

ORNATAM MUNDO FUNEREI THALAMI.
ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES
ON APULEIUS, *METAMORPHOSES* 4.33-34.

In Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 4.33-34 a strange funeral wedding ceremony is described. When Psyche's father consults the oracle of Miletus to find a husband for his youngest daughter, he is told to abandon her on a lonely mountain peak, dressed as a bride, as a prey for a dragon-like monster. This happens with a ceremony combining elements of both the funeral and the nuptial ritual. Psyche, in wedding attire, is escorted to the top of a mountain by a grieving crowd. A torchlight procession is accompanied by wedding songs performed in mournful tones. Then, the heroine takes leave of her family with a speech in which she accepts her fate. Finally, she is left alone to await her destiny until Zephyrus, a magical wind, carries her in flight to the enchanted palace where she will meet Cupid.

Previous studies focusing on the episode have mainly adopted a philosophical-allegoric or structural-narratological perspective. This section of the tale has been commonly referred to as «Psyche on the rock», with an emphasis on the exposure of the heroine on the mountain top¹. Dowden, revitalising a long-standing tradition of philosophical interpretation, explains the scene as an allegory of the end of childhood experience². Papaioannou draws attention to the narratological parallels between Psyche and Charite's story, showing how the motif of the interrupted wedding plays a dominant role in the vicissitudes of both heroines. Gianotti identifies the archetypal image of the victim exposed on a rock in the myth of Andromeda, pointing out significant parallels with former Latin poems³.

While agreeing that the similarities between Psyche and Andromeda, or other mythological heroines, are worth exploring⁴, and that the end of childhood and the incomplete wedding prospective are key elements in the interpretation of the episode, I need to return to Dowden's starting question: «Why is Psyche exposed on a rock?» to suggest a different explanation. Arguing that the exposure of the heroine on the cliff is a detail rather than the centre of the matter,

¹ DOWDEN 1982; PAPAIOANNOU 1998. In this first note, I would like to thank my doctoral supervisor Dan Octavian Ceperaga, as well as Davide Susanetti, Carlo Donà and Emmanuel Plantade for their observations on my earlier analysis of the episode of Psyche's funeral wedding (Perencin 2020), here revised and expanded. I also thank Gillian Davis for the linguistic revision. All mistakes are mine.

² Dowden's views are not unanimously accepted: cf. SCHLAM 1992, p. 96.

³ GIANOTTI 2003, p. 253: «Non v'è dubbio che su questa prima parte, definita in maniera non impropria "tragedia" di Psiche, agisca il modello di Andromeda, dell'*Andromeda* euripidea per quanto concerne il susseguirsi di "quadri scenici", dell'*Andromeda* maniliana per quanto riguarda l'intonazione epico-lirica del racconto».

⁴ SCHIESARO 1988, p. 145-148 for parallels with Iphigenia and other mythical heroines.

I propose to shift the focus of the attention to the funeral wedding ceremony. This requires a re-reading of the episode (Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 4.33-34):

“Montis in excelsi scopulo, rex, siste puellam
ornatam mundo funerei thalami.
Nec speres generum mortali stirpe creatum,
sed saevum atque ferum vipereumque malum,
quod pinnis volitans super aethera cuncta fatigat
flammaque et ferro singula debilitat,
quod tremit ipse Iovis quo numina terrificantur,
fluminaque horrescunt et Stygiae tenebrae.”

Rex olim beatus affatu sanctae vaticinationis accepto piger tristisque retro domum pergit suaeque coniugi praecepta soris enodat infaustae. Maeretur, fletur, lamentatur diebus plusculis. Sed dirae sortis iam urget taeter effectus. Iam feralium nuptiarum miserrimae virgini choragium struitur, iam taedae lumen atrae fuliginis cinere marcescit, et sonus tibiae zygiae mutatur in querulum Ludii modum cantusque laetus hymenaei lugubri finitur ululatu et puella nuptura deterget lacrimas ipso suo flammeo. Sic adfectae domus triste fatum cuncta etiam civitas congemebat luctuque publico confestim congruens edicatur iustitium. Sed monitis caelestibus parendi necessitas misellam Psychen ad destinatam poenam efflagitabat. Perfectis igitur feralis thalami cum summo maerore sollemnibus toto prosequente populo vivum producitur funus, et lacrimosa Psyche comitatur non nuptias sed exequias suas. Ac dum maesti parentes et tanto malo perciti nefarium facinus perficere cunctantur, ipsa illa filia talibus eos adhortatur vocibus: [...] «Ducite me et cui sors addixit scopulo sistite. Festino felices istas nuptias obire, festino generosum illum maritum meum videre. Quid differo, quid detrecto venientem, qui totius orbis exitio natus est?»

“On a mountain peak, o king, expose the maid
For funeral wedlock ritually arrayed.
No human son-in-law (hope not) is thine,
But something cruel and fierce and serpentine;
That plagues the world as, borne aloft on wings,
With fire and steel it persecutes all things;
That Jove himself, he whom the gods revere,
That Styx’s darkling stream regards with fear.”

The king who had once accounted himself happy, on hearing the utterance of the sacred prophecy, returned home reluctant and downcast and explained to his wife the instructions of the inauspicious reply. There followed several days of mourning, of weeping, of lamentation. But now the ghastly fulfilment of the terrible oracle was upon them. The gear for the poor girl’s funereal bridal was now prepared; the flame of the torches died down in black smoke and ash; the sound of the marriage-pipe was changed to the plaintive Lydian mode; the joyful marriage-hymn ended in lugubrious wailings; and the bride wiped away her tears with her own bridal veil. The whole city joined in lamenting the sad plight of the afflicted house, and in sympathy with the general grief all public business was immediately suspended. But the bidding of heaven had to be obeyed, and the unfortunate Psyche was required to undergo the punishment ordained for her. Accordingly the ceremonies of her funeral marriage were duly performed with the utmost sorrow, and escorted by the entire populace Psyche was led forth, a living corpse, and in tears joined in, not her wedding procession, but her own funeral. While her parents, grief-stricken and stunned by this great

calamity, hesitated to complete the dreadful deed, their daughter encouraged them herself: [...] «Take me and place me on the rock to which destiny has assigned me. I cannot wait to enter on this happy marriage, and to see that noble bridegroom of mine. Why should I postpone, why should I shirk my meeting with him who is born for the ruin of the whole world?»⁵.

