

MIRCEA PĂDURARU, *Fondul interzis. Incursiune în antropologia folclorului licențios* [“The Forbidden Fund.” An Incursion into the Anthropology of Licentious Folklore], vol. I (Iași: “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Publishing House, 2023)

The title of the book is highly inviting: the two words – forbidden and licentious, have more or less magical power to incite the interest of the reader in general and of ethnology, folklore, anthropology, in particular.

In the recent Romanian academic landscape, books related to topics that fit the term licentious are rare and temporally disparate. So rare that they dissipate the creation of a research paradigm that would be able to occupy a central place within the discipline. Recent contributions could be considered in chronological order: Constantin Bărbulescu, *The Imaginary of the Human Body. Between peasant culture and scholarly culture (19th-20th centuries)* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2005); Constantin Eretescu, *The value of water. Mythology and folklore studies* (Bucharest: Etnologic Publishing House, 2007); Gheorghe Patza, *Licentious Folklore from the Land of Dornelor* (Botoșani: Axa, 2008) and Andrei Oisteanu, *Sexuality and Society. History, religion and literature* (Iași, Polirom, 2016), of which only the latter two are explicitly centred on topics related first to human sexuality, collections from empirical reality and, the latter on a global cultural history.

In this context, the first volume, authored by our colleague from the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, stands out for its courageous approach of a theme that is marginalized by most authors of ethnological/folkloristic works. I do not know what the second volume has in store for us, but in the first, the author makes an ‘incursion,’ as he wants to specify or define his approach, into what has been written about this kind of folklore. The volume contains three parts, entitled: theoretical perspectives, the constitution of the so-called licentious folklore, collections and collectors and the hermeneutics of the forbidden fund. On page 29, the author explicitly tells us what the three axes of the book are: “1. The disciplinary condition of this type of folkloric document, 2. The moral level and social status of the informant, the person interviewed and 3. The idea of honourable and frivolous in ethnological research.”

The first part is, in its turn, divided into three chapters: the first refers to the ideological management of folklore considered obscene, the second tells us about the political vocabulary of this fund and the third presents us at length, under a suggestive title, “a quixotic crusade in favour of the filth,” three communications from the panel on licentious folklore, which took place on the occasion of the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society on 28 December 1960. The three speakers were Herbert Halpert, Horace P. Beck and Gershon Legman, with special emphasis on the case of Gershon Legman, with Transylvanian origins (his parents had emigrated at the beginning of the 20th century from Reteag, near the town of Dej).

What is relevant vis-a-vis Legman, is that unlike the other two participants with a moderate attitude, he invites/makes a plea for the study of licentious folklore per se, while at the same time criticizing Anglo-Saxon folklore by comparison with the advances already registered in countries such as Germany, France, Italy or Russia.

The second part of the volume is organized into four chapters, each dedicated to the detailed analysis of four funds, respectively their connection with four licentious folklore researchers/collectors: the Christea N. Țapu fund; Kryptadia fund and Bela Bartok; Emilian Novacoviciu and the 'Banatian pornographic fund' and the licentious folklore fund from the Dornelor Land and Gheorghe C. Patza. Of course, the first collection has its share of reluctance and the diatribes of Nicolae Iorga, worried beyond measure about the fact that the materials in question will have reached the girls' school patronized by her Majesty the Queen herself. Further on, Mircea Păduraru charges the famous historian very well when he says: "But Iorga makes another common mistake: he confuses the idealized representation of Romanian folklore, the one built and expressed in printed collections and folklore studies, with folklore itself, in a socio-empirical sense."

The three conclusions of this part are worth noting: the first – "We must note that all researchers involved in any way in the 'material business,' i.e. critics, 'editors,' coordinators or collectors, operate with an unclear concept of authenticity." The second – "almost everything that was reproached to the Tocilescu collection can today be scored as a value, as a plus, including the boldness in recording, including the courage in the selection of field areas and informants. The so-called pornographic pieces are now priceless jewels of genuine folkloric sensibility and samples of folkloric courage." And the third – "professional thematic collections come more difficult or, if they do come, they do so in the forms developed by Țapu, Novacoviciu and Patza. At least that's how things are in Romanian culture. When he decides to publish Kryptadia, Bartok acts provoked by the atmosphere of ideas and the research questions of the American academic environment."

