

Romanian Occasional Vocal Repertoire through the Lens of Myths and Archetypes

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Abstract: *This article offers an introductory exploration of the Romanian traditional occasional vocal repertoire through a dual analytical perspective that integrates musicological inquiry with symbolic–archetypal interpretation. Rather than providing an exhaustive analysis, the study proposes a preliminary framework for understanding these vocal creations not only as sonic expressions of community life, but also as manifestations of an archetypal imaginary that structures collective experience. Attention is given to fundamental symbolic images present in lyrics and performance contexts, to outline the coherence between musical structures and mythic–symbolic meanings. The article thus aims to open a methodological pathway for further, more detailed interdisciplinary research on Romanian occasional vocal traditions.*

Key-words: *Romanian traditional music, Myths, Archetypes*

1. Myth, Symbol, and Archetype

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between myth, symbol, and archetype can be understood by distinguishing the levels at which these concepts operate within cultural imagination. The archetype designates a universal and deep structure of human imagination—a fundamental pattern that transcends individual cultures and manifests itself in diverse forms. As such, archetypes provide the underlying framework through which collective experiences are shaped and interpreted (Jung 1953). Depending on the degree of universality attributed to them, archetypes have been defined either as general human constants (an approach that considers human culture as a global phenomenon) or as partial constants of specific cultures and civilizations, historically and geographically bounded (an approach that seeks to produce deliberately partial and historically situated syntheses) (Braga 2008, 13).

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The symbol represents the concrete expression of the archetype, functioning as a mediator between the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the conceptual. It conveys multiple layers of meaning, encompassing both immediate and figurative interpretations, and allows abstract archetypal structures to become perceptible within specific cultural contexts. Through symbols, archetypes are translated into images, actions, and expressions that can be shared and recognized collectively.

Myth, in turn, constitutes the narrative construction that organizes and circulates these symbols, integrating them into a coherent collective story with explanatory and normative functions (Levi-Strauss 1983). By embedding symbolic representations within a narrative framework, myth provides cultural coherence and continuity, offering models for understanding the world and for regulating social and ritual behavior. In this relational framework, the archetype supplies the foundational structure, the symbol enables imaginative transposition, and the myth confers cultural meaning and functional coherence upon the whole.

1.1. Romanian Myths

Myths can be seen as narratives that encapsulate universal archetypes, and in this context, Romanian mythology occupies a unique position at the intersection of Christian spirituality and enduring pagan traditions. The Romanian cultural identity has been historically shaped by foundational myths, which both distinguish the community from others and provide a sense of cultural continuity and longevity (Acar 2019, 39).

Positioned at a crossroads of major European cultural influences, the Romanian people have consistently absorbed and adapted innovative ideas, integrating those elements that resonate with their own social and symbolic structures. If myths are considered expressions of the essence of a civilization, a historical experience, or even a system of thought, then Romanian mythology may be understood as “the result of the fusion of ethnic forms with those transmitted from the proto-historical period” (Cosma, 1942, 8). In this sense, myths function as interpretative keys, granting access to ethical frameworks and symbolic systems, for “the most secret part of a culture’s identity is entrusted to its mythology.” (Detienne 1898, 1).

In this article, we aim to identify recurring myths and narratives that connect archetypal concepts within typically Romanian structures; this effort forms part of a broader doctoral research project, while the present study opens this perspective.

1.2. Archetypes

In the present article, we will consider some archetypes proposed by Carl G. Jung. Jung offers an interpretation of culture and artistic symbols through the lens of archetypes, viewing them as bridges between the individual and collective unconscious, and between personal experience and humanity's symbolic heritage. Our aim is to identify these three archetypal patterns within Romanian folk creations, particularly in the occasional vocal repertoire.

- The Self Archetype – a symbol of wholeness and integration, often associated with the divine image, ultimate meaning, and the figure of the civilizing hero.
- The Erotic Archetype (Animus/Anima) – the expression of masculine and feminine principles, as well as their unity in the figure of the androgynous being.
- The Parental Archetype – encompassing both paternal and maternal dimensions: the paternal aspect represents law, authority, and justice, while the maternal aspect embodies unconditional love, care, fertility, and the protective dimension of nature or the community.

