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The Topos of the "Immured Woman" or the Myth of the Construction Sacrifice? The Rehabilitation of the Corporeal Subject in Mihaela Moscaliuc's Poetic Reinterpretation of the Romanian Folk Ballad *The Argeș Monastery*

"I was born far, far away /on a particular land / where women /
are named Ana / where each one is walled-up alive /
in a bridge / a monastery / or a fortress"
(Ștefănescu, 2019, p. 209)[1]
"You call this offering
of flesh—*my* flesh—*your* sacrifice"
(Moscaliuc, 2014, p. 26)

From the "volatility" of Ana's body…

Recalling the archaic practice of human sacrifice, the topos of the immured woman has inhabited folk imagination in Transylvania, Oltenia, Muntenia, and Moldova[2] throughout the centuries. It entered the circulation of culture and literature in the 19th century, a turning point in the history of Romania, when

[1] All quotations from Romanian are translated into English by the author, unless stated otherwise.

[2] To learn more about the corpus of Romanian variants of The Argeș Monastery ballad and its geographical distribution, see Taloș (1973, 1997). This topos exists in numerous variations in all literary traditions of the Balkan region.

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the newly established state faced the task of national self-determination and cultural identification. Moreover, the 19th century represented a constitutive reversal of any reference from the East (Byzantine, Ottoman, Balkan) towards the West, and this change of paradigm led to the (sometimes compulsive) "overestimation of Western references" (Mihăilescu, 2014, p. 57). During this time, given the lack of several hundred years of Romanian language literature that could have guaranteed the linguistic and spiritual identity of the emerging nation, the aestheticization and adaptation of oral folklore became an effective recipe for filling this gap in the national literary canon. In 1852, Vasile Alecsandri published a pioneering and truly significant collection of folklore in the volume *Balade adunate si îndreptate* [Collected and Edited Ballads],[3] which included a text containing the topos of the immured woman in ballad form[4] under the title *Mănăstirea Argeșului* [The Argeș Monastery].[5] Hence, a certain archaic topos common to many cultures (including non-Western ones[6]) was literally aestheticized, separated from its oral folklore origins, and politically

[3] The volume *Ballades et chants populaires de la Roumanie (Principautés Danubiennes)* was published only 3 years later, in 1855, in Paris. This was a French translation by Alecsandri which thus provided material for Western folklorists to study.

[4] In my paper, I will use the terms *legend*, *ballad* and *myth* interchangeably. *Legend* indicates the semi-historical dimension of the text, which gives an account of the creation of a real historical object; *ballad* refers to the literary form in which the folktale appeared in the Romanian literary canon; *myth* refers to the classification established by G. Călinescu (national myth) and M. Eliade (cosmogonic myth).

[5] This is the story of the construction of a Romanian Orthodox monastery in Curtea de Argeș, at the request of the legendary founder of Wallachia, Negru Vodă – The Black Voivode. According to the legend, the work carried out by Manole and the other nine masons each day was mysteriously destroyed overnight. Manole had a dream in which he was advised that if he really wished to complete the construction, he should wall up within it the first wife or sister who appears on the horizon the next day bringing food to her husband or brother. The first woman to approach the construction site was Manole's pregnant wife, Ana. Manole pleaded with God to prevent her from reaching the construction site, but no obstacle could deter her from her path. Thus, Manole walls her in, under the pretense of playing a game. However, this sacrificial act does not constitute the end of the ballad: the denouement focuses on Manole's existential despair and, moreover, his death. Following completion of the temple, the ruler, Negru Vodă, enquired whether Manole and the other masons could have built a more splendid building than this. When they responded in the affirmative, Negru Vodă became furious and forced them all onto the roof, from which there was no escape. In an attempt to reach the ground safely, Manole leapt from the building with wooden wings, in an imitation of the flight of Icarus, but sadly failed. At the very location of his demise, a tiny spring appeared.

[6] To learn more about realisations of the myth of sacrifice in different cultures, see, e.g., Dundes (1996), Ivancu and Klimkowski (2016).

instrumentalized (see Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2024). However, the purpose of my paper is not a comparative analysis of divergent variants of the myth of sacrifice that exists in different cultural spaces, but an attempt to answer the question of why the most famous (re)interpretations of the ballad *The Argeș Monastery*[7] from Romania reject the corporeality of the immured woman, focusing on the idea of Manole's sacrifice in the act of artistic creation.

