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The “Boyar in the Helicopter”

Power, Parody, and Carnival in *Manea* Performances

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When I was poor,
I was praying to become rich
to humiliate my enemies
as they were humiliating me.
But the wheel of life turned;
I no longer see life from underneath;
I see life from above
'cause God is on my side.

—Gicuță din Apărători¹

MUSIC OF THE NEW TIMES

In Romania, the *manea* (pl. *manele*) has been a popular musical genre for more than twenty years, especially amongst the younger generations. One may hear *manele* on television and buy recorded media on many popular markets, along with fruit and vegetables. However, this chapter concerns primarily their live performances, which occur at events such as weddings, christenings, village fairs, and nightly in some pubs.²

In Romania, the word *manea* has come to designate a wide musical and choreographic array (see Giurchescu and S. Rădulescu 2011, chapter 1). Here I will use it in a narrow sense, to designate what is arguably the epicentre of the phenomenon: a song and a dance, based on one of these rhythms (see figures/examples 6.1a, b).

This is also the most frequent understanding of the word by musicians in performance contexts. *Manele* can be performed on all kinds of instruments, but the most emblematic songs are always played with amplification and synthetic sounds.

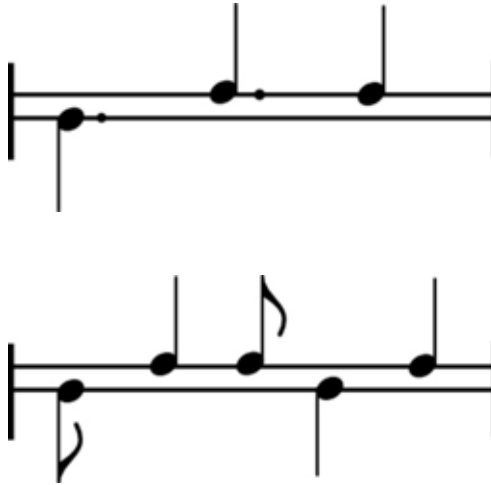


Figure 6.1 (a & b). Manea rhythms

Notation: Victor Stoichiță

The musicians who perform *manele* are usually ethnic Roma. They are called *lăutari* or *maneliști*. *Lăutari* generally denote professional musicians playing on demand.³ *Maneliști* refer to performers who specialize in *manele*, a skill that some *lăutari* may acquire. Broadly speaking, the *manea* tradition is deeply rooted in Romani professional music-making. It should be stressed, however, that according to *manea* performers, there are far more Romanian than Romani clients for the genre (S. Rădulescu 2004). It seems unlikely indeed that the Romani minority (which represents only 3.08 percent of the population according to the 2011 national survey⁴) could account for such a large phenomenon.

Manele are often criticised in Romania for their alleged immorality and low aesthetic value (Giurchescu and S. Rădulescu, chapter 1; Schiop, chapter 7). Their lyrics touch upon sensuality, quick money-making, pride, and violence. They often use slang words and turns of regional or popular grammar (commented upon as non-grammatical in the “educated” world). “Educated” people tend to think that *manea* songs voice the opinions and thoughts of the “underworld.” They note the revengeful tone of some songs, of which the epigraph of the present chapter may be an example. Once peripheral, the underworld is said to have taken control of the whole society since 1989. In the following, a sample of such criticism, the author writes for an online journal and refers to himself as an assistant lecturer:

The life of the *maneliști* and their fans is centred on money, kitsch, explicit sexuality, “cunning” [*șmecherie*], and playing with the boundaries of law and society. The ostentatious display of wealth has become a value in itself, the promotion of the disregard of moral norms seems like second nature, and to “not give a damn” about the law is the crowning achievement of their success. The *manele* are the soundscape of non-culture, “parties” held at midnight in the middle of the street, clan violence, and the moral

construction of a new and parallel world: the world of informal business, neighbourhood Mafiosi, and the dismantling of an already shaky society. (Tasente 2010)

The position of *manele* in Romanian society is puzzling in several respects. Firstly, it is surprising how little debate surrounds comments such as the above. Although *manea* lovers do have access to all kinds of media (e.g., two television channels are entirely devoted to the genre), they do not seem to care to reply. When they do, their main argument is about freedom. Here is how Bogdan (a twenty-year-old *manea* fan from Bucharest) puts it in an interview:

The . . . educated people, or those who pretend to be so, they have like a . . . restraint when it comes to *manele*. They have prejudice. People from the countryside or suburb districts, they don't have this kind of complex. They are not stressed by this. They don't fear so much how they'll be judged by others. They are . . . freer. They do what they want and what they like. (Bogdan L., profession unclear, Bucharest, 2010)

In Bogdan's opinion, this freedom does not necessarily imply disrespect for the morals and institutions of the country. His point is rather that “ordinary people” feel freer to joke about these things than elites do. It is not the *manea* that is “marked” in this view, but the elites' position. They have a “complex,” “stress,” a need to assert something. They cannot just have fun, instead taking the *manea* more seriously than they should. Many fans whom I have met considered that there was no need to debate this any further. It is true that on the critics' side, the *manea* is hardly ever discussed as a simple musical genre. The standard conversation would rather point to it as an omen signalling the end of society or the state and maybe the dangers of freedom . . . *manea* lovers are portrayed as unfortunate folk who have been brainwashed by communist dictatorship and savage capitalism, irresponsible hipsters, or plainly vicious delinquents. During my fieldwork in Bucharest, I collected, often involuntarily, many specimens of such “sociological” analyses. They appeared in (non-) discussions, which often shared the same pattern. Someone would ask what I was doing, I would answer that I was conducting research on *manele*, and my interlocutor would reply: *Păi, să-ți spun eu cum e cu manelele astea* [Well, let me tell you how things are with these *manele* . . .]. A self-assured explanation would follow, involving considerations on lack of education, “Gypsiness,” moral perversion, and quite often also the Ottoman legacy, communism, and the transition era. Over the course of one year, I heard the “Let me tell you how things are” from people as diverse as a history professor, jazz man, rock singer, English teacher, philosopher, railway engineer, and radio animator. I was often surprised by the strong confidence which seemed to drive them on these occasions. Their implicit advice (which some formulated explicitly) was that there was no point in studying the *manea*. Not only was the phenomenon ugly and immoral, it was also self-evident.