2. Romanian Occasional Vocal Repertoire through the Lens of Archetypes

This article addresses the Romanian traditional occasional repertoire, focusing exclusively on its vocal songs, which are closely connected to the folklore of ages and family life and to the folklore of work and annual celebrations. Within the folklore of ages and family life, the discussion refers to the nuptial repertoire, performed during wedding rituals, and the funerary repertoire, which expresses mourning, remembrance, and the passage from life to death. Furthermore, the folklore of work and yearly festivities includes the pastoral repertoire, reflecting shepherd life and its customs, the agrarian repertoire of spring and summer, associated with agricultural activities and fertility rituals, and the winter holiday repertoire, linked to traditional celebrations, ritual songs, and carolling that mark the cyclical renewal of time.

In what follows, this article will discuss several of the fundamental archetypes proposed by Carl Gustav Jung, emphasizing their symbolic meanings and functions within the collective unconscious, and will illustrate them through selected examples drawn from the Romanian traditional occasional repertoire. By focusing on vocal ritual genres associated with key moments of human existence, social transitions, and calendar-based celebrations, the analysis aims to highlight the ways in which these archetypes are embodied, expressed, and transmitted through traditional songs, revealing the deep connections between archetypal structures and ritualized musical practices.

2.1. The Self Archetype

In Jung's analytical psychology, the Self is a central and foundational concept, representing both the organizing center and the totality of the personality, encompassing conscious and unconscious aspects. Unlike Freud's Ego, which is limited to consciousness, the Self functions as the active and meaningful core of the entire psyche. It is understood both as a lived psychological experience and as an archetype of wholeness and ultimate meaning, often symbolized in myths, dreams, and rituals by figures such as heroes, kings, or divine beings, as well as by symbols of totality and the union of opposites. The aim of Jungian analysis is individuation, a demanding process through which the Ego gradually aligns with the Self, leading to psychological growth when the Ego is sufficiently strong and flexible (Jung 1975, 260-270).

To align the archetype of the Self with the Romanian traditional occasional repertoire, we have chosen the carol *Twelve Questions* (Douăsprezece întrebări) (Voevidca 2015, 130), structured around a catechetical and numerical dialogue beginning with the question "Who is the One?". This carol may be interpreted as a symbolic expression of the Self as defined by Carl Gustav Jung. At its core stands the figure of the One, explicitly identified as the Son of Mary, a divine presence who dwells in heaven and governs the world, corresponding to the Self as the central, ordering, and meaningful principle of the psyche. The progressive enumeration from one to twelve constructs an image of wholeness and totality, in which each sacred number (the Trinity, the Evangelists, the Commandments, the Apostles) represents a constituent part integrated into a coherent cosmic order. From a Jungian perspective, this symbolic movement from unity to multiplicity and back to unity mirrors the structure of the Self as both center and totality, as well as the process of individuation, through which diverse elements are unified around a transcendent organizing principle.



Fig. 1. "Twelve Questions" – carol

The carol features a melody based on tonal cadential relationships of V–I, developed over a minor octave ambitus and organized in stanzas of three melodic lines. Across each stanza, the melodic line forms an arching shape, with the climax occurring in the second line. The rhythmic structure is consistent for all lines within the stanza. The minor pentachord is extended with a supporting fifth and the leading note, adding melodic tension and direction.

2.2. The Erotic Archetype

According to Carl Gustav Jung, the Anima and Animus represent the inner images of the opposite sex within the unconscious, forming the basis of the Erotic Archetype. The Anima is the feminine aspect within the male psyche, while the Animus is the masculine aspect within the female psyche. These archetypal figures are not merely projections of personal experiences of love or desire, but symbolic representations of the complementary principles necessary for psychic wholeness. They appear in dreams, myths, and artistic expressions as mediators of emotional life, guiding the individual toward integration of the unconscious with consciousness (Jung 1968, 67-80).