The marriage-death connection emerging in this section has been traced back to a Greek, even earlier than Latin, literary *topos*⁶, typical of Greek tragedy⁷, novel⁸, and Hellenistic poetry⁹. The presence of constant elements typical of that *topos* has been emphasized too, such as the wedding attire of the protagonist; the torches, whose use is distorted; the wedding songs which turn to laments; the speech of the victim, who shows a serene acceptance of the fate and the attempt to comfort those present.

However, some linguistic peculiarities of the episode still raise questions because they are rather unusual. This is the case of *ornatam mundo funerei thalami*, *feralium nuptiarum*, and *feralis thalami*. These expressions combine the semantic areas of funeral and wedding rituals but lack parallels in Latin literature. The GCA, for example, notes that *funerei thalami* is a remarkable oxymoron, and that the combination is uncommon¹⁰. Since lexical oddities should be given special attention in an anthropological perspective interested in the ancient world¹¹, a question arises: when it comes to the cultural horizon of the Greeks and Romans, what do these expressions refer to?

Perhaps due to the reluctance of a part of Apuleian philology to go beyond the purely textual and literary dimension¹², this passage was not examined from an anthropological

⁵ Text and translation by E.J. Kenney, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990.

⁶ See GCA, p. 86-103.

⁷ SEAFORD 1987, p. 106-107: «It is important to observe that this enclosure is facilitated by the presence in the wedding of elements associated with death, to some extent perhaps actual lamentation, but more importantly ‘equivocal’ elements common to the two rites of passage. In both wedding and funeral the girl is washed, anointed, and given special πέπλοι and a special στέφανος in order to be conveyed on an irreversible, torchlit journey (on a cart) and accompanied by songs, and to be abandoned by her kin to an unknown dwelling, and alien bed, and the physical control (χειρ ἐπὶ καρπῶι) of an unknown male. The unmarried girl is buried in wedding attire; she is imagined as a bride taken off by Hades».

⁸ SCHIESARO 1988, p. 146: «Il topos del matrimonio-funerale, non privo di riscontri nello stesso romanzo greco, era diffuso anche in poesia, come attestano le varie ricorrenze nell’*Antologia Palatina*. I caratteri formali di queste realizzazioni sono stati indagati a fondo, e presentano punti di contatto interessanti con il nostro passo».

⁹ SZEPESSY 1972 provides an analysis of the *topos* of the girl who died on the day of her wedding in Hellenistic epigram, which also includes this Apuleian passage.

¹⁰ GCA, p. 87: «*funerei thalami*: a remarkable oxymoron; the metonymical use of *thalamus* for ‘marriage’ is frequent; for the combination with the adjective, no parallel is given by *ThLL* s.v. *funereus* 1582,75».

¹¹ Cf. BETTINI-SHORT 2018, p. 11: «Linguistic oddities, then, must occupy a place of honour in the Roman anthropologist’s *carpet*».

¹² See GCA, p. 2: «We approach the tale of Cupid and Psyche as the literary creation of one author, Apuleius, who in the purpose of this refashioned, transformed, and enriched material from a vast number of ‘sources’, Greek as well as Roman, written as well as oral traditions». Cf. note 5: «Our commentary in general agrees with Schlam, who in a critical review of a number of recent approaches from scholars of folklore and literary history has shown that the claim that the essence of this Apuleian tale is either folkloric, or mythic, or literary, is false and methodologically

perspective. Indeed, the presence of typical elements of marriage in rituals and beliefs related to early death is a widespread ethnographic theme that emerges in many times and cultures, not excluding the Greek and Latin ones¹³. Encompassing the multifaceted set of traditions known as «funeral wedding» or «wedding of the dead» in the same horizon of the Apuleian episode, a comparative analysis seems possible and useful in answering the question raised.

In this view, the present work aims to emphasise the correspondences between the Apuleian episode and the folkloric-ethnographic documentation on funeral weddings in rural south-eastern Europe, attested from the 19th century onwards and still alive today. The chronological, geographical, and cultural distance between the considered materials and the Apuleian narrative is significant. Such a comparison is nevertheless crucial for the analysis because the south-eastern European area has preserved exceptionally intact evidence on the close connection between marriage and burial in traditional cultures, with both ritual and mythical-poetic implications.

The cultural field involved in this comparison includes evidence from modern Greece and Romania, which preserve particularly archaic and conservative folk traditions that are both well documented and studied¹⁴. On a ritual level, in rural Greece and Romania, the funeral of an unmarried, young person was traditionally performed like a wedding, with the deceased dressed in wedding attire and wedding songs performed in mourning tones, exactly as it is described by Apuleius. Moreover, on a mythical-poetic level, the metaphor of death as a marriage, so

unsound. 'The Apuleian tale created rather than preserved a myth of Cupid and Psyche'. See SCHLAM 1992, p. 89. As for the relationship between the story of Cupid and Psyche and folklore, on which Fehling's prejudices have long weighed, the issue has recently been re-addressed by Braccini, who has broadened the investigation into the possible implications between ancient texts and oral narratives, reconsidering the value of folkloric documentation in enhancing our understanding of the Apuleian text (see BRACCINI 2018, p. 127-129; cf. HANSEN 2002, p. 100-114). On the side of iconographic documentation, Stramaglia has persuasively demonstrated that a number of artefacts predating Apuleius's lifetime depict scenes traceable to specific sequences of the story of Cupid and Psyche as told in the *Metamorphoses*, bringing new evidence in support of the prior existence and circulation of the tale, and contradicting Schlam's claim that «the [ancient] representations of Eros and Psyche are essentially independent of the narrative told by Apuleius» (SCHLAM 1976, p. 40): see STRAMAGLIA 2010, pp. 165-176.

