

THESES AND ANTITHESES IN LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS

“THE MAGIC OF WATER” IN ENCHANTMENT

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Abstract: In the first part of the research we aimed to define the enchantment, to highlight the most important plants and objects that have magical functions and what role and power the enchanter has. Next, we tried to emphasize the magical role of water, its specific functions in the practice of enchantment, which can lead to a deeper understanding of this ritual “practiced” even today.

Keywords: enchantment, enchanter, plants, objects, water.

ABOUT ENCHANTMENT...

The repertoire of enchantment, very vast in Romanian popular literature, oscillates between magic or popular prayer since ancient times. For millennia, enchantment has been considered the only way for people to resist both disease and calamity. It is considered a tool close to the simple man to intervene in the course of events, beyond ordinary powers. The unquestioning belief in its efficiency has led to a perpetuation in time and space.

The enchantments are the faithful reflection of ample representations of the universe in which the man of the traditional society lived. They summed up those daily elements with which a large part of the members of this society came into contact, due to the various availabilities to treat and remedy all the dysfunctions that arose. Enchantments produce a particular mythology well known to all members of society, although these magical texts were not available to all.

In Romanian culture, enchantment is considered to be both a formula that has a magical power, in order to remove evil and bring good, and a magical ritual in itself that contains all the elements of magic.

Enchanted against diseases, human or animal pests (against snakes, insects, the evil eye, etc.), against those who deal with the “making” of charms, which stole fruits of the cattle and fields were collected in an impressive number, and enchantments in the situation of balance disorders in nature (rain, drought) were

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found uttered. Thus, it is possible to intervene, knowingly, in order to restore some initial states, disturbed by unwanted intrusions of the characters coming from another world.

The term “enchantment” has dominated over time in Romanian popular culture due to the initial positive meaning of this ancient rite. Mihai Pop and Pavel Ruxăndoiu define the enchantment as a “coded message” put into action by a transmitter (performer), sent to a recipient (generator of magical forces), so that the referent can benefit from it¹.

Looking for poetic values, Lucian Blaga observed that “poetic effects, from the safest and most irresistible, are obtained by means that are of a magical nature. The magician involuntarily resorts to poetic means, the poet involuntarily resorts to magical means”², and many years later, Camelia Burghel noticed that there was a tendency to “discuss chromatics and the magic of numbers, about the capacity for suggestion, relaxation or even hypnosis of words ..., about their therapeutic and psychotherapeutic capacity, about joining the power of words to the powers of bioenergy, or even about the role of disease enchantment in paranormal phenomena”³.

PLANTS AND OBJECTS WITH MAGICAL FUNCTIONS NECESSARY FOR ENCHANTMENT

From ancient times it has been said that, for better effectiveness, any medical treatment must be accompanied by a magic formula (which can also be a text – enchantment).

In Romania, enchantments are most often accompanied by various practices, in which various magical objects and plants are used, depending on the goal that the performer (the one who practices the enchantment) wants to achieve, but there are enchantments that are limited only to the words spoken. In the enchantments in which *plants and magical objects are used*, a real show of action, gesture and incantations is created.

Based on the nature of plants or objects, Artur Gorovei⁴ makes a detailed presentation of them, by categories, which we find mentioned in the texts of the enchantments. Therefore we will find in its classification:

- *holy things* (“agheasmă” – holy water, cross, “pristornic” – the form in which the “prescura” is made, etc.);
- *plants* (hazelnuts, peppers, berries of various kinds, vegetables, pumpkin, burdock, sponge, basil, hemp, onion, thyme, sunflower, wheat, grass,

¹ Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Folclor literar românesc*, Bucharest, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing, 1976, p. 218.

² Lucian Blaga, *Despre gândirea magică*, Bucharest, Fundatia Regala pentru Literatura și Arta Publishing, 1941, p. 167.

³ Camelia Burghel, *În numele magiei terapeutice*, Zalău, Limes Publishing, 2000, p. 42.

⁴ Artur Gorovei, *Descântecel românilor. Studiu de folclor*, Bucharest, 1931, pp. 194–195.