To illustrate the Erotic Archetype (Animus/Anima) in the Romanian traditional occasional repertoire, we can use the harvest song: „Dragu mi-i la secerat” (Bocşa 2009, 10). This song depicts a man and a woman working together in the field, combining their efforts in a harmonious partnership. The playful interaction and mutual enjoyment of labor express the complementary masculine and feminine principles, reflecting the archetype’s symbolic unity and reciprocity.

Lyrics:

I love the harvest,
I love the harvest,
When he binds the sheaves.
Hai, lai, lai, lai, lai, la

I reap and he binds,
I reap and he binds,
Together, the world is dear to us.
Hai, lai, lai, lai, lai, la



Fig. 2. "I love the harvest" – Harvest song

Based on a parlando-rubato rhythm and an E Phrygian scale, the three melodic lines conclude with a melismatic refrain featuring a Phrygian cadence. The ascending seventh interval that opens the first melodic line imparts an expansive character to the entire harvest song.

2.3. The Parental Archetype

In Jungian analytical psychology, the parental archetype represents a fundamental structure of the collective unconscious, encompassing both nurturing and authoritative dimensions associated with the figures of the mother and the father. This archetype functions as a primary mediator of early psychic development, shaping the individual's sense of security, moral orientation, and relationship to authority. While the maternal aspect is often linked to care, containment, and the origins of life, the paternal aspect tends to symbolize order, law, and social integration (Jung 1968, 83-92).

This parental archetype can be clearly identified in a funeral lament for a deceased infant (Reteganul 1897, 21), where the symbolic bond between child and parents is foregrounded with striking emotional intensity. The text articulates a primordial attachment to the "parental breast" and emphasizes the figures of the loving father and nurturing mother, who are portrayed as protectors, caregivers, and sources of moral and physical sustenance. Rather than expressing individual grief alone, the lament gives voice to a collective, archetypal image of parental devotion and sacrifice, especially through references to care during illness and the parents shared suffering. From a Jungian perspective, the lament externalizes the parental archetype as a universal structure of loss and protection, transforming personal mourning into a symbolic narrative that resonates beyond the immediate familial context. In this way, the bocet functions not only as a ritualized expression of grief but also as a cultural medium through which the enduring psychic imprint of the parental archetype is articulated and preserved.

Romanian text	English translation
Vai ce jele și suspine M-au cuprins astăzi pe mine Când îmi caută se pornesc Dela sânul părințesc	Oh, what grief and sighing Have come upon me today, When my searching begins From the parental breast.
Să-mi las un tată iubit Ce de rele m-au scutit, Să-mi las o dulce măicuță Care m-a hrănit la țîță.	To leave behind a beloved father Who spared me from many evils, To leave behind a gentle mother Who nourished me on her breast.
Multe nu pot să grăiesc Văzând că toți mă jelesc, Mai cu seamă prea iubiți Supărații mei părinți.	I cannot speak Seeing that all are mourning me, Most of all the dearly loved ones, My sorrowful parents.
Mulțumesc de multul bine Ce l-ați purtat pentru mine, Care-n boala mea cea multă L-ați purtat cu multă trudă.	I give thanks for the great kindness That you bore for my sake, For in my long illness You bore it with great hardship.

3. Miorița Myth in Romanian Carols

Many studies have been devoted to the Miorița myth across our country (Babuts 2000, Cordoneanu 2012), yet in what follows we will turn our attention to two carols that share this thematic resonance. Our focus is to examine how the archetypes previously discussed manifest within an epic construction so widely disseminated across our territory. Many of Jung's archetypes are identifiable within the Miorița narrative, revealing its deep psychological significance.

The parental archetype appears in the implicit care and guidance associated with family and the shepherd's attachment to his roots, while the erotic archetype emerges subtly through the vitality and interconnectedness of pastoral life. The Self archetype is particularly evident in the shepherd's confrontation with death, which he embraces with acceptance and equanimity. The myth itself includes the shepherd's testament, a ritualized declaration of his fate and wishes, which functions as both a personal and symbolic statement. Death is allegorized as a wedding with the sky,

transforming the end of life into a cosmic union and elevating the shepherd to an apotheosis that celebrates the wholeness of his being. Furthermore, the figure of the old mother (*maica bătrână*) appears as a symbolic guide, embodying wisdom, care, and the continuity of life, reinforcing the intergenerational and archetypal dimensions of the narrative (Moldoveanu 2005, 15-19).

