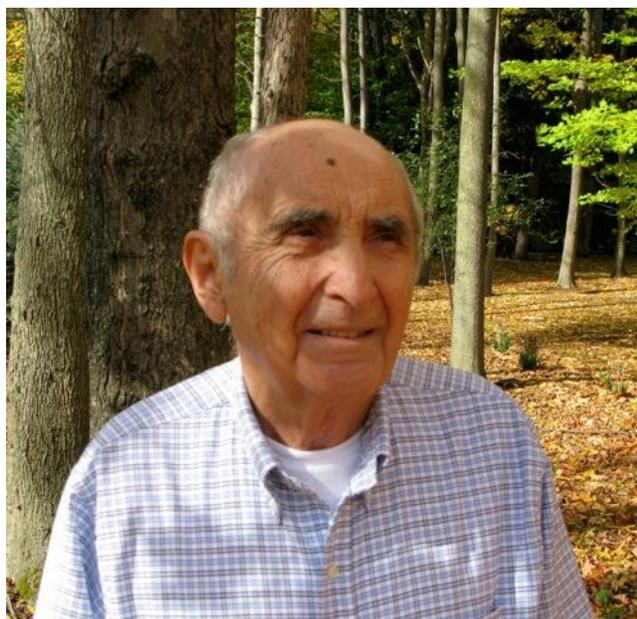


RSAA JOURNAL

Romanian Studies Association of America

Special Guest:

Dr. Nicolae Babuts



Dr. Nicolae Babuts

Dr. Nicolae Babuts, Professor Emeritus of French, has known a successful career that stretched over almost thirty years at the Syracuse University. But professional life did not stop at retirement for him; in fact, one could say it began all over again. To start with, Dr. Babuts has published three impressive volumes during this time:

Mimesis in a Cognitive Perspective: Mallarmé, Flaubert, and Eminescu. New Brunswick, USA and London, UK: Transaction Publishers, 2011.

Memory, Metaphors, and Meaning: Reading Literary Texts. New Brunswick, USA and London, UK: Transaction Publishers, 2009.

Baudelaire: At the Limits and Beyond. Newark, USA and London, UK: University of Delaware Press - Associated University Presses, 1997.

They reflect Dr. Babuts' research in Nineteenth-

Century French literature and in the field of Cognitive approaches to literature. He has studied Baudelaire in particular, but also Hugo, Mallarmé, and Flaubert and has also worked toward developing a cognitive theory of literature. The new and radical move in the theory is to install memory at the center of interpretation. In this new context, interpretation is guided by the concept of dynamic patterns as units of meaning, which are represented neither by words alone nor by theoretical or perceptual categories but by sentences in their capacity to unite language and perception. The concept of dynamic patterns is crucial to understanding how meaning is created to represent the world in memory.

In her review of *Memories, Metaphors and Reading*, Suzanne Nash [*Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 39.1-2 (Fall-Winter 2010-2011): 172-73] affirms: "Nicolae Babuts's latest work on the relationship of memory to creative expression and interpretation is an invaluable addition to the current research on cognitive approaches to literature being carried out by such influential scholars as Elaine Scarry, Michael Holquist, and Jonathan Gottschall." *Memory, Metaphors, and Meaning* abounds in finely textured interpretations that demonstrate the power of literature to create meaning."

Referring to *Mimesis on a Cognitive Perspective*, C. Kerr [*Choice*, November 2011] emphasizes: "Displaying impeccable scholarship, Babuts sheds new light on Stéphane Mallarmé's "Hérodiade," Gustave Flaubert's "Hérodias," and Mihai Eminescu's "Luceafărul." He also takes his readers on a fascinating voyage through centuries of artistic creation, from Aristotle and Virgil to Shakespeare, Proust, Baudrillard, Ricoeur, and Tarantino." "Babuts skilfully lays the foundation for a cognitive



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approach to literature, proving that memory is crucial to the way humans process art.”