- larch, corn, thorns, birch, buds, dandelion, wormwood, melon, willow, rye, shock, cane, nettle, garlic, vine, etc.);
- *animals* (dog, mole, rooster, cat, weasel, crushed spider, fish), insects (nun, grasshopper, moles, etc.);
 - *eatable things* (dough, borscht, flour, egg yolk, vinegar, poultry, bread, black pepper, salt, cinnamon, bacon, figs, raisins, brandy, oil, etc.), *unclean things* (manure, excrement, poultry manure, etc.);
 - *unusual things* (“căiță” – membrane that covers the head of newborns; cap of an undead; breast milk or even breast from a woman breastfeeding boy, etc.);
 - *various common things and objects* (needle, trough, water, living silver, handkerchief, whip, burning tow, shirt, charcoal, ash, belt, sieve, tin, flint, knife, “darac” – wool, hemp or linen combing tool, consisting of a system of combs with large steel teeth, fixed on a support; torch, scissors, fire, feather flake, soot, fork, spindle, fence, ball, rake, garbage, padlock, unwashed wool, wood, candle, marble, silk, broom, spool, button, pot, feather, brush, comb, horseshoe found, brimstone, arrow soap, human blood, spit, sickle, incense, bran, ax, tobacco, jug, etc.).

I. Aurel Candrea also talks about the objects used in enchantment, but also about the special virtue that must have: “knife and flour: to be *stolen*; knife, needle, horseshoe: to be *found*; needle, broom, comb, spindle: to be *left*; pot or jug: to be *new* and *bought without a bargain*; knife: must have been *placed on the bride and groom’s head in the church*; skewer: must have been *twisted* by three gypsies with their hands behind their backs”⁵, plus many other interesting things such as: metal or wooden objects, tools and utensils, edible things, plants and minerals, parts of animals or organic matter. In many Romanian beliefs, “călușarii” (a group of dancers who perform the dance “călușul”) appear as famous connoisseurs of plants, while “ieele” (imaginary beings from Romanian folk mythology, depicted as beautiful girls, dressed in white, who appear only at night, enchanting, through their song and play, men, over whom they have evil powers), true owners of these plants, complain all the time when their herbs are stolen from them by these “mythical thieves of natural remedies”⁶.

Medicinal plants had special healing qualities only during the decisive periods of the year, for example the feast of “Sânziene”, and in bad times, more precisely around Pentecost, they were considered ineffective.

Latter, Ovidiu Bîrlea classifies *magical objects and plants* into three important categories that have specific functions, with a well-defined purpose.

The first category is meant “to drive away the demons of diseases, scaring them or luring them through gestures whose imitation leads to their expulsion”⁷ in

⁵ I. Aurel Candrea, *Folclorul medical românesc comparat*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing, 1999, p. 378.

⁶ Antoaneta Olteanu, *Ipostaze ale maleficului în medicina magică*, Bucharest, Paideia Publishing, 1997, p. 168.

⁷ Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Folclorul românesc*, IInd vol., Bucharest, Minerva Publishing, 1983, p. 9.

which are used: knife, ax, sickle, scissors, garlic, wormwood, rosehip, hazelnut, coal (extincted), iron tools, etc.

The second category includes substances intended to cause nausea “pushing here to an improbable analogy with human behavior”⁸, here being included all the varieties of excrements that also have a medical value.

The last category includes substances with special healing properties verified by scientific medicine, namely *water* (unstarted, enchanted, sanctified, etc.), salt, honey, “along with the extensive list of plants used in teas or poultices”⁹.

A large part of the magical plants and objects mentioned above are loaded with deep meanings and valences, meant to attribute to the enchantment both *religious functions*, through the use of sacred objects, but especially through *magical functions*. It seems that the rural world has managed to harmonize the two functions even by enchantment, being as a bridge between the two.

THE ENCHANTRESS – POWER AND ROLE

The enchanters were considered special beings, endowed with supernatural powers, “capable of provoking and controlling certain psychic processes, they knew the organs of the human body, medicinal plants and their use for certain diseases”¹⁰, people even talking about their connection with the devil, which they sometimes fought, but also used in occult practices.

The people who dealt with the enchantment were, in general, the old women of the village, famous for their knowledge of a very wide repertoire, but also the men engaged in this practice, the fewest in number.