¹³ For the category of early, unmarried dead (ἄωροι and ἄγαμοί), see REHM 1994, p. 29. «The connection between weddings and funerals is made explicit for the young who died unmarried, for their graves are crowned with large stone loutrophoroi representing the ritual vessel for nuptial bathing. The points of shared activity between weddings and funerals find literal expression on epitaphs, which seek to evoke aspects of both rituals in those who read them. The conflation of marriages and funerals on the Attic stage speaks to the signal importance of these rituals in the lives of the audience and suggests an overriding continuity (at least during the fifth century) in the way they were conceived and understood». For the custom of dressing these special dead with wedding clothes, see SEAFORD 1987, p. 107 (see note 7) and ALEXIOU 2004, p. 5: «The body was washed, anointed and dressed by the women of the house, usually in white, but sometimes in the case of an unmarried or newly married person in wedding attire». The reference is to PEEK 1238.3 (νυμφοκόμοις στολίδεσσι σύν εὐκόσμοις γάρ ἄωρος / νυμφῶνος συτυγεροῦ τοῦσδε λέλογχα τάφου). Another clear example of girl dressed like a bride from Greek funerary epigram is PEEK 683, as well reported in VERGOT's 2006-2007 dissertation (οἷς γάρ ἔμελλον / κοσμεῖσθαι νύμφα, τοῖςδ' Αἴδαν ἔμολον). See also STRAMAGLIA 1999, pp. 215- 292, in particular p. 221 (chapter III, *La morte amoureuse*).

¹⁴ This does not exclude the possibility that elements useful for analysis may also come from other areas, where funeral-wedding traditions are attested.

distinctive in the Apuleian passage, also recurs in traditional oral poetry, such as the funeral laments and other genres. So, by integrally preserving both the ritual and mythical-poetic layers, which is rarely the case when analysis is limited to the ancient world¹⁵, south-eastern European folklore offers a privileged perspective on the traditions of funeral wedding¹⁶.

It should be made clear up front that the analysis does not prove any genetic link between the data or a common dependence on an older substrate. However, the comparison of the Apuleian text with the Greek and Romanian ethnographic documentation reveals morphological affinities that would otherwise remain unnoticed¹⁷. This connection may suggest, at least at the conjectural level¹⁸, new interpretations for a unique and intriguing image such as *ornatam mundo funerei thalami*, stimulating new research about the «funeral wedding» theme in the ancient world.

1. THE FUNERAL WEDDING IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPEAN TRADITIONS.

As early as the end of the 19th century, the studies of Marian¹⁹ have shown that the combination of traits typical of marriage and funeral is a common feature in Romanian folkloric and ethnographic documentation. In the 1920s, Muşlea's comparative research²⁰ proved that this was also true in Greece, Slovenia, and Bulgaria. According to the customs attested in these areas, the funeral of an unmarried person who died at a young age was performed with many elements taken from the wedding ceremony – some of which are the same as in the story of Cupid and Psyche – such as the dressing in wedding clothes, the use of torches and the specific lamentations that were performed on such occasions. According to Eliade, the core of these rituals and beliefs should be sought in a very ancient substratum, pre-Christian or even prehistoric in origin²¹.

¹⁵ «Often, we may speak of mutual influence and reinforcement [between *mythos* and *cultus*]; but in many cases, especially from antiquity, we are left with either the myth or the ritual, not both. And we must recognize artistic creativity: there may have been more versions of myth or ritual than we will even know» (DOTY 2000, p. 78).

¹⁶ Even when a record of the ritual performance is not available, elements of a myth may be clarified by reference to what is known about ritual usage in other contexts (DOTY 2000, p. 78).

¹⁷ The inclusion of ethnographic documentation in the philological debate concerning the tale of Cupid and Psyche is not entirely new: cf. PLANTADE 2016. Plantade's paper builds on previous contributions, co-authored with ethnographer Nedjima Plantade.

¹⁸ See GINZBURG 1991, p. 15: «“Historical explanation, explanation as a hypothesis of development is only one way of gathering data – their synopsis. It is equally possible to see the data in their mutual relationships and sum them up in a general image that does not have the form of a chronological development”. This “perspicuous representation (*übersichtliche Darstellung*)”, Wittgenstein observed, “mediates understanding, which precisely consists in ‘seeing the connections’. Hence the importance of finding the intermediary links”». The reference is to Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, which in Ginzburg 1991, p. 27 note 58 is quoted from the German text: for an English translation, cf. WITTGENSTEIN 2018, p. 46 n. 20).

¹⁹ See MARIAN 1892, p. 62-64. Though outdated, Marian's is the first important study on the topic, and it is still important for its rich ethnographic documentation.

²⁰ MUŞLEA 1972 [1925].

²¹ ELIADE 1972, p. 237: «The two themes [of the *Miorița* folk ballad] are among the most familiar in folklore: the first, *death assimilated to a marriage*, is archaic and has its roots in prehistory». About *Miorița*, see below.

The reasons underlying the idea of death as marriage seems quite clear: for traditional communities, the traumatic event of premature death had to be exorcised and sublimated²². Hence a specific ritual which suggested, through the performance of codified practices, the idea of overcoming the natural stages of life, including marriage. This archaic and deeply rooted idea gave rise to a whole complex of images, customs, rituals and myths which can be found in many cultures²³.

In south-eastern Europe, the ritual of the funeral wedding also has textual reflections in oral poetry. This is the case of many traditional genres such as the funeral laments, the *colindă* (ritual songs traditionally performed by a group of young men on the nights between Christmas and Epiphany), and the *cântec bătrânesc* (also known as *baladă*, ‘ballad’). In all these poetic genres the metaphor of death as marriage recurs, constantly linked to a context of premature death. For example, with regard to Romanian folklore, Muşlea points out that the theme emerges in what is by far the most emblematic song of Romanian oral poetry, the song of *Miorița*, the so-called «Ewe Lamb». In this ritual song, documented as both a *colindă* and a ballad, the relationship between the poetic metaphor of death as marriage and its ritual background, linked to early death, is still recognizable beyond the poetic and aesthetic elaboration.

The following paragraphs focus on three main points of contact between Psyche’s ceremony and the south-eastern European traditions of funeral wedding: the dressing, the songs, and the victim's speech.