The third part of the book approaches the hermeneutics of the forbidden fund and promises a continuation in the second volume already announced in the introduction. It begins in a strong key, with the idea of the allegorical dimension of the ethnographic discourse elaborated by James Clifford, considering that through such an assumption (i.e. of the allegorical dimension) "the ethnographic/anthropological discourse proves more lucidity and shelters itself from hegemonic attitudes, as well as from other forms of epistemic hubris. In addition, the understanding of the allegorical dimension of the ethnographic text, both by the producer and the reader, further sensitizes both the act of writing and the act of reading." In the sub-chapter entitled "a map of contributions to the topic," Mircea Păduraru talks about four types of contributions to the topic in the Romanian ethno-anthropological culture:

"1. writings that anathematize obscene-licentious folklore, usually with less ethnological rigor and more rhetorical pathos

2. studies aiming at a partial recovery of this type of folklore

3. contributions that, in the context of other interests, integrate sexual folklore into ethno-anthropology studies, admitting the constitutive character of 'obscenity' in the formula of many folklore phenomena and not bypassing it in their approach

4. studies openly exploring, without detours, the field of the 'forbidden fund'."

Only partially the four categories of contributions can also suggest an evolution of progressive understanding of the topic and the emancipation of the discipline in Romania.

And the two following chapters revolve around opposite ideas: one centred on the idea against obscenity, where the author analyses in detail the concept of authenticity, bringing to the fore the polemic between Vasile Alecsandri (the interventionist perspective) and Moses Schwartzfeld (the exact recording), and the other centred on the idea of defending licentious folklore, where the approaches to the subject of Ion Diaconu (the temptation of psychoanalysis), Ovidiu Bârlea (the mysticism of folk dance) and Petru Caraman (the folkloristic rationale of pornography) are discussed. Mircea Păduraru mentions the survival of the "Alecsandri effect" which will remain as a feature within the theory of authenticity (exact recording) precisely through this ignorance of licentious folklore.

In the part related to "the defence of licensed folklore," Mircea Păduraru chooses three case studies: Ion Diaconu, Ovidiu Bârlea and Petru Caraman. The choice is due to the fact that the three researchers express themselves explicitly on the issue, even if they do so in a timid and partial way, as Mircea Păduraru also points out. In short, in the case of Ion Diaconu, the author tells us about his [Ion Diaconu] inadequacy in using Freudian psychoanalysis in his approach of the licentious folklore. In the case of Ovidiu Bârlea, the image of the woman is very important: "observational literature becomes more one of a creation [Ovidiu Bârlea], remaining tributary to a romantic ideal regarding the image of the woman."

Next, the author points out three important aspects of Ovidiu Bârlea's approach: "1. The use of the term 'archaic,' 2. The selective and ideologized reading of the present and 3. The ethical, not emic understanding of sexual folklore which he analyses down to the smallest details."

In summary, Ovidiu Bârlea seems to fit the sentence in Caragialesque key: "to be recorded but not to be published." Which leads us to the idea of censorship applied by a dominant class nicely argued by the quote from Linda Williams: "pornography is simply any representation that a certain social class or dominant group does not want in the hands of other less dominant classes or groups. Those in power construct the definition of pornography through their power of censorship."

The volume ends with the analysis of Petru Caraman's reflections regarding the licentious folklore but also the scatological one in the context of the *descolindat* custom. The author points out at the end of the book, about these three great figures: "dedication towards elaboration of an honourable and dignified macronarrative about the Romanian nation" of the Romanian folklorists, by eliminating this "forbidden fund" from the public circuit. We could also say that he thus removes the peasant's work shirt from the museum (not only the closet to recall a passage from the article written by Otilia Hedesan and Vintilă Mihăilescu), in addition to other things that relate to the ordinary life of the Romanian peasant. We could look

at this volume as a dissent perhaps not only in relation to the past and the present, but also to the future of this research field, if it is to remain singular in the Romanian academic landscape.

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