

CHRISTIAN FAMILY VALUES IN ROMANIAN FOLKLORE – PART II

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Abstract

This paper works as a sequel to an early investigation of Christian family values as illustrated in Romanian folklore. Both papers belong to a larger transdisciplinary research project in which I examine Christian values within the Romanian family, namely both Christian values as transmitted within and by the family and more general views about the family (as ultimately a sociogenic unit), with a view to identifying the extent to which Christian teachings have influenced the Romanian collective imagination as filtered and transmitted at family level also with the help of folkloric performance. If the early paper studies a number of texts which have enjoyed wide dissemination and popularity – the ballads Miorița and Meșterul Manole / Monastirea Argeșului, and proverbs, this one looks in parallel at familiar popular creations like Petre Ispirescu's folktales (even though we may regard some texts as better known than others through subsequent dissemination) and at somewhat less familiar ones nowadays, especially in an urban milieu, like traditional songs belonging to the rite of passage – wedding orations and mourning songs – and exempla. A word of caution: my interest in folklore stems from the assumption of its relative conservatism, which renders it inherently apt to preserve certain attitudes and beliefs that underpin the collective imagination of the Romanian people and thus afford a glimpse to the latter. As my analysis demonstrates, the Christian and patriarchal values crystallized in the collective imagination inform one another and moreover concur on legitimizing the social status quo. On the other hand, we should also remember that the dissemination and performance of folklore now is significantly different from what used to be the case barely 150 years ago. It may not be far-fetched to argue that, for many people, folklore is nowadays very much of a museum piece, even as remote rural areas may have remained thoroughly folkloric-minded at least regarding the rites of passage.

Unsurprisingly, societal issues as those permeating Romanian folklore not only suggest the impact of Christianity on society at large, but also beg attention to the traditional gendering of actions, roles and identities. By way of consequence, the analysis proper is unavoidably gender aware and is implicitly informed by gender and especially feminist studies.

Key Words: family values, Christianity, Romanian folklore, wedding orations, folktales, exempla