Therefore, the main source of inspiration for my literary analysis in this article will be Elizabeth Grosz's philosophy of corporeal feminism. The author opens her book "Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism" with the consideration that "the body has remained a conceptual blind spot in both mainstream Western philosophical thought and contemporary theory" (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). The main commonly shared view of the human subject stems from the traditional Platonic-Cartesian paradigm, which, according to Grosz, goes as follows:

> Feminists and philosophers seem to share a common view of the human subject as a being made up of two dichotomously opposed characteristics: mind and body, thought and extension, reason and passion, psychology and biology. This bifurcation of being is not simply a neutral division of an otherwise all-encompassing descriptive field. Dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term, while the other is its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart. (Grosz, 1994, p. 3)

In the context of this tradition, the woman was (and still is) positioned "on the side of the body", while the mind and its faculties were seen to be mainly the specialty of men (Hyży, 2003, p. 17). As I claim, the influence of this dichotomy, based on the idea of the fundamental dualism of mind and body which dominated Western thought for centuries, will also influence the reception of the legend of the immured woman in Romania, where intellectuals, educated from the 19th century at universities in France or Germany, were under the impact of Western philosophy and culture, aiming to synchronize with (mostly French) cultural, social, and political models (see, e.g., Cornea, 1972; Jurczak, 2011; Marino, 2001).

Hence, the central themes in the interpretations of *The Argeș Monastery* ballad were the intellectual superiority of man (Manole), who has the power to create an everlasting masterwork (The Argeș Monastery), and his anguish

[7] The canonical reference point for most interpretations of the myth in Romanian culture and education has become the variant presented by Alecsandri.

over the moral dilemma of the necessity of immuring his wife (Ana/Caplea[8]). The accentuation of the male figure of the creator, coupled with its association with a building symbolic of Romanian history – the metropolitan church of Curtea de Argeș, the necropolis of Romanian kings – allowed this ballad to become a national myth, the myth of the construction sacrifice, further perpetuated in the writings of George Călinescu (1941) and Mircea Eliade (1943/2004, 1955/1972, 1972/1996). In his *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [History of Romanian Literature from its origins to the present], Călinescu recognizes the Legend of Master Manole as one of the fundamental myths of "Romanian spirituality". He defines this myth as follows: "Our concept of creativity is the fruit of suffering" (Călinescu, 1941, pp. 64–65, 2001, p. 42), thus interpreting the ballad of *The Argeș Monastery* as "Romania's constitutive aesthetic myth that emphasized the importance of individual sacrifice in acts of artistic creation" (Neubauer & Cornis-Pope, 2007, p. 273). For decades, Călinescu's classification determined how this ballad was conceived because the entire Romanian communist and early post-communist literary canon was reconstituted based on the hierarchies established in his works of literary historiography (see Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2024).

The body of the sacrificed woman is absent from the canonical interpretations, even though it "literally validates the social contract" (Aleksić, 2013, p. 4). After all, the Argeș Monastery was built at the request of the ruler of Wallachia, Negru Vodă, who threatened the masons with death if they failed to complete the task:

> […]
> Their efforts are in vain,
> Because the work of the day
> in the night collapses.
>
> The prince, exasperated,
> Reproaches them;
> Then in his anger
> Again threatens
> To wall them all up
> In the foundations (Brewster, 1996, p. 43)[9]

[8] The two most popular names of the "immured woman" that appear in different Romanian variants of the ballad. In my article, I will use the name Ana, which is present in the canonical version published by Vasile Alecsandri.

[9] Here I quote the ballad in the English translation presented in the article of P. G. Brewster.

According to the legend's plot, this "foundation sacrifice" was therefore necessary both to ensure the successful construction of the temple and to save the lives of the masons – the act was therefore performed to preserve the old social order.

