

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES OF DÂMBOVITA COUNTY**Cristina Furtună, Assist. Prof., PhD, "Valahia" University of Târgoviște**

Abstract: The narrative is an act of communication by means of which the partners taking part in it, namely narrators and listeners, transmit different pieces of information by means of formalized discourses. In colloquial environments, the narrative is always presented orally. It is a verbal act, yet, unlike other colloquial acts, it has artistic connotations.

The channel by which the messages are transmitted is always the life speech, the communication being a direct communication between the narrator and the listener. The narrative act is a synchronous act, in which the performance and the receiving of this performance occur concomitantly, the presence of the two partners being absolutely necessary.

The phenomenon of story-telling, extremely vivid in the area of Târgoviște, contains different themes. The stories narrated by veterans, characterized by old images, often contradictory and unclear, stand next to new images, blurred by mishaps of life. The latter prove the fact that in the reality of the story, the virtual images are preferred, more often than not, to the real ones.

Târgoviște was a princely residence for four centuries, hosting 33 reigning princes, and the stories of the times of yore are still alive in the memory of the people of Târgoviște, under the form of narratives or historical anecdotes.

In our paper we shall talk about these narratives, especially those concerning the times of Neagoe Basarab, Vlad the Impaler (Vlad Tepeș) and Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul), as they have remained engraved in the mind of our contemporaries.

Keywords: narrative, historical narrative, anecdote, collective memory.

Introduction

As in the case of the study of other communication acts, in the study of the narrative, as well, attention must be given to the subjects narrated, since the narrative mediates within the relations between the groups of subjects.

The researches in the field have proved that the narrative phenomenon differs from one regional group to the next, as dialects do in linguistics. In general, the researchers have highlighted the narrators' personality. In the researches in the field, it has been noted that, in the traditional cultures, only some people narrate, and the majority simply listen.

Regarding this issue, there are relatively old data on narrators, and this information characterizes moments of the phenomenon's history and different orientations in its research. Thus, in the collections of Romanian fairy tales of O. Bîrlea, there is much information made available about the Romanian narrators from the years following the Second World War¹.

In the dynamics of the cultural life, the narrative brings into the present an amount of information that people may always handle, using it in different speeches that they give. The narrative is one of the popular cultural events, deserving the researchers' attention, even to this day.

Next we are going to speak about the historical narratives present in Dâmbovita County.

10., Bîrlea, *Introducere* (Introduction) to *Antologie de proză populară epică* (Anthology of Popular Epic Prose), I, 1966, p. 11-31.

1. Narratives on Neagoe Basarab - a Wallachian ruler

Neagoe Basarab is known, first of all, as a man who loved reading books.

In one of the narratives told by a respondent, we have found a little story about how this Wallachian ruler would defend not only his homeland, but also his people, the common people, his “poor”, as he called them. The ruler rose against the merchants of Braşov and Sibiu, who had the intention of taking the selling markets away from the Wallachian merchants. Neagoe Basarab threatened the merchants of Braşov that if they kill his merchants – “his poor” – he will erase the Land of Bârsa from the face of the Earth for good.

As for the merchants coming from Sibiu, Neagoe Basarab was even tougher, and the people found a resemblance between him and Vlad the Impaler, by the words: “No matter how many thieves I may find out there stealing from the poor people of my country, even just a chicken, I demand that they all should be hanged, so that nobody should dare steal again”, according to the ruler’s words.

Neagoe Basarab would protect his merchants against any abuses committed by the Turks, as well.

2. Narratives about Vlad Țepeş (Vlad the Impaler)

There are some very short narratives, telling about incidents happened at Vlad the Impaler’s court. So much had he terrified the villains, that a golden cup was placed near a fountain for drinking water, and nobody dared stealing it – according to one of our respondents, who knows about it from his great grandfather.

1) Our interlocutor speaks about the conflict between Vlad the Impaler and the people of Târgovişte. Since the ruler’s brother had been booed because he had tried to force a nobleman’s daughter to love him, on Easter day, when the people were celebrating, and the young were dancing in circles, the ruler got the old people moving around the whole town pushed from behind by pricking objects, and the young men together with their wives and with the lasses, dressed in holiday dresses were taken to Poenari, where they worked for building the fortress there until their clothes got torn and they remained almost naked.

