

**A Romanian Singer of Tales:
Vasile Tetin**

Eliza Miruna Ghil

Vasile Tetin is a peasant singer native of Teleorman county, in southern Romania. A versatile and highly gifted performer while in his prime, this singer regularly included in his show the local brand of traditional epic poetry, the so-called *cîntec bătrînesc* (“song of old deeds”), a type of epic similar in certain respects, such as themes and verbal compositional techniques, to the Balkan epic studied by Albert B. Lord in his classic book *The Singer of Tales* (1960). This epic differs, however, from the Yugoslav material described by the American scholar mainly in two ways: 1) in length: the songs have a more episodic character and rarely attain the length of one thousand lines; 2) in performing style: they often intermingle a sung and a declaimed *recitative* skillfully interwoven against an instrumental background (i.e., a string accompaniment) by the vocal performer, who may also participate in the playing. Though not unknown in other epic traditions in the Balkans, this type of register switching is quasi-mandatory in the long pieces performed in the Romanian territory.¹

Now seventy-eight years old and officially retired from public singing in spite of an enduring local popularity, Vasile Tetin is an alert interlocutor endowed with an engaging sense of humor and with obvious natural intelligence. Thanks to these qualities, he turns out to be an excellent subject of study for the researcher interested in the performance of epic poetry, both old and new. The following portrait is based on two lengthy encounters that I had with the singer in September and December 1983, encounters supplemented with several shorter interviews conducted according to my instructions in 1983 and 1984.²

I. Education and artistic training

Vasile Tetin was born on September 21, 1907 in the village (*comună*) of Ciuperceeni, situated in the vicinity of Turnu-Măgurele, a little town (and harbor) at the confluence of the rivers Danube and Olt. As one of the ten children born to Marin and Anica, peasants of modest means (*țărani săraci* in modern parlance), Vasile had a childhood full of hardship. He attended school for one year in his native village. But when Romania entered the First World War in 1916, schools closed down and civilian life was disrupted. After the war that ended in 1918, his parents could no longer afford to send him to school, and had to use him for work around the house, particularly to guard sheep. Later on, while in the military service, young Vasile briefly attended a course for illiterate adults (*de alfabetizare*) where he was taught more reading and writing.

He can be considered literate now, though in a very minimal way. Judging by his own statements, the printed word appears to have played no role in the making of his artistic personality: he never saw a printed *cîntec bătrînesc* and never learned one from a book. He regrets at times nowadays, rightly or wrongly, not having been more “schooled” in his lifetime. It is interesting to note that the difficulty of reading as a terribly strenuous type of activity which brings tears to one’s eyes is a recurrent descriptive detail in the variants of some epic songs as sung by Vasile Tetin, for instance in the case of “Dobrișan.”

In 1918, while in his early teens, he joined an elder cousin, Marin Mitran (nicknamed Tăzluș), a violin player and singer, and underwent a sort of apprenticeship under his guidance. This type of learning from elder relatives constitutes the most typical form of apprenticeship in the Romanian epic tradition (Ciobanu 1969:10; Fochi 1980:27; Bîrlea 1942). Our singer learned to play the violin and to sing “songs of old deeds” (*cîntece bătrînești*) and “songs of a good time” (*cîntece de petrecere*). He subsequently enriched this epic and lyric repertory—both genres are part of his programs as we shall see below—while listening to “the village elders,” as he puts it.

He was married at the age of twenty and had three sons. Unfortunately, none of the three inherited his artistic gifts, a fact that saddens him deeply, aware as he is of the imminent disappearance of the epic art form so dear to his heart, a process

now close to completion in the Romanian territory. He attempted at one time to teach epic songs to a niece endowed with a good voice, but the attempt failed. "The young ones are lazy and conceited nowadays," he used to say; they prefer to learn short lyric pieces, since epic singing is a demanding and laborious art form and not a matter of simple memorization as we shall see below. The readiness to train a female performer in this art form may indicate our singer's desire to rejuvenate the genre and its possible audience: traditional epic singing is, by and large, a male trade in Romania as elsewhere in the Balkans (Lord 1960:14).

Vasile Tetin earned his meager living primarily as a farmer. He inherited a few acres of land and would tend his land part of the year, working also for well-to-do peasants (*chiaburi*) part of the year as a sort of contractor (*în parte*). But he would spend a significant amount of time during the weekends (up to three days at a time) performing, a kind of second job that often proved considerably more profitable than the first.

His association during his formative years with two important figures of the Romanian traditional entertainment scene deserves mentioning in this context. He was, first, a member of Maria Lătărețu's band at the beginning of her career (1932-33), and performed with her as a violin player and back-up singer during her early appearances, for instance in the restaurant of Sănduș, in Odaia, a suburb of Turnu-Măgurele. She then left for the capital Bucharest, situated at a distance of about one hundred miles from the area, and subsequently became one of the most prominent members of the lyric repertory called "folkloric" in Romania, a singer whose records reached a wide audience and are often being played on the radio in Romania to this day. Vasile Tetin can still croon "in Maria Lătărețu's manner," and often did so very successfully (particularly with respect to the feminine public) while performing at weddings and parties in the past.

His association with a second traditional singer turned out to be even more important from the viewpoint of epic performance, namely, with Marin Dorcea (Modeleanu), a *lăutar*³ from Ciuperceni, well known to the public in his native Southern Teleorman, and to specialists. Tetin performed with Marin Dorcea extensively as back-up singer (*secundaș*, as he calls it) in his youth, and learned from him part of his own epic repertory. Born in 1895 and now deceased, Marin Dorcea is one of the fourteen epic singers featured in individual portraits in Alexandru Amzulescu's well-known

anthology of *Cîntece bătrinești* (1974:522-24). A house builder (*dulgher*) and part-time singer (particularly during the holidays of the cold season), Vasile Tetin's mentor possessed, according to A. Amzulescu, the richest repertory of a contemporary epic singer, some forty-five pieces in all. Items which Marin Dorcea once sung, such as "Gruia lui Novac," "Badiu Cîrciumaru," "Miu Haiducu," "Corbea," "Radu Anghel de la Greci," "Antofiță a lui Vioară," "Dobrișan," "Chira Chiralina," "Ghiță Cătănuță," "Ciobanul care și-a pierdut oile," are now also in Tetin's repertory. He may not have learned all of them from Dorcea directly,⁴ but he credits him, for instance, with the teaching of "Dobrișan," one of his most elaborate and beautiful pieces.