The suffering of Ana's body is kept silent; however, its manifestations are present in the text of the ballad ("My breast hurts and weeps / Tears of milk"; Brewster, 1996, p. 44). Her entire body revolts against the crime to the extent that it is not even possible to control its vital bodily fluids. The means of disciplining these outpourings turned out to be a state of silence/disavowal. Ana, by sacrificing her body, is deprived of her corporeal form and passes over to the side of the "mind", to the realm of "the sublime" – thus becoming a disembodied emanation of the ideal woman, "a saint" of sorts. Moreover, there is a singular focus on her moral qualities: chastity, devotion, faithfulness, courage, and consistency. This vision is supported by Christian philosophy: "Within the Christian tradition, the separation of mind and body was correlated with the distinction between what is immortal and what is mortal" (Grosz, 1994, p. 5). Thus, Ana becomes immortalized as a protective spirit of the monastery.[10] Her soul animated the construction, and the "architectonic body" substituted the body of flesh (cf. Eliade, 1955/1972, p. 183). Furthermore, in this case, the narrative about the sacrifice of the human body is spiritualized: "the soul of the sacrificed woman and unborn child would be transferred into the body of the construction (…) [continuing] to live on a different level in perfect accord with what Mircea Eliade calls 'the ethics of reintegration'"(Ivancu & Klimkowski, 2016, p. 59).

Thereby, on the symbolic level, Ana becomes iconized; she is encapsulated in the concrete cultural form of a devoted and self-sacrificing woman.

[10] An intriguing comparative backdrop to this tale is the story of Saint Philoftea, whose relics are associated with the Argeș monastery. Here, it is the metaphysics of the permanent presence of a woman which is salient; Saint Philoftea, the patron saint of the city Curtea de Argeș, persists in the form of a relic that has causal properties and performs miracles (protecting one from disease, poverty, and the evil done by others). The real presence of Saint Philoftea's relics seems to stand in opposition to the unreal presence of Ana's remains within the walls of Argeș Monastery. Both, however, are linked to the history of the place, both shared in it for several centuries, both are heroines of semi-legendary events, and both were put to death by men close to them (Philoftea was killed by her father). Both were also endowed by the cultural imagination with extraordinary post-earthly powers (Ana saved the walls of the monastery from collapse with her sacrifice, and Philoftea began to perform miracles after her death); thus, they both fit in with Eliade's theory, which deems a violent death a creative one (cf. Eliade, 1955/1972, p. 183).

On the other hand, on the material and physical level – she is annihilated, while at the same time, her body becomes, ultimately, the guarantor of the continuity and durability of the construction. Such an interpretation, influenced by the reductionism of a traditional dualistic philosophy that regards the body as an object, endows an irreducibly external status to the subject and its spiritual depths (Świerkosz, 2008, p. 77). This dualistic notion tends to dominate all literary reinterpretations of the ballad, typically written more frequently by male writers who have adopted Manole's perspective when exploring the myth of the construction sacrifice.[11] Notwithstanding the fact that some female poets have also referred to the ballad (e.g., Ana Blandiana, Nina Cassian, Ileana Mălăncioiu, Crisula Ștefănescu[12]), their tendency has been to focus on Ana's spiritual suffering. Using the metaphor of confinement and of "boundaries", these poets describe their unhappy and difficult experiences of love and the degree of incomprehension on the part of the man. Disappointingly, Ana's body and her corporeality are practically absent from their poetry.

… to its corporeality.

That is why I find Mihaela Moscaliuc's poem *Ana to Manole* so unique: here the body and corporeality play a central role. The poem was first published in 2014 in "The American Poetry Review" (then reprinted in Moscaliuc's poetry volume *Immigrant Model* in 2015), thus – of possible relevance here – after the emergence of new theories on the subject in feminist philosophy, which recognized that the body should be redefined in a non-dualistic way[13] (Świerkosz, 2008, p. 78). It is also worth mentioning that the change in perspective that Moscaliuc proposes occurs in the English language, which remains her principal tool of poetic expression. Thus, transformation occurs not only at the symbolic level of interpretation, but also at the material level of literary expression.

[11] The most important of these is Lucian's Blaga drama *Meșterul Manole* (1927), representing the classic reference in literary studies concerning the legend in the interwar period, but also dramas by Nicolae Iorga, Octavian Goga, Adrian Maniu, Victor Eftimiu; in communist poetry (e.g. Nicolae Labiș, Marin Sorescu, Nichita Stănescu), novels (e.g. George Călinescu), and theatre (e.g. Horia Lovinescu); and in contemporary prose (e.g. Emil Rațiu, Florin Horvath).