The enchantress did not always enchant herself, as she could be without a cure, and parents who enchanted “a child of theirs had to have a spoon in their belt for the enchantment to have a cure”¹¹. When the enchantress goes out to enchant, she must be clean “that is, untouched by a man, nor be with three cherries”¹², she must be primed so that she may also receive the sick person’s body and make him recover. Another particularly important factor is the prestige of the person performing the enchantment in the respective community, which implicitly reflects the prestige of the person requesting the enchantment.

Ever since these mysteries entered the profane world, any scholar can dare to enchant. It is obvious that most women who have children have learned to enchant,

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Ion Ghinoiu, *Lumea de aici, lumea de dincolo*, Bucharest, Editura Fundației Culturale Române Publishing, 1999, p. 185.

¹¹ Tudor Pamfile, *Boli și leacuri la oameni, vite și păsări*, Bucharest, Saeculum I.O. Publishing, 1999, p. 5.

¹² Artur Gorovei, *cit. work*, p. 78.

and it is no longer necessary for them to use the knowledge of old women. But a very important thing, from the popular belief, must not be ignored, the learned enchantment has no cure, only the “stolen” one can help the sufferer.

Nicoleta Coatu talks about the self-suggestion aimed at both by the practitioner (how much she/he believes in what she/ he does) and the patient (how much he/she believes in what is done to him/her), everything depending on the practitioner. At the heart of this scheme is faith, suggestion, and empirical or perhaps scientific belief.

WATER – MAGICAL “SHAPES” FOR ENCHANTMENT

Water is defined by Ivan Evseev¹³ being an “ambivalent symbol: the primordial substance from which all forms arise and in which they return by regression. It is the archetype of all connections; it is a universal binder, but also an element that separates and dissolves”.

The enchantment of water in enchantments is found in certain ancient peoples who use magic as an escape from the real world. Thus, the Indians had many enchantments in which they invoked water to cure the disease because “water cures them all”, while the Chaldeans¹⁴ believed that the god of the river lived in “Great Water, Great Lady”.

In the traditional Romanian culture, water appears in four magical forms: *ordinary water* (ordinary, drinking water), *special water* (brought from a certain place to give it special qualities), *sanctified water* and *unbegun water*.

Water is used both for its role as an internal medicine and as a necessary-obligatory magical element, depending on the situation.

Interestingly, water has not only the role of healing, but also of making a “diagnosis of the disease”. Artur Gorovei describes how a person from Traian commune (Romanați¹⁵), proceeds to find out if he is really suffering from suffocation (asphyxia, suffocation) or not. On the advice of a skilled old woman, the person collects the water from the dishes washed on Wednesdays and Fridays in a new bowl (plate) in which there is ash placed three times with a spoon, spindle or comb. Finally, a new clay pot is placed over the bowl, and if the patient is really ill, the water in the bowl will rise and bubble like the stomach of the patient, who for healing will have to drink the water raised, if the water does not rise, the patient does not suffer from this disease.

¹³ *Dicționar de simboluri și arhetipuri culturale*, Timișoara, Amarcord Publishing, 1994, p. 16.

¹⁴ Population of Aramaic origin, which migrated in the 10th century BC. in southern Mesopotamia.

¹⁵ Former first-order administrative unit in the Kingdom of Romania, located in the historical region of Oltenia.

Special water is brought only from certain places. It can be taken from ugly, boiling, smelly waters or from abandoned wells and fountains (helps with ugly enchantments). *Special water* can also be considered that from the “topila” (from the pond where the hemp melts); “the water gatered from the hoof of the cow, thrown with the back of the palm towards the eyes, used in the enchantments of longing for the eyes; the water left over from Sunday, used in charms against crickets; the water from the glass that stands at a crossroads ... the water gathered from nine fords; the holy water at the Epiphany ... the water from the holy well; water from nine springs; the water in which a baby snake is killed; unbegun water from three springs”¹⁶.

Nicoleta Coatu states that this *special water* is transported in “new”, “open vessels”, with the handle of the pot turned back, to signify the beginning, but it can also be transported in the mouth “in a protective space away from the profane environment”¹⁷.