The master of them both had been, for part of this material, Ancu Zgîrță the Elder (Moș Ancu Zgîrță) from Ciuperceni. Tetin claims to have learned from this singer "Miu Haiducu," one of the longest songs in his repertory (more than seven hundred lines in the variant that he sang for me), among others. Ciuperceni appears thus to have been a major center of epic singing in the "peasant style," as opposed to the other style extant in the Romanian performing tradition, namely the "gypsy" style, brilliantly represented, for instance, by the "school" of Clejani (Ilfov county, near Bucharest). Space does not permit a full description of these performing styles in the present context. Suffice it to say here that the "peasant style" is described as "purer" in melodic line and intonation, while the "gypsy style" is referred to as being more heavily ornamented and also characterized by a nasal delivery. The specificity of the latter style appears to be due to its representatives' proximity to urban folklore rather than to racial propensities (Ciobanu 1969:147). As for our singer, he is obviously a representative of the "peasant style," a true *lăutar țăran* ("peasant bard"), as Amzulescu would call him.

II. Career and Performing Style

Vasile Tetin is an equally skillful performer of epic and lyric songs. He used to intermingle the two genres in his public appearances in order to present a well-balanced and entertaining program. Endowed with a keen sense of showmanship, he seems

to have reached a high degree of professionalism in his “act,”⁵ judging by the wide variety of songs he knows and the astute awareness of the public’s response, a response to which he is able to react instantaneously.

When he was still performing publicly (he retired in 1982 after a bicycle fall⁶) he would get almost weekly invitations to perform at weddings, anniversaries, family occasions (such as the baptizing of a child) and work gatherings (*clacă*) throughout the area. He had compiled four programs of about one hundred songs each and had them ready for use. He would alternate them in such a way that none would be repeated after too small an interval, so that guests who participated in the wedding where he sang the previous weekend, for instance, and who might happen to be invited also to the anniversary where he was to perform the subsequent weekend would not recognize the same pieces in the program. Epic, lyric, and dance materials were given almost equal importance as far as I can tell.

He performed in Teleorman as far north as Siliștea-Gumești, on both banks of the river Olt, crossing thus at times into Oltenia,⁷ and as far east as Zimnicea. During his years with Maria Lătărețu’s band he reached the outskirts of the capital Bucharest. His appearances in taverns, on the occasions of fairs (*bîlci*), organized in Turnu-Măgurele in connection with the yearly cattle market (*oborul de vite*) that took place around Saint Mary’s day in August, were much sought after in the 30’s, 40’s, and 50’s. He would be paid handsome fees by innkeepers and restaurant owners who were eager to attract well-disposed patrons ready for relaxation after the business transactions concluded in the marketplace nearby. He could make at times twice as much as the predetermined fee in unsolicited tips that enthusiastic listeners would throw his way in the heat of the performance. Nea Vasile⁸ likes to tell the following story: he once agreed to perform for 1,250 *lei* during the fair that accompanied the cattle market in Turnu-Măgurele in the 30’s and ended up earning 3,000 additional *lei* in such tips for the two weeks of the fair.⁹

Vasile Tetin used to have an extremely powerful voice. He would thus sing in the village of Șegarcea-din-Vale, for instance, and his singing would reach as far as the village of Lunca, situated at a distance of more than one mile. Much of this beautiful instrument still survives. He uses it both forcefully and skillfully, and can switch effortlessly from a powerful baritone to a delicate

and soft countertenor of infinite sweetness within the same song. He often uses a melisma and high pitched notes in the opening melodic lines of the flexible stanzas (*strofe libere*) that constitute the compositional units in this type of epic. In lyric pieces his voice turns warm and insinuating, for instance in the half-sensual, half-melancholic crooning in “Maria Lătărețu’s manner.”

His violin-playing must have been also first-rate. It still is quite good, in spite of the broken hand in which that bicycle accident of 1982 resulted. In the variant of “Ciobanul care și-a pierdut oile” (“The Shepherd who lost his sheep”) that he sang for me in September 1983, the narrative episodes are interspersed with “ethnic” singing and playing, while the hero attempts to extract information about the lost flock from a Romanian, a Gypsy, a Russian, and a Serbian. The instrumental interludes that accompany these characters’ answers are of virtuoso quality.

Vasile Tetin displays a very engaging artistic personality. Though not pushy or overbearing as some performers tend to become because of an overwhelming desire to please, he is understandably proud of his art. His discreet and modest nature brightens tremendously when stimulated by the presence of an attentive and sympathetic audience. When I first visited him in September 1983 in his little “summer house” in Măgurele, I found him somewhat ailing and dispirited. He apologized and thought that he would disappoint us that day because he was in poor physical shape. But after just a few minutes of singing he came back to life, since he noticed that my party and myself¹⁰ respected his art and took a genuine interest in it. He then sang for us for about five hours almost uninterruptedly (except for a twenty-minute break for a little snack), warming up gradually, and we could hardly stop him at the end of the day. Answering one question, Nea Vasile told me that singing uninterruptedly did not tire his voice and that the more he sang the better and the more invigorated he felt.

Nothing escaped the singer’s attention while performing for our group. Thus, during the lengthy “Cîntecul lui Miu Haiducu” (“The Song of Miu the Outlaw”), which occupied 716 lines and 30 minutes on tape, he turned to his fictitious *cobzar* (“back-up fiddler”) three times and poked fun at him because “he was falling asleep.” This type of staging device was meant to illustrate his answer to one of the questions concerning his reactions to the public’s possible boredom. What did he do when he noticed that

some listeners were dozing off? He said, during the interview that preceded this performance of “Miu Haiducu,” that he would turn at times to his back-up fiddler and start pretending to mock him for falling asleep, thus alluding tactfully to the audience’s lack of attention at that specific moment.