In the carol from Bistrița-Năsăud (Moldoveanu 2005, 85), which carries the thematic essence of Miorița, the shepherd's testament takes center stage, alongside a female presence—a maiden from the village whom the shepherd wishes to marry. When the other two shepherds learn of the desire of the third, they threaten him with death. Resignation in the face of death is immediate, yet the testament specifies the place for his burial, with a celestial vault above the grave, and the carol concludes with the image of the sheep weeping with tears of blood. One can observe a reduction of the mythic material here; unlike the grander Miorița narrative and the epic texts encountered in ballads, where the story unfolds in a broad, multi-layered cosmic and social context, the carol is markedly lyrical. The focus is condensed, emotional, and personal, emphasizing intimate affective experience rather than the expansive mythic or epic scope.

<p><i>Ms. A.I.E.F.B.</i> <i>Culeg., trans. Darius Pop. 1951</i></p>	<p><i>Maieru, Bistrița Năsăud</i> <i>Inf. Mihai Pop a lui Bonifapt, 15 a.</i></p>

Fig. 3. Carol with “Miorița” theme

The verses of the carol are composed in a hexasyllabic meter, while the sonic structure is organized around a major hexachord. The rhythm follows a giusto-silabic pattern, ensuring a precise alignment between syllables and musical accentuation. The carol features the most frequent refrain of the local tradition (Moldoveanu 2005, 27), “Hai lerule,” complemented by the phrase “mi dor.” The three melodic lines each incorporate this refrain, typically positioned before the final line, which concludes with a cadence on the first scale degree. The result is a balanced and harmonious interplay of metric regularity, modal sonority, and refrain placement, lending the carol both structural clarity and lyrical charm.

A similar thematic pattern, including the presence of a female character who chooses the more handsome shepherd and incites the other two to plot his death, is also found in a carol from Turda (Moldoveanu 2005, 87). As in the previously discussed Bistrița-Năsăud carol, the verses are largely concentrated on the

shepherd's testament, which functions as a ritualized declaration of his fate and wishes. The testament emphasizes the shepherd's awareness of his impending death and projects the symbolic mourning of his flock, which is said to weep both in the mountains and in the valleys. In this carol, as in the former example, we observe a marked reduction of the epic narrative of the larger Miorița myth, with the focus narrowed to the lyrical and affective dimensions of the story. The female character's role introduces an interpersonal and dramatic element, while the testament and the mourning of the sheep retain the symbolic resonance of death, cosmic order, and the shepherd's apotheosis, albeit within a compact and lyrically concentrated form.



Fig. 4. Carol from Turda with "Miorița" theme

From a musical perspective, the two carols exhibit strikingly similar traits. Both are composed in a hexasyllabic verse structure and feature a concise melodic design centered on the shepherd's testament. The sonic framework is organized around a major hexachord, and the rhythm follows a giusto-silabic pattern, ensuring a precise alignment between syllabic stress and melodic accent. The final melodic line in each carol concludes with a tonic cadence, creating a sense of closure and harmonic resolution.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the occasional vocal repertoire examined in this study has revealed the presence of the archetypes outlined above. The parental, erotic, and Self archetypes, as proposed by Carl G. Jung, resonate within the broader mythic imagination of Romanian folklore. Also, the Miorița myth, as one of the most emblematic narratives, encompasses multiple archetypal patterns and finds reflection in the carols studied, demonstrating how mythic structures are

condensed and transformed in lyrical form. Approaching the occasional vocal repertoire through the lens of myths and archetypes thus offers a novel interpretive framework, illuminating the deeper symbolic dimensions of these songs and their capacity to express universal human concerns. This perspective allows us to perceive the interplay between personal emotion, social ritual, and collective imagination, suggesting that even the most localized and situational vocal expressions are rooted in enduring psychic and cultural structures that continue to shape communal identity and aesthetic experience.

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