

THE REPRESENTATION OF RITUAL (IM)PURITY THROUGH METEOROLOGICAL METAPHORS IN FOLKLORIC LANGUAGE

Elena PLATON¹

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ABSTRACT. *The Representation of Ritual (Im)Purity through Meteorological Metaphors in Folkloric Language.* For the mythical-magical thinking of archaic and traditional communities, ritualistic purity represents a fundamental dimension of the entire universe, most often linguistically expressed through a reference to its antinomian pair, with the help of the *clean-unclean* opposition. According to the degree of contamination with various impure things, such as the multitude of *good* and *evil spirits* that populated the world, both space and time were qualitatively differentiated in *good places* and *bad places*, *good hours* and *evil hours*. People themselves had, in turn, to fulfil this condition of ritual purity, before beginning an important activity. If they were not pure from this point of view, they would be unsuccessful whether it was about working in the fields, going to church, or travelling somewhere. However, these metaphors from folkloric language, long discussed in Romanian ethnological literature, will be invoked only as points of reference in our study, since we intend to closely analyse here some of the least investigated meteorological metaphors, such as *morning dew*, *mist*, *clouds* and *rainbow*. We consider that they too deserve close attention, considering that a person, as a passing being, is represented in many folkloric creations as a forever wanderer, who begins their path *With morning dew on your feet/With mist on your back*. Starting from the image of the bathed person and, thus, purified by the morning dew, but burdened by the thick,

¹ **Elena PLATON**, PhD habil., is an Associate Professor within The Department of Romanian language, Culture and Civilisation at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. Her areas of interest are Romanian as a foreign language (see *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină. A1, A2*, Cluj-Napoca, 2012; *Româna ca limbă străină. Elemente de metadidactică*, Cluj-Napoca, 2021), but also ethnology and anthropology, more exactly, aspects of the mentality of archaic and traditional Romanian societies (*Frăția de cruce*, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, or *Biserica mișcătoare*, Cluj-Napoca, 2006). In 2020, the author coordinated the *Patrimoniul și imaginile lingvistice românești* volume, which is part of the five-volume series included in *Enciclopedia imaginărilor din România*. Within this paper, she elaborated the theoretical study about the concept of *linguistic imaginary*, as well as the encyclopedic study *Bazinul lingvistic al folclorului*. Email: elena.platon@ubbcluj.ro.

impure mist that they symbolically carry on their back, we will attempt to remake the imaginary scheme that connects the pure and the impure in the archaic mentality, a scheme organised not after the principle of antithesis, but of the ambivalence specific to symbolic logic.

Keywords: *pure, impure, morning dew, mist, cloud, hail, dragon, silver, rain, rainbow*

REZUMAT. Reprezentarea (im)purității rituale prin metafore meteorologice în limbajul folcloric. Pentru gândirea mitico-magică a comunităților arhaice și tradiționale, puritatea rituală reprezintă o dimensiune fundamentală a întregului univers, cel mai adesea aceasta fiind exprimată lingvistic prin referire la perechea sa antinomică, cu ajutorul opoziției *curat-necurat*. În funcție de gradul de contaminare cu diverse lucruri impure, cum ar fi mulțimea de *duhuri bune* și *rele* care însuflețeau această lume, atât spațiul, cât și timpul erau diferențiate calitativ, în *locuri bune* și *locuri rele*, *ceasuri bune* și *ceasuri rele*. Omul însuși trebuia, la rândul lui, să îndeplinească această condiție a purității rituale, înainte de a începe o activitate importantă. Dacă nu era curat din punct de vedere ritual, nici muncile agricole, nici mersul la biserică, nici plecarea într-o călătorie nu aveau sorți de izbândă. Însă aceste metafore din limbajul folcloric, îndelung discutate în literatura etnologică românească, vor fi invocate doar ca simple puncte de referință în studiul nostru, întrucât ne-am propus să analizăm aici, îndeaproape, câteva metafore meteorologice mai puțin investigate, precum *roua*, *ceața*, *norii* și *curcubeul*. Considerăm că și ele merită o cercetare atentă, având în vedere că omul, ca ființă trecătoare, este reprezentat în multe dintre creațiile folclorice ca un veșnic călător, ce pornește la drum *Cu roua-n picioare/Cu ceața-n spinare*. Pornind de la imaginea omului spălat și, deci, purificat de roua dimineții, dar împovărat de ceața densă, impură, pe care o cară, simbolic, în spate, vom încerca să refacem schema imaginară care leagă purul și impurul în mentalitatea arhaică, o schemă organizată nu după principiul antitezei, ci al ambivalenței specifice logicii simbolice.

Cuvinte-cheie: *pur, impur, rouă, ceață, nor, grindină, balaur, argint, ploaie, curcubeu*

1. Preamble

One of the most impressive images present in Romanian ceremonial funeral songs is that of the human being who starts in the long journey to the other world, early in the morning: *With morning dew on your feet/With mist on your back*². This stereotypical image, indicating the moment of departing, when

² My translation, the original text: "*Cu roua-n picioare/Cu ceața-n spinare*". Unless otherwise mentioned, all quotes in foreign languages are translated by me.

the fields are filled with morning dew, and the valleys are cloaked in mist, also appears in epic songs, such as *Miorița*³ (*Little Ewe*). However, it also reminds us of the love incantations in which the girl leaves to find her love, also early in the morning: "The cheek I haven't washed/To icons I haven't prayed,/The path, the footpath I took/*On the unbeaten footpath,/On the untouched morning dew...*" (Marian 2000b, 20)⁴.

And still, the image does not represent a simple clipping from a scenery. On the contrary, if we reintegrate it in the ceremonial funeral song it belongs to, we realise that the two elements, *the morning dew* and *the mist*, outline defining landmarks of another reality, of a mythical-magical nature, in which the required gesture cannot be fulfilled in reality, but only at a symbolic level, where the path is *long* and *without shadow*: "Wake up, John, wake up,/With your eyes see,/With your hand receive./That we have come,/That we have heard/That you're a wanderer,/With dew on your feet,/With mist on your back,/On the long path,/Long, without shadow..." (Brăiloiu, *apud* Pop 1998, 209)⁵.

Considering that the ceremonies related to family life, all great *wanderers* – whether it is the *newborn* who is entering life, the *newlyweds* who cross the threshold to enter a new social condition or the *dead-wanderer* who is exiting the *white world* to leave for the *black world* – must pass through a *ritualic bath*⁶, we understand that this emblematic image needs a different interpretation. More precisely, it cannot be separated from the idea of ritual purity, mandatory in the most important "paths" in a person's life. In fact, there is also a linguistic argument that the image must be interpreted in this key, namely, the metaphor used for the deceased in Romanian funeral texts: *dalbul de pribeag* (*white wanderer*) where the adjective *white* means "candid, delicate, proud, shining, enchanting" (Șăineanu 1999, 160-163). Decoding the above image following an imaginary scheme built around purity, the dead-wanderers appear before us with their feet washed – and, thus, purified – by the morning dew but, at the same time, burdened by the thick mist, magically impure, that they symbolically carry on their back.

Thus, the two meteorological metaphors suggest that, in order to understand the manner in which ritual purity is presented in the imaginary of archaic and traditional Romanian communities, we have to position ourselves in an ambivalent,

³ For instance, in a variant from Gr. Tocilescu's collection: "Joi dă dimineață,/ Pă rouă, pă ceață" (*apud* Pop 1998, 209) ("Thursday in the morning,/ On dew, on mist").

⁴ "Pe obraz nu m-am spălat/ La icoane nu m-am închinat,/ Pe cale, pe cărare m-am luat/ Pe cărare necălcată,/ Pe rouă nescuturată..."

⁵ "Scoală, loane, scoală,/ Cu ochii privește,/ Cu mâna primește./ Că noi am venit,/ Că am auzit/ Că ești călător,/ Cu roua-n picioare,/ Cu ceața-n spinare,/ Pe cea cale lungă,/ Lungă, fără umbră..."