2. THE DRESSING.

One of the most distinctive features of the funeral-wedding rituals in South-Eastern Europe is the dressing of the dead bride, or groom. In Romania, until very recent years, it was a typical custom to bury the young unmarried dead, both male and female, in wedding attire. Other symbolic objects such as a ring or a crown, typically worn by spouses during Orthodox Christian religious weddings, could be included too²⁴. In some cases, a young woman could be designated or volunteer to act as a «bride» for a boy who died prematurely²⁵, performing a wedding ceremony — not binding on the living partner — with friends acting as wedding witnesses. Even for these roles, clothing was not casual, as emerges from Kligman’s 1978-1979 anthropological inquiry about the funeral and wedding traditions in the northern region of Maramureş:

The deceased, who is about to be married in death, is dressed in wedding attire; brides — living or dead — wear white. The bridesmaid is also dressed appropriately for her role. The other

²² Cf. DE MARTINO 1958.

²³ Far from having a local diffusion, similar customs can be traced in different areas of the world and in distant times, because they belong to a broader complex of rituals and belief related to the untimely death. As an example, a funeral-wedding practice was documented in Asia by Marco Polo: cf. BARBIERI 1998, p. 16-17.

²⁴ For the funeral dressing of the young unmarried dead, see MARIAN 1892, p. 64-66.

²⁵ The opposite case not always is documented: see KLIGMAN 1988, p. 223: «The father of the dead ‘bride’ observed: “A bride is ‘put’ only for young men; a groom is never ‘put’ (for girls) – only a crown”.».

participants who «celebrate» this wedding, however, are mourners; accordingly, they are dressed in black funeral clothes. [...] While the «bride» or «groom» wears a wedding crown, the mourners respect the convention of funeral decorum; for example, the men go bareheaded²⁶.

In Greece, similar customs are documented by Danforth:

The analogy between marriage and death is even clearer, and is explicitly articulated, at the funeral of an unmarried person. On such occasions people say, «We celebrate the funeral like a wedding» (*Tin kidhia tin kanoume sa ghamo*). [...] In Potamia and in many other areas of Greece a person who dies unmarried is buried dressed in wedding attire. The deceased also wears a wedding crown, which in some cases is actually placed on his head by his godparent, just as it is during the Orthodox wedding ceremony²⁷.

At the poetic level, the inclusion of typical elements of marriage also occurs in the ceremonial lamentation. The lexical repertoire of the ritual laments emphasizes the death-marriage identification. The deceased is addressed as «groom» or «bride» in form of a metaphor. But leaving the poetic metaphor aside, it is remarkable that the dead is actually dressed as for a wedding. Thus, for example, in the following lament reported by Klingman:

N-am văzut așa un mnire
 Măi Dumni ca și pă tine.
 Să zie popa acasă
 Să te cunune pe masă.
 Mnirele stă-n copârșeu
 Mnireasa-i la Dumnezău.
 Cu haine albe-mbrăcată
 N-om vide-o niciodată.
 N-am văzut așa o mnireasă
 Să zie popa acasă
 Să te cunune pe masă.
 Mnireasa-i-n copârșeu
 Mnirele-i la Dumnezău.
 Druștile ti-or ntreba
 Zine mnirele ori ba?
 Mnirele-i fecior de crai
 Te-a duce de mîna în rai.

I've never seen such a groom,
 Oh, Dumni, like you are –
 That the priest comes to the house
 To crown you on the table.
 The groom is in a coffin;
 The bride is God's,
 Dressed in white clothes –
 Never shall she be seen.
 I've never seen such a bride
 That the priest comes to the house
 And crowns you on the table.
 Bride in a coffin;
 groom is with God.
 The bridesmaid will ask you,
 "Is the groom coming or not?"
 The groom is the son of the King;
 He'll lead you by the hand to heaven²⁸.

The identification of the unmarried deceased with the bride or groom also recurs in the funeral lament of rural Greece. This following specimen shows very clearly how premature death is presented as a marriage:

²⁶ KLIGMAN 1988, p. 220-221.

²⁷ DANFORTH 1982, p. 79-80

²⁸ KLIGMAN 1988, p. 222.

Don't tell them that I have been killed.
 Don't tell them that I am dead.
 Just tell them that I have married and taken a good wife.
 I have taken the tombstone as my mother-in-law, the black earth as my wife,
 and I have the little pebbles as brothers- and sisters-in-law²⁹.

These examples show that the metaphorical association between the opposite elements of marriage and death is well attested in popular poetry and ritual lamentation. The nuptial metaphor mitigates the life-death contrast, assimilating the two rites in the common ground of a passage³⁰.

3. WEDDING OR FUNERAL SONGS?

As for the next element in question, something very similar to the songs of Psyche's procession is also reported in the south-eastern European ethnographic context. Danforth points out that in rural Greece the lamentations sung at a funeral, independently from the identity of the dead, could be the same songs performed at weddings, only with small textual or melodic modifications to adapt them to the funerary context. Basically, they are the same songs, only performed in different ways. Danforth's vivid account deserves a full quotation since it shows striking similarities with the description of the wedding pipes and hymns played in mournful tone for Psyche's funeral wedding:

One of the most striking features of Greek funeral laments is the close resemblance they bear to the songs that are sung at weddings throughout rural Greece. [...] These wedding songs are called *nifika traghoudhia* or *nifatika traghoudhia*, literally "bridal songs". The classification of songs as *miroloyia* or as *nifika traghoudhia* depends on the context in which they are performed [...]. So close is this resemblance that many songs can be sung at both death rites and weddings. Of such a song it is said: "You can sing it as a funeral lament, and you can also sing it as a wedding song" (*To les miroloyi, to les ke nifiko*). The lyrics and the basic melody of these songs are the same whether they are performed at death rites or at weddings, but the manner in which the melody is sung varies according to the occasion. When these songs are sung at weddings, the style is more forceful, vigorous, and joyful; the melody more elaborate, with trills and light melismatic phrases. At death rites, the style is more somber and restrained; the melody flatter and less elaborate. This relationship between funeral laments and wedding songs is but one aspect of a larger correspondence or analogy between death rites and marriage rites which is to be found in Greek culture³¹.

²⁹ DANFORTH 1982, p. 81

³⁰ Cf. DANFORTH 1982, p. 82: «Death is in many important aspects both like and unlike marriage. This paradoxical relationship of simultaneous opposition and identity, difference, and likeness, is the essence of metaphor. To assert through ritual and song that a funeral is a wedding is to establish a metaphoric relationship between the two rites of passage. [...] The power of metaphors lies in their ability to change the way we view our world». For the notion of «rite of passage», see VAN GENNEP 1909.