This bantering in *pseudo parlato* (a style close to the normal intonation of prose) was obviously prompted by the audience’s reactions whenever it occurred. While I myself listened to him spell-bound all of the time, some member of our group may have appeared to the singer absent-minded, and this detail reminded him of what he told me that he would do under similar conditions at a wedding or a party where the real back-up fiddler would be present and could be used to startle the dozing audience. These brief comic interludes were both amusing and ingenious; they strengthened the singer’s grip on the public and fueled the listeners’ curiosity about what was to follow.

In addition to his powerful voice and skillful violin-playing, Vasile Tetin also takes pride in what he calls *memorul bun* (“the good memory”). He could listen just once to an epic song of average length (200-300 lines for the Romanian corpus of “songs of old deeds”) and would be able to perform it unhesitatingly the following weekend. For longer pieces he may have needed to listen to the piece twice, he said. This practice seems widespread among the good epic singers in the Balkans (Fochi 1980:28; Lord 1960:19; Ciobanu 1969:72).

Vasile Tetin’s epic singing is known to specialists in his own country. Two of his renditions of epic songs—of “Vidros” and “Dobrișan”—appeared in print in Amzulescu’s *Cîntece bătrînești* mentioned above, while a third, “Ghiță Cătănuță,” appears in this scholar’s most recent publication, the monumental *Cîntecul epic eroic. Tipologie și corpus de texte poetice* (Amzulescu 1981). Some of his performances were taped by Ovidiu Bîrlea in July 1962. Tetin subsequently traveled in person to the Institute of Folklore in Bucharest (now “Institutul de Cercetări Etnologice și Dialectologice”), and sang for the same researcher “Antofiță a lui Vioară,” “Gruia lui Novac,” and “Badiu Cîrciumaru” (“Badiu the Tavernkeeper”).¹¹

Our singer had some national exposure during his long performing career as well, such as a television appearance in January 1966 with a rendition of “Toma Alimoș.” He also visited Bîrlad (in Moldavia) and Baia Mare (in northern Transylvania) in

the 60's, a period during which the "song of old deeds" was given a good deal of attention by the Romanian authorities, who were interested in collecting and preserving it for posterity.

III. A Singer of Tales at Work: Vasile Tetin's Artistry

Vasile Tetin is a genuine "singer of tales" who does not perform a memorized and fixed text, although he may respond when asked that he does so. He creates the song while singing it, that is, *in performance*, while weaving the traditional thematic commonplaces (called *formule cǎlǎtoare* by the Romanian scholars) and the rhythmic formulae that fit the general design of the respective song in a forceful and apparently natural flow. There are here and there split-second hesitations, practically unnoticeable during the live performance but audible on tape; they unveil for the researcher, though *not* for the normal listener, the tremendous effort of concentration and elaboration at work during the instance of live performance that we witness.

The musical/rhythmic structure seems to be the most stable element in the combination of artistic factors that make up the complex syncretic product called *cîntec bătrinesc*. But the verbal component displays a high degree of flexibility, so that two renditions of the same song, even sung by the same artist, are in no way identical, though the singer usually claims that he "always sings the song that way." I tested this claim tacitly on several performances of "Dobrișan," and I shall comment on the results of this experiment below. This phenomenon is well known to scholars familiar with live epic performances (e.g., Murko 1929:15).

However, even at the musical/rhythmic level, controlled improvisation (that is, controlled by the traditional elements which the singer internalized during his apprenticeship years and actualizes during the live performance) may still play a significant role. I mean in particular the alternation between sung recitative and declaimed recitative, alternation used regularly in long works in order to vary the tone, rest the voice, and break the monotony of the stately, solemn melody often typical of epic singing.¹² This switch from the sung to the declaimed register is not a fixed given for the song in question; it is rather a device at the performer's disposal to use as he sees fit during the live performance (Vicol 1976:23; 1979:49). I believe, for my part, that the situational

context and the performer's capacity to adapt to it often determine when the switch occurs. This seems to be the case in Vasile Tetin's performing practice, as far as I can judge on the basis of observations made during repeated performances of "Miu Haiducu," "Corbea," "Dobrișan," and "Badiu Cîrciumaru."

Our singer handles such alternations very skillfully. He also intersperses his delivery with parenthetical comments meant to bring the work to the audience's level as he perceives it, such as explanations of archaic terms (e.g., *malacu* in "Badiu Cîrciumaru," glossed by Nea Vasile as "that's how they called the Turk then"); implicit apologies for some rough terms unsuitable for the ears of city folk, particularly female (for instance: *futu-mi-l* ["fuck him"] used by the hero's enemies in "Min Haiducu" and swiftly replaced with *arză-mi-l* ["may he burn in hell"]); brief anticipations in *pseudo parlato* of coming events (e.g., "Look here how they're going to tie him up!" in "Badiu Cîrciumaru"); and so forth.

I shall attempt now to provide a glimpse into Vasile Tetin's epic know-how by comparing the beginnings of two renditions of "Dobrișan," sung on September 21, 1983 (for me) and on July 17, 1962 (for Ovidiu Bîrlea) (Amzulescu 1974:430 ff.).¹³ I shall then refer briefly to a third variant produced by another singer. This song belongs to the category of the "feudal court" (Amzulescu 1964).

Here are, side by side, the first two free stanzas of the variants in question. The initial 44 lines in my variant (A) and the initial 36 lines in Ovidiu Bîrlea's variant (B) are sung uninterruptedly, an occurrence that is typical for the performance of long epic pieces in which the sung and the declaimed recitatives alternate, but in which the first one or two free stanzas are entirely sung, in order to set the framework and the pace for the whole performance.

A

Floare verde, flori domnești,
 Floare verde, flori domnești,
 Din oraș, din Bucureștii,
 Din oraș, din București,
 5 La 'nalte case domnești
 La 'nalte case domnești
 Ce să văd în Bucureștii,
 Ce să văd în București

B

Floare verde flori domnești
 Floare verde flori domnești
 Din oraș, din București
 La nalte case domnești
 Ce să văd în București
 Ce sîn' nalte-n scărișoare
 Și rotunde-n foișoare,
 La mijlocu casilorî

+ Dă sara, dă cînd pîrăște pã Dobrișan!	+ Șade-un tînăr dă Moldovean, Măi, ce cîne, ce dujman	
+ Nu-l pîrăște pã dreptate	+ Și la inimă 'iclean,	60
45+ Il pîrăște pã strîmbătate	+ De sara, dă cînd pîrăște pã Dobrișan!	
+ Nu-l pîrăște ca să-l crească	+ Iel nu-m' pîra pã dreptate	
+ Mi-l pîrăște ca să-l piardă!	+ Și-l pîra pã strîmbătate,	
(Instrumental interlude)	+ Nu-l pîra ca să mi-l crească	
	+ Și-l pîra ca să mi-l piardă..	65

Translation of variant (A)

I. Green flower, princely flowers,
Green flower, princely flowers,
From the city, from Bucharest,
From the city, from Bucharest,
In princely houses,
To be seen in Bucharest
To be seen in Bucharest

—Instrumental interruption—

Which are high in their staircases
And all round in their towers

Pseudo parlato: Good folks, only my fiddler had houses like these; but the earthquake brought them down!