There is, of course, a persistent gap between “elite” and “folk” people in Romania as in its neighboring countries. Sugarman (2007) has stressed that this kind of discussion surrounds new popular musics in virtually all the societies of southeastern

Europe. She has proposed that “while some might characterize such discourses as elitist, xenophobic, or even racist, a more sympathetic examination of them can highlight the ways that such musics bring into focus the tensions that have emerged in all these countries over the past fifteen years in the face of massive political and economic change” (Sugarman 2007:290). Where democracy and free markets have challenged the role of the elites as an arbiter of culture, “elite criticisms of commercial folk music can be seen as attempts to shore up a sense of self-worth in the face of a system that has denied them both social and economic recognition” (Sugarman 2007:292). It is, of course, difficult to demonstrate (or to contradict) such an analysis but it seems at least plausible in the Romanian context, too. It may be added, however, that the critical discourse is often endorsed even by people who actually enjoy these kinds of music. It is true in the Albanian communities where Sugarman has studied: “We’re the criminals of Albanian music,” a producer of *muzika popullore* (the local equivalent of *manele*) told her, “and you too are a criminal because you like this music” (2007:269). It is also true in Romania, where I met quite a few *manea* fans who seemed just happy to concede that their beloved musical genre was sonic rubbish for the fools and perverts. One could sometimes sense a kind of teenage defiance in this provocative attitude. Sometimes my “elite” status could also have triggered a duplicity learned over decades of dictatorship (my interlocutors would just tell me what people like me wanted to hear). But sometimes I had known my interlocutors for years and knew that teasing and making fun of everyone (themselves included) was amongst their favorite ways of interacting. Some of my Romani friends, in particular, liked to behave that way. It is striking that double meanings and irony are totally absent from the critical analyses mentioned above. In such theories, *manea* lovers are always supposed to be serious about the music. Hence, many sophisticated theories about *manele* are grounded, paradoxically, on the most rudimentary assumption: that songs represent the inner thoughts and feelings of those who like them. But seeing the way the listeners enjoy themselves during *manea* performances, and knowing the daily humor of some of them, it is highly implausible that irony and (self-)parody would not come into play at some point. Maybe the greatest misunderstanding between “the elite” and “the folk” stems from this: the former do not recognize that the latter can use double meanings and ironies which are not at all transparent.

Generally speaking, a rigorous analysis cannot assume that listeners simply endorse the semantic and emotional content of music, and especially not of party music. Parties are usually understood by their participants as “special” time-spaces, where people behave according to motivations unusual to them. “Disconnection” is a key expectation in this respect, in Romania as elsewhere. Party musics are best understood as “techniques of enchantment” (Gell 1988; 1992) that immerse the listeners into artificial universes. In Romania, the *lăutari* seek to manipulate not only the emotions of their listeners (Stoichiță 2008) but also their cognitive focusing (Stoichiță 2009) and their sensations of space and time (Stoichiță 2013a). This enchanted auditory universe is built into interaction with the participants and enables

them to live unusual emotional and relational experiences that would not be available to them otherwise (Amy de la Bretèque and Stoichiță 2012; Stoichiță 2013b).

So why do local critics try to read the past and the future of the country in what could be a playful musical genre? Is there really a link between the success of the *manea* and the post-communist times? The genre may have older musical roots (Giurchescu and S. Rădulescu, chapter 1; Beissinger 2007; Oîșteanu 2001), but it is obvious that it also plays on ideas related to the free market, cultural democracy, and political freedoms that were unavailable before 1989. The problem is that in *manele* such ideas are not implemented in a “civilized” way. They are rather unleashed with all their savage potential. Could this reflect how they were implemented and understood in Romanian society, too? The analysis proposed here arrives at conclusions similar to those of Sugarman (2007), but through a different path. It insists on the ironic and parodic potential of the *manea*, which seems to have been overlooked by other analysts. The first section deals with the emotions of power that listeners often describe as the core of their musical experience. It traces these feelings to textual, interactional, and musical characteristics of the *manea*. The second part discusses the listeners’ ambiguous involvement with these emotions. This leads to the suggestion that *manele* re-instantiate a model of behavior that was once linked with both carnivals and political upheavals. It is the double nature of revolutions to turn the world upside down (as in Gicuță’s song quoted in the epigraph on p. 163). Whether this is temporary or permanent is yet unclear for many Romanians. I suggest that rather than “saying” something about this, the musical time-space enables the participants to play themselves with the contradictions of this uncertain situation. So let *me* tell you how things are with these *manele*.

EMOTIONS OF POWER

Whether local commentators like the *manea* or not, most of them agree that it plays with ideas and feelings of power: economical, physical, sexual, and even religious (when God is depicted helping the successful *manea* fan). This impression can be traced to three distinct factors: the lyrics of the songs, the “tipping” interactions during live parties, and the sound constructs themselves. These aspects are described briefly below.

Lyrics of Power

Consider the following lyrics, by Little Sorin the Kid [*Sorinel Puștiu*] (see example 6.2):⁵

*Cine-i mare barosan,*⁶
barosan de barosan,
barosanul “number one”?

Who’s the big boss,
 the boss among bosses,
 the boss “number one”?

<i>Are bani în buzunar.</i>	His pockets are full of cash.
<i>Are bani, da are bani,</i>	He's got cash, he's got cash,
<i>da are bani și are femei;</i>	he's got cash and women;
<i>da am și bani, da am și bani,</i>	yes, I've also got cash, I've also got cash,
<i>da să moară dușmanii mei!</i>	and may my enemies die!
<i>Da, da, da, sunt mare barosan;</i>	Yes, yes, yes, I'm a big boss;
<i>da, da, da, sunt șmecher⁷ "number one";</i>	Yes, yes, yes, I'm the clever "number one";
<i>da, da, da, sunt șmecher, bogat;</i>	Yes, yes, yes, I'm clever and rich;
<i>am multă putere, ca un împărat.⁸</i>	I have a lot of power, like an emperor.

Not only do the lyrics enhance economic power but the words *barosan* and *șmecher* are idiomatic slang words, which most Romanian speakers are likely to attribute to Roma and/or the Mafia underworld.