Words such as “skillful,” “a pleasure to read,” “graceful book,” “a turning point” reflect the high professional appreciation his work receives among peers.

He has also edited *Mircea Eliade: Myth, Religion, and History* published at Transaction Publishers in 2014.

In addition, he published poetry (http://stonecanejournal.org/SC6OnlineContents/SC6_babuts.pdf) and poetry translations, as well as numerous encyclopedia articles and reviews. His scholarly articles from the Phoenix re-birth period can be read in *Philologica Jassyensia*, *Mosaic*, *Carmina Balcanica*, *Symposium* 49, 54, 57 and 60.

Forthcoming? *Literature and the Metaphoric Universe in the Mind*. The book will appear in September, 2015 at Transaction Publishers.

Folkloric Reception of the Bible

II. Christianity: Europe and Russia

- Romance Languages ■ German ■ British Isles
- Nordic/Scandinavian ■ Russia ■ West Slavic

A. Romance Languages

Folklore in Romance languages, as well as in other languages, should be understood as comprising the creations of oral traditions. However, we know most epic songs, fairy tales, lives of the saints, and ballads, mainly through the mediation of texts, in which they appear either as copies of oral narratives, or as inspiration for the creation of new stories, like those of the lais of Marie de France (late 12th

cent.). There was, especially in the Middle Ages, a fruitful exchange between learned authors or authors connected to the established church and the anonymous throng of singers or tellers of stories.

Many epic songs were inspired by the Christian faith and its traditional role in the wars against the Saracens. As early as the 8th century, “The texts of the period are filled with biblical reminiscences” (Delaruelle: 26). Speaking of the chansons de geste (epic songs), Norman Daniel writes: “The Biblical story is the expression of faith most characteristic of these poems” (Daniel: 214). He cites Aymery’s prayer (in the 13th-cent. poem *La mort Aymery* [The death of Aymery]): “Glorious Father who made the world ... chose to be born for the ransom of the world...” (Daniel: 214–15). The prayer is uttered while Aymery watches the fire that is prepared for him by the Saracens. It contains references to biblical figures such as St. Peter, Jonas, Daniel, and Moses. In another passionate prayer, this time before the battle against the Saracens, from *Le Couronnement de Louis* (12th cent., The Crowning of Louis), Guillaume addresses God and speaks of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, and the life of Jesus, his passion, and resurrection (see Daniel: 216). In *La chanson de Roland* (The Song of Roland), again the warriors’ inspiration comes from the belief in the sacred character of their cause. Both Roland and Charlemagne begin their prayers addressing God with the moving lines: “Veire paterne, ki onques ne mentis” (line 2384: “O true Father who have never lied”) and “Veire paterne, hui cest jorm me defent!” (line 3100:



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“True Father, this day defend me!”) respectively and mention biblical figures. Mortally wounded, Roland invokes the experience of Lazarus and Daniel, hoping to have God save his soul, while Charlemagne prays to God for victory against the Saracens and mentions how Jonas and Daniel were saved (see “Song of Roland”). There may be some irony in the fact that historically Charlemagne’s army at Roncesvaux (reportedly in 778) battled not the Saracens but the Basques. Yet the fact that two or three centuries later (perhaps at the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th cent.), in the Chanson, Roland died fighting the Saracens is an indication of the power of the people’s imagination to substitute the enemies of the faith for the historical reality.

Sometimes, however, the prayer occurs not before a battle with the Saracens but during a confrontation between Christians. Thus Girart of Vienne prays to God to intervene and help Oliver, his champion, in a duel with Roland, Charlemagne’s champion:

Immortal God, Who suffered mortal Passion,
And from the grave brought back and saved St.
Lazarus,
And pardoned all the sins of Mary Magdalen,
And saved old Jonah when the great fish had
him...

