be.

In the frame of a folk religion system, characterized, in Laura Stark's terms, by an „emphasis on reciprocity and exchange between humans and divine or sacred agents” (Stark 2002: 30), Romanian fairies (as is probably true of all fairies in the world) are numinous entities who negotiate their authority with humans. The question is: what might be the very trade between the *Iele* and humans?

VIOLATION OF TABOOS AND CHARMING INITIATION

In the classification of Romanian legends, those assigned to types 13244 and 13245 assert the human origin of the flying Fairies (Brill 2005, I). They were:

the servants of Alexander the Macedonian, who (...) drunk his living water that king Ivantie had given to him [water] taken from the River Jordan. Drinking the living water, the servants flew in the air and turned into *Iele* (Muşlea and Bîrlea 2010: 209)¹³;

They bathed in the living water from the well of Ivantie. They remained young for ever. When they dance, then we have whirlwinds [Ro. *Vântoasele*, the Windy Ones].

(Brill 2005, I)

These legends are related to the episode in the *Alexander Romance* of the visit by the Macedonian emperor to the island of Makaron in the very vicinity of the Paradise. According to Byzantine versions,

and also to the Romanian ones,¹³ he met King Evante there who „was sitting naked on a golden throne with a golden crown on his head. And there was a fountain under his feet”¹⁴ (Cartoian 1922: 87), a miraculous fountain connected with the rivers of the celestial paradise. Alexander learned that „the one who bathes this water will rejuvenate to the age of 30” (idem). Evant offered to Alexander a flagon filled with water from the well of eternal youth, but, since the Romance ends with his death, the Macedonian never used it. Why? An insertion in a Romanian manuscript written around 1800 continues the story and restores narrative causality: „some say that Alexander’s servants drank this water, and they are still alive, and will never die until the Doomsday” (Gaster 1883: 28–29).

The mortal nature of Alexander’s servants has been transgressed through the fraudulent acquirement of sacred knowledge: the well with the miraculous liquid impregnated with heavenly substance was not intended for them. Following this, they suffered a corporal reconfiguration and gained the ability to fly, to have divinatory abilities and to enter a realm of a perpetual present continuous. According to another legend, that involves the same pattern of a taboo violation in order to earn oracular faculties, they consumed a liturgically consecrated food in a forbidden context: „The Holy Ones were maidens who [...] have stolen the Eucharistic bread and God cursed them not to be heard by anybody except the one who will stay awake late at night in the places where they might pass” (recorded in South Carpathian region) (Gusti, Herseni and Stahl 1999: 222). Here the taboo that was violated was the interdiction to listen to their words or to their charming sounds, which might reveal knowledge with sacred provenance; consequently, to stay awake against the common bodily and mental limits representing an initiatory test that verifies the receiver as a future charmer.

The certain knowledge with sacred provenance that consists in oracular awareness, recognition of therapeutic herbal remedies, erotic and musical initiation, and, not least, the ability of enchant, is occasionally and only under specific circumstances disclosed to humans. But the price is that the human must get sick first. „Old

women are convinced that their healing gift was given either by the Mother of God or by the *Iele*, after a serious illness in the course of which their soul is carried by the *Iele* through the air, and they [the *Iele*] teach them [the old women] how to cure” (Candrea 1999: 334).¹⁵

Which kind of diseases? In the first Romanian medical manuscript treatise composed in 1760 (in Sibiu), an adaptation of a Greek original, „numbness and tremors” are considered to be symptoms for a malady that the translator (a medical physician) explained for his Romanian readers (probably familiar with the local folk terminology) as similar to the disease called „to be taken by the *iele*, as the uneducated people use it” (Chisacof 2017: 183, 253, 258). In fact, Romanian emic terms that point to certain disorders caused by the fairies are contradictory:

The first terms under consideration, ‘abducted by the *Iele*’ (*furat din Iele*), and ‘taken up by the *Iele*’ (*luat pe sus din Iele*), mean that the body and soul of the victim are moved through the air against his or her own will, to a distant space. To ‘be abducted’ is partially synonym with to ‘be transported’, lifted amidst a whirlwind (here caused by the circle dance of the fairies) with the corollary of having access, through vertigo, to those levels of reality whose perception implies exceeding normal psychic and cognitive limits. Supernatural abductions are common both to prestigious religious figures (to St. Elijah, St Paul, etc., in the canonical Christian context; to the Mother of God, etc., in apocryphal contexts) and to ordinary people, as well.