2) Another respondent tells that Vlad the Impaler fixed the Turkish caps by nails in the heads of some Turkish messengers who refused to take their caps off.

3) Another narrative mentions that Vlad the Impaler would tie the women accused of adultery to the shame pole, saying that they were not good for being wives, and he impaled a lazy wife because her husband was wearing his shirt torn, although she had flax and hemp at home.

4) An older respondent from Târgovişte tells how the ruler would appreciate learning. He executed at once any messenger who did not have the proper answer ready, blaming the one who had sent such a messenger who was not sufficiently trained. The ruler would demand that the messengers should be well trained so as to know how to make their appearance at a ruler’s court, the required or the usual protocol of the time, how to speak to the highest officials, how to hand over the letters and certain gifts.

5) The same respondent tells that Vlad the Impaler was concerned about developing in the souls of their soldiers the love for their homeland and the spirit of fight. “The one who thinks of death should not join me”, Vlad the Impaler would say to his soldiers before going

to the battlefield - according to the respondent. After the battle, the ruler would punish the soldiers whose backs were wounded, as he believed that they had run away from enemy, and would reward those with wounds on the front side of their bodies.

7) The same respondent tells that in the year 1507, Bogdan III the One-Eyed, Moldavia's ruler, apparently started a war against Radu the Great. When the armies were facing each other at Retezeni, on the banks of the river, near Râmnic, a monk of the Wallachian side asked Bogdan to go back home, since it was a shame for the Wallachians and Moldavians to kill one another, as they were both Christians and related. The monk was no other but Maxim, according to his real name, Gheorghe Brancovici, the Wallachian metropolitan bishop, uncle of the first lady – Despina – the wife of ruler Neagoe Basarab. 463 years ago, monk Maxim knew that Moldavians and Wallachians are related. Our interlocutor is proud that even since those times, at Târgoviște, there was a proof of the conscience that Moldavians and Wallachians belong to same people.

Târgoviște, the old Wallachian capital, was seriously put to test by the Ottomans, but Mircea I of Wallachia and Vlad the Impaler fought for the future of our town.

Wallachia was the war front and the “dam” of the whole Europe, for the defense of Rome and of the neighboring countries.

8) Another respondent remembers his grandfather's stories, namely that at Târgoviște, since the 17th century, girls had been sent to school or to apprenticeship, to a teacher paid by their parents. Thus, there were teachers who were hired by different families for the girls' training. Also, we may note that the teacher was responsible for how she educated the girls entrusted to her.

Some girls, particularly those from noble families, come in the service of the princely court. The ruler's wife had her own girl servants. They had to be trained. We suppose that at the princely court of Târgoviște, Elena – the wife of ruler Matei Basarab – would have had in her service young trained girls. It should be mentioned that Lady Elena herself spoke Latin and wrote letters herself in the Romanian language. One of her letters, written at Rucăr (Muscel), in 1653, and addressed to the people of Sibiu, contains an introduction and a closure formula in Latin, while the body of the letter is in Romanian.

The anecdotes about Vlad the Impaler preserved in the memory of the people of Târgoviște are nothing but summaries of some stories about this ruler.

The particular facts, the historical personality of national glory of a hero like Vlad the Impaler, bound through his whole being and tragic destiny to his people, could not have remained without an echo in the people's culture. A number of story-legends, related to those that circulated in other areas, kept alive the memory of this patriotic ruler - as a man who had been just and brave - throughout the generations, until this day. Unlike the German and Slav narratives, which had had written versions, their Romanian counterparts had been cultivated only orally. Transmitted from generation to generation, the narratives suffered inherent modifications, the fantasy coming not just once into stage to color the historical fact, making it look more like a legend.

The stories-legends about Vlad Țepeș that circulated from mouth to ear among the Romanians have their own particular features, compared to the narratives that circulated abroad. These features are determined by the totally different attitude, completely favorable to

the hero. One can note the absence of those ill-willed interpretations marked by malice and a denigrating spirit. The voivode is presented as the Romanian people had seen him: a brave ruler who loved his country, a righteous but also merciless judge, a brave and intelligent man. Any of his acts, no matter how harsh, has a motivation, a reason that is above his person. The exceptions are few and their explanation may lie in the late works influenced by the foreign versions.