⁶ This is done by certain people, at a certain moment, with a certain water, having the purpose of easing the integration of the deceased in the beyond (Ghinoiu 1999, 218-219).

symbolic, logic, in which *the clean* and *the unclean* are in a relation of solidarity. *The morning dew* and *the mist* are associated in a binomial structure similar to other great complementary pairs that structure the imaginary of folklore, such as *mare* (*big*) and *mic* (*small*), linguistically materialised in expressions such as: *fata mare* (*marriageable daughter*) and *fata mică* (*young daughter*); *socrul mare* (*the bridegroom's father*) and *socrul mic* (*the bride's father*); *Crăciunul mare* (*Big Christmas*) and *Crăciunul mic* (*Small Christmas*); *Vinerea mare* (*Good Friday*) and *Vinerea mică* (*Small Friday*) (Latiş 1993, 59-62) etc. Thus, the imaginary scheme of ritual purity seems to be built in the same way, since the linguistic expressions that mark the degree of contamination with various impure things of the more important dimensions of existence indicate a binomial organization as well. For instance, both space and time are qualitatively differentiated in the imaginary of folklore, materializing in *locuri bune/curate* (*good/clean places*) and *locuri rele/necurate* (*bad/unclean places*), in *ceasuri bune* (*good hours*) and *ceasuri rele* (*evil hours*) (Bernea 1985, 22, 217). In fact, the entire world of folklore is livened by the multitude of *duhuri bune* and *rele* (*good and evil spirits*), the *bun-rău* (*good-evil*) entirely corresponding to the *clean-unclean* pair.

We have chosen to speak here about this axis of the imaginary, since the inhabitants of this world did everything in their power to obey the condition of ritual purity being convinced that, if they were not pure, they would be unsuccessful whether it was in working in the fields, shepherding, going to church, or going on a (real or imaginary) journey. The ritualistic bathing was always present in family customs or in relation to various holidays or calendar, being observed with the utmost attention at gatherings, at the offering of gifts, at sacrifices etc. The participant, whether “active” (in the case of incantation) or “passive” (in the case of Christmas carols, the nuptial or funeral ceremonial etc.) had to go through the ritualistic bathing for, otherwise, they would be “eliminated from the ceremony” (Eretescu 1974, 8)⁷ or fail in their endeavours. The consecrated gesture through which the hero would wash their white face before leaving for battle, also present in the Christmas carol *Ciuta* (*The Hind*): “Cause our young king/*His white face washed*/A golden shepherd's alpenhorn he took,/Throughout the country the horn he blew,/A great army he gathered up...” (Teodorescu 1985, I, 39)⁸ is especially eloquent to this end.

Similarly, after any type of “contamination” with unclean things, the performer had to regain their initial state of cleanliness. This happened not only within the funeral ceremony, when everyone who became impure through contact with the deceased are required to wash themselves “nine times back to

⁷ “eliminat din ceremonie”.

⁸ “Căci tânărul nostru împărat/ *Pe fața-i albă s-a spălat*,/ Bucium de aur a luat,/ În țară a buciumat,/ Mare oaste-a rădicat...”.

back” (Marian 2000c, 45)⁹, but also in the case of birth, where the midwife was ritually bathed, in order to become purified after contact with the new mother¹⁰: “the *niece* pours water in a dish, and then takes that water with her hands, washes the midwife’s hands; and after washing them, she give her a new headcloth, to wipe her hands. Both the headcloth and the new kerchief remain as a gift for the midwife’s trouble. The washing is compulsory, under the threat that, otherwise, in the beyond the midwife will be “*bloodied up to her elbows*” (Marian 2000a, 179)¹¹. The significance of this gesture, accepted by the entire community, emerges from the obligation to perform it at the funeral of the niece who neglected to execute it during her life and who died before her time. In this case, at the funeral, her relatives will perform her gesture at her behalf, wiping the midwife’s hands with the actual cloth found on the deceased’s face.

Considering the importance of this binomial structure of the world, in the present study, we will not only look at the meteorological metaphors of purity, but also at other impurities, as they appear connected to each other according to the laws of symbolic logic. Certainly, in order to be able to reconstruct a more complete and complex semantics of the pure and the impure, we will make use not only of the deciphering of *conceptual metaphors*¹², through which the *clean-unclean* idea is “materialised”, but also of the entire composite of ritual beliefs and practices that ensure the framework of the ethnographic reality and, clearly, of the cultural charge of the linguistic imaginary that is discussed especially in ethnolinguistics (Bartmiński 2018). Since the “humble” metaphor of the drop of morning dew is one of the most widely spread images to illustrate the health/beauty of the one *cleaned* with the help of magical formulae uttered

⁹ “de nouă ori dupăolaltă”.

¹⁰ The beliefs about the impurity of the new mother (*lehuza*) and the tabooing of relationships with her are widely spread in Romania. Among other interdictions, she is not allowed to go to the fountain, because the spring will dry up, or milk the cows, so that the milk spring will not disappear (Ciauşanu 2007, 280).

¹¹ “*nepoata* toarnă apă curată într-un blid, și apoi, luând cu mânele sale apă de aceea, spală cu dânsa mânele moașei; iar după ce i le-a spălat, îi dă o ștergură nouă, ca să se șteargă. Atât ștergura aceasta, cât și o năframă nouă, rămân ca dar pentru osteneala moașei. Spălarea este obligatorie, sub amenințarea că, în caz contrar, în cealaltă lume, moașa va fi toată „până în coate *sângioasă*”.

¹² This type of metaphor is also named a conventional or everyday metaphor, being different from the poetic metaphor. It demonstrates that “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff, Johnson 2003, 3), that the metaphoric transfer is not only related to language, but it constitutes the very essence of the manner in which human thought functions, regulating our entire daily activity and structuring both the manner in which we perceive things and that in which we behave in the world or interact with one another. In a very broad sense, the essence of this theory is that any new concept is understood and, thus, configured in the terms of another concept: “We claim that most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured; that is, most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts” (Lakoff, Johnson 2003, 56).

by an enchantress, we will continue to research the meaning that was attributed to it in the Romanian archaic and traditional mentality, in relation to other meteorological metaphors of (im)purity.

2. Morning dew – a metaphor of ritual purity

Light-Morning dew. If, in the emblematic verses invoked in the preamble of this study, the idea of the purity of the morning dew does not show through with sufficient clarity, and the hypothesis of the ritual *bathing* of the deceased's feet in the fresh morning dew could be considered a simple supposition, the stereotypical formulae that conclude the incantations confirm, without a doubt, the pure character attributed to this substance. In these ritual poems, which have the purpose of improving (= purifying), through magical means, a person touched by various things considered, par excellence, impure, such as various diseases, ugliness or lack of love, the morning dew-purity identity is explicitly expressed: "Let so-and-so remain/*Clean/Enlightened,/Like the day they were born,/Like the star in the sky,/Like the morning dew on the ground...*" (Teodorescu 1985, II, 38)¹³.

Even though, according to the logic of "orientational" metaphors defined in cognitive linguistics, what is found below should be considered evil and, thus, impure, while what is above is good and beautiful (Lakoff, Johnson 2003, 17) and, thus, pure¹⁴, in the magical formula rendered here this imaginary scheme does not seem to work. On the contrary, in this incantation gathered in 1884, the morning dew, in the terrestrial plane, and the stars, in the celestial plane, appear as two ends of an axis that integrated the world above and below with the light metaphor. Transferring the purity of the star above onto the drop of morning dew below, the bedewed field becomes a symmetrical, shining figure, while the black ground magically transforms in a reverse/correspondent image of the starry sky. The *light* of the stars and of the drop of morning dew, even if passing and disappearing when the sun rises, is the trait that reunites the two life planes: the terrestrial and the celestial. The morning dew thus becomes a *container-metaphor* of the *substance* type (30), which incorporates the brightness generating light. Certainly, however, the ephemeral nature also represents a semantic trait that joins together the morning dew and the star, both being a

¹³ "Să rămâie (cutare)/ *Curat,/ Luminat,/ Ca-n ziua maica ce-a fapt,/Ca steaua din cer;/ Ca roua din pământ...*".