[12] See the anthology *Lacrima Anei* by Gheorghe Păun (2019).

[13] See works by, among others, Judith Butler, Christine Battersby, Susan Bordo, Rossi Braidotti and Donna Haraway.

Moreover, *Ana to Manole* was written in a very interesting and interpretively inspiring context, as the poet's response to Andrei Codrescu's poem of 2011, *Master Manole to Ana*. What Moscaliuc and Codrescu have in common is that they are both Romanian-born writers and poets who live in the United States of America and write in English. This is testament to the fact that the ballad of Master Manole still resonates in the Romanian collective cultural consciousness – emigrant literature is a good litmus test in such cases because it often uses themes that are seen as important to the national culture, deconstructing them with the power of an outsider's fresh perspective. They both use the term "a retelling" of a Romanian folk ballad in the subtitle of their poems, which they address to each other, making the reading of these texts a more intimate and personal experience.[14]

Thus, the two poems take the form of a dialogue, which seems to be an emotionally truer and psychologically more credible mirroring of Ana's and Manole's conversation from the ballad, enclosed within a certain convention: Manole deceives Ana by pretending that the walling-up is just a game and, despite his inner division, disregards her cries of protest and distress:

> While Manole
> Grief in his soul,
> Takes her in his arms,
> Climbs upon the wall,
> Puts her down there – alas!
> And speaks to her thus:
> "Stay there, my proud love,
> Remain there without fear,
> Because we want to play a joke,
> To pretend to wall you up".
>
> […]
>
> "Dear Manole, Manole
> Enough of this game,
> Because it is fatal.
> Dear Manole, Manole,
> O, Master Manole!
> The wall squeezes me
> And breaks my body."
>
> […]

[14] I am not aware of any personal history linking Codrescu and Moscaliuc with regards to the story of the creation of these poems.

The wall presses upon me
And kills my child,
My breasts hurt and weep
Tears of milk. (Brewster, 1996, p. 44)

In Codrescu's poem, the contemporary Manole verbalizes a question that does not crop up in the original text, thereby undermining the intricately woven interpretive web that sees Ana as a woman humbly accepting her fate. The simple question "Why?" reveals the absurdity of the act of immurement:

Anna immured cries Why?
Anna immured makes no room for answers I don't have
Anna immured I have no answer to your Why
and neither does the church-bell calling the deluded and the meek
to vespers so that they'll trust the church itself to be the answer

I am a mason and a liar and I will always be one
I am the wall that will not stand unless I build my love within
(Codrescu, 2011, p. 33)

The tone of Codrescu's poem is predictable – its principal theme remains the problem of masculine guilt, which seems to replicate the commonly present model in the Romanian literary tradition initiated by Blaga in his drama from 1927. Admittedly, Manole is full of anger and regret over the act he has committed, but then again it is *his* moral dilemma which remains central. Moscaliuc's poetic response exposes the emptiness of this apologetic gesture since Manole's confession does nothing to alter the real consequences of his act. She is fed up with participating in this dialogue in terms imposed by men and their interpretations for the sake of moral values and "higher" ideals. It is her body, after all, that represents the main experiencing subject here – it is the memory of her body that recalls violence ("[I] hauled you back/from the pub, mended your face, lied to village folk/about my torn shoulder, the raw eyes"), rape ("Hoodwinked like the fly so taken with the gift of random crumb/ she keeps unspooling the cocoon of saliva while the gifter/takes her again and again from behind"), and every touch of the beloved/executioner. It also contradicts the chronology of space-time: her body simultaneously constitutes the distant past (being sacrificed), the present (still ensuring the indestructibility of the monastery's walls), and the future (the will of supportive women throughout the generations). At times, the lyrical 'I' also assumes the voice of a contemporary woman experiencing violent abuse from her partner. Thanks to this literary strategy, a flesh-and-blood woman emerges from behind Ana's

legendary (and therefore somewhat unreal) persona, making her experience tangible and timeless.

Her body is fragmented ("my flesh", "my breath", "my fingers", "my thighs", "my torn shoulder"), and scattered in time, thereby contradicting the linearity of human experience by recalling memories in a spiral motion.