Redeem this day the life of my young champion
(Newth: 429)

Speaking of the end of the 11th century in France, Delaruelle points out that the editions and commentaries of the Bible multiply (Delaruelle: 236). Among the reasons for this “flowering” of both oral and written traditions during the 12th and 13th centuries, one may count the crusades, increased wealth, better social conditions, and a

cultural cohesion that prompted L. Cazamian to write: “The medieval system as a whole knew an organic integrity and a well-rounded definiteness of outline during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries” (Cazamian: 11–12); and to add glowingly: “... all western Europe was involved in the glow and enthusiasm of a cosmopolitan age whose common Christian faith was the deepest principle of its moral harmony” (12). On the negative side, one may count the Albigensian crusade and the birth of the Inquisition.

Throughout the Middle Ages, many known and just as many anonymous writers and storytellers told stories of the saints and of biblical events. One of the best known is the story of the fall in the Garden of Eden as told in the liturgical drama called *Le Mystère d’Adam* (*The Mystery of Adam*; see “Liturgical drama”). But the story that has been told and retold, more than any other, with thousands of variations and thousands of contexts is the one connected with the cult of the Virgin Mary. The chronicle version of the Spanish *Mainet*, tells how the young Charlemagne (before he was king) refused to kneel before the Lord of Toledo’s daughter. His tutor explained that *Mainet*, as Charles was called, “bows to no woman except the Holy Virgin” (Montgomery: 56). In the Middle Ages she acquired the title *Maria maris stella* (Mary, the star of the sea). Her images guiding the ship of faith “appear frequently in Iberian literature” (Fontes: 86). Fontes gives as an example of devotion Alfonso X’s *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. On the French side, Émile Male writes: “The cult of the Virgin, which grew in the 12th century, flourished in the 13th” (Male: 175). According to tradition, Mary, already betrothed to Joseph, was given by the high priest the task of weaving the purple veil for the holy of holies. In a scene of the annunciation,



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she is portrayed spinning on the spindle the purple thread. And Male comments: Moreover, the people have never completely forgotten the old tradition: the light threads that in the fall float in the fields, today are still called the threads of the Virgin. (191) In the 13th century, tradition held that Mary was present at the birth of John the Baptist. This may explain why in the later Italian practice of Leonardo and Raphael, e.g., the two children are shown playing together.

A French fairy tale tells the touching story of Péquelé, a juggler who wanted to remain in a monastery to serve the Holy Virgin. The abbot, however, did not think that the Holy Virgin needed an acrobat to serve. One day the abbot witnessed the scene in the chapel in which Péquelé performed, before the image of Our Lady, all his acrobatic tricks with such passion that ... the Virgin left her stone column and came to Péquelé on a ray of light. She leaned over him and, with the edge of her veil, gently wiped his streaming forehead. (Pourrat: 41) The abbot saw that he was wrong and allowed the juggler to stay. Another legend, that of the three Marys, daughters of Anne, has it that the three arrived as fugitives on the shores of Provence (see Santman: 75). In some versions the third Mary is not the Virgin Mary but Mary Magdalene. According to Philippe Walter the three were: Mary the mother of James the minor; Mary Salome, mother of the disciples James and John; and Mary Magdalene: The whole group [including Maximin, Lazarus, and Martha] is said to have arrived in Provence to escape the persecutions. (Walter: 233) But according to Walter, the legend has no historical basis. For him it is a Christian transformation of a triad of fairies. In any case we note that "In Provence the cult of the Marys was connected to the sea" (Santman: 76) and that in his well-known poem *Le Bateau*

ivre (The Drunken Boat), Arthur Rimbaud speaks of "les pieds lumineux des Maries" ("the luminous feet of the Marys") in the context of possibly calming the ocean. Such are the unexpected ways in which legends are propagated.

One of the most interesting phenomena is the case of the Provençal troubadours. Robert Briffault points out that the troubadours at the beginning of the 12th century...took over the formulae and conventions of erotic poetry and applied them to religious poetry by the single expedient of substituting the name of Our Lady for that of the object of their profane passion. (Briffault: 157) Briffault adds: The Italian troubadours [such as Montanhagol and Sordello] adopted the fashion instituted by the piety and prudence of their Provençal colleagues. (159) And they are the ones who were the mediators for the poetry that came to Dante and the other poets of the stil nuovo.