Within the transfigured reality of the charm, the abduction, namely the exhausting dance with the *Iele*, the continuous twisting, precedes the proper condition of the ‘disease’ and paralysis. Here is an example:

Când o văzură,
Die mână o luară
Și în gioc o băgară,

În sus o ridicară,

*When they saw her
They took her hand
And pulled her in their
dance,
They lifted her up,*

Ca un fuior die cânepă	<i>They swingled her</i>
o melițară,	<i>as a hemp tow,</i>
Ca un snop de grâu o îmblătiră,	<i>They flailed her as a</i>
	<i>sheaf of wheat,</i>
Moartă în pământ o trântiră.	<i>They knocked her head</i>
	<i>to the ground.</i>
Creierii din cap i-o turburat,	<i>They disturbed her</i>
	<i>brains from the head,</i>
Moară în cap i-o așezat.	<i>They put a mill in</i>
	<i>her head</i>

(Șăineanu 2012:75).

Such manifestations point to the symptomatology of divine possession (whether good or evil), like a body moving out of control and hallucination (the “mill in her head” suggests acoustic hallucination). In Bogdan Neagotă’s words, „the torment is the price for gaining the ecstatic state” (Neagotă 2015:80). It seems that Alexander’s Maidens (*Fetele lui Șandru*), as the *Iele* are sometimes named strictly in incantations, are initiating agents that mediate communication with the sacredness through the altered states of consciousness that they induce by music and dance.

Another term that denominates the disease caused by the fairies is the „fall of the *Iele* of the Holy Ones” (*căzut(ă) din Ieledin Ale Sfinte*), which, by contrast to the previous situation, is associated from the very beginning with a downward movement, body immobility, catalepsy (when only the soul is transported), and oneiric initiation:

The good enchantresses are fallen *Holy Ones*. They slept motionlessly for several days and several nights and [while sleeping] were tortured by the Holy Ones; after this torment they gained the charms. Old Stanca from the river, for example; she doesn’t know any evil things. She was disfigured when she was 18 years old, while she was sleeping by a beech tree. Her father took her home and

she only woke up after eleven weeks. She was tortured by the Holy Ones with green eyes [...]. When they fall down by the Holy Ones, when they squirm and speak with the *Iele*, the appropriate remedies are revealed to them. It is revealed to them the nature of the charming afflictions, the identity of those who have stolen a certain thing, the manner to keep enemies away.

(see Neagota 2015: 88).¹⁶

Humans are not automatically passive victims of the fairies, but they can choose their position. „It is said that ‚The Holy Ones’ revealed to her, provoke headaches, dizziness and threaten her with death **if** [*my emphasis*] she refuses to obey them; in turn, they teach her to enchant” (Candrea 1999: 334). In other words, the deal is to accept the fairies’ authority, a situation that is consistent with the status assumed by the charmers specialized in performing the incantation and the ritual of setting the Fairies’ Table, as illustrated above. On the contrary, she/he can refuse them:

there was a man who said that at the age of 10 years, sitting in the shelter, a group of beautiful women pounced on him. They lifted him in the air and took him on a hill, where they left him in a willow. Then they took him dancing and, when his brother appeared, they abandoned him and withdrew themselves. The boy couldn’t move any longer and was carried home in a chariot. Three months later, an old woman told him that he would become a wizard, but he was afraid of that. In the week of *Rusalii* [the week of Pentecost], he had bouts of insanity and tried to whistle words [or sounds] of fairies; after the week of *Rusalii* he recovered.

(Marienescu 1873; see Brill 2005, I, type 13256).

Here, a failed incantation can be identified, interrupted by the presence of the boy’s brother. Declining, out of fear, the quality of initi-

ated, a quality that he almost had acquired, the boy violates the prohibition to disclose the fairies' song that has been confided to him during the ecstatic state induced by the airy dance: he „whistles” their „word” in everyones hearing and... recovers.

In the frames of transmitting both the incantation and the gift to be enchanted and, from this position, the skill to magically enchant, heal, hear, and see what the others do not see, permanent vigilance and availability to accept the fairies' authority are demanded from those chosen by the *Iele* to become their future agents of the numinousness. Wide-awakeness – beyond the ordinary registers of time and space – is a precondition for being initiated into charming knowledge, even if this means the violation of the fairies' taboo (as those people who lie in wait late in the night in order to hear them). „The ritual practice recommend that the charm must be learned by stealth, by lurking near the one who pronounces it in a certain moment” (Bîrlea 1983, II: 12–13). In other words, clandestine learning through the *stealing* the charm, together with its numinous power, represents a challenge and a task the neophyte must pass in order to qualify as a charmer.

In their turn, Alexander the Great's servants had fraudulently acquired the reservoir of sacred knowledge, therefore becoming both initiated and agents for humans' initiations induced through music and dance. Flying, the maiden themselves had been *carried away*, abducted in the air!