Other narratives, the most numerous, present Vlad the Impaler as a tough man, willing to instate in his country an exemplary climate of work, justice and honesty, totally devoid of lying, stealing, cheating and laziness. Vlad does not forgive hypocrisy and lying. A painful lesson for dishonesty is given by Vlad to a merchant who, after being brought back his lost purse, no longer wants to give to the one that had found it the reward promised publicly, and even accuses him of having taken some of his money. Judging them, the ruler understands the merchant's "stratagems" and punishes him, giving the whole purse to the one who had found it.

Even since the time of Vlad's life are invented and disseminated cycles of narratives in German, relating the "awful deeds" of this Wallachian ruler. They spread rapidly in the Saxon world, and through their inclusion in some famous writings of the time, written in Latin², they became popular with many peoples in Europe. Ioan Bogdan characterized them as follows: "The German narrative about Vlad the Impaler is neither a simple chronicle telling only real facts, nor a story totally dominated by fantasy; it is both"³.

Unlike other historical heroes, whose deeds were glorified in odes and epic stories, Vlad became, in the above-mentioned stories, a "black" character, associated to the malefic spirits. Such an attitude towards the hero, meant to compromise him, leads to the intuition that its authors were from the camp of Vlad's enemies. In this concern, the commentators are unanimous: The German narratives about Vlad must have started from the Saxons of Transylvania. By their direct and laconic style, numerous stories seem taken out of such reports full of hate and exaggerations, by which those who wrote them hoped to discredit "the tyrant of tyrants" and maybe to remove him from the throne⁴.

The cycle of narratives spreads rapidly in the German world. "The feats of Țepeș - as Iorga mentioned - spread all over the German world by means of stories for the people or songs that everybody read"⁵. By them, the name of *Dracula* name became very popular, and Vlad himself finally adopted it to sign his correspondence later on (*Draculea*). In point of content and of the interpretation of the facts related, the German narratives on Dracula could be grouped into several categories, with the mention of the existence of permanent interrelations between them:

2A significant contribution to the dissemination of the German narratives about Vlad Țepeș in the Western world goes to the *Comments* of Pope Pius II (Piccolomini), the chronicle of Antonio Bonfini and the *Cosmography* of Sebastian Münster, works that included these narratives or referred to them in their text.

3Ioan, Bogdan, *Vlad Țepeș și narațiunile germane și rusești asupra lui* (Vlad the Impaler and the German and Russian Narratives about Him), Ed. Librăriei Socec, București, 1896, p.96.

4Ion, Stăvăruș, *Povestiri medievale despre Vlad Țepeș-Draculea. Studiu critic și antologie* (Medieval Narratives about Vlad the Impaler-Draculea. Critical Study and Anthology), București, Editura Univers, 1978,p.27.

5N., Iorga, *Încă ceva despre Vlad Țepeș și Ștefan cel Mare* (Something more about Vlad the Epaler and Stephen the Great, in *Convorbiri literare* (Literary Conversations), year XXXVIII/ 1904, p. 381.

-with a historical character. The fights of Vlad the Impaler for the throne, his conflicts with some of the boyars or rivals, the expeditions to the area of the Saxon burghs or in the area of the Danube against the Turks, events attested by historical documents, are reflected in more than a third of the stories of this narrative cycle⁶.

-under the sign of the absolute authority. A few stories delineate the image of a feudal prince exerting his authority firmly, by acts that show no mercy. Really famous for the lesson of authority and dignity offered is the narrative about the foreign envoys sent to Dracula. Coming once at his Court, a few foreigners, messengers of a great kingdom, do not accept to completely take off their caps. Asked why they do not take their caps off, full of themselves, they pretend that this is how they stay in front of their ruler, as well. Dracula feels their defiance and gives the black humor reply: "I want to strengthen them". Then, he immediately had their caps nailed on their heads, so that the caps may never fall and for the messengers to keep their custom"⁷.