—Instrumental interlude—

II. In the middle of those houses
A big table is set there
Surrounded by many lords.
They were seated at the table
And all were drinking and eating.
Close to the prince Minea-vodă
Who was seated, dear God?
Three lords from the Northern country
With hats made of a bear's fur.
They pay no taxes to the empire
They know no fear of God.
One of them has a black beard
All the lords ask his opinion.
Another has a white beard
All the lords listen to him, folks!

—Instrumental interruption—

Near the three Northern lords

Who was seated, dear God?
 It was Trezdeu Asmaşlîu
 May God strike him with his might!
 Near Resteu Aşmaştale
 Who was seated, dear God?
 It was Resteu Aşmaştale [*sic*]
 Who performs his job on horseback.
 —Instrumental interruption—
 Near Resteu Aşmaştale
 Who was seated, dear God?
 It was a young Moldavian lord
 What an enemy, what a dog!
 And treacherous in his heart.
 —Instrumental interruption—
 What an enemy, what a dog!
 And treacherous in his heart.
 Since last evening he slanders Dobrişan!
 He does not slander him with reason
 He slanders him without reason.
 He does not slander to praise him,
 He slanders him to destroy him!
 —Instrumental interlude—

The variant of September 1983 (A) seems to start more hesitatingly than the variant of July 1962 (B): the singer repeats five of the six initial lines and uses after stanza I an aside comment, in *pseudo parlato*, about his fiddler's houses (with a fleeting reference to the devastating earthquake of March 5, 1977, to bring the communication "up to date"). Variant (B) is narratively more direct, and more ornate in its descriptions, such as those of the participants in the princely feast (lines 12-16) and of the meal served. The motive ("travelling formula" in the Romanian scholars' terminology) of the "big table"¹⁴ occurs identically in both variants: "Mare masă mi-este-ntinsă/ Dă mulz' boieri mi-e coprinsă"—11. 13-14 in (A) and 9-10 in (B)—but in (B) an elaborate version of the "banquet" motive also occurs (11. 22-36), prompted by a direct reference to the festive meal in which the audience itself is participating while the performance goes on (II. 20-21: "Chefu' dăplin şi-l făcea/ Tot ca şi noi acuma..." ["They were eating their fill/ As we are doing right

now’]). Variant (A) omits this “travelling formula,” perhaps since we were in actuality a small group, not the boisterous public seated at a wedding or at a party.

But if the beginning of (B) seems superior in descriptive elaboration, a greater portion of the work is sung in (A)—44 lines versus 36, a feature which imposes the solemnity of the epic diction more forcefully. Moreover, the first occurrence of the declaimed recitative dramatically breaks this musical continuum precisely when the narration hits upon the beginning of the conflict (l. 43): i.e., the treacherous speech by one of the prince’s advisers, the young Moldavian, who slanders the hero Dobrișan, a rich shepherd from Stoienești whose authority and glamor rival, he says, those of the prince himself.

The recurrence of some four brief instrumental interruptions, one in stanza I and three in stanza II, combined with the two full-fledged instrumental interludes that mark the boundary between free stanzas, enhance the solemn tone of the performance.¹⁵ I am unable to compare (A) with (B) on this point, since the published text of (B) does not indicate at all the instrumental dimension of the performance. But one has the feeling that in (A) the singer takes longer to set the tone and seems to “test the water” in order to adjust his delivery to his audience’s expectations, an audience with whom he is somewhat unfamiliar. He also seems eager to put on a more complete show and to sustain his epic delivery, and at the highest level of elaboration (melodic/poetic/instrumental), once it has been established.

If we turn now briefly to the same song as performed by another singer, namely Petria Bucătariu from Sihlea, Râmnicu-Sărat county in northeastern Valachia, close to the frontier with Moldavia (Diaconu 1980:144 fol.),¹⁶ we will be struck by its conciseness. All the essential elements of the narrative (*and* of the epic diction) are there, but what Tetin sings in forty-seven lines in (A) and in sixty-five in (B) takes only fourteen in Petria Bucătariu’s rendition. Here is how this singer goes about it:

În curți la Ștefañ-Vodî
 Frumșasî masî mi-ntiñsî
 Di mulș boșeriġ mġ-e cupriñsî.
 Dar la masî čini-m’ șadi?
 Șed boșeri țării

Pribeḡi Moldóvii,
 Caimacani tîrguluḡ,
 Veşnişḡ dḡ-aḡ divanuluḡ.
 Can la capu mesii
 10 Şadi catanáş mai mari:
 Niş nu bḡa, niş nu mîniñcî,
 Numai şadi şî-m pîraşti—
 Pîraşti pă Dobrişan,
 Dobrişan dîñ Stojeneşti.

At Prince Ştefan-Vodî's court
 A beautiful table is set
 Surrounded by many lords.
 At the table who is seated?
 The country's lords are seated,
 The exiles from Moldavia,
 The vice-princes of the city,
 The counselors of the *divan*.
 Close to the head of the table
 A high officer is seated:
 He neither drinks, nor eats,
 Only sits there and slanders.
 He slanders Dobrişan,
 Dobrişan from Stojeneşti.

In the variant quoted above—let us call it (C) —the slanderer is an officer of high rank (*catanaş mai mari*) who is not clearly described as a Moldavian. Such a character would have struck a singer from a Danubian county, a singer like Vasile Tetin, as foreign and therefore potentially dangerous, but would have interested a singer from an area adjacent to Moldavia, like Petria Bucătariu, much less in this respect. There are some “exiles from Moldavia” mentioned (l. 6), but it is not clear whether this officer is one of them.