¹⁴ In other context, however, this logic organised on a vertical axis completely works. For instance, the practice of the upward aspersion that shepherds make in Maramureş when they have to cross a running water with their sheep, splashing them with water "de jos în sus" ("from toe to head") (Latiş 1993, 67), confirms the efficiency of a gesture that references pure, upstream river springs.

type of *newborns* fated to perish every day, once the sun rises in the sky. Moreover, in the magical formula discussed here, there is also a reference to the moment of birth of the enchanted one, a symbolic state of the human being for the highest degree of cleanliness.

Incorporating the light of dawn, the morning dew becomes a subtle substance, “filled with celestial material”¹⁵, associated with the pearl, as it emerges from the manner in which it is put in a metaphor in riddles: “*The Lady’s little earring/From the bottom of the sea*” (Pamfile 2018, 341)¹⁶. Thus, it was interpreted as an authentic sign of “the sky and earth’s hierogamy” (Evseev 1998, 402)¹⁷. Light is the binder between purity metaphors in the following love incantation as well, where the protagonists are enchanted so as to remain *clean*: “*Clean like the silver/Lit like the sky/Like the star up above,/Like the morning dew down below/ Like the lap of the Virgin Mary*” (Pamfile 1998, 197)¹⁸. Here, the *clean silver*¹⁹ metaphor clearly guides the reading of the other metaphors through the same source-domain of the light, the brightness being seen however not just as an effect of the astral light, but also as an emanation of the sacred being (the Virgin Mary). In fact, the purifying role of the light is well known, being confirmed in popular beliefs, where light is considered “the fright of unclean spirits” (Ciauşanu 2007, 105)²⁰, and, by contrast, the unclean place is “the place where the sun never shines” (Niculiţă-Voronca 1998, 188)²¹.

The purity hypothesis derived from the bright nature of the drop of morning dew is further consolidated by its power to return sight to the blind (not by chance, the pupil is also called *the light of the eyes*), as told by fairytales: “The poor blind man was sitting propped against a cross and thinking about his misfortune, when he heard from the cross some *magical birds* speak. *One was saying: «if only the blind man would wash with morning dew, he would instantly see»*” (Şăineanu 1978, 523)²². However, the gesture of washing with morning

¹⁵ “plină de materie celestă”.

¹⁶ “*Cerceluşul Doamnei/Din fundul mării*”.

¹⁷ “hierogamiei cerului şi al pământului”.

¹⁸ “*Ca argintul curăţat/ Ca cerul luminat,/ Ca steaua de sus,/ Ca roua de jos/ Ca poala Maicăi Precistii*”.

¹⁹ Not only *pure silver* but also gold is invoked as a landmark for the final purification of the one enchanted, as it happens in the incantation for a child born with a mark and which was collected in Moldavia: “Let N. remain *clean/ Clean/ And enlightened/ Like pure gold/ Like the Virgin Mary,/ Who left him,/ Like morning dew in a field,/ Like the star in the sky!/ Amen*.” (“N. să rămână *curat/ Curat/ Şi luminat/ Ca aurul strecurat/ Ca sfânta Maică Marie,/ Ce l-a lăsat,/ Ca roua-n câmp,/ Ca stea-oa-n cer!/ Amin*.”) (Marian 2000a, 23).

²⁰ “spaima duhurilor necurate”.

²¹ “locul unde nu luminează soarele niciodată”.

²² “Sărmanul orb sta rezemat de o cruce şi se gândea la nenorocirea lui, când auzi de pe cruce vorbind pasări năzdrăvane. Una spunea: «de s-a spăla orbul cu rouă, îndată ar vedea»”.

dew recommended here to regain eyesight can also refer to the therapeutic valences attributed to this aquatic substance, of which we will discuss later on.

The untouched morning dew. Another potential source of the morning dew's purity is represented by its intact nature, which must be associated, in a magical-ritual context, with the *virgin water*, called *aqua virgo* by Ancient Romans, used in magical practices to restore the health or beauty of the enchanted one. In order to keep its purity, the water must be protected from any type of touch: it is taken from wells "early in the morning, and not after others", then it is "quickly" brought home, in a new jug, "from which no one has drunk", "without speaking to anyone" and "in covered jugs" (Gorovei 1990, 138)²³. In fact, pure-untouched identity is also demonstrated by the equivalency between *clean places* and *unbeaten places*, as it emerges from the description of the enchantresses' home: "In *clean places*,/ *Unbeaten by the foot*" (Ghinoiu 1999, 158)²⁴. We are told by beliefs that, just like the devil's step, the step of the unclean person contaminates with impurity the beaten place, according to the principles of magic through contiguity. On the other hand, the touching of a clean girl/woman makes everything grow "as if out of water", and the dry grass turn green (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, I, 133). As it is known from magical practices as well, sampling the trace of the loved one is done precisely because it concentrates complex information about the wearer that even the hunter from Palaeolithic was researching by following the wild beasts they intended to hunt (Evseev 1998, 369). As metonymy for the human being, the *trace* is negatively valued in Romanians' beliefs as well, just like in those of other peoples, which is confirmed by the expression: *a călca în urmă rea* (*to step on a bad trace*), which marks the appearance of a misfortune.

Through this expression, we better understand why the *unbeaten morning dew*, a true *ontological metaphor* invented by the archaic person, becomes the ideal linguistic expression through which the virgin, intact aspect of the concept of purity materialises. By dying at the moment it is touched by the sun's light²⁵,

²³ "dis-de-dimineată, și nu după alții", "din care nu a băut nimeni", "fără a vorbi cu cineva", "în vase astupate".

²⁴ "În locuri curate,/ De picior neumblate".

²⁵ Certainly, even the ephemerality of this meteorological phenomenon stimulated the imagination of the traditional individual, making them transform it into a symbol of absolute purity. More precisely, since it melts under the sun's heat, the morning dew does not have time to become contaminated with the evil things that invade the diurnal space (this is the reason why there are also prescriptions regarding performing ritual practices before sunrise). This feature is frequently invoked in lyrical songs: "Taci, taci, taci, inima mea/ Rabdă pe cât vei putea,/ că nu-i trăi cât lumea/ că-i trăi o zi sau două/ și te-i topi ca ș-o roaună" ("Be quiet, be quiet, be quiet, my heart/ Bear as much as you can,/ for you won't live forever/ for you'll live a day or two/ and then melt like morning dew") (the Jarník-Bîrseanu collection, *apud* Gherman 2020, 163) or in disenchantments for the evil eye: "Fugi, deochi,/ Dintre ochi,/ ...Să te duci, să piei,/ Cum piere roua la soare/ Cum piere spuma de mare..." ("Run, evil eye,/ From between the eye,/ ...Go, and perish,/ Like morning dew perishes under the sun/ As foam perishes in the sea...") (Teodorescu 1985, II, 41).

the morning dew remains the absolute symbol of ephemerality. However, it is precisely this ephemerality that saves it because the danger of its exposure to black magic disappears. The same semantic value also derives from the imaginary of the *Câmpul rourat* (*The bedewed field*), described in Christmas carols. This is a sacred space, found in the vicinity of another mythical-magical space, pivoted by the *Mărul-rotat* (*Round-apple tree*), and their mystification is based on the same *pure-unbeaten* equivalency: being found at the edge of the world, they are difficult to access for the mere mortals, being rarely – if ever – beaten by a human foot. The feather from the plumage of celestial vultures brought by the protagonist from these spaces found at the edge of the earth is also protected with great care, so that it is not touched by wind or by rains that could affect its integrity/purity and, as a result, its efficiency as a magical instrument: “...Cause *I was far/ at the Round-apple/ at the Bedewed field/ Where I have fighting/ Two baby vultures/ Two grey chicks/ Up in a small cloud/ On a flake of gold*” (Teodorescu 1985, I, 50)²⁶. The places where diseases are banished and where there is no profane human gesture are also spaces of magical-ritual purity. These are described with the help of the “invalidated metaphor” (Brătulescu 1966, 91)²⁷: “Where grass *doesn't grow*”, “Where people *don't tread*” or “Where grass *is not stepped on*” (Gorovei 1990, 175-176)²⁸.