The lyrics are made up of clear statements such as “I am the big boss” or “I am clever and rich.” The most straightforward interpretation would attribute the “I” pronoun to the singer. This is hardly possible in the case of *manele*, however. They are deeply rooted in the tradition of *lăutari*, who are not supposed to “express themselves.” They are generally perceived as “emotion makers” rather than actual senders of the feelings that their music evokes (Stoichiță 2008). This is true of “traditional” *lăutari* in the countryside but also of modern *maneliști* from the capital. The following is an excerpt of a conversation with Felix, a *manea* performer (we are talking here about a *manea* with the lyrics: *Sunt șmecher număr unu;/cad doi când dau cu pumnul*. [I'm clever Number One;/and when I hit with my fist, two of them fall.]):

These songs are to big up the wiseguys [*șmecheri*]. They are usually drunk and they are pleased to hear such things about themselves. They really get inflated like roosters. The *lăutari* are the craftiest, slyest, falsest people. All they want is to please. Because these guys are also dangerous. There have also been unpleasant situations in which musicians have been hit by guys like these. Then you may even say that the guy is stronger than God! Just to please him, to . . . “Ok, that's enough! Bravo! You are free now, you may go!” There are many *lăutari*, maybe most of them, and I would even say that there is no *lăutar* who has never been “terrorized” in his career. Especially here, in the capital. You will have occasions to see such “terrorizations.” If you want, you will. Heh, heh! [laughs]. (Felix, keyboard player, age thirty-seven, interview, Bucharest, 2009)

The idea that musicians are expected to serve and fulfil the fancies of their audiences is clear for all the *lăutari* whom I have met. Their music has complicated relations with truth and actual facts. The main job of the *lăutar*, for which he gets paid, is to build an enchanted world for the listener, maybe a world where he would be stronger even than God, like in Felix's comment.

It is also clear that songs about “tough guys,” as in the ones mentioned above, are not only for “tough guys.” Listeners may also command them to “pretend” or for more subtle effects, as we shall see later. At any rate, whether the singer believes or

not that he himself is a rich and powerful person does not matter when he sings the *manea*. It would actually be inappropriate for him to boast publicly about his own well-being during a live performance. In the usual paradigm of *lăutar* performance, when Little Sorin the Kid sings “I’m the boss,” listeners do not even suspect that he could actually mean it for himself.

Tips and Agencies

The disconnection is enforced by the practice of tipping the musicians while they play. This is actually an old way of paying professional musicians in Central and Eastern Europe (Noll 1991; Pettan 1996; Pettan 2002:245). It attains however an unprecedented level in Romania with the *manele*. It is while they play *manele* that listeners are most likely to interrupt the musicians to offer them money. The amount may range from ten to several hundreds of *lei* (Romanian currency; i.e., \$3–\$300). The money is called a “tip” [*baçiş*] but sometimes also a “bribe” [*şpagă*]. For maximum impact, it can be given in several steps: €50 now, €50 some seconds later, then another €50. Alternatively, the giver may have prepared a wad of smaller banknotes and pours it slowly onto the singer’s head or at his feet. This is a clear sign of economic power. Even a simple one hundred *lei baçiş*, which is not uncommon, is a significant amount of money compared to the legal minimum wage of six hundred *lei* per month. Some listeners are said to use *manele* in this way to gain renown in public spaces.

Felix (professional keyboard player): So there are people who really correspond to what the *manea* says. There are others who do not really correspond, but who want to pretend that they are what they are not. So if they have maybe one hundred or one hundred fifty in their pocket⁹ and are in a restaurant, and at the table nearby sits someone who . . . let’s say it is a clever guy [*şmecher*], a guy from the underworld [*interlop*]; then they may want to show off, to assert themselves, and this is how they do it: they give money to the *lăutari*: “My name is So-and-so”; “From Popescu, fifty”; “A greeting of fifty *lei*”; “From Popescu again”; . . . and so on. They want to assert their name, to make themselves a name. This is why the *şmecheri* and the underworld guys have used *manele* to such a great extent. If it were not for the *manele*, I doubt that they would have become so famous.

V.S.: And why would they want to become famous?

Felix: Power! They want to dominate!

The *lăutari* know well that not only rich people give *baçiş*. Under the influence of alcohol, good music, and collective emulation, many listeners go “over the top” and even sometimes transform into Mafioso wannabes.

Felix [continuing the previous discussion]: And then, gradually, even those who did not have the pride or cleverness disease—or they may have had it but not so much—they started to borrow these things from the clever guys [*şmecheri*]. Everyone wants to be clever. Everyone, especially those seventeen- and eighteen-year-old kids. They started to do the same.

There is always an uncertainty about the actual wealth of the tipper. All Romanians know that music and alcohol can push people beyond their normal limits, and parties are moments where excess is to be expected. Going to parties with Romanian and ethnic Romani friends, I would witness how easily even “reasonable” people would go over the top, both emotionally and economically. For example, one of these friends spent part of a wedding tipping the musicians with considerable amounts of money which turned out the next day to have been the money he and his wife had been saving over the year to send their daughter to a better school in town. Another factor of uncertainty is that the musicians sometimes return the tips to the giver discreetly. This happens amongst friends (I was asked, for example, to give big amounts just to “warm up” a party). It also happens in the protective relations between some “wise guys” [*șmecheri*] and some *lăutari*: the former give huge tips during the performance, but the latter have to give back an even bigger amount as a “tax for protection” [*taxă de protecție*]. When this is not a plain racket, it is a kind of patronage where powerful people “take care” of less powerful musicians, with complex money flows between them. So here again, the display of power which is accomplished in the “tip” has an uncertain relation to the actual economic wealth of the giver.

The giving of *bațșiș* is always announced on the microphone by the singer. If the amount is small, it may be omitted, but at least the name of the giver is announced: *Din partea lui Puiu, mulțumim frumos!* [From Puiu, thank you very much!]. Puiu’s name thus enters the universe of the song alongside Little Sorin the Kid, adding to the possible interpretations of the first pronoun in the lyrics (the “I” in “I’m the boss”).

Quite often, the listener who gives *bațșiș* does not ask for a significant change in the music played. It is rather a way to mark his or her appreciation, to ask for a small attention (a specific verse, an instrumental chorus), or “to give a dedication” [*a da o dedicație*]. In the latter case, the singer announces on the microphone the names of the giver and the addressee, with words such as *Și special de la Puiu, pentru Claudiu, să se știe!* [This special one is from Puiu, for Claudiu, just so everyone knows!]. Occasionally, dedications may be “given” without a precise recipient: *Pentru toată lumea* [For everyone].

With the dedication, the person behind the “I” in the lyrics becomes even more difficult to identify. In the above example, it could be Puiu meaning to say something like “I’m the boss” to Claudiu. But the lyrics may also be understood as representing the latter, either accurately (Claudiu is known as a “boss”) or with parodic intent (he is not so rich, or just pretends to be, etc.). Neither Puiu nor Claudiu actually utter the word “I.” The dedication simply associates both of their names with the song.¹⁰

The dedications are often used by guests at live events for complex interactional effects. Through them, many things may be suggested or stated publicly without being clearly assumed by anyone. Several dedications, from various individuals, may follow each other in close succession during the same song. Each of them adds to the intricacy of any attempt to analyze the performance using standard communication schemes.