We recognize the motive of the “big table” in lines 3-4 and some of the participants in the banquet. The *caimacani* (“vice-princes”) occur in l. 7 here as before in l. 15 of (B), but none of the other lords on which (A) and (B) dwell at length—the rebels from the Northern country (ll. 19-26 in A and 43-47 in B), or the dignitaries with exotic names (ll. 29-34 in A and 51-54 in

B)—appears in Petria Bucătariu's variant. I cannot judge the handling of the musical component by this performer since the editor does not mark it in any way.

Tetin's variant (A) is 553 lines long (counting as individual lines all the repeated lines); among these, 170 are in *recitativ melodic*, 384 are in *recitativ parlato*, and 4 are in a transitional delivery, half sung and half declaimed. Tetin's variant (B) is 600 lines long; among these 123 are sung and 477 are declaimed. Petria Bucătariu's variant (C) is 137 lines long.

The abundance of lines delivered in *parlato* appears to be a stable characteristic of Vasile Tetin's performing style and has little to do, so it seems, with the advanced age of the singer. This hypothesis has been suggested by some scholars, according to whom the recourse to the *parlato* register may be a device used by older singers in order to save their strength (Amzulescu 1974:xli). The sung parts are more extensive in (A) of 1983 than in (B) of 1962. His performance of other epic pieces, such as "The Song of Iancu Jianu," a classic piece for the Romanian repertory belonging to the category of "songs about outlaws" (see Appendix), is entirely sung and embellished with elaborate instrumental interludes and with some brief instrumental interruptions that together create a considerably fuller overall artistic effect than can be inferred from the simple reading of a published text. The frequent changes in intonation, gestures, and mimicry add to the vivacity of a performance which never turns dull, in spite of the repetitiveness in the presentation of the episodes narrated.

Space does not permit an analysis of the entire "Song of Dobrișan" here. I shall only mention, in the present context, the ending provided by Vasile Tetin's variants, an ending which is subtler and more thought-provoking than that of Petria Bucătariu's variant. The two rivals, the prince and the shepherd, discover—thanks to disclosures by their mother, now a nun—that they are in fact brothers who had been separated in childhood by the Turks.¹⁷ The two brothers celebrate their reunion and bury their rivalry with a large feast. Variant (C) stops after this scene of reconciliation.

But variants (A) and (B) go on to show the prince offering Dobrișan the opportunity to exchange positions with him. The latter declines the honor and proceeds to extol the virtues of the pastoral lifestyle, free of the worries that burden a sovereign in power and capable of constant renewal. In variant (A), which is

more explicit on this point than variant (B), Dobrișan remarks to his brother the prince:

- + Domnia ieste adevărat sărăcia.
- + Azi te bagă, mîine te scoate,
- + Stăpîn nu iești pã domnie niciodată.
- + Da' ciobănia ie bogăția,
- + Moare o oaie, să naște zece,
- + Ciobănașu' nu să pierde.¹⁸

Princely power is true misery.
 Today you're in, tomorrow you're out,
 You never master princely power.
 But being a shepherd is true richness,
 A sheep dies, ten sheep are born,
 The shepherd always prevails.

After this speech they conclude an alliance; Dobrișan is granted “tax privileges” and will reign undisturbed from now on in Stoieniști.

* * *

Vasile Tetin's production in the epic genre is constantly first-rate and his artistry enlightens and delights in a steady outpouring of musical, poetic, and dramatic richness. In his practice the epic art form lives, and the epic universe is brought to life anew each time he sets out to “tell”¹⁹ the heroes' deeds. He obviously loves to sing about Miu Haiducu, Iancu Jianu, or Dobrișan, and his face brightens up with joy in the heat of the performance. While singing, he becomes the voice of this legendary past, a voice which revivifies the heroic world with its sophisticated and transient sound, thus fulfilling *hic et nunc* the glorious and fragile predicament of the singer of tales: to live through song, for us and with us, an epic experience for the duration of the live performance.

University of New Orleans

Notes

¹In Romanian scholars' terminology these registers are *recitativ melodic* and *recitativ parlat* (called *băsmi* by the traditional singers, from *basm*, "fairy tale"). One or two lines may be delivered in an intermediary type of recitative when a transition from the sung to the declaimed register occurs.

²I would like to thank Mr. Stelian Cristescu (Bucharest) and Mr. Gheorghe Stan (Turnu-Măgurele) for their generous and expert assistance in this respect.

³The term *lăutar* comes from *lăută* ("luth") and is the typical "show business" appellative for singers/performers of the type described in the present article, a term used in villages in Romania.

⁴The last item in this enumeration, performed by Tetin for me in September 1983, was learned from "Tache Ruses from the village of Traian, old *lăutar*," according to our singer's admission made on tape at the end of his performance of this song.

⁵I use this term in the sense we give it in modern "show business" parlance. Vasile Tetin is as sophisticated an entertainer as those we are accustomed to watching in contemporary Western societies, and his ability to put together a "good show" is remarkable, as Part II of this paper will describe.

⁶Vasile Tetin is still vigorous at seventy-eight, his memory is intact, his reactions vivacious and his diction clear. But he is not in perfect health any longer and considers himself artistically somewhat rusty. The right hand injured in the fall is not as agile with the violin as before, he says, and he is no longer able to reach vocally certain very high notes which presented no problem for him in the past. He continues to work his land as usual.

⁷The river Olt represents the natural boundary between the traditional provinces Valachia (capital Bucharest), and Oltenia (capital Craiova). Some of Tetin's performing characteristics bring him close to what A. Amzulescu described as the style of elder singers from Oltenia: the heavy reliance on *recitativ parlat*, for instance (Amzulescu 1974:xl).

⁸*Nea* is an appellative coming from *nenea* ("elder brother, uncle") and is used as a form of more intimate address to elders in villages. The *nea* in question may then respond with *nepoate*, *nepoțică* ("nephew, little niece"). Nea Vasile was confused for some time about how to address me. Thus, I passed through an intermediary stage of *nepoțică, doamnă profesoară* ("little niece, lady professor"), but finally reached the *nepoțică* stage, an achievement of which I was very proud.