-presenting Vlad as a justice maker and moralizer. The subjects of a significant part of the narratives present a prince determined to enthrone a spirit of justice, honesty, truth, diligence and courage in his country. Had he not been unjustly accused of unmotivated acts of cruelty, Țepeș-Dracula could have been considered one of the wise princes of the Middle Ages. Anyway, his image, despite his detractors' attempts to diminish it, could not be totally shadowed, as the objective reader can still see its halo quite distinctly through the thick fog of hate⁸.

-denigrating and absurd inventions. In their obsessive desire to retort to the man who had paid draconically for their intrigues and interventions in his country, the authors of the German narratives often use their fantasy, often pushed to its sickly limits. Thus, beside the quasi-historical actions, they also attribute to Țepeș-Dracula other acts that are a pure invention, related in the style of the incriminating pamphlets. These terrifying narratives then gave free way to the fantastic stories with vampires and bad spirits that inspired the horror movies *Dracula*, using which other merchants of strong sensations and having a doubtful taste have literally flooded the 20th century world market⁹.

While the German narratives about Vlad the Impaler were disseminated in successive editions flooding the European West, establishing the fame of a new literary hero, the first of Romanian origin, the Slav Orient received, in its turn, our ruler's actions, by a work with a similar profile, multiplied in numerous manuscript copies: *Story about Draculea the Voivode*¹⁰. The oldest known text and also the most complete one, discovered at the Kirilo-Belozersk Monastery¹¹ in northern Russia, attests the existence and the circulation of this work just a decade after the death of the Wallachian hero. As in the case of the German version, these narratives represent a cycle of a smaller size, yet more developed from a

6 Ion, Stăvăruș, op. cit, p. 33-34.

7Idem, p. 36.

8Idem, p. 36.

9 Ion, Stăvăruș, op. cit, p. 38-39.

10Title in Slav: *Scazanie o Draculea vovodea*.

11The Kirilo Belozersk manuscript of the Slav story about Țepeș was discovered and published by A. D. Sedelnikov under the title *Literaturnaia istoria povesti o Dracule*, in *Izvestia po ruscomu iazâcu i slovesnosti Akademii Nauc*, vol. II, Leningrad, 1929, p. 633-639. All the subsequent editions reproduce this text, which is more complete than the one in the Rumianțev collection, considered the best until then.

literary perspective and having only a few points in common with the above-mentioned ones.

Story about Draculea the Voivode is one of the first writings of the lay literature with the Slavs and “the first original writing in Old Slav talking about Romania”¹². The narratives of the Slav cycle can also be grouped into several parts, according to their contents and theme: historical, judicial, moralizing etc. Compared to the German narratives, the historical events are received from different positions. Vlad the Impaler is a patriotic, valiant and clever voivode, defending his country and knowing to face especially the greedy Turkish invaders. The author insisted on such illustrative episodes, leaving aside those with a vendetta character, fed by the conflicts for power and for the throne, spread by the authors of the German narratives.

A significant part of the Slav cycle contains moralizing stories. Most of them look at actions and attitudes amended by Vlad the Impaler, who considered them incompatible to the principles of honor, justice, truth, honesty, moral virtues that should reign in his country: “And he hated evil so much in his country that if anyone did something bad, such as a theft, burglary, lie or injustice, that person certainly could not stay alive [...] and even if anyone had great riches, his riches could not save him from death”¹³.

Some topics can be found as well in the German narrative, yet their presentation in the Slav collection is different, in line with the favorable attitude towards the Romanian national hero, which determines the characters he is facing to change their origin and behavior.

In total disagreement with them, one can nevertheless find some narratives obviously inspired by the spirit of the German justice-related stories: about the feast offered by Draculea to the beggars and to the poor, whom he then sets on fire; about his pleasure to eat in the middle of his victims, impaling the companions who said that they disliked the smell; about the killing of the artisans that helped him bury his gold under a river; about his torturing animals while he was in prison¹⁴.

The Slavist Ioan Bogdan is the first that edits them in Romanian, reproducing, in the original and in the translation, the text of the manuscript from the Rumianțev Museum in Moscow, with ample references, in a comparative spirit, also referring to other more significant versions from the Russian manuscript collections¹⁵.