I quote the entire poem below to make my analysis clearer and more understandable to the reader:

> Ana to Manole
> A retelling of a Romanian folk ballad, for Andrei Codrescu, in response to his "Master Manole to Anna."
>
> Manole Manole, you've made me a nest
> festively, without haste, stacked river slabs
> boyishly, in jest, called it a game
> as you chanted my plain name.
> Your corset mars my flesh,
> your corset cuts my breath,
> you are so loud loving me
> with your art, reliving the night
> with hot lips you wedded me,
> mouthful by mouthful, finger to toe.
> There, in your father's barn,
> you promised no dream,
> no masonry would keep us apart.
> Swaddled in oilsack, rolled in milk & dung,
> we burned like cornsilk all night,
> the incense of our flesh mocking
> the church's tongue. I stayed quiet with you,
> so quiet all but my blood disappeared.
> So how could you say, as your palms
> make love to stone the way they'd made love
> to my thighs, *This, my Ana, is quite the same—*
> *stone my flesh, mortar the binding vow.*
> *Let me take you at once, all of you,*
> *wife and swell of a son, take you*
> *where we can love without fear, without harm.*
> You listened to the song, whose song I do not know,
> then roped me to the scaffold, erect as a splint,
> taut as the consonant that breaks my name in half.
> How you made me into easy rhyme.
> You say *sanctified*, I say spooned lies as last rites.
> You say it was love that divined, love that dreamed up

the voice & its command, eagerness to love & dread of work
threatening to stump the love. You call this offering
of flesh—*my* flesh—*your* sacrifice.
You raised the wall till it cinctured me whole,
silt shored against carcass, and for the glory of what?
A toe ring in the gods' trinket box, this masterpiece
you then bragged you could outshine.
I say it was the jaded gods having fun.
To think you could win their grace
with gilded turrets, dream yourself
a welder of shadows.
You fashioned the voice out of fear
you'll stay a mason, master bricklayer
instead of Creator, so here we are:
you, water fountain fed pennies by tourists
too sated to invent their own myths,
I, cacophonous wailing.

*

And what good now to say I had known all along.
I'd caught the voice, its command, in the net of dusk,
and when, priming myself for the journey,
I rubbed chamomile and crushed mint on my thighs,
your fingers were ghosting mine.
What good now to say that I saw the end of day
before my palms sieved the flour,
before the udder slipped my fingers,
before braving teethed brambles, storms and floods.
I knew what would come of me and I came knowingly.
A basketful of breads, a temple all yours, two hearts
to a cradle of bricks.

*

I fed you berries cold with dew, hauled you back
from the pub, mended your face, lied to village folk
about my torn shoulder, the raw eyes. Each time,
I forgave you, blamed your wretched art, your self-doubt.
Each time, you entered me in search of forgiveness
and, crumbled inside, you'd call me Ana-my-altar.
For weeks I'd believe myself one.
Hoodwinked like the fly so taken with the gift of random crumb
she keeps unspooling the cocoon of saliva while the gifter
takes her again and again from behind.

*

Dear Manole,
The compost of your wings feeds
my dreams, but do not be fooled:
this darkening in my womb
—his soul—will not
protect this bloody wall.
Still, I am your good wife.
As I rock your stone child,
the monastery sways.
On hot summer nights, lovers
knife their names on my breasts,
monks press their lonely bodies
against mine. I cool them off,
one by one. Cuffed to my song,
how easily they too abandon all secrets,
how easily they forgo holiness
for a grain of flesh.

*

I entered eternity with a mouthful of grime,
a fool myself, born of mothers who pickled
grief in barrels then sealed the cellar doors.
When the tower of dowry pillows kissed the ceiling,
they kicked me out, rope in my hand,
village quince tree ready to wed me.
I entered eternity as dark maid, through an eye socket
smooth as a looking glass. Nobody
welcomed me below except my barren sister,
Ereshkigal, whose seedless womb twists, throbs.
She laughed at my idiocy and hurled me back
to rest upon the joke you made of me.
It's her cackle you hear at night.