⁹The importance of the market day as an occasion for this type of performance has been recorded also for Yugoslavia (Lord 1960:15).

¹⁰We were about eight altogether. I wanted to have with me some people from the region born in the nearby villages, since the primary interest of my research was the song *in performance* and the rapport between singer and public (i.e., the pragmatic dimension, in the semiotic sense, of the epic text, not just the verbal aspect of the phenomenon). Thus, I never interrupted or contradicted the singer, not even when I taped him later on; I told him to do for us what he would do for a normal public at a party, at

his own pace. I was born in Turnu-Măgurele myself and the dialectal features of the Romanian spoken (and sung) in the area posed no problem for me. But I left Romania almost twenty years ago and my foreignness might well have been evident.

¹¹These tapes are probably now in this Institute's archives; they are, understandably, a jealously guarded property of this institution and, though they may be consulted, they may not be copied. Therefore I have relied on my collected material for the present remarks. I also rely, of course, on this Institute's publications on the epic tradition.

¹²Tiberiu Alexandru (1975:56) mentions three such types of recitative: "recto-tono," or the same sound repeated several times (the term comes from Gregorian chant); "melodic," or repeated formulae consisting of several sounds clustered around one main sound; "parlato," an almost spoken delivery. A. Fochi (1980:109) considers the last two types as truly essential for the performance of the Romanian epic.

¹³The place of the instrumental interludes is not marked in this edition; the sign (+) placed on the left side of a line indicates the declaimed register, while no sign indicates the sung register. I also adopt A. Amzulescu's notation for the transcription of my variant.

¹⁴These "formulae" have been listed, discussed, and illustrated by A. Fochi (1980:283-354). I shall refer to this list in my commentary on "Dobrișan." I use the term "motive" to refer to these units, in accordance with the practice of some scholars who would call these "loci communes" *motives* in order to distinguish them from the strictly rhythmic *formulae*, as in the analysis of the Old French *chanson de geste* (Rychner 1955:126-39).

¹⁵I distinguish between the full-fledged *instrumental interlude* (which exhibits a clear melodic structure and marks the passage from one free stanza to another) and the brief *instrumental interruption* (an accompaniment of a few bars that might have usually been played by the back-up fiddler while the singer would have concentrated on the vocal part). In Vasile Tetin's renditions of epic songs, both types of instrumental interventions occur. I have not encountered this distinction in the scholarship on the topic; since this distinction is manifest in Tetin's actual epic practice, however, I make it here.

¹⁶I follow the phonetic transcription used by this editor. The dialect he transcribes is a transitional one between Valachian and Moldavian (presenting more features of the latter, in fact). Tetin's dialect is purely Valachian.

¹⁷The cause of this separation—abduction by the Turks—is not mentioned in (C). The Turks' ominous presence frequently surfaces in the epic variants produced in Teleorman, a geographic area adjacent to the Danube and the Ottoman Empire in the Middle Ages, and therefore vulnerable to the Turks' attacks during the times in which many of the Romanian epic songs originated.

¹⁸In a previous episode the prince panicked when he saw the richly clothed hero and mistook him for an envoy from the Sultan's court, sent to remove him from his reign. Dobrișan's remark does not fall on deaf ears. The prince's panic appears in both (A) and (B).

¹⁹“a zice” is the technical term for epic diction in the parlance of the *lăutari*.

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Appendix

The Song of Iancu Jianu

“The Song of Iancu Jianu” is a classic work in the Romanian traditional epic repertory. It belongs to the category of “songs about outlaws” (*haiduci*, that is, popular figures who supposedly stole from the rich in order to help the poor in medieval times). Another such song from the same category mentioned in this paper is the one on “Miu Haiducu.” These heroes were not exclusively male, as the pieces dedicated to the *haiduca* Voica Bălaca testify (Amzulescu 1974:xxiii).

Iancu Jianu is a historical figure. An aristocrat by birth, he became an outlaw presumably in order to fight the abuses inflicted on peasants by the local feudal lords obedient to the Turks. His surname comes from the river Jiu, in Oltenia. He lived at the beginning of the nineteenth century and was a comrade-in-arms of Tudor Vladimirescu, the head of the peasant uprising of 1821. He was presumably killed by a posse’s bullet at a fairly early age.

The song is entirely sung and its rhythm is very lively. The appellative *lele* that marks the beginning of some of the free stanzas (I, V, VIII, IX) is sung on a highly pitched melisma (like a long musical shout) and is followed by a few bars played on the violin. The instrumental interludes are at times fairly elaborate and at times fairly brief, and use variations on the basic melodic line of the musical stanza. The melody is practically the same for each stanza. A few instrumental bars prolong certain lines here and there; the singer accompanies himself on the violin from the beginning to the end.

There is an instrumental introduction before stanza I starts; it is not, however, a fully structured *taxîm* (Alexandru 1975:55), but only an introductory series of musical phrases that will reappear in the melody of the stanza itself. Because of the rhythmic vivacity of the song, the smooth passage to the declaimed register (so

widespread in “Dobrișan,” “Miu Haiducu,” and others) does not occur in this piece. The melody moves on so forcefully that there is no time for this register-switching.

A. Amzulescu (1974:346-48) published an incomplete variant of this song as performed by Mihai Constantin (nicknamed “Lache Găzaru”) from Desa, in Dolj county, in 1951. The tape which contained Constantin’s rendition seems to have been partially damaged, and I have not encountered a complete variant of this famous piece in modern anthologies. Vasile Tetin’s variant seems well crystallized artistically. The song is 144 lines long in his rendition and lasts 14 minutes on tape.

The song was taped on September 21, 1983 in Măgurele, in Teleorman county, Romania.