³¹ DANFORTH 1982, p.74

In the Aromanian context, Muşlea reports that the conflation of wedding and funeral songs was also possible, but only for the untimely death of young, unmarried people, much like in Psyche's ceremony:

Si celui qui vient de mourir est jeune, on lui chante beaucoup de myriologues sur des airs de chansons de noce et sur différents autres airs usités dans les réjouissances ; ou bien ce sont les chansons de noce un peu adaptées à la situation tragique³².

Like the macro-theme of the wedding of the dead, this specific custom has a wide geographical and cultural spread³³. However unusual the syncretic union of the wedding song with the funeral lament may seem, it finds its reason in the trait that unites these two rites of passage, namely the theme of departure from one place to another: from the home of the family to that of kindred in a wedding, or from the world of the living to that of the dead in a funeral. Both these dimensions are present in Psyche's episode.

4. THE SPEECH.

The last element to take into consideration is Psyche's speech, which, according to Schiesaro, «is characterised by the acceptance of her own destiny and the attempt to console those present (her parents and a large crowd) for the pain that is about to hit them»³⁴. The serene acceptance of death is an important element, but there is something more to it. Psyche's behaviour and her submission to fate are alien to human feelings and literary logic. Without any reasonable cause, she acts as if she were eager to meet her monstrous bridegroom³⁵. In this regard, it must be pointed out that the acceptance of death combined with protocol prescriptions is an extremely archaic folkloric theme, which in many cases hides ritual implications. In this view, Psyche's ceremony and speech may suggest the existence of an implied ritual protocol which had to be followed. Another example of acceptance of death combined with protocol prescriptions can be found in the more archaic versions of the Romanian song *Miorița*. Although there are obvious differences between Apuleius' narrative and the Romanian oral poetry, a common landscape emerges from the comparison of the texts: a character in the face of death imparts ritual

³² MUŞLEA 1972 [1925], p. 14.

³³ The same tradition is documented for example in Kyrgyzstan. See KÖCHÜMKULOVA 2016, p. 217: «In its poetic composition, melody and themes, a bridal *koshok* shares many similarities with the funerary lament (*Koshok* or *joktoo*)».

³⁴ SCHIESARO 1988, p. 146: «Il discorso di Psiche in procinto di essere sacrificata è caratterizzato dall'accettazione del proprio destino e dal tentativo di consolare i presenti (i genitori e una vasta folla) per il dolore che sta per colpirli». The translation is mine.

³⁵ The motif of the maiden who agrees to marry a monster is well known in folklore. Cf. Thompson's *MI*, L54.1. *Youngest daughter agrees to marry a monster; later the sisters are jealous*.

prescriptions, referring to his own funeral as a wedding. Without implying a direct link between these testimonies, it seems possible to include them in the same anthropological horizon.

4.1 THE ROMANIAN SONG OF *MIORIȚA*.

The song of *Miorița*, ever since the great poet Vasile Alecsandri made it famous³⁶, has always had a prominent position in Romanian culture and its critical reception has been marked by intense debates³⁷. Documented in more than a thousand variants, it appears both in the genre of the *colindă* and in that of the *cântec bătrânesc* (also called *baladă*, ballad). To simplify, the *colindă* is a more archaic ritual genre, performed in chorus during the nights around the winter solstice. The *balada* represents a more recent stratum and more susceptible to innovations because it is performed by a single voice.

The most ancient form of the song of *Miorița*, the *colindă* one, tells the mythical story of a shepherd on the verge of death who expresses his last wishes in the form of a testament. Quite surprisingly, he agrees to die and describes how he will be killed and buried. In some versions of *Miorița* the death of the shepherd is presented as a wedding: the young man asks not to say that he died, but that he got married (as in the Greek lament quoted above). The metaphoric marriage is a very particular one, because the traditional elements of the ceremony are replaced by those of Nature and of the Cosmos.

The following examples show two important aspects: in the *colindă* version, the connection between the song and early death rituals clearly emerges. In the ballad, the funeral wedding scene appears explicitly. The poetic and aesthetic elaboration of the ballad shows a greater complexity, nevertheless its ritual implications are still recognisable.

4.1.1 THE *MIORIȚA* CAROL.

The protagonist of *Miorița*, after learning that his fellow shepherds intended to kill him, does not attempt to avoid such fate, but he designates in his last will the place of his burial and the objects he wishes to have near him. This resignation in the face of death, often interpreted as an aesthetic and literary trait – or as an expression of the proverbial Romanian fatalism – takes on different connotations considering the most recent studies about its performing context.

In Transylvania, as Bernardele pointed out, the *Miorița*-carol could be ritually performed as a «*colind* for the dead», meaning that its function was connected to the occasion of untimely death, «more precisely the premature death of a young shepherd boy, which occurred in exceptional circumstances, outside his home village»³⁸. In its ritual context, the song illustrates

³⁶ Alecsandri's (1821-1890) literary version of *Miorița* is the most famous among the many variants of the song. It appeared in 1850 in the magazine «*Bucovina*», then was included in *Balade* of (1852) and finally in the collection *Poesii populare ale românilor*, 1866. See ELIADE 1972, p. 226, n. 1.

³⁷ See CEPRAGA 2004, p. 66-79; cf. ELIADE 1972, p. 226-256.

³⁸ BERNARDELE 2015, p. 144. The translation is mine.

the gestures to be performed in the event of an untimely death, occurring in exceptional circumstances, far from home and from the community. Basically, it describes the scheme of a primitive funeral rite, to be performed as a substitute for the usual one. Thanks to this interpretative filter, the shepherd's bizarre requests assume a more concrete and coherent meaning.