The pure and, at the same time, sacred nature of the unbeaten *bedewed field* appears in other genres of oral literature: fairytales, dirges or nuptial poems. For instance, when asking forgiveness from the bride, those who are part of the groom's train, represented in the form of great boyars who descend onto the bride's yard, pretend their horses are fed with hay and green trefoil, cut on Saint George's Eve, while respecting precise ritual conditions: “*With morning dew untaken,/ With flowers unshaken,/ Gathered on a day of rest/ By two sister girls...*” (Teodorescu 1985, I, 128)²⁹. The image of purity derived from the lack of touch appears in the ballad *Iorgu Iorgovan* as well, where the virgin-sister retreats in order to prevent incest in the protecting space of the forest. Here too the image of the chaste girl, untouched by the wind and unseen by anyone is presented through the invalidated metaphor: “*On the narrow footpath,/ Through the deep valley,/ In loneliness,/ Under slabs of stone,/ By wind untouched,/ By no one seen...*” (Crețu 2014, 152)³⁰. The metaphor appears in other variants of the ballad as well, where the “wild” girl throws herself in the Cerna river, but

²⁶ “...Că am fost departe/ la Mărul-rotat/ La Câmp rourat/ Unde mi se bat/ Doi pui de vulturi/ Doi pușori suri/ Sus într-un norel/ P-un fulg d-aurel”.

²⁷ “metaforei infirmate”.

²⁸ “Unde iarbă nu crește”, “Unde oameni nu umblă” or “Unde iarbă nu se calcă”.

²⁹ “Cu roua neluată,/ Cu floarea nescuturată,/ Strâns în sărbători/ De două fete surori...”.

³⁰ “Pe potecă strămtă,/ Prin valea adâncă,/ În singurătate, /Sub lespezi de piatră,/ De vânt nebătută,/ De nimeni văzută...”.

is reborn for eternity at a cosmic level, under conditions of absolute purity, converted in: "Proud flower,/ Proud/ Like the day,/ *Tender*³¹/ *Like morning dew*,/ Under slabs of stone,/ Placed in the shade,/ *Untrodden by anyone*" (152-153)³².

The ballad *Cicoarea (Chicory)*, gathered in 1858, also invoked the untouched purity of the girl with whom the Sacred Sun falls in love. She walks on a *rivulet of morning dew* while gathering the drops in a glass. However, her purity is threatened right when she is discovered (i.e. seen) by the sun: "*On a rivulet of morning dew/ Walking her walk,/ The young sprout,/ Barefoot through the morning dew,/ The fairy of flowers,/ The flower of dawn,/ Her morning dew gathering,/ Her glass filling./ And she thinks,/ That she's unseen./ But she was seen,/ By the dear, sacred Sun...*" (Teodorescu 1985, II, 152)³³.

The fairytale *Fata din dafin (The Laurel Girl)* also brings to the foreground the same image of the *clean girl*, who appears only before the one who will have found her secret. In fact, one of the virtues of this unseen and untouched flower, hidden in the heart of the laurel, is that it can make the fairytale hero who manages to open the laurel, collecting the flower-girl and putting her next to his chest invisible (Roşianu 1973, 137). In fact, by becoming visible, the girl will lose her initial purity, for the magical formula for opening the laurel suggestively builds the same image of cleanliness that has not been spoiled by any touch: "*Open, green laurel,/ The clean girl to exit,/ By the sun,/ Unseen,/ By wind untouched,/ By man unseed*" (Teodorescu 1985, II, 87)³⁴. This image is found in other variants of Iorgovan's ballad as well: "*Face/ Fair,/ By wind untouched,/ By man unseen*" (Teodorescu 1985, II, 114)³⁵.

In lyrical poetry as well the clean girl is metamorphosed through the *bedewed flower (floarea rourată)*, by comparison to the man who is antithetically associated with the *fanned chaff (pleava vânturată)* (Bîrlea 1979, 88). In an allegory the first cycle of a girl's life is portrayed through the blooming scenario: "And with rain I was rained me/ And with *dew I was bedewed*;/ From rain I

³¹ *Fragă* (like the morning dew) has, here, most likely, the meaning of "tender", "raw", "delicate", since the syntax imposes an adjective and not a noun, while semantically, according to DEX, *fraged* also means "recently grown", which would give complete coherence to the text. For prosody reasons however, the adjective *fraged* seems to have been modified after the model of the noun *fragă*.

³² "Mândră floricea,/ Mândră/ Ca ziuă,/ *Fragă/ Ca rouă*,/ Sub lespezi de piatră,/ La umbră băgată,/ *De nimeni călcată*".

³³ "*Pe pârâu de rouă/ Plimbă-mi-se plimbă, /Tânără mlădiță,/ Prin rouă desculță,/ Zâna florilor,/ Floarea zorilor, /Rouă adunându-și, /Paharul umplându-și. /Și ea mi se crede,/ Că nimeni n-o vede./ Dar o a văzut,/ Drăguț sfântul Soare...*"

³⁴ "Deschide-te, dafin verde,/ Să iasă fată curată, /De soare/ Nevăzută, /De vânt/ Nebătută,/ *Pe pământ/ Neumblată, /De voinic/ Nesărutată*".

³⁵ "*Față/ Cu albeață, /De vânt nebătută, /De om nevăzută*".

sprung/ From morning dew I bloomed,/ When the sun arose/ I beautifully bloomed..." (100)³⁶.

Morning dew-sacred water. Certainly, the healing power of the morning dew is due not only to the light that it incorporates but also to the fact that it reunites earthly and heavenly waters. In most universal beliefs it is considered as "a pure, precious water, the water of principles by excellence"³⁷, a condenser of the generating forces of the wet principles (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, III, 175), a status that certainly charges it with sacred powers. Thus, in riddles, the morning dew is metamorphosed under the form of the largest water on Earth, and in a wedding oration the groom being obligated to answer, in order to prove his wisdom and to be allowed to leave with the bride from home towards the church, the question: "*What water is the largest/ Here, under the sun?*", the right answer being "*The largest water,/ Here under the sun, Summer morning dew/ Over the entire world*" (Gherman 2020, 164)³⁸. However, the morning dew is also identified with a water mythical in origin, namely the *water drops* from the bottom of the sea, sprinkled everywhere by the tails of the four gigantic fish that support the earth, with the *sweat* of the four giants, who are sweating under the weight of the earth or even with the *earth's sweat* (162). However, the sacred character of the water from the morning dew drop, more guessed in the legends that speak of fish or giants that support the earth placed on water, is also explicitly stated in popular beliefs. These show that the morning dew is *sacred* for it is "dripped from the sky", being sent "as a gift from God, to revive the crops" (161)³⁹.

The beliefs that identify the drops of morning dew with "*the tears of the Virgin Mary shed at Christ's cross*" (162)⁴⁰ speak of the celestial and sacred nature of the morning dew water as well. However, even if they don't come from a divine character, the tears seem to be some corresponding metaphors, analogous from a formal, but also semantic point of view to the drop of morning dew, which strengthen its symbolism. Similar to the morning dew they too have life generating virtues, as it emerges from the fairytale *Făt-Frumos din lacrimă* (*Prince Charming of the Tear*), in which the queen, saddened by not being able to bear children, cries while praying to the Virgin Mary. A tear from her "black eye" – here again we have the light-darkness binomial – is sipped by the queen who instantly becomes "îngreunată" ("heavy with child") (Șăineanu 1978, 402), this gesture of autophagy explaining the title of the fairytale as well. The tear

³⁶ "Și cu ploaia m-a plouat/ Și cu roua m-a rouat;/ De ploaie am răsărit,/ De rouă am împupit,/ Când soarele-a răsărit/ Io frumos am înflorit..."

³⁷ "apă pură, prețioasă, apa principilor prin excelență".

³⁸ "Ce apă-i mai mare/ Aici, pe sub soare?", "Apa cea mai mare,/ Aici pe sub soare, Roua de vara/ Pe toată lumea".

³⁹ "picurată din cer", "ca dar de la Dumnezeu, spre învierea semănăturilor".