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| I. | Lele! | (a few instrumental bars) |
| | Dedeșăl și dedeșăl măi, | (a few bars) |
| | Colea-n vale-n codricelî, | (a few bars) |
| | Colea-n vale-n codricelî, | (a few bars) |
| | La umbra de stejărelî, | (a few bars) |
| | Frumos doarme-un voinicel, | 5 |
| | Frumos doarme-un voinicelî, | |
| | Tot cu arma lîngă iel. | |
| | — Instrumental interlude — | |
| II. | Tot cu arma lînga iel, mă, | (a few bars) |
| | -Mă, duc, mamă, după ielî, | |
| | Mă duc, mamă, după ielî, | 10 |
| | Că mi-e tînr voincelî | |
| | Și mi-e tare drag dă ielî. | |
| | -Ca nalba ș-o viorea, mă, | |
| | Nu te duce, fata mea, | |
| | Nu te duce, fata mea, mă! | 15 |
| | Ăla nevastă nu vrea, mă, | |
| | Nevasta lui ie flinta, | |
| | Flinta și haiducia. | |
| | S-a amoretat dă iea, mă, | |
| | S-a amoretat dă iea. | 20 |
| | — Instrumental interlude — | |
| III. | Ca mărariu, ca mărariu, | |
| | Ca mărariu, ca mărariu, | |
| | Ăla mi-e Iancu Jianu, | |

- Cel mai mare căpitanu'.
 Maică, mi-a speriiat Teleormanu' 25
 Și mi-a jăfuit divanu'! (a few bars)
 Țăla mi-e Iancu Jianu,
 Cel mai mare căpitanu'
 D-a speriiat Teleormanu'
 Și mi-a jăfuit divanu' 30
 Mamă, nu te duce, fata mea,
 Ca să trăiești prin pădure,
 Să speli... 'aine sîngerate (slight hesitation to find
 După 'aiduci lăpădate. the rest of the line)
 Să stai, maică-nchisî-n casî 35
 Și să te uiț' pã fereastră;
 Să speli 'aine sîngerate
 După 'aiduci lăpădate.
 — Instrumental interlude (elaborate)—
 IV. Mărzăcel și mărzăcel! (a few bars)
 - Iancule, dă unde vii? 40
 Iancule, dă unde vii?
 - De la tîrg du peste Jii.
 - Iancule, ce-ai tîrguit?
 - Cîn' ți-oi spune, mai nimic!
 Am dat aur și argintî, 45
 An loat gluanțe dă plumbî.
 Am dat aur și argintî,
 Mi-an loat gluanțe dă plumbî.
 Căci copiii șade-n crîngî,
 Sînt copiii fără minte, 50
 Rîsipesc la gluanțe multe,
 Bagă iarba cu palma,
 Gluanțele cu chivăra.
 Și mi-e frică dă belea,
 Că i-o sosî potera, 55
 N-are, frate, cu ce da
 Și le-o scurta viața.
 — Instrumental interlude (very lively rhythm)—
 V. Lele! (a few bars)
 Siminoc și siminuocî, (a few bars)
 Cîntă cucu-n vîrf dă pluopî, (a few bars)
 Iancu să trage la Oltî, 60
 Iancu să trage la Olt. (a few bars)

- Să trage, măi, cu foc,
 Și să trage, măi, cu foc.
 Că la munt' ie-Olt' vărsatî,
 Văzui că sînt vinovatî, 65
 Văzui că sînt vinovat.
- Instrumental interlude (very lively; long and elaborate)—
- VI. Strigă Iancu-n gura mare: (a few bars)
- Măi podiță, măi podare,
 Trage podu' mai la vale
 E, că-ț' răcesc un glonț în șale! 70
 Trage podu' mai d-a dreptî
 Că-ț' răcesc un glonț în peipt!
 Trage podu' la limanî
 Să treacă d-un căpitan!
 Căci ieu sînt Iancu Jianu, 75
 Cel mai mare capitani,
 Dă mi-am jăfuit divanu'
 Și s-a speriat Teleormanu'!
- Instrumental interlude (rather brief)—
- VII. Dară Iancu ce-mi făcea, mă?
 'N Teleorman că să ducea, 80
 Loa bani dă la bogai
 Și da pă la ai săraci,
 Ca să-ș' ia boi, măi, și vacii,
 Ca să-ș' ia boi, măi, și vaci. (a few bars)
 - Vin' cu podu', mă treci Oltu', 85
 C-aicea mă arde focu'!
 Dar podarii s-a-mbătat, (the singer laughs)
 Pă sumanii s-a culcat.
 Alții la sat mi-a plecat,
 Pe Iancu mi l-a lăsatî, 90
 Pe Iancu mi l-a lăsat.
- Instrumental interlude (rather brief)—
- VIII. Lele! (a few bars)
- Dară Iancu ce-mi făce',
 Din guriță că-mi zicea, mă,
 Dacă vedea și vedea
 Că potera mi-l sosa, 95
 Din guriță iel zicea:
 - Cată, futu-i mînă-sa, mă,
 Dăcîț să mă rog d-un prostî,

- Pîn-o da podu' pe rostî,
 Mai bine cu murgu' 'not. 100
 Decît o para la podî,
 Mai bine cu murgu' 'not.
 Că mi-e murgu' cam nebunî,
 Trece prin Olt ca pe drumî,
 Şi mi-e murgu' cam nerodî, 105
 Trece prin Olt ca pe pod.
 — Instrumental interlude (average length)—
- IX. Lele! (a few bars)
 Dară Iancu ce-mi făcea, mă,
 După cal dăscălica, mă,
 Şaua pă iel mi-aşăza,
 Şi la chingă mi-l zlăbea, 110
 Dă putea, măi, d-a 'nota.
 Şi pă cal că-ncălica, mă,
 Cînd odată-i sumuţa, mă,
 Cu pintenii-l atîngea, mă.
 Iacă potera-l sosa, 115
 După iel gluante trăgea
 Ca frunza şi ca iarba.
 Cînd fu, măi, să treacă la Oltî,
 Iancu trăgea cîte-un focî.
 — Instrumental interlude (brief)—
- X. Cînd odată-i sumuţa, mă, 120
 Cu pintenii-l atîngea, mă,
 La juma' dă Olt sărea.
 Joacă murgu' tot lupeşte
 Şi-m' coteşte iepureşte,
 Pă Iancu dă glonţ fereşte, 125
 Pă Iancu dă glonţ fereşte.
 Aşa bine ce 'nota, mă,
 Nici chinga nu şi-o uda, mă,
 Nici chinga, nici ibrunca,
 Nici un colţ la ipîngea. 130
 — Instrumental interlude (brief)—
- XI. Iar la mal cîn' mi-ajungea, mă,
 Vadu' nu îl nemerea, mă,
 Gloanţe ca ploaia fugea,
 Potera pă iel trăgea.
 Dară murgu' ce-mi făcea? 135

Iel p-o coastă să punea,
 Înota, frate, 'nota,
 Mare talaș ca făcea,
 Cu talaș l-amesteca,
 Pă Iancu dă glonț ferea, 140
 Pă Iancu dă glonț ferea!
 Pînă vadu' mi-l găsa, mă,
 Și-n pădure că intra,
 Și-n pădure că intra.
 ["Cîntarea lui Iancu Jianu," învățată dă la Gheorghe Dinu, zis Bunică, din
 Islaz.]