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

Firstly, the famous ritual of *Căluș*¹⁷ performed by esoteric group of men who gathered strictly in the Pentecost week is directly associated with the *Iele*: through choric trance they cure the people whose malady is diagnosed as *being taken by the Iele / the Rusalii*. There are similitudes between the charmers who receive their gifts directly from the fairies after an episode of affliction and mental disorder, on the one hand, and the *călușari*, on the other hand (e.g. during their ritual performance, one of the dancers suddenly trembles and

falls down to the ground as if himself is tormented by the fairies; in turn, he heals the patient). Yet they do not cover the entire repertoire of practices, means and agents involved in this arena: they only act as a group (not an individual charmer), they do not settle any Table with offerings for the Fairies on behalf of a sick person, they do not utter incantations (as other charmers do), etc. Consequently, the ritual of *Căluș* was not discussed in this article, which dealt instead with specific practices and incantations that do not enter within the attributions of these choric charmers.

Secondly, based on the consequences the encounter with the fairies has upon humans, three categories of actors may be identified: 1) those who, for lack of vigilance, indirectly and involuntary violate the taboos, enter into contact with the *Iele*, pollute their territory. They are simple punished victims, whose illness is mostly physical; 2) those who are chosen by the *Iele* to become their agent. In such cases we do not speak about the violation of taboos. The fairies invade them, causing physical and mental disorders. Still subordinated to the *Iele*, they might become charmers at the first level of initiation; 3) the fairy-seers, people who actively seek to enter in contact with the fairies and, in this respect, deliberately violate the taboos – e.g. they willfully stay on watch late at night to vigilantly hear their voice; they drink water from forbidden fountains; they bury their musical instruments at a crossroads, etc.- in order to acquire numinous knowledge. They are initiated in a register of perception that transgresses ordinary reality and gain their own enchanting power.

Thirdly, deeply marked by a specific religious view over universe, traditional knowledge about human *un-normal* behaviour might refer to mystic communication with different hypostases of the sacred (here the fairies) as ‚to be carried’, ‚to be abducted’, while modern neuroscience diagnoses it as an altered state of consciousness. The situation of being in an altered state of consciousness was defined as

to deviate from the natural [world-consciousness] relation in such a way that the world and/or self tend to be misrepresented (...). The resulting misrepresentational state is not the functional, original or permanent state of the

organism's consciousness, but caused by some external or internal change to the organism's biological makeup that alters the representational [world-consciousness] relations.

(Revonsuo, Kallio, Sikka, 2009).

It can be noticed that ethnology and neurosciences share a certain interest on humans' interactions with reality, interactions that includes negotiation between cultural patterns and conventions on the one hand, and individual evaluation and interpretation of the natural and supernatural on the other hand: "it is not the contents of consciousness *per se* that define whether a state is 'normal' or 'altered' but its relation to the world. Thus, in an altered state, consciousness relates itself differently to the world, in a way that involves wide spread misrepresentations of the world and/or the self" (Revonsuo, Kallio, Sikka, 2009).

The question is not to evaluate what is supernatural and what is natural (biological) in these experiences, but to undertake the inevitable differences between the views upon one and the same reality and the manners to interfere with it (the sacred action over the human's body and mind vs. the scientific explanations of the body and mind *altered* activities) as part of the epistemological labor of ethnology. In the absence of interdisciplinary case studies which explore closely the symptomatology and the interior personal feelings and sensorial experiences of those who assert they have been taken away by the fairies, the hypothesis I suggested here remain incomplete.

NOTES

¹ A cartographic distribution of the terms in the Romania territory was made by Maria Purdela Staru (Purdela Sitaru 1999:156).

² Among ethnographers, the almost generic term is *Ielele*, which occurs in popular usage all over Romania. Its etymology is controversial. One proposal is that it comes from the feminine personal plural pronoun *ele* used in an euphemistic manner in order to avoid fairies' real, dangerous, name.

Another proposal is that it originates in the Turan root *iel*, meaning ‘wind’, ‘air’, ‘rheumatism’. The second hypothesis was supported by Lazăr Șăineanu: “The air or the wind has been personified as an aerial fairy”. Another name for the same entities, ‘The Windy Ones’ [Romanian Vânoasele], who are “the mistresses of the wind, flying through the air and entering human bodies”, is apparently sustained this hypothesis (Șăineanu 2012: 105–106). At present, the only widely-accepted etymology is *Iele* < *ele*.

³ “Especially in charms, the word ‘masterly’ generally means any creature who possesses a magic power, whether it be a fairy, a woman, or a bird” (Șăineanu 2012:98).