⁴⁰ "lacrimile Maicii sfinte vărsate la crucea lui Hristos".

has purifying virtues as well⁴¹, being enlisted in the sphere of pure substances, as we find out from fairytales: “the *crystal clear* spring water was running” (Gorovei 1990, 371)⁴² or from riddles that metamorphose the tear as a special water, “without sand” or “without soil”: “What water *without sand* is there in the world?” (Papadima 2009, 266)⁴³ or “The most stillest of waters/ and *without soil*” (267)⁴⁴. Lamentations also tells us that they have the strength to wash/whiten the black clothes (i.e. dirty) of the deceased, sent from the depth of the earth on the messenger-wind: “When your *shirt* be *black*,/ Send it to me, dear mother,/ On the wind’s son,/ From the earth’s depth/ (...) / *Washed in lil’ tears*/ And dried in lil’ thoughts...” (Marian 2000b, 355)⁴⁵. Moreover, fairytales speak even of the power of tears to bring heroes turned to stone back from the dead: “The king’s son placed the stone in one of the palace’s chambers and his wife, stricken by pain, cried for three days, until she filled a big basin with tears that once poured over the stone, the fisherman’s son quickly came back to life” (Șăineanu 1978, 388)⁴⁶.

The gesture of gathering the tears in a basin, with a therapeutic purpose, is also found in “bedewing”, recorded in certain parts of Bukovina, where girls would wash their eyes in the morning dew gathered from “the clean field in the morning of Saint George’s, so as to be more lovely and more attractive” (Marian 2022, 285)⁴⁷. The therapeutic power increases if the morning dew is gathered in sacral moments, such as Saint George’s Day or Easter, before sunrise, at the first sound of the semantron, while strictly following certain ritual conditions: the gathering is done while wearing a *new headcloth*, in *seven or nine mornings*, from the bedewed crops, the morning dew being kept as a cure in a small bottle (Gherman 2020, 165). It is worth mentioning that this is the same way in which Romanians keep Holy Water from Epiphany throughout the year, which strengthens the hypothesis of the sacral character attributed to the morning dew. The diseases that can be cured through *bedewing* are very diverse: headaches and aches of limbs, various external diseases, such as boils, warts and scabies,

⁴¹ The purifying valences also emerge from the equivalency with elements that are not aquatic in nature. For instance, the morning dew is metamorphosed as a sponge capable of cleaning any type of uncleanliness: “*Un burete uriaș, / A șters praful din oraș, / A înviorat câmpia / Și a sporit bogăția*” (“A giant sponge,/ Dusted the city,/ Reinvigorated the plain/ And increased wealth” (Papadima, 335).

⁴² “apa izvorului care curgea *limpede ca lacrima*”.

⁴³ “fără nisip”, “fără tină”: “Ce apă este în lume *fără nisip?*”.

⁴⁴ “Apa cea mai lină/ și mai *făr’ de tină*”.

⁴⁵ “Când ți-a fi *cămeșa neagră*,/ Să mi-o trimeți, maică dragă,/ Pe fecioru vântului,/ Din fundul pământului/ (...) / *Spălată-n lacrimele/ Și uscată-n gândurile...*”.

⁴⁶ “Feciorul de împărat așeză stana într-o cameră a palatului și soția sa, de durere, plânse trei ani de zile, până umplu o strachină mare cu lacrimi pe care, turnând-o peste stană, feciorul pescarului învie numaidecât”.

⁴⁷ “un câmp curat în dimineața de Sfântu Gheorghe, ca să fie mai drăgălașe și mai atrăgătoare”.

but also eye diseases (pink eye). All of these were “cleaned” through the simple washing with morning dew, the human bodies becoming contaminated with the purity of this sacred element, according to the principle of magical adjacency. The morning dew is used as a prophylactic as well, especially to prevent the appearances of blemishes on the cheek (the luminous cheek, without blemishes, could be associated with the luminous nature of the drop of morning dew as well), the sun itself taking, in its anthropomorphic stage, before setting for the world, a morning dew bath, prepared on its table “ca să se întărească” (“so as to strengthen itself”) (Olteanu 2021, I, 250).

It is evident that, due to its purifying power, morning dew is beauty generating. Beliefs show that the one who washes themselves with morning dew will have their face whiter and more tender (Ciauşanu 2007, 22). The morning dew also cleans the protagonist of enchantments from everything that is ugly: “– Good morning,/ *Dew, lil’ mornin’ dew!*/ – Thank you,/ *Dearest!*/ – Dew, lil’ mornin’ dew,/ I came to pray/ And to ask you to wash me,/ To clean me,/ To cleanse me/ Of all hates/ And enchantments/ To make me/ Sweet and beautiful...” (Pamfile 1998, 195)⁴⁸. This enchantment confirms the hypothesis launched in other ethnological research, according to which, in the imaginary of the person of oral culture, beauty is a true “gift of the water”: “Water, *bedewed water, Make me fair and beautiful...*” (Ursache 2014, 9, 27)⁴⁹. As a natural continuation of this belief, it is said that the morning dew gathered from the plains on the mornings between Easter and Pentecost can even attract the love young men (Gherman 2020, 166).

Morning dew is however a source of health, vigour and beauty not only for people, but also for the animal kingdom. For instance, the horse of the hero from ballads is fed with fresh grass and with morning dew untouched by human foot, in order to gain strength and beauty (*a thick mane* here represents equine beauty): “Stay, dark-bay, tethered some more [...],/ ‘Cause if I marry,/ I’ll also free you,/ To graze field grass,/ To drink mountain water,/ To graze *untouched grass,*/ *Of morning dew unshaken,*/ To drink water from rock/ Filtered between the corners,/ To grow a *thick mane,*/ *A thick, dishevelled mane,*/ To be *quick paced,*/ To help me in haste” (Teodorescu 1985, I, 58)⁵⁰. The practice of the *împrourat* (early morning grazing) reflects the same therapeutic valences attributed to the fields filled with morning dew: still on the day of Saint George’s, until daylight,

⁴⁸ “– Bună dimineața,/ *Rouă, rouliță!*/ – Mulțămim dumitale,/ *Mândră drăguliță!*/ – Rouă, rouliță,/ Am venit să mă închin/ Și mă rog să mă speli, /Să mă curățești/ Să mă limpezești/ De tăte urile/ Și făcăturile/ Ca să mă faci/ *Drăguță și frumoasă...*”.

⁴⁹ “dar al apei”: “Apă, apă *rouroasă,*/ *Fă-mă mândră și frumoasă...*”.

⁵⁰ “Mai șezi, murgule, legat [...],/ Că dacă m-oi însura,/ Și ție drumul ți-oi da,/ Să paști iarba câmpului,/ Să bei apa muntelui,/ Să paști *iarbă neumblată,*/ *De rouă nescuturată,*/ Să bei apă de pe piatră/ Printre colțuri strecurată,/ Ca să-ți crească *coamă lată,*/ *Coamă lată, respirată,*/ Să fii *iute de picior*/ Să-mi ajuți la câte-un zor”.

cattle are taken to *împroor*, meaning to graze on morning dew, so that the cattle would be healthy (Olteanu 2021, I, 361). In stories, horses “are raised in the dark, given milk to drink and *fed with morning dew*) (Șăineanu 1978, 645),⁵¹ the morning dew probably replacing the lack of light through its specific aforementioned qualities.

Mana-morning dew. Despite being positively valued, morning dew can be used in black magic as well. *Master-people*, also called *wraiths*, use it to destroy the crops of other – grain crops – and to help theirs. In the morning of Saint George’s Day, the “master” goes early in the morning to the grain crops, where they undress before sunrise, they recite an enchantment, and with a table cloth they gather the morning dew from the neighbour’s or another’s grain crops and shakes it out on their own crops. By doing this, they “*take the mana from the food and gives it to their grain crops* (so that their crops will be incomparably more plentiful than those of others)” (Gherman 2020, 166-167)⁵². This practice comes to explain and consolidate, at the same time, the imaginary about the regenerating virtues attributed to the drops of morning dew, since morning dew seems to concentrate *the mana of grain crops* itself, that fertilizing power that the harvest is dependent on every year. The story of the *morning dew gathering luck*, which comes with clothes wetted by the morning dew gathered from all the fields while bringing the mama to the old woman’s field, also supports this *mana-morning dew* equivalence (Pamfile 2018, 341).