3. Narratives about Michael the Brave

1) When Michael the Brave fought against the Turks, he came here with his army and all and they rushed to the valley, in our village, to wait here for the other Romanians, from over the mountains and from Moldavia. In order to get his armies ready for the battle and to be able to keep an eye on the Turks that were following them and were coming along the Valley of Dâmbovița, Michael the Brave went up to Colțu Albinei (The Bee’s Corner), where one can see that bare rock, and he left a guard there. This is where his soldiers were

12 Pandelescu, Olteanu, *Limba povestirilor slave despre Vlad Țepeș* (The Language of the Slav Narratives about Vlad the Impaler), p. 21.

13 Ion, Stăvăruș, op. cit. p. 46.

14 Ion, Stăvăruș, op. cit. p. 47.

15 Ioan, Bogdan, *Vlad Țepeș și narațiunile germane și rusești asupra lui* (Vlad the Impaler and the German and Russian Narratives about Him), București, 1896, p. 107-170.

sometimes watching; and at other times, Michael was watching on his own. It is here that the Romanian rulers made a deal about how to get rid of the pagans easier.

People still know to this day the old steps that the guards were climbing to get up there.

Here, in Stoenеști, there were fights as well. In the area of Stoienеasca, where there was once a church, many very large bones have been found.

Some of our old men would say that Michael the Brave had in Rucăr, on Sasului Hill, a palace whose traces can still be seen to this day.

2) Michael the Brave was the son of a ruler, but, as his parents died, he remained parentless because his relatives wanted him to get lost, as they could feel that Michael was going to be a great man. The poor boy remained here and there in people's houses, like any orphan child. At day, he would run around with other boys, through the mountains, watching over sheep and goats, whistling with his mouth and with his fingers.

During a spring, around the Ascension day, he was going up a hill, with his flock of sheep, when he suddenly saw in the middle of a clearing a lot of snakes staying together, head to head, making a terrible buzzing, in a heap of foam. Twenty-four snakes had gathered there, to make a "bead" (a sort of ball). Michael the Brave had heard from the old men of the villages that snakes come together every year to make a "bead" and if there is any man around and takes the bead seizing it by the tail of the biggest snake, whatever he wishes for, he will be lucky with it.

Michael had heard the people of the villages that he was not of a bad origin, that out of the hate between his parents and their relatives, he had been disinherited for his relatives to take his fortune without fearing that when he would grow up he might become a danger for them.

When Michael saw the snakes making a bead, all these things were going through his mind; he was standing motionless at the margin of the clearing and he was thinking about how he could get hold of the bead and accomplish his wish of punishing all the evil-doers and setting the country free from pagans, because at that time the country was under Turkish dominion.

As the boy was standing there pensively, at once he saw a raven coming and, after having rested on his shoulder, it rushed in the middle of the snakes, took the bead in its beak and flew up high. Then, Michael, in that perplexity, forgets about the snakes and runs following the flight of the raven.

Michael was running ceaselessly, in order not to lose the raven from sight, and did not feel that he was crossing "*Dark forests/ And deep valleys, / Market towns and villages, / Leaving the princely Walachia behind*". And the raven did not stop until it reached the city of Constantinople. And when it reached that city, the raven put the "bead" down, right in front of Michael. At that moment, the Turkish emperor was going through that place, in a carriage drawn by six horses, and realizing that Michael was a Romanian child, took him with him to raise him and to get him to embrace the Turkish law. And this is exactly what happened. Michael, although he had accepted the Turkish law, because he had had no choice, had nevertheless kept his Christian faith alive in his heart and he had it in his heart even when he

died. Michael was serving at the court of the Turkish emperor, was growing up and getting stronger every day, so that even the emperor was amazed by Michael's beauty and wisdom.

At the age of 20, his forehead was three-palm wide, he had a cap on his head made out of three bear skins and a sheepskin coat made out of the skin of 30 rams; his broadsword and his mail coat weighed more than 150 kilos. After he passed the age of 20, he got homesick and willing to revenge; and he knew that in the stables of the Turkish emperor there was a wonderworking horse. He went and took it and, riding it, he came to Walachia, drove away from it the pagans and the evildoers and the people who had disinherited him, and all the people that were living on other people's work, and finally he became a ruler over Walachia where he ruled for seven years. And in those seven years, he fought and defeated seven kings and emperors, built seven churches and monasteries for his name to be forever remembered and never forgotten.