In the modern era, people have been attracted to the various places where the Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared, e.g., Lourdes in France (in 1858), and Fatima in Portugal (in 1917). In the former case, the initial vision appeared as a small woman no bigger than Bernadette herself, very young and not necessarily like Mary mother of Jesus. But by saying that she is the Immaculate Conception, she gave the public, including the authorities and the church, a reason to believe that she was Mary. One can perhaps see here the dynamics of how traditions begin and take hold.

Another saint who merits attention is St. James, the Greater, the apostle who was considered as the evangelizer of Spain. In order to reconcile the sojourns in Spain with the evangelical account of his martyrdom in Judea, the tradition imagines a translation of his body to Spain.



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This was confirmed when his tomb was discovered or rediscovered in the 9th century (see Melczer: 13). One cannot overestimate the role that St. James played in the tradition of pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela. Melczer mentions ... the mystical story involving both Santiago and the Virgin Mary. Weary and disheartened by the labors imposed upon him, Santiago is comforted by the Virgin who appears to him standing on a jasper column planted in the Ebro River. (69) The case of St. Anne is also interesting. She is not mentioned in the Bible, but because she was needed to fill the role of the mother of Mary, both she and her daughter were associated with motherhood. One of Anne's "best-known functions in popular religion was assisting women in labor, a belief kept alive even into this century in, for instance, the Abruzzi region of Italy" (Santman: 84). And in the Romanian fairy tale, "Voinicul cel cu cartea in mina nascut" ("The Hero Born with a Book in his Hand"), it is the Virgin Mary who helps an older couple have a child. The distance between the two areas, Romania and Italy, indicates that these legends were widespread.

Sometimes, fairytales aim to highlight the dimension of the fantastic and not the religious aspect as such. When they do include biblical figures, these acquire some of the aura of the fantastic. In the French tale of "The Flight into Egypt," Our Lady invokes the help of nature to escape the pursuing Herod's soldiers and the child performs miracles (see Pourrat: 70–73). The duo of God and St. Peter, or Jesus and St. Peter are often introduced as traveling in this world and interacting with people. In "Le diable et le maréchal ferrant" ("The Blacksmith Outwits the Devil"; Delarue: 346–47) the blacksmith who

ruins himself by helping others, especially passersby whom he would wine and dine, signs a contract with the devil to sell his soul for Folkloric Reception of the Bible some money. Afterwards Jesus and St. Peter travel through the village and as it is raining, the blacksmith invites them in gives them dinner and fresh clothes, and has them sleep in his house free of charge. The next day, when leaving, the travelers offer to fulfill three requests. These requests help him outwit the devil and get back his soul. In a Romanian tale, "Imparatul cel fara-delege" ("The Sacrilegious King"; Ispirescu: 433–42), God and St. Peter, disguised as two old men, save the heroine's baby from drowning.

In the Romanian tale "Cei trei frati saraci" ("The Three Brothers who were Poor"; Ispirescu: 443–49) each of the three brothers asks that his wish be fulfilled. The oldest brother asks to have a vineyard, the middle brother asks to have a flock of sheep, and the youngest asks to marry and have a house by the bridge. They all promise to help travelers, but only the youngest keeps his promise. He is sleeping when two old men come by and his wife has to wake him up. He helps the two travelers and gives them dinner and a change of clothes. One of the old men asks for more: he asks the man and his wife to sacrifice their only child. He gets up from the table and takes the child to throw him into the oven. But when the wife goes to check the oven, she finds her son unharmed and a woman as shining as the sun comforting him. As the two travelers leave, they walk without touching the ground. A cloud lifts them to heaven. They were God and St. Peter. The tale is noteworthy for some affinity with the story of Abraham who was tested by God when asked to sacrifice his own son (Gen 22; see "Aqedah").