- I. Dear woman! ...
 Pasque flower, pasque flower, folks,
 Here in the valley, in a little thicket,
 Here in the valley, in a little thicket,
 In the shadow of an oak tree,
 Nicely sleeps now a young hero,
 Nicely sleeps now a young hero,
 With his weapon by his side.
- II. With his weapon by his side, folks.
 - Mother, I'll go after him,
 Mother, I'll go after him,
 'Cause he is a young hero,
 And I am in love with him.
 - As mallow and violet (grow), folks,
 Don't go after him, my daughter,
 Don't go after him my daughter,
 That one doesn't want a wife, folks,
 'Cause for a wife he has his gun,
 His gun and his outlawry.
 He fell in love with it (her), folks,
 He fell in love with it.
 — Instrumental interlude —
- III. As the dill now, as the dill (grows),
 As the dill now, as the dill,
 That one is Iancu Jianu,
 The greatest captain of all.
 Daughter, he scared all Teleorman
 And also robbed the Divan.
 That one is Iancu Jianu,

The greatest captain of all,
 Who scared all Teleorman,
 And also robbed the Divan.
 Daughter, don't go after him,
 In the forest then you'll live,
 And you'll wash clothes full of blood
 By the outlaws left behind.
 Better stay, daughter, at home
 And look out through the window;
 Or you'll wash clothes full of blood
 By the outlaws left behind.

— Instrumental interlude—

- IV. Dear flower, dear flower!
 - Iancu, where are you coming from now?
 Iancu, where are you coming from now?
 - From the fair, on the Jiu.
 - Iancu, what did you buy there?
 - Not much really, I'll tell you!
 I gave plenty o' gold and silver,
 I bought bullets made of lead.
 I gave plenty o' gold and silver,
 I bought some bullets of lead.
 'Cause my kids sit in the grove,
 Mindless children as they are,
 They waste bullets all around,
 Use gunpowder by the handful,
 And the bullets by the shako.
 And I fear a misfortune,
 That the posse might then reach them,
 And they won't have what to use
 And it'll shorten their life.

— Instrumental interlude—

- V. Dear woman! ...
 Everlasting flower grows,
 The cuckoo sings in the poplar,
 Iancu withdraws toward Olt,
 Iancu withdraws toward Olt.
 He withdraws with fiery will,
 He withdraws, folks! with fiery will.
 In the mountains Olt o'erflowed,
 I see that I am now guilty,

- I see that I am now guilty.
 — Instrumental interlude—
- VI. Iancu shouts in a loud voice:
 - Listen here, ferryman,
 Draw the ferry down the river
 Or I'll shoot you in the loins!
 Draw the ferry straight ahead,
 Or I'll shoot you in the chest!
 Draw the ferry to the bank
 So a captain may cross over!
 'Cause I am Iancu Jianu,
 The greatest captain of all,
 And I robbed all the Divan
 And scared all Teleorman!
 — Instrumental interlude—
- VII. And now Iancu, what's he doing?
 In Teleorman he is going,
 He'd take money from the rich,
 He'd give it to poor people,
 So they'd buy oxen and cows,
 So they'd buy oxen and cows, folks!
 - Bring the ferry, take me o'er Olt,
 'Cause here I am on fire!
 But the ferrymen got drunk,
 They were sleeping on their coats.
 Others to the village went,
 And left Iancu standing there,
 And left Iancu standing there.
 — Instrumental interlude—
- VIII. Dear woman! ...
 And now Iancu, what's he doing?
 He was saying to himself, folks,
 If he looked and saw now there
 That the posse was to reach him,
 He was saying to himself:
 - Look at them, o! fuck them now,
 Rather than begging a nut,
 Until he'll ready the ferry
 Better swim with Dark-bay horse.
 Rather than a penny for the ferry,
 Better swim with Dark-bay horse.

'Cause my Dark-bay horse is crazy,
 Crosses Olt as on the road.
 And my Dark-bay horse is silly,
 Crosses Olt as on a ferry.

— Instrumental interlude—

IX. Dear woman! ...
 Now Iancu, folks, what's he doing?
 He's dismounting, folks, the horse,
 He put the saddle on his back,
 He loosened his saddle girth,
 So that he could swim at ease.
 He was now mounting the horse, folks.
 Now he was on top of him, folks,
 And he touched him with his spurs, folks!
 Here is the posse coming,
 Bullet after him they're shooting
 Like the leaves and like the grass.
 When he was about to cross,
 He would fire then a shot.

— Instrumental interlude—

X. Suddenly he is on top, folks,
 He touches him with his spurs, folks!
 In the middle of Olt he jumped.
 Dark-bay horse moves like a wolf,
 And is turning like a hare,
 And protects Iancu from bullets,
 And protects Iancu from bullets.
 He was swimming so well, folks,
 The saddle girth was not wet,
 Neither the girth, nor the blanket,
 Not even a bit of cloak!

— Instrumental interlude—

XI. And when he reached the bank, folks,
 He couldn't find the ford, folks,
 Bullets were falling like rain,
 The posse was shooting hard.
 And Dark-bay horse, what's he doing?
 He was leaning on a side,
 Was swimming, brother, was swimming
 A big wave he was now making,
 He was mingling him (Iancu) with the wave,

Protecting Iancu from bullets,
Protecting Iancu from bullets!
Until the ford he could find, folks,
And he went into the forest,
Went away into the forest.

(“The Song of Iancu Jianu,” learned from Gheorge Dinu, nicknamed Bunică,
from the village of Islaz.)



Vasile Tetin