Sonic Power

Power is also instantiated in the way *manele* sound. I have already mentioned that their loudness is often brought up, especially by critics who see it as an attempt for *manea* fans to take control of performance spaces. It is now most common that the *lăutari* play with loud amplification, whatever the musical style, but during *manea* sessions the “gain” buttons on the mixer are generally pushed even further.

Manele are also performed with characteristically “thick” instrumental and voice textures. For melodic instruments, thickening may be achieved with electronic sound effects such as the “chorus” or the “octave voice.” In addition, when several melodic instruments play together, they try to synchronize in parallel thirds. This altogether fills and enlarges the spectral range of the melodic line. The practice contrasts with the usual synchronization mode of much traditional music in Romania where musicians would rather play in unison or heterophony.

The treatment of the voice shows a similar preference for “thick” sounds. Typical *manea* singers have a rich and “full” [*plin*] texture. The most famous of them perform in the company of another singer whose role is to keep the ambiance going while the lead singer rests and double the latter’s voice when he sings the chorus. As for melodic instruments, this doubling is also performed in parallel thirds.

Not only are the voice and melodic instruments amplified and thickened, they are also multiplied. An electronic “echo” effect is applied to them adding a train of reverberations to any of their sounds. In live performances, the combination of large echo and strong amplification enhances the disconnection between the physical space in which the party takes place and the musical space in which the music develops. Reverberation is one of the basic acoustic clues for guessing the depth of an environment. Playing with electronic echo and pushing the volume high annihilates the natural reverberation of the performance space, replacing it with a musical one. Listeners are immersed in a paradoxical environment where visual and auditory cues of space no longer match (Stoichiță 2013a). Add to this that wireless microphones allow the musicians to be far away from the loudspeakers that produce the sound, and at very high volumes, in confined spaces, even the loudspeakers’ location leaves few acoustical clues: the universe constructed in music is no longer traceable to a definite source. It permeates the whole place and becomes a medium comparable to air. This immersion effect is enforced by the continuity and length of the performances (sometimes more than one hour of uninterrupted play). The harmonic and rhythmic section relies on a synthesizer [*orgă*]. It does not play melodies.¹¹ The left hand performs the bass line, the right hand the chords, and the device is also the source of the basic drum rhythm.¹² The *orgă* stores several pre-programmed patterns, which may run at a metronomic pulse through the whole performance. There is a large rotary knob to adjust the tempo, but it is rarely used more than once or twice every half hour. Many melodies can be chained meanwhile, in perfect continuity to one another. The sonic construction of the *manea* performance is thus sustained by the precise and relentless patterns emanating from the *orgă*.

Experiencing Power

There are moments in a party when an observer may think that the dancers are blasé, impassive, or unreceptive to what is played. Their movements, for example, seem narrow and quiet compared to the roaring and dazzling virtuosity of the music. Their faces may not show any visible emotion but rather a quiet placidity. Indeed, they may actually be bored. But quite often their comments on the performance say the contrary. In their words, good music is a violent encounter that “tames” [*răcorește*, literally “refreshes”] the listener.

Good *lăutari* are “strong” [*tari*]; bad ones are “weak” [*slabi*]. Hearing a good performance, one may feel “torn/broken apart” [*rupt/spart*], “destroyed” [*distrus*], “terminated” [*terminat*], or “chopped like cabbage” [*făcut varză*]. The term *taraf*, which was traditionally used to refer to a small group of *lăutari*, is now replaced by “troupe” [*trupă*]. To ask a violinist to perform an improvised solo, the singer may call him “to go on the attack” [*trece la atac*], meaning both the musical and the physical front-line of the band (the attack is implicitly directed upon the dancers). Furthermore, the singers frequently enhance the instrumental choruses with shouts, cries, and sound effects reminiscent of explosions or gun machines.

A good illustration of this musical warfare is the song *Bomba bombelor* [The bomb of all bombs] as performed by Little Sorin the Kid [*Sorinel Puștiu*] in an unidentified live event (see example 6.3¹³). The recording was released on the album *Șarpe lângă casa ta* [Snake near your house]. In the introduction, we hear the singer address the band’s violonist (nicknamed Rooster [*Cocoș*]) with two rhymed verses: *Hai Cocoș, pornești motorul/Ca să crape difuzorul!* [Come on, Rooster, start the engine/ to blast away those speakers!]. This engine is what the *lăutari* typically call a “trick” [*șmecherie*] (see Stoichiță 2008). Playing on two strings at once and starting at their lower ends, the violinist shifts his fingers on the neck toward the bridge. Played acoustically, this slow ascending glissando would not be very impressive. But with the amplified, compressed, and reverberated sound of his violin, the effect is strongly reminiscent of the starting of a plane engine.¹⁴ At its climax, the glissando breaks into the chorus sung by Sorinel (S1) and his unidentified accompaniment voice (S2) (see figure 6.1c).

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (x3) | S1: <i>Bomba bombelor</i> | S1: You’re the bomb of all bombs |
| | S2: <i>Ești bombă!</i> [or variant] | S2: You’re a bomb! [or variant] |
| | S1: <i>Tu ești bosul boșilor</i> | S1: You’re the boss of all bosses |
| (x3) | S1: <i>Bomba bombelor</i> | S1: You’re the bomb of all bombs |
| | S2: <i>Ești bombă!</i> [or variant] | S2: You’re a bomb! [or variant] |
| | S2: <i>Iei cheful dușmanilor.</i> | S2: You tone down your enemies. |

From a phonetical point of view, “*Bomba bombelor*” is a rather juicy line. Its repetition emphasizes the iconicity of the word *bomba*, with its two /b/ plosives (that become four in the syntagm *bomba bombelor*). These words are set to a pattern of alternating crotchets (quarter notes) and quavers (eighth notes) that parallel the

The figure displays two musical examples, (c) and (d), for 'Manea rhythms'. Example (c) consists of a Melody line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The melody is: F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Below it is a Drums line in common time with a pattern of quarter notes marked with 'x': x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter). Example (d) features a Voice line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The melody is: F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter). The lyrics 'Bom ba bom be lor Ești bom bă' are written below the voice line. Below the voice line is a Drums line in common time with a pattern of quarter notes marked with 'x': x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter), x (quarter).