*

Take me in, mute sisters, mute sunbright.
I'll sweep the closets, break the glass slipper,
tie our umbilical cords into a magic broom.
Whisk my blood, swallow me, I am yours. (Moscaliuc, 2014, pp. 26–27)

Hence, Moscaliuc seems to realize a similar project to that presented by Grosz in her essays, in which the proper representation of the female subject also presupposes an obligatory rehabilitation of female corporeality. The poet made

the decision to restore Ana's subjectivity by referring to her corporeality and by introducing a perspective into her text that is practically absent in Romanian reinterpretations of the legend. After all, Ana's body possesses symbolic and political dimensions while remaining annihilated – "immured" – therefore it is impossible to talk about her experience without considering her body. In Moscaliuc's text, the female protagonist of the ballad, who herself had not been a full-fledged subject in the cultural discourse for decades, becomes a symbol of exclusion, representative of the many victims of violence. Indeed, by embodying an archaic topos she can be a figure that transcends the boundaries of race, social origin, and her individual experience to encapsulate the life experience of any person belonging to any vulnerable group exposed to discrimination. The lyrical self resists being objectified and clearly articulates the physical suffering *she* must have experienced but which was considered the sacrifice of the creator – Manole. She addresses him directly: "Your corset mars my flesh", "your corset cuts my breath", "[you] roped me to the scaffold, erect as a splint", "you made me into easy rhyme", "You call this offering/of flesh—*my* flesh—*your* sacrifice", "You raised the wall till it cinctured me whole".

In all source variants of the ballad, Ana, on her way to the construction site, resists the forces of nature visited upon her by God, who is implored to intercede by Manole through his prayers. This act of defying nature was thus symbolically understood as an act of courage, a victory over her own weakness and proof of Ana's affection and devotion. Her moral qualities, such as perseverance and her love for her husband, allow her to defy nature (identified in the tradition of Western philosophy with femininity) and to stand on the side of culture and social order, represented by Manole and his masterpiece, the monastery. At the same time, in a variant of the legend written down by G. Dem. Teodorescu, one that is slightly longer and more elaborate than Alecsandri's version, Caplea [Ana] asks that her new-born child be given to nature after her immurement. By sacrificing herself in the name of creation, she wishes that her child be returned to the forces with which she is organically connected, emphasizing the separation between the biological and the spiritual in this version. Regaining control as a mother in that single moment, she refuses to hand the child over to society, instead giving it to nature.

The dichotomous positioning of Ana inscribes this story with interpretations which define the body in "nonhistorical, naturalistic, organicist, passive, inert terms, seeing it as an intrusion on or interference with the operation of the mind, a brute givenness which requires overcoming, a connection

with animality and nature that needs transcendence" (Grosz, 1994, pp. 3–4). Hence, "man and mind, woman and body, become representationally aligned" (Grosz, 1994, p. 4). According to such an interpretation, the production of male culture (represented here by the construction of the monastery under the power of the Wallachian ruler) can happen only through the destruction of female nature. However, in Moscaliuc's poem, Ana is aware of the end of the story ("What good now to say that I saw the end of day […] / I knew what would come of me and I came knowingly") and of the fact that she will be sacrificed; her body is therefore not presented as passive and subject to manipulation but as aware of the fact that it has been "filled by social forces […] and socially constituted" (Hyży, 2003, p. 91). Here, these two orders – natural and cultural – remain inseparable.

Moscaliuc is cognisant of the inseparability of the material presence of the body and its cultural imagery, which forms the basic premise of Grosz's considerations:

> By "body" I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the physical and social inscription of the body's surface. […] The body becomes a human body, a body that coincides with the "shape" and space of a psyche, a body that defines the limits of experience and subjectivity only through the intervention of the (m)other, and, ultimately, the Other (the language-and rule-governed social order). (Grosz, 1995, p. 104)

The Other, towards whom Ana constitutes herself, is represented by Manole, who is the incarnation of the rules governing the social order (in the construction of the monastery ordered by the voivod Negru-Vodă). Hence, Ana's flesh was made into a particular type of body that, being subject to cultural and institutional inscriptions, symbolically supports the entire structure of the monastery, right up to the present day. Ana's body was sacrificed, and her flesh immured, and so the walls became an extension of her body and a literally "inscriptive surface" (cf. Grosz, 1994, pp. 138–159). By being exposed to inscriptions, the walls are capable of feeling all the (sexual) intensities, pleasures and pains of the body. They are also able to seduce, to attract, to interact with other living bodies:

> On hot summer nights, lovers
> knife their names on my breasts,
> monks press their lonely bodies
> they against mine. I cool them off,

one by one. Cuffed to my song,
how easily they too abandon all secrets,
how easily they forgo holiness
for a grain of flesh.