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Also there are some resemblances with the legend of St. Julian the Hospitaller (see Jacobus: 127–28). Both the youngest brother and Julian have a house or a hospice by a bridge or by a river, with the purpose of helping travelers at a critical stage of their journey. Both protagonists are resting or sleeping when the travelers arrive. In both stories the help they give to the strangers is a test that shows their essential goodness and enables them to obtain happiness for the brother and his wife and salvation for Julian and his wife. (See also Gustave Flaubert's version, "La légende de Saint-Julien l'hospitalier" [1877, "The Legend of St. Julian the Hospitalier"], in which the traveler, whose appearance is that of a leper, asks Julian to embrace him. He is Christ, who ascends to heaven and takes Julian with him. The embrace appears almost as shocking as the sacrifice that the brother and his wife are asked to make.) Another legend that has some affinity with the two preceding ones is the story of the giant Reprobus ("the reprobate"), who was persuaded by a hermit to help travelers cross a river. One day when he was carrying a child on his shoulders, the waters began to rise and the child became heavy as lead. With superhuman efforts he brought the child to the other bank to safety. At that moment the child declared: Je suis le roi que tu cherchais et que tu as servi sans le connaître. Désormais, tu ne t'appelleras plus Reprobus mais Christophe, "celui qui a porté le Christ." (I am the king whom you sought and served without knowing him. From now on you will no longer be called Reprobus but Christopher, "the one who carried Christ.") (Walter: 239)

In his fine study of the well-known Romanian ballad Mioritza, Mircea Eliade advances the idea of the shepherd's impending death in a Cosmos

"sanctified by participating in the mystery of marriage." He then adds: "And it is also as a marriage that the Christian mystics and theologians have interpreted Christ's agony and death" (Eliade: 252). He cites St. Augustine as proof of this interpretation.

Some minor references to biblical names are nevertheless significant because they indicate how widespread the biblical echoes reverberated. Thus in Marie de France's lay of "Gugemar," a bed is said to be "a very rich bed, carved by the cunning workmen in the days of King Solomon" (Marie de France: 7). In "A Story of Beyond the Sea," having lost all hope to persuade the Count to save his own daughter, Thibault and the brother pray asking for Jesus' help, and indeed she is rescued (see Marie de France: 175). In a wider sense of folklore, one has to count Christmas carols, which are characteristic of all Romance languages, including those in the new world (see "Carol" and "Christmas VII. Music").

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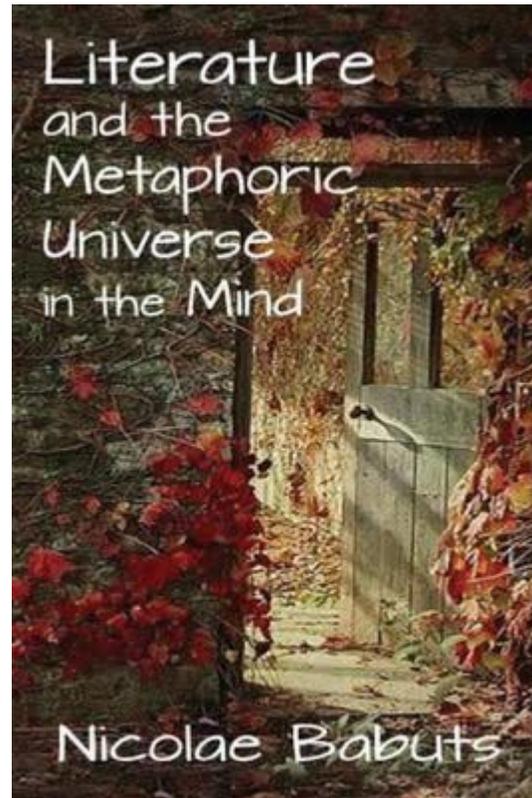
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