3) Michael the voivode and the executioner

When he was bănișor (local administrator) in Mehedinți and was doing his job very carefully and honestly, being loved by the boyars and by the people, the country was being ruled by a bad and wicked ruler, called Alexandru cel Rău (Alexander the Bad). The rumor had it that Michael was the son of a reigning prince and had the right of ruling the country.

Then, Alexander the Bad immediately sent a group of horsemen to catch him and bring him to the throne, in Bucharest. The soldiers immediately went to Strehaia, where Michael had his headquarters, took him and set out with him to Bucharest, as they had been ordered. Michael felt that there had to be some evil reason behind his being taken to the throne, and to the ruler. This is why, as soon as they had got to Bucharest, Michael asked the soldiers to allow him to let him enter the church they met on their way, to pray to God. The soldiers fulfilled his wish and Michael went into the church of Miss Caplea and prayed to Saint Nicholas, who was the protector of that church, to help him escape from the evil intention of the ruler, and he promised that if he should get out of this situation alive he would build a church in honor of this saint. After the divine service, Michael went out of the church with a confident soul. The soldiers took him in front of Alexander the Evil who called the boyars to give a verdict regarding the accusation that he had conspired to gain leadership of the country. They found him guilty and condemned him to death, for Alexander the Evil not to have any rival.

When they took him to kill him, the executioner, axe in hand, looking at the Michael's magnificent appearance, started trembling, was filled with awe, threw the axe away and said out loud: "I cannot kill such a valiant man, it would not be right for such a man to perish!" and he left. The boyars of the country and the people who were present, seeing in this event a divine sign, went to the throne and, all as one, they asked the ruler to forgive Michael, because he was innocent. The ruler, unable to resist the boyars' and the people's supplications, forgave him and appointed him ban of Craiova, giving him a superior rank.

Later on, when he became a ruler, Michael did not forget this event and ordered the building of a great church in honor of Saint Nicholas, a church that exists to this date and lies

on a hill in Bucharest, a hill called *Dealul lui Mihai-Vodă* (The Hill of Michael the Voivode), and he took the executioner to the court, making him his faithful servant¹⁶.

In the gallery of heroes that sacrificed their life for the people's freedom and independence, a central place goes to the exceptional figure of the man who tried and managed for the first time to unify the Romanian Countries, accomplishing, in this way, his predecessors' dream: Michael the Brave. He is one of the great army commanders, one of the great visionaries who intuited that in front of the danger of the Ottoman Empire's expansion, the only force able to preserve the integrity of the sovereignty of the Romanian Provinces was their Union in a single state. A defender of the Christianity, he was one of the outstanding members of the European anti-Ottoman alliance, his religious motivation being a solid support of his actions. He had an intense political-diplomatic activity, along with the military one or the activity meant to consolidate the princely power, as a symbol of the national identity. He dreamt of a strong Romanian State, built on the basis of the ethnic unity of the inhabitants of the three provinces: Walachia, Transylvania and Moldova. His endeavors constitute a defining moment, lying at the basis of the future modern Romanian State.

Nowadays, four centuries after the moment when he was meanly killed by the people whom he had greeted with "welcome, my valiant young men" ("bine ați venit, vrednicii mei voinici"), according to the story of Stavrinus' chronicle, four centuries after the moment when "his body, as handsome as a tree, fell" ("căzu trupul lui cel frumos ca un copaciu...") in the dust of the Turda Plain, we have considered it a sacred duty to present the several legends above about Michael the Brave.

His memory was, is and will remain forever alive in the Romanians' soul, as it stands written on his tombstone:

"Here rests what the crime and the impiety have left out of the holy body of Michael Voivode the Brave, while his soul lives in the soul of a whole nation until the Scriptures will come to pass, when he shall find in heavens the rest of the just, together with the souls of his parents who once lived". (Nicolae Iorga).

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¹⁶Victor, Petrescu, Mihai, Stan, *Mihai Viteazul în memoria urmașilor* (Michael the Brave in His Descendants' Memory), Târgoviște, Editura Bibliotheca, 2001, p. 3-6.

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