Figure 6.1 (c & d). *Manea* rhythms

Notation: Victor Stoichiță

asymmetrical tension of the underlying drum rhythm. The second singer replies with variants of “*Ești bombă!*” [You’re a bomb!], shouted without definite pitch or precise rhythmic values. In one of his interventions he also shouts, “Hiroshima!” These sonic and textual elements contrast with the stability of the instrumental theme that follows (see figure 6.1d).

It is entirely composed of even crotchets contained in a narrow ambitus and symmetrically structured in two small motives that only differ by their first note. Whereas the line of “*Bomba bombelor*” was “molded” onto the drum pattern, this metronomic instrumental theme seems merely to “float” above it. If one were to imagine iconic representations in line with the lyrics, the sung chorus would probably figure the blasting of the bomb, while the subsequent theme would be the methodical and inescapable advance of “*bosul boșilor*” [the boss of all bosses].”¹⁵

Parody and Irony

The power embodied in the music can be experienced in various ways by the listeners. Many songs—especially those explicitly related to might—direct the audiences toward playful moods. In a previous study I argued that the *manea* was particularly pervasive to ironic interpretations and that this possibility was a key factor in both its popular success and its inclusion in semi-ritual contexts like wedding parties (Stoichiță 2013b). I refer to irony as a figure of speech with its cognitive ramifications (see Gibbs

and Colston 2007) rather than to the post-modern trope for which the same word is sometimes used (Hutcheon 1994; Colebrook 2004). In particular, the psycholinguistic model of irony proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1981) and Wilson and Sperber (1992) offers, I suggested, interesting insights on the ironic plays during *manea* performances. Here I will bring into discussion the related idea of parody. Literary critics define parody as a form of intertextuality. It is one of the multiple ways in which one text can relate to another. There are divergences regarding the precision to apply in its definition. Some authors favor a narrow approach where parody is to be distinguished from figures such as pastiche, forgery, satire, or travesty (Rose 1993). Others prefer to see it as a broad category of practices, arching over these distinctions. This is the approach favored by Dentith, whose definition I adopt here:

Parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice. . . . [“Polemical” refers to the] contentious or “attacking” mode in which the parody can be written, though it is “relatively” polemical because the ferocity of the attack can vary widely between different forms of parody. (2000:9)

Dentith is mainly concerned with written text, but his definition is rooted in figures of speech. Here is a minimal example of parody (Dentith 2000:3):

Speaker 1: “*I don't like this cold weather.*”

Speaker 2 (in exaggeratedly feeble and whining tones): “*I don't like this cold weather.*”

The basic movement is to echo something in a context where it gains a different interpretation. In the interaction above, the effect relies on the same words framed in a different intonation. Parody is a relation that can be detected between isolated utterances, texts, and styles (like Cervante's *Don Quixote* echoing chivalric writings) and also between texts and cultural habits as illustrated in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (see the tea party or the Queen's croquet).

The account of parody by Dentith (2000) is similar to the account of irony by Sperber and Wilson (1981) and Wilson and Sperber (1992) that I mentioned previously. I will refer hereafter to an irony/parody compound which is primarily an imitation of something in a context where it seems inappropriate or does not “fit” in well. By itself, this unfitness does not constitute irony/parody as such. It could be interpreted just as well as a mistake or a token of bad taste, for example. The choice between these alternatives depends on many factors, but none of them is a definite marker: nothing singles out a text or a behavior as a sure instance of irony/parody (even intonation, which is often quoted as a marker of verbal irony, is ambiguous in this respect; see Bryant and Fox Tree 2005). It is up to the interpreter (reader, listener, etc.) to find out that the element does not fit in and why. This judgment is relatively free, and the above theories predict that some interpreters will detect irony/parody where others will see, for example, arrogance or kitsch.

The cognitive factor that directs the interpreter toward irony/parody rather than some other interpretation is normally a hypothesis made by him about the state of mind and the intentions of the emitter (Curcó 2000; Creusere 2000; Hancock, Dunham, and Purdy 2000): Does the latter believe or not in what he says, does he want me to believe it? If I think that he is just pretending and does not want me to believe it either, I will probably think that he is being ironic/parodic of the uttering. *Manele* add another layer of uncertainty as we have seen in live performances where the emitters and intended receivers are themselves undetermined. Hence, irony/parody is even more difficult to ascertain “objectively” than in the usual study cases covered by psycholinguistics and literary critics. The following examples strive nevertheless to illustrate the potential appearance of this compound or at least the necessity for the interpreter to depart from simple literal understandings of the corresponding interactions.

Come for a Ride, Girl

Below is an excerpt of an interview with Ileana and Magdalena, two students at a faculty in Bucharest. They both devote much time to their studies but like to have some fun on Saturday nights. They listen to many kinds of music, amongst them *manele*. Ileana says: “I like the ironical ones [*la mișto*], those with lyrics. . . . Not so sentimental [laughs]. For example, there is a tune, well, it’s called ‘Come for a Ride, Girl’ [*Hai, gagic, la plimbare*]. It is sung by Florin Fish [*Florin Pește*], I think. It’s very funny. If you listen to it, you’ll die laughing.” Here are the first lyrics of the *manea*, sung by Florin Fish [*Florin Pește*] featuring Claudia and the band Play Aj (Mr. Juve and Susanu) (see example 6.4¹⁶):

Florin Fish:

Hai, gagic, la plimbare.
Nu te mai da așa mare.
Îți dau bani, îți dau orice
ca să facem dragoste.

Come for a ride, girl.
 Stop being so proud.
 I’ll give you money, I’ll give you
 anything
 to make love with you.

Claudia:

N-am încredere în tine
că nu te cunosc prea bine.
Dar aș face dragoste cu tine
și apoi să văd dacă te ține.

I don’t trust you
 ’cause I don’t really know you.
 But I’d make love to you
 And then see if you’re still up for it.

Ileana says that she understands these lyrics *la mișto*, a familiar expression meaning in a “funny,” “ironical,” or “parodic” way. This does not mean that the *manea*

is only good for laughing *at*. Ileana really likes the song and she and her friends dance to it at parties.

The video clip of “Come for a Ride, Girl” indeed allows for several interpretations.¹⁷ For the most part, it shows Florin Fish with a nice haircut driving a beautiful Mercedes convertible. We also see him offering money to a giggling young woman (Claudia) in something like a modern living room.¹⁸ Along with these images, the video clip also features some parodic sequences. An old and visibly defective car is being pulled with great difficulty by a donkey through a muddy village back street. A plate number hangs on one of the animal’s flanks. The driver is Mr. Juve. He is nervous and seems to curse the donkey for not moving faster. Other images in the same setting show two musicians emerging from the roof of the same car (this time at rest). Both look like peasants on a typical work day. One plays an old guitar and the other an old accordion. Interestingly, these parodic images are strictly limited to the instrumental introduction and chorus. They constitute the only appearances of instrumental performers although they are obviously not the source of the electronic sounds heard at that moment.