Blood-morning dew. Another belief that speaks about its generating power is one related to Adam, in which it is stated that even “human blood was made from morning dew” (Gherman 2020, 162)⁵³. Even in the forgivenesses towards the bride, recorded by Sim. Fl. Marian in the 1892 collection, the image of the blood originating from morning dew appears, also when Adam is described, thus strengthening the idea of semantic solidarity between the two elements: “And they built/ Our ancestor Adam,/ From whom we all come,/ With bones from stone,/ With eyes from the sea,/ With *blood from morning dew*,/ With soul from the holy spirit...” (Marian 2000b: 534)⁵⁴

3. (Im)pure mist

Devil-mist. Although associated with impure things, mist is not entirely separated from morning dew. On the contrary, in beliefs it is seen as a type of vehicle that ensures the connection between sky and earth, collecting the morning

⁵¹ “sunt crescuți la întuneric, adăpați cu lapte și hrăniți cu rouă”.

⁵² “*ia mana de la bucate și o dă la holda lui* (așa că holda lui va fi neasemănat mai rodită decât ale altora)”.

⁵³ “sângele omenesc a fost făcut din rouă”.

⁵⁴ “Și și-a zidit/Pe strămoșul nostru Adam,/ De la care ne tragem toți neam,/ Cu oasele din piatră,/ Cu ochii din mare,/ Cu *sângele din rouă*,/ Cu sufletul din duhul sfânt...”.

dew and raising it to the sky: "At night mists descend on the earth, in the morning dew is gathered from the grass and crops and is raised to the clouds..." (Gherman 2020, 163)⁵⁵. However, beyond these positive valences, most often mist is negatively valued, due to its opacity. Judging things from the perspective of symmetry with the *light-morning dew* metaphor, we observe that now we are talking about an element that does not allow the purifying light to pass and, in this dark fog, there are various evil spirits certainly hiding. Of these, the devil himself appears in pastoral beliefs embodied in the form of mist. Thus, it is believed that the devil "...would come out towards daylight from water and from lakes, and then, *widening itself like a mist*, falls over the sheephold and disfigures the sheep" (Latiş 1993, 66)⁵⁶.

Silence-mist. The impure nature of the mist is also derived from the fact that it is lacking a voice. Its unearthly nature seems to derive from the fact that it moves without noise, only being identifiable at the visual level and not at the level of sound, as stated by riddles: "It sits in the woods, *without sound*; / It's a cloud, / And doesn't roar" (Papadima 2009, 202)⁵⁷. The fact that its presence cannot be noticed from an auditory point of view: "What goes through the shrubs / And *doesn't make a sound*?"⁵⁸ nor signalled by the bark of watch dogs: "What goes through the village, / And *dogs don't bark at*?"⁵⁹ (202) enlists it in the series of dangerous and, thus, impure elements, since in the scenery, described with the help of the invalidated metaphor, as a space stripped of any sign of life, also constitutes, as we remember, the place where diseases and evil spirits in enchantments are banished: "Run, evil eye, / From between the eyes,... / Where the priest / Doesn't sound the semantron, / Where the girl / Doesn't dance, / Where the rooster / Doesn't crow, / Where the cow / Doesn't bellow, / Where the cat / Doesn't meow" (Teodorescu 1985, II, 41)⁶⁰.

Death-mist. Even the death of someone dear is symbolised with the help of the mist that sets in the morning at the window: "Yesterday in the mornin', / *A mist set, / Mist at the window,* / And a black she-raven, / Whirling above, / Wings flapping, / Me it hit, / Clouding my eyes, / Tarring my face, / Gluing my lips. / I cannot speak, / To thank them" (Pop 1998, 207)⁶¹, thus confirming

⁵⁵ "Noaptea se lasă neguri pe pământ, dimineața culeg roua de pe iarbă și semănături și o ridică la nori...".

⁵⁶ "...ar ieși înspre ziuă din apă și din lacuri, apoi, *lățindu-se ca o ceață*, cade peste stână și pocește oile".

⁵⁷ "Stă-n pădure, *Nu răsună*; / Nour îi, / Și nu tună".

⁵⁸ "Ce trece prin tufe / Și nu s-aude?".

⁵⁹ "Ce trece prin sat / Și câinii nu bat?".

⁶⁰ "Fugi, deochi, / Dintre ochi,... / Unde popă / Nu toacă, / Nu toacă, / Unde fată / Nu joacă, / Unde cocoș / Nu cântă, / Unde vacă / Nu zbiară, / Unde pisică / Nu miorlăie".

⁶¹ "Eri de dimineață, / *Mi s-a pus o ceață, / Ceață la fereastră,* / Și-o corboaică neagră, / Pe sus învolbând, / Din aripi plesnind, / Pe min' m-a plesnit, / Ochi a-mpânjenit, / Fața mi-a smolit, / Buze mi-a lipit, / Nu pot să grăesc, / Să le mulțumesc".

that the mist from the dead-wanderer, mentioned above, in the emblematic verses from the *Preamble*, could truly symbolise death itself carried on one's back, while walking through the morning dew is the ritual washing that conditions becoming integrated in the other world.

Mourning-mist. Mist is also chosen in the imaginary of the folkloric person to metamorphose the feeling of profound sadness that weighs on the heart of the one left by their beloved. Just as in the context of the funerary ceremonial, the mist sets on the house's gate, but also on the heart, as shown in traditional lyrical poetry: "Since my love left/ *Fog set over the gate,*/ Both over the pole and the twig,/ *And over my lil' heart*" (Bîrlea 1979, 90)⁶². In fact, even the expression *they have a face as long as a wet week*⁶³, still used today in standard Romanian, reflects this olden association between a person's feelings and bad weather.

4. (Im)pure clouds

Clouds-oxen of the sun. On an even higher plane, mist has clouds as a symbolic correspondent, which also do not allow light to reach the earth, overshadowing the sun⁶⁴. Most often, mist and clouds appear simultaneously, just like in the carol of a young highland shepherd, collected in 1887 and entitled *Ciuta (The Hind)*. Here, the hero goes on a hunt: "Thursday in the morning/ *On cloud and mist*" (Teodorescu 1985, I, 40)⁶⁵. Moreover, there are also some popular beliefs that join together mist and clouds, stating that clouds are born from the very mist that envelops the valleys and transforms into clouds by raising to the sky: "clouds are spread on earth in the form of fogs, which hide within valleys and mountain crevices"⁶⁶, those rising from the woods being stronger than those that rise from waters; the clouds "rest on words, on high and untrodden mountains or even under the earth in the form of fogs that come out only at the breath of the dragon, who is master over them"⁶⁷ (Gherman 2020, 79). According to their origin, clouds have various colours and, thus, a different magical charge: the *bluish milky*

⁶² "De când bădița s-o dus/ *Negură-n poartă s-o pus,*/ Și pe par și pe nuia,/ *Și pe inimuța mea*"

⁶³ *Parcă tot îi ninge și îi plouă.*

⁶⁴ Another clear proof that the clouds are in an antithetic rapport with the light is represented as well by the practice of casting clouds away by using a candle and a cross, but also by burning incense (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 192). Even against the hailstone (the *stone from the sky*) brought by black clouds a candle from Easter is lit, with the purpose of chase away the storm (Gherman 2020, 173). These elements, present in the defence practices against the devil, confirm the association of clouds with the devil, as it can be noticed below.

⁶⁵ "Joi de dimineață/*Pe nor și pe ceață*".

⁶⁶ "norii sunt împrăstiați pe pământ în formă de neguri, care se ascund prin văi și crăpăturile munților".

⁶⁷ "hodinesc pă păduri, pe munți înalți și neumblați ori chiar sub pământ în formă de neguri și ies afară numai la suflarea balaurului, care e stăpân pe ei".

clouds, and thus clean, are formed from the steam that emerges from mountain valleys (clean), while the *bluish-black* clouds, unclean, emerge from swamps, the favourite place where even the impure devil, called *The unclean one*, nestles.