As no original or correct version exists for oral traditional songs, I selected a version of the *Miorița*-carol to suite my demonstrative purposes. The following text is part of Fochi's monumental collection, which counts more than 930 variants, and was collected by Pop-Retegianul at the end of XIX century in Transylvania (XCVIII, Trans. 78, *Pecurariul streinel*):

La vârful muntelui
 Dimineața lui Crăciun,
 sunt vreo trei păcurărași.
 Cei mai mari îs veri primari,
 cel mai mic îi strein tare,
 Tot îl mîna și-l adună
 ca s-abată oile.
 Pîna oile-abătè,
 lui grea lege îi facè:
 o pîn pușce să-l împușce
 ori în sabie să-l arunce.
 El din grai așa grăia;
 - "Dragilor frați și firtați,
 pe mine nu mă-mpușcați,
 fără capul mi-l luați
 și pă mine mă-ngropați
 în turiștea oilor,
 în jocuțul mieilor.
 Pă mine pămînt nu puneți,
 numai dragă gluga mea
 și drag fluierașul meu
 puneți-l la capul meu.
 Cînd vîntu a trăgăna
 fluierașul m-a cînta,
 cînd a sufla vîntu lin
 m-a cînta ca p-un strein,
 cînd a sufla vîntu-ncet
 m-a cînta ca p-un secret,

On the mountain top
 On Christmas morning³⁹,
 there are three shepherds.
 The older are cousins,
 the youngest is a stranger,
 they urge and they call him
 so that he gathers the sheep.
 Until he gathers them,
 they condemn him by the old law⁴⁰:
 to shoot him with the gun
 or to cut him off with the sword.
 So he spoke from the mouth:
 - "Dear brothers and fellows,
 don't shoot me,
 but cut my head
 and bury me
 in the sheepfold,
 where the lambs play.
 Don't put earth on me,
 only my dear hood⁴¹,
 and my dear wooden whistle
 put it near my head.
 When the wind will blow,
 the whistle will play for me;
 when the smooth wind will blow,
 it will mourn me as a stranger;
 when the soft wind will blow
 it will mourn me as a secret,

³⁹ The *colinde* are ritually performed in the period of the winter solstice, from Christmas days to the Epiphany, with auspicious function. The carol singers, *colindatori*, group of unmarried young men, visit the homes of the village throughout the night and choose from a large repertoire the most suitable songs for each household.

⁴⁰ According to Cepraga 2004, p. 70, «lege» ('law') has here the archaic meaning of «set of ancestral traditions, ritual».

⁴¹ *Glugă* is a woollen hood typical of the shepherd's clothing, which was attached to the collar of the robe and could be used as a saddlebag for food if necessary (Cf. BERNARDELE 2015, p. 151).

oile cele cornute mîndru m-or cînta pe munte, oile cele bălăi, mîndru m-or cînta pe văi, oile cele seine, mîndru m-or cînta pe mine.”	the horned sheep will mourn me sweetly on the mountain, the golden-haired sheep, will mourn me sweetly in the glen, the ash-coloured sheep, will mourn me sweetly.” ⁴²
--	--

What mostly emerges from this song is the typical, obsessive attention paid to behavioural norms and ceremonial acts. Improvised burials were often an inevitable choice for shepherds who died in places or situations which precluded interment or transport of the body, yet this event was highly traumatic for the community. Thus, the shepherd's dispositions in the song provide the listeners with instructions on the appropriate behaviour both to compensate the dead for the unperformed ritual and to protect the community of the living from the negative consequences of an improper burial. What may seem, at a superficial glance, an attitude of serene acceptance of death, reveals itself to be, instead, the sign of an ancient and forgotten ritual background, which still echoes in certain Romanian oral traditions⁴³.

Many other considerations could be added, but one more aspect is relevant to the comparison with the Apuleian episode, namely the location of the burial. Within the typological variety of *Miorița*, the shepherd usually asks to be buried in a high place; in a well-defined area of the sheepfold; or along the road, at the foot of three fir trees, or next to a well⁴⁴. Except for the sheepfold, which recalls the *post-mortem* continuity of the profession carried out in life, these are liminal places, traditionally considered as points of communication and access to the other world. This reflects the ambiguous condition of the premature dead, who, not having received their due funeral rites, were thought to remain suspended between the realms of the living and the dead. It is probably for this reason that the place of the burial, as the setting of the entire plot, are on the mountain, the horizon of pastoral life, but also meeting place between celestial and terrestrial dimensions. This symbolic perspective is consistent with the location of Psyche's funeral wedding, which, according to the oracle, also takes place on a mountain.

What is most important in the *colindă*, is that, behind the victim's words of acceptance of death, a specific ritual background is hidden, closely linked to the theme of early death. Thus, it is still possible to ask if, behind the words of Psyche accepting her fate, there may also be a forgotten ritual background too.

⁴² FOCHI 1964, p. 604. The translation is mine. See also CEPRAGA 2004, p. 78-79.

⁴³ CEPRAGA 2015, p. 169 «L'ossessione protocollare per il rispetto dei gesti, delle prescrizioni e delle interdizioni suggerisce la presenza di uno scenario rituale sottostante: sono le stesse dinamiche che ritroviamo, ad esempio, nella *Miorița-colindă*, quando il pastore impartisce le istruzioni sulle modalità della propria uccisione e del proprio funerale». The quotation refers to the epic song *Constantin Brâncoveanu*, which is discussed in the cited article.

⁴⁴ BERNARDELE 2015, p. 148-149.

4.1.2 THE *MIORIȚA* BALLAD.

In the genre of *cântec bătrânesc*, or ballad, the theme of the shepherd's early death is transformed through metaphor and presented as a marriage⁴⁵. The motif is not necessarily present in every variant, but its importance was stressed, after Mușlea, by Stahl and Brăiloiu⁴⁶. In Alecsandri's famous version of the song, the theme appears in all clarity. However, since that version is not exempt from intervention of the learned poet, I prefer to quote another text, taken, like the previous one, from Fochi's collection (DCXCIII, Ext. 17, *Strinu*).

- A mea miorica,
Cea bună sorică,
Pe mine m-o omoară,
Colea-n vale reci,
Ntr-ape reci,
Tu te-oi-nfurișă,
Din turma-oi ieșea
Chiar și mi-oi pleca,
Pe Dunăre-n jos;
La Craiova mică,
L-a-mea muichiliță,
Să-i spui muichii mele,
Că m-am însurat,
Și mireasă-am luat.