Broadly considered, the video clip confirms the possibility of a parodic understanding of the song. On the other hand, most of it takes place in high-end cars and with scantily dressed women, which is just the usual iconography of *manele*. Ileana did not mention the video clip during our discussion. She may not even have seen it. The possibility of taking such songs ironically is self-understood anyway. As Ileana’s remark implies (in a continuation of the same discussion), there is a whole class of *manele* that can be appreciated *la mișto*.

Ileana: And I also like “I’m a ‘*barosan*,” from Little Sorin the Kid [*Sorinel Puștiu*]. Do you know it?

V.S.: No, I don’t.

Ileana: Well, it’s funny, too. It’s got funny, lyrics.

This is the first song discussed in the present chapter. Here again, Ileana does not simply find the song funny but actually likes it and dances to it with her friends. According to her, it also has a nice melodic line. This song also has a video clip but it contains just the “usual” *manea* iconography with no obvious tokens of parody.

The Boyar in the Helicopter

The following stanza is a condensed example of playful unfitness. It was sung by Florin Salami [*Florin Salam*] around 2010 (see example 6.5¹⁹):

*Tatăl meu este boier
și o să-mi ia elicopter,
și o să-mi ia elicopter
să-l plimb pe Salam cu el.*

My father is a boyar
and he’ll buy me a helicopter,
and he’ll buy me a helicopter
so I can give Salami a ride.

The melody is a heavy and slowly descending line, in phrygian mode with abundant melisma: something typically “Oriental” [*oriental*] by local standards.²⁰ The helicopter is a modern Western device, and the boyar a landowner of the Ottoman times. It is likely that nowhere else in Romanian poetry do these two words rhyme. They belong to completely different worlds, not only chronologically but also geographically. Mixing incompatible references is a favorite practice in *manele* as in many popular musics of the Balkans (Buchanan 2007a; Kurkela 2007; Rasmussen 2007; Sugarman 2007).

The last verse anchors the opposition in the actual performance context. It refers to Florin Salami, who is singing it. He distances himself as much as possible from the first person subject in the lyrics, however, by using his own surname. The “I” thus remains available for any individual in the audience and particularly for the *baçiş* giver (here a teenager at his eighteenth birthday).

Cinderella in the Pub

A parodic/ironic effect can also be achieved by mixing the characters of the lyrics with the global character of the song. One day, I asked Felix (previously cited keyboard player) when he had started to perform *manele*. He recalled the tapes of Azur de la Brăila, Odeon, and other similar bands, which were circulating before 1989 more or less under-the-counter. Their main characteristic was the use of amplification, synthesizers, and electric guitars in Romanian popular music. This was a rare sound at that time. The lyrics were not concerned with state politics but they could allude to political taboos such as theft.²¹ According to Felix, many of them were “*şmecheroase*” (with *şmecherie*, here meaning either cleverness or irony) anyway. This was enough to ban them from official production and distribution networks.

Felix was then in his twenties, lived in his parents’ village in Romanian Moldova and was already performing intensively as a *lăutar*. For him and his friends, this was something new and fascinating. He specifically recalled the effect produced by *Cenuşăreasa* [Cinderella], as performed by Odeon and Costel Geambaşu (see example 6.6²²; see also chapter 3):

And when we heard that, we were fascinated. You can imagine. They had this song, “Cinderella.” “Oh, how much I loved you, Cinderella.” . . . This was completely new for us, something extraordinary. We knew “Cinderella” from the fairy tales [pointing to his right] but now, she was appearing in a song like that [pointing to his left]. (Felix, keyboard player, interview, Bucharest, 2009)

The gesture of Felix pointing to his right and left illustrates his perception of two heterogeneous universes clashing in the song. His surprise must have been strong as he still remembered it twenty years later. In the sonic and referential universe of the “clever guys,” Cinderella’s behavior indeed becomes clearly parodic:

*Cu ce foc te-am mai iubit,
Cenuşăreaso.*

Oh, how much I loved you,
Cinderella.

*Te-am iubit dar m-ai mințit,
Cenușareaso.*

I loved you, but you lied to me,
Cinderella.

...
*Te cunoști după sandale,
Cenușareaso,
că ești fată de locale,
Cenușareaso.²³*

They know you by your sandals,
Cinderella,
that you're a girl from the pubs,
Cinderella.

If You Get on My Nerves

The reverse effect would be to take the familiar into the fairy tale. The following excerpt sung by Cristi Nut [*Cristi Nucă*] at a wedding in Iași illustrates this (see example 6.7):²⁴

*Nu te lăuda că ești bogat.
Știi că n-ai o chiflă să bagi în stomac.*

Don't come boasting that you're rich.
I know you don't even have a crust of
bread to eat.

*Stai mai bine-n banca ta
că ești vai de steaua ta.*

Better keep quiet
'cause you're just pathetic.

[chorus:]

*Și dacă mă enervezi,
mă faci ca să-ți dovedesc
că port la mine bani cash
cât un Mercedes.*

And if you get on my nerves,
I'll have to prove to you
that I've got enough cash
to buy a Mercedes.

*Tu știi că sunt special.
Tu știi că sunt number one,
dar nu sunt lăudăros
că nu-i frumos.*

You know that I'm special.
You know that I'm "number one,"
but I'm not boastful
'cause that ain't nice.

The words of this *manea* could have been exchanged during an argument at the corner of the street. Their trivial origins are emphasized by the fact that they repeatedly violate the octosyllabic meter. But they rhyme nicely, and Cristi Nut sings them to a richly ornamented tune that fits the harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment perfectly. In the enchanted world of *manele*, the argument becomes outrageously boastful and arrogant. A wink of self-derision comes in the last line that states, in a somewhat childish style, "but I'm not boastful/'cause that ain't nice."