The clouds' diversity of colours and shapes has, thus, stimulated people's imagination, giving birth to an entire mythology that has given them an ambivalent status: white, luminous clouds, as the source of the rains invoked in times of drought, generally represent an epiphany of the light forces, being metamorphosed as the *sun's oxen*, tasked with carry water to the *sun's court*, identified with "cearcănul soarelui" ("the sun's dark circles") (78). They are also the ones that forecast good weather and, according to their shape and the mythical-magical charge that is attributed to them, they are metaphorically called: *oile lui Dumnezeu* (*God's sheep*), if they are small, *norii mieilor* (*lambs' clouds*), if they have "levels and white strings"⁶⁸, *nori de miel* (*lamb clouds*) (a sign of clear skies and good weather), *nori-mioare* (*ewe clouds*) (a sign of sunshowers), *nori oiști* (*sheep clouds*), if they are spread over the sky like sheep, *negurici* (*foggies*), if they are spread over the sky and forecast rain during strong heat (82). In the category of *clean* clouds we also have golden-white clouds, called *mana*, that detaches from fir woods (the fir tree being itself a sacred tree in Romanian beliefs), when the wind blows or after rains (Pamfile 2018, 337).

The beneficial, fertilising valences of clean clouds, similar to those held by the *mana*-morning dew, are also referenced by Romanian ethnologists who have described the hyperbolic paths of shepherds that equally intersect the terrestrial and the celestial. Where the carols show us that "shepherding takes place unhindered both on earth and in the sky"⁶⁹, the sheep being driven to pasture, during the day, "pă cer, pă pământu" ("in the sky, on the ground") and, at night, they shelter "în cel cercă de lună" ("in that dark circle of the moon"), drinking water from the "norețul de ploaie" ("rain cloudlet)" (Crețu 2014, 158).

Dragon-clouds. In contrast to clean clouds, considered a true spring of fertility, according to the meaning of the metaphor that designates them (*the sun's oxen*⁷⁰), threatening clouds, thick as a blanket and that forecast storms, are part of the *unclean* clouds, whose names are suggestive for their relation with the darkness populated by all types of obscure forces: *black clouds*, *dark clouds*, *buffalo-clouds*, *fogs* (Gherman 2020, 81) or *even bulls* or *black cows*. The presence of this last symbolism is signalled in the recitative formulae from children's folklore, where *Murga*, a black cow or female buffalo, appears as the demonic personification of clouds (Evseev 1998, 308).

⁶⁸ "trepte și șinoare albe".

⁶⁹ "păstoritul se desfășoară nestingherit atât pe pământ, cât și în cer".

⁷⁰ The white bull is considered a solar symbol and "apare în multe rituri agrare al românilor, având funcții fecundatoare, apotropaice și augurale" ("appears in many Romanian agricultural rituals, having impregnating, apotropaic and augural functions") (Evseev 1998, 54).

However, *unclean* clouds, carriers of hailstone and threatening storms, are also associated with other demonic beings, such as *dragons*. The imaginary scheme that creates solidarity between *clouds* and *dragons* has at its basis beliefs according to which clouds would have their origin in the very “steam rolled through the nostrils by a tired dragon” or in “the water raised by dragons from rivers and seas” (Gherman 2020, 77)⁷¹. Thus, the impurity of the clouds derives from the impurity of dragons, due to their malevolent nature, as they are often identified even with *The unclean one* (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 197). Moreover, Romanian mythology explains the appearance of dragons through the transformation of some giant snakes that, after spending seven years under the face of the earth, “rise into clouds as storms” (Șăineanu 1978, 530)⁷². It is worth noticing that the transformation of snakes into dragons is conditioned by an interdiction that reminds us of the restrictions imposed in the case of a human initiation act, valid no matter whether the initiation is a positive or negative one. Practically, both in the case of dragons and humans, the purity of the one initiated is also ensured through the lack of contact with any disruptive force. Thus, snakes can transform into dragons only if they stay isolated from people and *do not see* and *do not bite anyone* for twelve years (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 192). As it can be observed, what is avoided are the foreign look, charged with a potential for malevolent magic and which we know well from the beliefs related to the evil eye, but also any direct contact with an impure external factor, which could compromise the process of magical transformation. Moreover, we notice that this sacral purity, given by the lack of any touch, also functions in the zone of demonic forces since, as it is known, in the heart of the sacred the complementary game of contraries is sheltered. From an etymological point of view, *sacer* means both “blestemat” (“cursed”) and “divin” (“divine”), which means that the sacred can be both “sfânt” (“sacrosanct”) and “spurcat” (“impure”) at the same time (Coman 1983, 174). The second condition of the transformation of snakes into dragons is the mixing of their own slobber with those coming from other snakes that are equal participants in the initiation process. From this mixture what results is foam that will transform, in turn, in an expensive stone or in a diamond, assimilated to a true cornucopia, that gives food to the one that owns it, at a simple command: “My little stone: to eat and drink!” (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 207)⁷³. Thus, we are witness to true alchemy since the resulting precious stone has miraculous therapeutical properties, which also explains how it is possible for the fairytale hero becomes more beautiful and smarted after being swallowed and, then, spit out by a dragon.

⁷¹ “aburii vărsați pe nări de un balaur obosit” or in “apa ridicată de balauri din râuri și mări”.

⁷² “se ridică în nori ca furtuni”.

⁷³ “Pietricica mea: de mâncat și de băut!”.

The impure nature of the dragons also derives from the humid places where they live: lakes, swamps (similar to the devil) or fountains and, thus, still waters associated, in general, with the unclean aquatic element by comparison to pure running waters or with the untouched water from the practices for disenchantment. Beside this intimacy with the aquatic environment, dragons also have a direct connection to clouds, since it is believed that they live “in clouds” and they ride them, leading them everywhere in order to carry hailstones and rain, in which case they “also carry the name of *ale* or *hale*, personifying the hurricane and strong winds” (Șăineanu 1978, 531)⁷⁴.

Enemy-clouds. Similar to the mist, associated with the devil incarnate, clouds represent as well the embodiment of other mythological beings, enemies of humanity, such as *zmeii* (*dragons*), who generally live in the *dark world* underground (Șăineanu 1978, 288), thus a world deprived of sunlight. Thus, in fairytales, we find out that a dragon turned into a *cloud* had kidnapped the three daughters of the emperor (Șăineanu 1978, 408). If in the traditional lyrical poetry the *cloudy sky-mourning* metaphor prevails: “I’m so *upset*/ *As the sky’s cloudy*” (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 128)⁷⁵, ballads highlight another imaginary scheme, that in which clouds mean “enemies”, considered, in turn, unclean. For instance, pagan Turks appear in the form of a *thick cloudlet* (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 115).

God’s sheep-clouds. In both instances, pure and impure, the clouds have a sacred character, being intimately connected to all types of divine beings that entered the scene once Christianity appeared: Saint Elijah, Saint Peter, Saint Alexis or even God, as it also emerges from the name, *God’s sheep*, given to the clouds. The clouds are also represented as *God’s ladder*, down which He comes every time He wants to come and see what the people are doing. In this case, the contamination with the sacredness of biblical characters with which He comes into contact is as evident as possible. However, it should be mentioned that these associations with Christian divine beings most likely constitute an addition to ancient beliefs about dragons that live in the clouds or even turn into clouds in order to be able to intervene in the human world. It should be noticed however that biblical characters receive the role of controlling the dragons, ordering them to raise the clouds high up in the sky and “*să-i cârmuiască*” (“to lead them”) (Gherman 2020, 80). In this manner, the forces of good brought by Christianity take control of pagan forces. In fact, even *Solomonarii*⁷⁶

⁷⁴ “poartă și numele de *ale* sau *hale*, personificând uraganul și vântul turbat” (N.B. *ale* is another term for “dragon”, while *hale* can mean “tempest” or “monster”).

⁷⁵ “Atâta-s de *supărat*/ *Cât ceriul de-nourat*”.