Thus, through the body/walls, she expresses her being-in-the-world.[15] This shows, on the one hand, the subject's corporeal connection to the world; on the other hand, it simultaneously depicts a form of enslavement of this body through its annihilation in being turned into a temple and thereby cut off from its natural functions. Moscaliuc's Ana does not give up her corporeality but transfers it to the walls, identifies with the "body" of the monastery, and communicates through it with the world. At the same time, she is aware that as a guarantor of its continuity and the coherence of history, her body is subject to the constant machinations of interpretation and so has become institutionalized. Replicating the model of transgression, Ana, as a temple, is both the observer and the observed. Although she only has her voice left to communicate with the world ("I, cacophonous wailing", "[they are] cuffed to my song"), it ultimately remains part of her body image.

The body, according to Grosz, represents an ambivalent terrain – simultaneously a cause of oppression and a promise of emancipatory transformation. The poem's finale can be interpreted as such an emancipatory promise: the woman does not transform herself into the immortal guardian spirit of the building created by men (ro. *stihie*) but makes herself nourishment for other women, connecting with them via the umbilical cord. Such a symbolic connection is understood in all cultures and points to that initial, even magical, relationship each person experiences – the biological connection to the mother.

This alternative ending is addressed solely to women, countering the dominant male-centric dimension of the text, in which Manole's masculine experience is meant to be emblematic of the mentality of a whole nation. In Moscaliuc's poem, Ana's sacrifice is meant to empower women and the sisterhood.

[15] Probably in the 19th century, during the reconstruction of the Argeș Monastery carried out by the French architect André Lecomte du Noüy, a seal was imprinted on one of the walls to indicate where Ana was allegedly walled-up. This marker is still there today, providing quite a tourist attraction but arousing an unhealthy level of excitement ("Is it true that there is a woman's skeleton in the wall?") [Information collected from the monastery guides during my field studies in Curtea de Argeș in July 2022].

In any case, in its present incarnation, the site does not provide a pretext for in-depth reflection on the ethical/cultural/social dimensions of the ritual of the "foundation sacrifice".

The final request to "swallow her" suggests not the end of a cycle but its continuation, symbolizing the circle of life. Thus, Ana does not dispose of her corporeality; on the contrary, she appreciates it and gives it significance. Although it is an object of both pleasure and suffering, the body is privileged here and can be interpreted in opposition to Manole's abstract ideals and ideas, which are characterized by the lyrical 'I' as a "wretched art" leading to a real tragedy. She views his project to be a failure driven by Manole's hubris and excessive ambition that now remains a dubious attraction for bored tourists, devoid of imagination:

> […]
> you'll stay a mason, master bricklayer
> instead of Creator, so here we are:
> you, water fountain fed pennies by tourists
> too sated to invent their own myths,
> I, cacophonous wailing.

Moscaliuc's Ana abandons Christian symbolism (resulting from the nature of the building in which she was immured) and takes the Sumerian goddess Ereshkigal as her patroness, which can also be understood as a reference to the multicultural anchoring of the myth. The name of the goddess can be translated as "Lady of the Great Earth", who, according to Mesopotamian mythology, is ruler of the underworld: she is "the goddess of death but also associated with birth; regarded both as mother(-earth) and a virgin" (Heffron, 2016); therefore, she represents the most significant roles that women adopt in the cultural and social imaginary. Moreover, in this particular belief system, the coexistence of the aspects of fertility and death as powers of the earth combined in the cycle of life links her symbolically to the figure of Ana, who, in a parallel manner, also belongs to both worlds: the worlds of death and vitality. Her fertility and creative powers are captured within the monastery's walls, guaranteeing their imperishability.