In order to have a cure, the *unbegun* water must “be brought by a woman, or a great girl, or a clean man, before the sun rises, to go uneaten to a river, spring, or well from which no one took water that day”¹⁸. The one who brings the water must not speak, look back, respond to the “good morning”, return to the same path or give someone a drink from the jug. It is said that the enchantment would be more curable if the bringer of the water did not meet anyone in its path.

The *raw water* in which the *coal* is extinguished is considered to be very good in the rapid cure of any disease. Usually three, six or nine coals are used (in Bacău county, only three or nine coals are used for “deochi”/ spell).

Regarding the superstitions related to bringing *unbegun water*, Nicoleta Coatu offers two logical explanations: it is not good to go back on the same path so as not to negatively contaminate the substance intended for therapeutic practice and do not look back while walking through the water, because it would it may have something to do with the myth of Orpheus.

A general rule regarding unbegun water cannot be established because there are different regions in the Romanian area that apply different rules for bringing it and preparing it.

For example, in Bucovina, the enchantress throws the bread and salt she brought into a river, makes three rosaries and fills the pot with water, while saying:

“Flowing water,
I will smite thee,
with bread and salt,
to cure thee,
from head to foot.
With cure, with health and age”.

(S. FI. Marian, Vrăji...¹⁹, p. 91)

¹⁶ Arthur Gorovei, *cit. work*, p. 84.

¹⁷ Nicoleta Coatu, *Structuri magice tradiționale*, ALL Publishing, 1998, p. 107.

¹⁸ I. A. Candrea, *cit. work*, p. 378.

¹⁹ *Vrăji, farmece și desfaceri. Descânțete populare române*, Bucharest, Coresi Publishing, 1996.

The enchantress will repeat this ritual three times, after which she returns home without saying anything or looking back.

The days when the unbegun water is procured are also variable, depending on the localities: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday. But if the ritual of procuring the unbegun water is repeated for three days, the enchantment will be cured much faster, because the number three symbolizes the perfect order of balance.

For the “iele” enchantments, the Romanians use the water from the place where two springs meet; we mention some representative and important versions:

“Big water,
Great lady,
Coming from 99 valleys,
From 99 valleys encountered,
To cure (someone),
Remember, Saints,
Good, Sweetened,
Remember to bring,
/ Bring the cure”

(A. Gorovei, *Descântecele românilor*, p. 161).

In Sângiorz-Năsăud, after being enchanted “among the iele”, a pit is made over which the patient’s head is washed, then pepper and garlic are put in the pit and everything is covered with *earth*. No one is allowed to walk in that place for a year, so that the disease does not become associated with it.

As we have seen, the water can no longer be used after enchantment, it must be thrown in an untrodden place, so that no one steps on it. If this still happens, the disease that has been transferred to the water will pass from the water to the one who stepped on it.

For example, the water used for the “deochi” enchantment is thrown at the door sill or on a board in the fence, while saying: “As water flows on the board, so the pain of the matrix drains from (someone’s name), and as the water clears all the stones and all the banks, so (someone’s name) clears and cleans the matrix”²⁰. When the water is thrown after the “izdat” enchantment²¹, it is said: “As this batten is washed from the rain and the wind, so let (someone’s name) be washed from the izdat”, and when the water is thrown on a thorn in the “brâncă” enchantment²² is said: “Let the brânca remain in the thorn and not come back”.

There are cases in which water is thrown on a dog or a cat, but not in order to transmit the disease to them because the enchantress says: “the cat and the dog should come, but (someone’s) disease should not come”.

²⁰ Artur Gorovei, *cit. work*, p. 88.

²¹ Heart disease manifested by sharp heart pain.

²² “Black spot”, a disease associated with cancer.

The *holy water* is taken from the priest when he uses the cross at the baptism of the Lord and is used in the enchantments of whiteness²³. *Holy water* is brought in a bottle, it is placed down, together with the basil, and the enchantress, putting her right foot on them, wets the patient's eyes.

We can conclude that water, in various forms, is the main element that is found in most enchantments and without which one cannot even conceive a magical invocation by the enchanters. Water is used in enchantments not only to heal, but also to diagnose the disease, which can also help with healing.

²³ Eye disease.