⁷⁶ *Solomonarii* (Conjurers) are the main wizards from traditional Romanian beliefs, capable of directing meteorological phenomena according to their desire. As “traditional meteorological wizards” they are sometimes considered as *the devil’s disciples*, other times they are “saints, God’s underlings” who carry the *Cartea/Cărțile Solomonarului* (*The Conjuror’s Book(s)*), which

(*Conjurers*), mythological creatures that ride on clouds, leading them wherever they want to start rains, are also called “God’s people” despite being formed at the devil school. Even the beliefs about the origin of hailstone, traditionally also called *stone*, betrays a mixture of Christian and pre-Christian elements: the stone from the clouds is made either by dragons, devils, or even by Saint Peter who, in Bukovina, is called “the master of hailstone and dragons”⁷⁷, the one who sends to earth stone boiled by dragons for three days, in an alchemy that is full of meaning. However, he makes the clouds give hailstorms only in the places where the greatest sins were committed: for instance, where aborted fetuses were buried, the earth being made impure by the sinful girls, or where someone committed suicide (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 189-190). And, thus, he becomes a true divine vigilante.

5. (Im)pure rainbow

The last meteorological phenomenon discussed here is considered “one of the most optimistic and oldest symbols of humanity”, a true “communication bridge between sky and earth” and a “symbol of cosmic harmony” (Evseev 1998, 105)⁷⁸. It is true that, at the level of the rainbow, there is a perfect synthesis between the celestial and terrestrial mediums, namely, between light, air and water, it being, through the explosion of light and colours, the perfect candidate for the representation of absolute purity. Metamorphosed as a *waist belt of the sky/of the earth/of the Virgin Mary*, based on a similarity in shape, the rainbow is also a presence charged with sacredness (Gorovei 1972, 139), invoked either to stop excess rain, either as a source of abundance (Olteanu 2021, I, 458). Moreover, the belief according to which it would drink *new water* (pure, from rain) or even water “numai din rouă” (“only from morning dew”) (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 244) contributes to investing it with attributes of purity and sacredness. Additionally, the beliefs about the miraculous powers of the perforated stone through which the rainbow drinks, contaminated with sainthood due to the magical touch of the rainbow, consolidates this semantics. Thus, we find out that the perforated stone is left as inheritance, since it can give omniscience and other uncommon qualities, while also having therapeutic properties. For instance, it is used to milk the cow, three times crosswise, if it gives milk with blood, or it is disenchanted of cysts or the cattle and calves are protected from enchantments (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 245).

concentrates the true “învățătură globală a magiei populare” (“global wisdom of popular magic”) (Kernbach 1994, 243-245).

⁷⁷ “domnul grindinei și al balaurilor”.

⁷⁸ “unul dintre cele mai optimiste și mai vechi simboluri ale omenirii”, “punte de comunicare între cer și pământ”, “semn al armoniei cosmice”.

However, even the rainbow's sacredness is an ambivalent one, found at the crossroad between the clean and the unclean. Being metamorphosed as "the path of dragons" that they take to drink water (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 245), it is also contaminated with the impurity specific to these demonic, antihuman and anthropophaginic entities. Even in children's folklore the rainbow appears as a bridge between the sky and the earth, that dragons use to take water from the depths of the earth that they then take to the sky and pour back over the earth, as beneficial rains. Here, an archaic magical incantation is kept, whose purpose is to cause the appearance of the rainbow: "Rainbow, bow,/ *Drink water from the tarn,/ Rainbowlet, owlet/ Drink water from the vine*" (Evseev 1998, 105)⁷⁹. Finally, even riddles represent the rainbow as a *giant dragon* that slurps the earthly waters: "*Striped snake, over the Prut tossed*" (Gorovei 1972, 140)⁸⁰, but also as "*Striped towel/ Over the clouds tossed*"⁸¹, the second metaphor explicitly referencing its purifying valences.

However, what emerges most is its power to reunite opposites in belief that it can determine the cancelling of any differences, including those related to sex. Thus, girls invoke the rainbow in order to turn into boys: "Rainbow, rainbow,/ You have colour like my waist belt,/ And *drink water from the creek,/ And make me a boy*", while the boys do it to be turned into girls: "Rainbow, rainbow,/ You have colour like my waist belt,/ And *drink white-hot water,/ And make me a girl*" (Evseev 1998, 106)⁸². Moreover, the performing of a complex ritual can ensure the permanent androgynous nature of the protagonist, the only one able to ensure self-knowledge and exceptionalism: "They who *rides a pig* to where the rainbow drinks water and *goes head over heels three times, will become boy for a month and girl for another*. And the *child born* of the pregnant woman who will *walk on her knees* to where the rainbow drinks water, *will say "Our Father" three times* and *drink water from more downstream will be a girl for a month and boy for another* and will know everything in the world and be wonder-working" (Niculiță-Voronca 1998, II, 245)⁸³.

However, the most eloquent information that reflects the power to reunite contradictions attributed to the rainbow appears in the traditional beliefs that speak about the fight between God and the devil imagined at the end of the world. They, the two cosmocrats will hold on to the rainbow placed right in the

⁷⁹ "Curcubeu, beu,/ *Bea apă din tău,/ Curcubiță, biță/ Bea apă din viță*".

⁸⁰ "*Șarpe vărgat, peste Prut aruncat*".

⁸¹ "*Ștergar vărgat/ Peste nori aruncat*".

⁸² "Curcubeu, curcubeu,/ Ai culori ca brâul meu,/ *Și bei apă din pârau,/ Și mă fă pe min' flăcău*", iar, băieții, pentru a fi transformați în fete: „Curcubeu, curcubeu,/ Ai culori ca brâul meu,/ *Și bei apă turbată,/ Și mă fă pe mine fată*".

⁸³ "Cine merge *călare pe porc* unde bea curcubeul apă și *se dă de trei ori peste cap, se face o lună băiat și o lună fată*. Și care femeie îngreunată va merge în *genunchi* până unde bea apă curcubeul, *să zică „Tatăl nostru” de trei ori* și să beie apă mai la vale, *copilul acela ce-l va face are să fie o lună fată și o lună băiat* și are să știe tot ce-i pe lume, are să fie năzdrăvan".

middle of the world (for the rainbow “is purposefully made from the beginning of the world through the middle of the sky, so that it would be a border at one point”⁸⁴): the devil with all his imps and with the sinful souls on one side, and God with His angels and good souls on the other”. And then, “whoever will win, will get everyone else” (Olteanu 2021, I, 259)⁸⁵.

6. Conclusions

Following the manner in which the idea of ritual purity and, respectively impurity is represented in the imaginary of archaic and traditional Romanian communities, with the help of these “humble” meteorological metaphors, we discovered that, generally, the morning dew is raised at the level of metaphor of absolute purity. Although it represents an aquatic entity, it appears as well as celestial matter, symmetrical to the intangible stars, incorporating in its semantics the light that casts out evil spirits and all of earth’s unclean things. Due to the light, but also its perishable and intangible, it becomes a true sacred substance, used not only therapeutically and cosmetically, but also ritualistically, in order to ensure the absolute cleanliness necessary when performing certain ritual acts of major importance. On the contrary, the mist and the clouds that obstruct solar light constitute the metaphors chosen to represent a(n) (im)pure sacredness, clouds having, for instance, positive properties as well when associated with beneficial rain. Finally, the rainbow also represents an ambivalent metaphor of sacredness, which reunites opposites: the sky and the earth, light and water, masculine and feminine and, last but not least, the pure and the impure. Thus, the individual from the folklore world was able to research meteorological phenomena – that the modern individual has isolated himself from with various walls –, using them as instruments for the understanding of the manner in which the universe is built and, in the end, for the understanding of the meaning of life itself. Seen as some epiphanies of purity-impurity, these elements gain sacred values, being profoundly ennobled in the imaginary of the individual from the olden days.

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⁸⁴ ”e anume făcut de la începutul lumii prin mijlocul cerului, ca să fie odată hotar”.

⁸⁵ ”care pe care va dovedi, acelaia vor rămâne toți ceilalți”.

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