Conclusions

Moscaliuc's poem uses the figure of Ana from the well-known folk ballad to show that cultural phenomena such as the objectification of women or their iconization have social outcomes as well as horribly painful physical consequences. It also reveals the ambivalent nature of the female body, which is a source of

a woman's entrapment in a realm of stereotypes and psychological enslavement, but can also be a source of emancipation, as the lyrical subject seems to urge. The monologue of the "contemporary" Ana shows how the processes of social inscription on the surface of the body impact and construct the psychic interior. It also reveals how the psychic "exteriority" of the subject is constructed and can be interpreted according to the logic of the three-dimensional model of the Möbius strip employed by Grosz as a guiding framework for her thought. Thus, influenced by the central idea of the inflection of mind into body and body into mind:

> This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but also the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside. (Grosz, 1994, p. xii)

Moscaliuc's poem becomes a reinterpretation of the topos of the "immured woman", thus distancing itself from the dominant Romanian cultural interpretation of the Legend of the Argeș Monastery in the category of an aesthetic myth, which had emphasized the necessity of sacrificing what is most precious in order to create a great work. Moscaliuc's text, which constitutes a transcription of a specifically female experience, brings us closer to the origins of the ritual of the "foundation sacrifice" itself, raising questions about the cultural and social significance of the immurement of a female body. Her retelling of the folk ballad flies in the face of the way Ana's body has been produced and perpetuated by the majority of the representations created by Romanian culture in interpretations of the ballad – representations which marginalized, or even excluded considerations of the body, being primarily concerned with ideas, moral dilemmas, reason and judgements, all seen from the cyclopean male perspective.

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Topos „wmurowanej kobiety" czy mit poświęcenia dla twórczości? Rehabilitacja korporalnego podmiotu w poetyckiej reinterpretacji rumuńskiej ballady *Monastyr w Argeș* autorstwa Mihaeli Moscaliuc

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wiersza Mihaeli Moscaliuc *Ana to Manole* (2014) jako przykładu wyjątkowej interpretacji kanonicznej rumuńskiej ballady ludowej *Monastyr w Argeș*. W przeszłości kultura rumuńska, pod wpływem zachodniej myśli filozoficznej podążającej za modelem dualizmu kartezjańskiego, marginalizowała, a nawet wykluczała rozważania na temat kobiecego ciała z interpretacji tego tekstu. W rumuńskich wyobrażeniach zbiorowych legenda zawierająca topos wmurowanej kobiety funkcjonuje wyłącznie jako opowieść koncentrująca się na poświęceniu głównego bohatera – Mistrza Manole, które było konieczne, aby zapewnić pomyślne ukończenie budowli. Jego męskie doświadczenie i dylematy moralne są uprzywilejowane. Moscaliuc powraca w swoim wierszu do kluczowego, ale nieobecnego/wypieranego dotąd tematu tekstu – ciała/cielesności wmurowanej kobiety (Any). Jej utwór dowartościowuje ciało jako obowiązkowy element rehabilitacji kobiecego podmiotu. Głównym źródłem inspiracji dla proponowanej w artykule analizy literackiej są idee zawarte w filozofii feminizmu korporalnego Elizabeth Grosz.

Słowa kluczowe: feminizm korporalny; wmurowana kobieta; ofiara zakładzinowa; kultura rumuńska; ballada ludowa; „Monastyr w Argeș"; Mihaela Moscaliuc; Elizabeth Grosz

The topos of the "immured woman" or the myth of the construction sacrifice? The rehabilitation of the corporeal subject in Mihaela's Moscaliuc poetic reinterpretation of the Romanian folk ballad *The Argeș Monastery*

The main objective of the paper is to present Mihaela Moscaliuc's poem *Ana to Manole* (2014) as an example of a unique retelling of the canonical Romanian folk ballad *The Arges Monastery*. In the past, Romanian culture marginalized or even excluded considerations of the body from interpretations of this text, following, as I claim, the dualistic model of the separation of mind and body which largely dominated Western philosophical thought. Accordingly, in Romanian collective imagery, the legend containing the topos of the immured woman functions solely as a story centring on Master Manole's sacrifice, one that was necessary to ensure the successful construc-

tion of the monastery. His masculine experience and moral dilemmas are thus privileged. In her poem, Moscaliuc returns to the pivotal but absent/disavowed theme of the text – the body/flesh of the immured woman (Ana). Hence, her text shows that the proper representation of the female subject presupposes an obligatory rehabilitation of female corporeality. The main source of inspiration for this literary analysis is the ideas found in the philosophy of Elizabeth Grosz's corporeal feminism.

Keywords: corporeal feminism; immured woman; foundation sacrifice; Romanian culture; "The Argeș Monastery"; folk ballad; Mihaela Moscaliuc; Elizabeth Grosz

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