The performance took place at a wedding. It was ordered by three participants who gave a €50 dedication "*Pentru oamenii care cred că au bani dar de fapt nu au*" [For those who think that they have money but, in fact, don't]. This may have targeted someone in particular. But whatever their intentions, asking for a corner-of-the-street argument in a wedding, where people usually try to appear as "civilised" as possible (well-dressed, well-behaved, etc.), is a discrepant behavior that opens wide the possibility of an ironic understanding. Toward the middle of

the song, an Austrian gives another €50 dedication “*Pentru toți bogații*” [For all the rich guys]. On the recording, one may hear the singer repressing his laughter as he repeats the announcement.²⁵

His Love, His Kidney

Listeners do certainly use the dedications to create comic effects. Here is another example, heard during a party at the club *Million Dollars*. Vali from Giurgiu [*Vali de la Giurgiu*] was singing close to a group of dancers. One of them was giving dedications “for Alina, his love.” At one point he requested the following one, repeated on the microphone by the singer: “For Alina . . . his love . . . his heart . . . his eyes . . . his liver . . . his spleen . . . his kidney . . .” The ellipses represent pauses during which the giver told the singer what to repeat, sneaking a bank note into his hand at each step. The latter’s tone of voice was rising gradually. At one point, he nearly burst into laughter as did some other dancers. Of course, “heart” and “eyes” are common replacements for “love,” but the viscera set in line with them were turning the whole dedication into a parody.

These examples illustrate ways in which *manea* songs reflect heterogeneous and seemingly incompatible references in a unified musical universe. The play may be in the lyrics alone, between the lyrics and the music, or between the whole song and the performance context. The contrasted elements act upon each other as fun house mirrors. Each of them is reflected in a distorted manner and re-appraised in the context of the others.

It should be stressed that the interpretations outlined above do not imply that the song is diverted from an “original intent.” The musicians’ “intent” is to enchant the listener. Provided the song is listened to, remembered, paid for, and maybe danced to, its goal is fulfilled. *Manele* are party music, and the *lăutari* do little to enforce serious understandings. After all, laughing *at* a *manea* is also laughing *with* it, which is enough to make it successful. On the listeners’ side, the question of “seriousness,” as opposed to irony/parody, deserves a more detailed examination.

Who Thinks It’s Funny?

The “funny” aspects of *manea* songs appeared as an obvious feature in many discussions with *manea* fans and critics alike. But quite often, too, my interlocutors imagined the existence of other listeners who appreciated *manele* in a straightforward, non-comical manner. On the Romanian “educated” side, these would be either “Gypsies” [*țigani*], “clever guys” [*șmecheri*], and/or uneducated dwellers of the “*mabalale*” [suburbs; sg. *mahala*]. “Educated” people found *manele* ridiculous, but always with the feeling that other people “out there” took them seriously.

Interestingly, talking with Roma, suburb dwellers, and even “clever guys” from the underworld did not bring a “core” of humorless listeners any closer. Quite the contrary: some of my Romani interlocutors voiced the opinion that songs like “Come

for a Ride, Girl,” which Ileana and Magdalena found “ironical” [*la mișto*], were made specifically for Romanians. They were less sure about “I’m the Big Boss” or “The Bomb of All Bombs.” These may have been taken “seriously” by some Roma but, again, not by themselves. Maybe the “smart” or “clever” guys [*șmecheri*] portrayed in the songs understood them literally. But they were always other people.

This applied to the humoristic aspects only, which in turn seemed closely linked to the lyrics about power. Such songs always seemed somehow “funny.” In other kinds of lyrics, especially the love and exile songs, my interlocutors more often recognized a faithful depiction of their own feelings.

It would, thus, be incorrect to say that *manele* “are” ironical/parodical. The above analysis only covers a specific potential of these songs, one that has been overlooked by most commentators. Listeners are usually somewhere in between plain identification and plain irony/parody, as many feelings can overlap in their musical experience. Songs and interactional situations merely suggest interpretations, and participants retain a considerable freedom in this respect. This openness is one of the reasons for the popular success of the songs (listeners can appreciate them from various angles). It is probably also why *manea* lovers tend to link the genre with ideas of freedom. Once recognized, the potential of irony and self-derision enables them to embody characters and to live emotions that they would not necessarily assume in their daily life.

In addition to these psychological aspects, the irony/parody compound also has a social relevance. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, many commentators in Romania interpret the *manea* as “saying” something about the current state of society. This is not a matter of sheer misunderstanding even though their most frequent assumption—that *manele* simply “express” the thoughts of those who like them—is arguably wrong. As a conclusion, I will suggest that the *manea* and its playful relation to power closely resemble another kind of party, which also had ambivalent political and symbolic implications: carnival.

Echoes of the Carnival

An old European *topos* associates merry-making, violence, and revolution. Bercé (1976) has shown how the cosmic and climatic cycle was linked to the annual upheaval of political institutions in early modern France. Peasant feasts (of which the carnival is emblematic) were only one step apart from peasant revolts until the French Revolution. This model has influenced the reception of the revolution itself by some of its contemporaries, especially in light of the imminent turn of the century (Stoichiță and Coderch 1999). Emblematic of the Romanian “post-revolution” times, *manele* are reminiscent of this tradition in several ways.

They feature “kings,” “princesses,” “emperors,” “boyars,” and “squires” [*regi, prințese, împărași, boieri, jupâni*] but in contexts that are often parodic. Hearing a dedication to “the princess of the neighborhood” [*prințesa cartierului*] is a casual

example. References to “boyars” and “squires” [*boieri, jupâni*] are also ironic since they belong to a world of long ago, and calling someone such names is sending him way back into the past.

A second trait of carnivalesque is the inversion that grounds the power of many *lăutari*. I have argued elsewhere that from the Romanian perspective, leaving the collective feast in the hands of Romani musicians was already a kind of upheaval of the usual hierarchy (Stoichiță 2008:84). *Manele* carry this reversal one step further. One of the most famous *manea* singers (*Adrian Minune*, i.e., “Adrian Wonder”) is also mocked occasionally for being a dwarf. Two other famous performers—Babi Wonder [*Babi Minune*] and Ionuț Earring [*Ionuț Cerceș*]—are child prodigies. Both are shown behaving like adult *lăutari* in their video clips. They sing about similar topics (especially money and love affairs) with exactly the same instrumentals and voice inflexions. These children do not perform like real *lăutari*, taking whole ceremonies into their hands, but they may appear as “guest stars” for two or three songs. Their CDs are sold along with those of the other *manea* stars and are just as easy to find on the popular markets.