My little lamb,
Good little sister,
They will kill me,
There in the cold valley,
In the cold waters,
You must get away,
Get out of the herd
And go,
Down the Danube,
To little Craiova,
To my dear mum,
And tell my dear mum
That I got married,
And I took a bride⁴⁷.

Compared to the case of the *colindă*, the theme of early death is treated here in a more poetic and elaborate way. Early death is metaphorically presented as a marriage. This poetic device is consistent with the set of mythical-ritual ideas outlined so far. Beyond the poetic disguise, the premature death of the shepherd remains recognisable and maintains its centrality. Considering the Greek funeral lament quoted above and the ritual implications of the *colindă*, the metaphor of the funeral wedding in this ballad becomes nothing more than the textual reflection of a very archaic mythical-ritual system.

The poetic transformation can go even further. Since an untimely death is defined as a wedding, it must be a very special one. In some variants of *Miorița*, the typical elements of the wedding ceremony are replaced by elements of Nature and of the Cosmos. The quoted ballad continues:

Nuntă mi-au făcut.
Lăutari avut,
Păsări lăutari,

They did the wedding.
There were fiddlers,
Birds <as> fiddlers,

⁴⁵ See *supra*, DANFORTH 1982, p. 81.

⁴⁶ STAHL 1938; BRĂILOIU 1946.

⁴⁷ FOCHI 1964, p. 986-989, vv. 101-114. Translation is mine. The text, published in 1943, was collected in ex-Yugoslavia.

Prioți munț-ai mari,
Soarili și luna,
Mi-au ținut cununa.

The great mountains <as> priests,
The sun and the moon,
They held my crown⁴⁸.

The rhetorical complexity of this popular text risks obscuring its ritual background. Death presented as an engagement takes on a topical dimension in Romanian folklore, which would need separated research⁴⁹. In all cases, however, the metaphor of death as marriage is linked to a context of early death. It remains therefore possible to wonder if there is a ritual background associated with premature death, behind Psyche's «funeral wedding» too.

CONCLUSION.

Despite the chronological, geographical, and cultural gap, comparative analysis reveals significant points of contact between the Latin text and the folkloric documentation. Firstly, the ceremony described by Apuleius has remarkable similarities with existing rituals. Secondly, the way in which the theme of the funeral wedding is treated poetically in the tale of Cupid and Psyche is not at all distant from examples taken from Greek and Romanian oral poetry. Although this implies neither a direct historical relationship between the folkloric evidence and the Latin text, nor a direct knowledge of such a ritual on Apuleius' part, it seems possible to include the ceremony described in the *Metamorphoses* and the traditions known as funeral weddings within the same anthropological horizon. Moreover, since premature death is inevitably at the basis of such traditions, a possible connection with this peculiar ritual context does not seem to be excluded for the Apuleian episode as well.

Apuleius may have derived the link between wedding and funeral through the most diverse cultural models (fictional, ritual, hearsay or other), so the hypothesis that Psyche's funeral wedding may have had precise correspondences in rituals existing in antiquity needs further confirmation. However, the comparative reading suggests that the ancient evidence linked to the anthropological theme of premature death should be carefully investigated in relation to this passage. Such an analysis, which has to date been lacking, could provide new insights into the interpretation of the episode⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ FOCHI 1964, p. 988, vv. 120-125. I deliberately omit three verses in which the metaphor is exaggerated, saying that the wedding took place between the shepherd and the gun that killed him, since this image undoubtedly represents a recent innovation. Although genuine and explainable by the pulsating vitality of the Romanian folkloric repertoire, it could be misleading in the context of the present discussion.

⁴⁹ In this respect, the comparison could be extended to the *colinde* sung for the dead girl: ISPAS 1987, p. 155-157.

⁵⁰ As a closing remark, Psyche could be identified more as the living partner of a Romanian «funeral wedding» rather than the dead one. The heroine acts like the girl who volunteers or is chosen as a ritual bride for the young man who died prematurely. Cupid, by contrast, being a divinity does not belong to the human world (cf. STRAMAGLIA 1999, p. 224). His otherworldly and infernal traits are explicit in the words of the oracle. Psyche, not unlike the surrogate partner of the funeral wedding traditions, is a human being chosen for union with a creature who belongs to the underworld. Therefore, a parallel can be established between Psyche and the funeral-wedding surrogate partner, on

So far, the link between narrative and ritual, perfectly clear in the ethnographic context of south-eastern Europe, can only hypothetically be applied to the ancient world, where evidence is more fragmentary.

Nicola Perencin
 Università di Padova
 e-mail: nicola.perencin@phd.unipd.it

ABBREVIATIONS

GCA: M. Zimmermann, S. Panayotakis et al., *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius - Apuleius Madaurensis Metamorphoses - Books IV 28-35, V and VI 1-24: The Tale of Cupid and Psyche. Text, Introduction and Commentary*, Groningen, 2004.

MI: S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature. A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballades, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, 6 vol., Copenhagen, 1955-1958.

ThLL: *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, vol. VI Pars Prior F, Leipzig 1912-1926.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALEXIOU 2002: M. Alexiou, *The ritual lament in Greek tradition*, second edition, Lanham-Boulder-New York-Oxford 2002².

BARBIERI 1998: A. Barbieri, *Marco Polo e l'Altro*, «Studi Testuali» 5 (1998), pp. 7-24.

BERNARDELE 2015: G. Bernardele, *Immaginario e cornici culturali della «morte speciale». Ancora sulla Miorița-colind*, «Transylvanian Review» 24 suppl. n. 2 (2015), pp. 143-160.

BETTINI-SHORT 2018: M. Bettini, W.M. Short (eds.), *The World through Roman Eyes: Anthropological Approaches to Ancient Culture* (or. ed. *Con i Romani. Un'antropologia della cultura antica*, Bologna 2014), Eng. trans., Cambridge 2018.

BRACCINI 2018: T. Braccini, *Lupus in fabula. Fiabe, leggende e barzellette in Grecia e a Roma*, Roma 2018.

BRĂILOIU 1946: C. Brăiloiu, *Sur une ballade roumaine. La Mioriza*, Genève 1946.

one hand, and Cupid and the dead partner on the other. Psyche's marriage to Cupid requires a symbolic death which is consistent with the mythical and ritual context.