⁴ Maria Vivod noticed the term *șojmanke* [Romanian spelling is *șoimance*] among Romanian speakers from Serbia. She wrote that “the word *șojmanka* is unknown in Vlach. Eastern Serbian Vlach communities know and use the term *șojmanosa* [the appropriate Romanian spelling is *șoimănoasă*]. According to Es Durlić, the Vlach term *manosa* means “abundant,” but *șoj* is entirely unknown” (Vivod 2018:59). However, she informally learned about this term, as she explained in footnote no 9 (Vivod 2018: 59), and related it to the Hungarian word *sólyom*, a term with a probable Turkish root. In reality, the term is well known in the Romanian language and has nothing to do with *mănos* [fertile], but with the word *șoim* [falcon], whose augmentative is *șoiman*, which also means ‘brave, daring’, or ‘to fly as fast as the falcon’. “Thus, *Șoimanele* means fairies which move very fast” (Șăineanu 2012:94–95). On the other hand, “*Șoiman* is an epithet that is given only to pure and somewhat holy things, such as the sun, the bee, the bread” (Marian 1883, I: 118).

⁵ This fairies’ name is coincident with the name of the Pentecost feast, *Rusalii* (a defective of singular noun). Rooted in Latin *Rosalia*, the Feast of Roses. It is recognizable in the Gr. *Ρουσάλια* and the Slavic *rusalija* (Ciorănescu 1958–1966). At least according to my knowledge, its use as the name of the Pentecost feast is specific to Romanians, while *Rusalka* (pl. *Rusalki*) in the Slavic languages points to feminine entities from the other world, more or less connected with water.

⁶ The etymological hypothesis proposed by Ioan Aurel Candrea (and agreed by the Dictionary of the Romanian Academy) is *Sânziene* (pl.) < Lat. *sanctus dies Johannis*. Based on the possible origin of Romanian *zână* (fairy) from the Latin *Diana*, another hypothesis (accepted by the Romanian Language Dictionary) relates the term *sânziana* to the Lat. *Sancta Diana*.

⁷ From Bulgarian *dragaika*. It also points to the same flower as *sânziana*. Both terms are used in the plural form.

⁸ There is to distinguish the *Rusalii* fairies from the *Sânziene Drăgaice* fairies: the first ones are most punitive against those who do not observe the Pentecost celebration, a celebration with a funerary component, while the *Sânziene Drăgaice* are deeply connected with agriculture and with the medicinal flowers whose name they bear (it is believed that the curative properties of these plants and, of all herbs, are at their greatest on Mid-summer's day).

⁹ By and large, many of the fairies' attributes are similar in various European cultures.

¹⁰ All the terms which denominate them are plural nouns.

¹¹ In the real Romanian landscape, there are concrete fountains identified by local people as the Fairies 'the Mild Ones' the *Ielele's* Fountain.

¹² Similar beliefs are known among modern Greeks: called The Good Ladies, Those with Kind Heart, The Happy Ones and other euphemistical names. They are led by the sister or by the daughter of Alexander the Great, who drank the water of immortality (Șăineanu 2012: 124).

¹³ The first attested copy written in Romanian language was dated 1621.

¹⁴ In Romanian: "ședé suptu un copaciu naltu și frumos. Și ave de tote pomele într-însulu. Și era nește pasări cu penele galbine ca aurul și cânta nește cântece menunate. Și elu șede în jilțul de aur și cu cununa de auru în cap și gol. Și era fântână suptu picioarele lui" (Cartoian 1922: 87).

¹⁵ The belief that there are certain healers "who lie in delirium and meanwhile get knowledge of different other worldly medicine" is also attested in Greece, Bulgaria, and Dalmatia (Pócs 1989: 48).

¹⁶ The grandmother's memory of one of my informants indirectly actualizes the oneiric state as a mean of communication with the fairies: "She told me that once, when she was young and unmarried, she was returning home from a sewing bee. She was alone on the road and it was already night. Suddenly she heard a fluttering and she knew that there were the Beautiful Ones. She had to run home quickly. She was alone in the house. She got into bed and plugged her ears, so she wouldn't hear their song. She was afraid they would paralyze her if she heard them. She fell asleep and dreamt that she was picking flowers together with a group of beautiful women. When she woke up in the morning, everything was alright. That was all" (personal

field archive: recorder from A.T., man, 27 years old, born in Bălcești, Vâlcea county; recorded in Bucharest, October 2022).

¹⁷ The Romanian ritual of Căluș and its complex choric repertoire is included in the UNESCO's list of intangible heritage of the humankind.

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