- CEPRAGA 2004: D.O. Cepraga, L. Renzi, R. Sperandio (ed.), *Le nozze del Sole. Canti vecchi e colinde romene*, Roma 2004.
- CEPRAGA 2015: D.O. Cepraga, *Il martirio del principe e la fine del mondo. Constantin Brâncoveanu nei canti narrativi tradizionali romeni*, «Transylvanian Review» 24 suppl. n. 2 (2015), pp. 161-171.
- DANFORTH 1982: L.M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*, photography by Alexander Tsiras, Princeton 1982.
- DE MARTINO 1958: E. De Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico. Dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria*, Torino 1958.
- DOTY 2000: W.G. Doty, *Mythography. The Study of Myths and Rituals*, Tuscaloosa-London 2000.
- DOWDEN 1982: K. Dowden, *Psyche on the Rock*, «Latomus» t. 41, fasc. 2 (1982), pp. 336-352.
- ELIADE 1972: M. Eliade, *Zalmoxis the Vanishing God. Comparative Studies in Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe* (or. ed. *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan: études comparatives sur les religions et le folklore de la Dacie et de l'Europe Orientale*, Paris 1970), Eng. trans., Chicago-London 1972.
- FEHLING 1977: D. Fehling, *Amor und Psyche. Die Schöpfung des Apuleius und ihre Einwirkung auf das Märchen. Eine kritik der romantischen Märchentheorie*, Mainz-Wiesbaden 1977.
- FOCHI 1964: A. Fochi, *Miorița. Tipologie, circulație, geneză, texte*, București 1964.
- GIANOTTI 2003: G.F. Gianotti, *Andromeda e Psiche. Storie nuziali e assunzioni in cielo*, in M. Guglielmo, E. Bona (ed.), *Forme di comunicazione nel mondo antico e metamorfosi del mito. Dal teatro al romanzo. Atti del Colloquio internazionale del P.A.R.S.A. (18-19 ottobre 2001)*, Torino 2003, pp. 243-257.
- GINZBURG 1991: C. Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, (or. ed. *Storia Notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba*, Torino 1989), Eng. trans., New York 1991.
- HANSEN 2002: W. Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread. A Guide to International Tales found in Classical Literature*, Ithaca-London 2002.
- ISPAS 1987: S. Ispas, *Flori dalbe de măr*, București 1987.
- KENNEY 1990: *Apuleius. Cupid & Psyche*, ed. E.J. Kenney, Cambridge 1990.
- KLIGMAN 1988: G. Kligman, *The Wedding of The Dead. Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania*, Los Angeles-London 1988.
- KÖCHÜMKULOVA 2016: E. Köchümkulova, *Kyrgyz Wedding Songs*, in T. Levin, S. Daukeyeva & E. Köchümkulova (ed.), *The music of Central Asia*, Bloomington-Indianapolis 2016, pp. 217-233.

- MARIAN 1892: S.F. Marian, *Înmormântarea la Români, studiu etnografic*, București 1892.
- MUȘLEA 1972 [1925]: I. Mușlea, *La mort-mariage. Une particularité du folklore balcanique*, (or. ed. in *Mélanges de l'école roumaine en France*, Paris 1925) in *Cercetări etnografice și de folclor*, vol. II, Bucarest, 1972, pp. 7-28.
- PAPAIOANNOU 1998: S. Papaioannou, *Charite's Rape, Psyche on the Rock and the Parallel Function of Marriage in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, «Mnemosyne» vol. 51 fasc. 3 (1998), pp. 302-324.
- PEEK 1988: W. Peek, *Greek Verse Inscriptions. Epigrams on Funerary Stelae and Monuments*, Chicago 1988.
- PERENCIN 2020: N. Perencin, *Le nozze funebri di Psiche: Apuleio, Met. IV 33-34 alla luce del folklore romeno*, «Lingua – Language and Culture», XIX, n. 1 n.s. (2020), pp. 89-111.
- PLANTADE 2016: E. Plantade, *Le récit de Psyché et Cupidon comme témoignage sur la littérature orale amazighe*, in *Regards croisés sur Apulée. Actes du colloque international (Souk-Ahras, du 30 mai au 01 juin 2015)*, Alger 2016, pp. 75-98.
- REHM 1994: R. Rehm, *Marriage to Death. The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy*, Princeton 1994.
- SCHIESARO 1988: A. Schiesaro *La "tragedia" di Psiche. Note ad Apuleio, Met. IV 28-35*, «Maia» 40 (1988), pp. 141-150.
- SCHLAM 1976: C.C. Schlam, *Cupid and Psyche: Apuleius and the Monuments*, University Park (Pennsylvania) 1976.
- SCHLAM 1992: C.C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius. On Making an Ass of Oneself*, London 1992.
- SEAFORD 1987: R. Seaford, *The Tragic Wedding*, «The Journal of Hellenic Studies» 107 (1987), pp. 106-130.
- STAHL 1938: H.H. Stahl, *Filosofarea despre filosofia poporului român*, «Sociologie românească» 3 (1938), pp. 104-119.
- STRAMAGLIA 1999: A. Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae: storie di fantasmi nel mondo greco-latino*, Bari 1999.
- STRAMAGLIA 2010: A. Stramaglia, *Le Metamorfosi di Apuleio tra iconografia e papiri*, in G. Bastianini e A. Casanova (eds), *I papiri del romanzo antico. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (11-12 giugno 2009)*, Istituto Papirologico «G. Vitelli», Firenze 2010, pp.165-192.
- SZEPESY 1972: T. Szepessy, *The Story of the Girl Who Died in the Day of Her Wedding*, «Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae», 20 (1972), pp. 341-357.
- VAN GENNEP 1909: A. Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*, Paris 1909.

VERGOT 2006-2007: S. Vergot, *Commento linguistico ad iscrizioni funerarie greche*, dissertation, Università degli Studi di Padova [unpublished].

WITTGENSTEIN 2018: L. Wittgenstein, *The Mythology in Our Language. Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, translated by Stephan Palmié (or. ed. L. Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über Frazers "The Golden Bough"*, «Synthese» 17 (1967), pp. 233-253), Eng. trans., Chicago 2018.