The father of Ionuț Earring is Petrică Earring [*Petrică Cerceș*]. He is also a well-known *manea* singer. His name is reminiscent of Petru Earring [*Petru Cerceș*], famous in his own respect for having ruled Wallachia in the sixteenth century. Many interpreters have nicknames alluding to either very “high” or very “low” references: Florin Fish [*Florin Pește*], Florin Salami [*Florin Salam*], Vasilică Silt [*Vasilică Nămo*], Sandu Soup [*Sandu Ciorbă*], Little Sorin The Golden Kid [*Sorinel Copilul de Aur*], and Ruxandra the Princess of Ardeal [*Ruxandra Prințesa Ardealului*]. The case of Florin Salami is particularly interesting. His civil name is Florin Stoian. He was first known on the *lăutar* scene as Florin the Charming [*Florin Fermecătorul*]. Then, in 2002, he switched to the opposite connotations of Florin Salami.²⁶

Another parallel with carnival time is abundance and ostentatious waste. Abundant food (especially roasted meat) characterizes ritual feasts such as at weddings and christenings, but also at *manea* clubs where one can order large trays of popular food (sausages, ribs, potatoes, garlic seasoning) at all times during the night. Alcohol is, of course, no less abundant. Money seems to flow freely in *baçiş* offerings. Sexual lust is overtly expressed, and the dance may be unusually permissive. One of the most famous *manea* clubs (Million Dollars) also features a brothel on the second floor.

Playing on power and parody, *manea* songs nicely fit these ambiances of lust, abundance, and suspension of daily constraints. Crude popular language, ludicrous imagination, and orgiastic power characterize their musical universes. They instantiate many traits of “grotesque realism” as found by Bakhtin (1990:46) in Rabelaisian writing. They make deliberate use of popular and/or obscene vocabulary, treat trivial topics with elaborate detail, emphasize them in hyperbolic distortions, and project aberrant fantasies on real people, things, and events.

The fact that the occasions to celebrate are typically associated with liminal events (weddings, christenings, birthdays, obtaining of school degrees or drivers’ licenses,

etc.) is relevant in this respect. As good music is supposed to provide a violent experience, “taming” and “breaking down” the listeners, it also projects them into a universe where many paradoxical experiences become possible. At parties, pride is typically mixed with self-derision. Such ambiguous feelings, which can hardly be experienced in daily life, are also markers of ritual events (Houseman 2006; Berthomé and Houseman 2010; Stoichiță 2013b).

At another level, the upheaval of “normality” also characterizes a popular perception of Romanian politics in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution. Daily conversations and mass media often leave the impression that important aspects of the world have been reversed since then: “clever guys” prosper while honest people work hard and remain poor; cultural minorities have specific rights which the majority does not; “Gypsies” have become powerful and live in palaces; the older generations struggle in this new world while the younger ones taunt them; the climate itself has become chaotic, with many floods, droughts, and extreme frosts. Since 1989, the writings of journalists both reflect and convey a powerful sense of irony (Ghiță 2000).

If it were just for the renewal of language and society through the “parodic destruction of ideological bonds and outdated links between things and phenomena” (Bakhtin 1990:458), there would be nothing to worry about. But many Romanian intellectuals fear that the *manea* world may become a model of behavior. Their anxiety is possibly triggered by the fact that there seems to be no “return to normality” in sight after the carnival. In other words, the “normality” itself turns out to be problematic since *manele* are rooted precisely in the long-awaited free market and cultural democracy that the 1989 turn provided at last. Other post-socialist countries have seen the rise of similar cultural movements that also function as “lightning rods” for many debates around continuing class and regional tensions (Sugarman 2007).

Indeed, *manele* may be seen as emphasizing chaos, if only for the way they mix heterogeneous echoes of the world. In contrast with Western “dissenting” art forms, such as hip-hop, *manele* can hardly be described as a protest. They carry no critique of social or political entities (nothing like the “State,” “Police,” or “System”). Some songs do refer to “enemies” [*dușmani*], but these are always individuals. Taken as social statements, *manele* are unquestioningly victorious. It is not a matter of how many people like them but rather what their content is.

I have argued that it is difficult to understand the *manea* as the “voice” of groups unheard before. Its link with political change goes beyond the new possibilities of expression afforded by the 1989 revolution. *Manele* dissolve and reimagine the world in ways that are reminiscent of the old European tradition of violent feasts. Especially in live performances where they are used as immersion techniques, they allow alternative agencies to be experienced, both between and “within” the listeners. Under this light, the song in our epigraph does not necessarily reflect a supposed revenge of the oppressed. In the end, nobody knows who the “emperors” [*împărați*] were and are, neither who they will be. “God” [*Dumnezeu*] and the “wheel of life” [*roata vieții*], keep turning the world endlessly upside down.

NOTES

1. *Atunci când eram sărac,/mă rugam s-ajung bogat,/să umilesc dușmanii mei/șa cum făceau și ei./Dar roata vieții s-a întors;/nu mai văd lumea de jos;/văd lumea de la-nălțime/c-a ținut Dumnezeu cu mine.* Gicuță from Apărători (CD *Singur pe lume*, Autentic Music). This and all subsequent translations are mine.

2. From 2001 to 2006 I undertook fieldwork in rural areas and small urban settings in Romanian Moldova with the help of a grant from the University Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense. I worked with professional musicians who played, amongst other things, *manele*. In 2009–2010 I conducted ten months of fieldwork in Bucharest on this genre specifically, with the support of a fellowship at the New Europe College, Institute for Advanced Study in Bucharest. I am grateful to the staff and colleagues there for their help and insightful remarks. An earlier version of this text was written during my stay at the NEC and is due to appear in its yearbook. I am also indebted to Speranța Rădulescu (Romanian Peasant Museum, Bucharest) and to the “*manea* team” gathered by her (most notably Anca Giurchescu, Florin Jordan, Costin Moisil, and Mirela Radu), for many enlightening discussions.

3. For general descriptions of *lăutari* in Romanian society, see Beissinger (2001); S. Rădulescu (1988, 2002); Stoichiță (2008:63–87).

4. See <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/>, arrays 7, 8, and 11, accessed 28 July 2013.

5. *Chef de manele* [*Manea* party], Vol. 2, Lesperance Music, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tb_nKwx2kTM, accessed 22 December 2013. <http://manele-in-romania.ro/manele-i/ch8/8-2-video.html>

6. *Barosan* is a slang word derived from Romani: *baro* [big] + *san* [you are]. It may refer to physical dimensions and/or socio-economic power.

7. *Șmecher* is another slang word meaning “sly,” “cunning,” “crafty,” or “elegant.” According to *Dicționarul Explicativ al Limbii Române* it derives from the German *schmacker*: “who has refined tastes.” See www.dexonline.ro, accessed 7 October 2010.

8. All of the examples discussed in this chapter can be accessed online: www.svictor.net/boyar.

9. In our conversation, Felix was counting in “old” *lei*, as they were used before the 2005 currency reform. The numbers he gave had four more zeroes than the ones I transcribed. The old system is still widely used, and during the musical performances, tips are usually announced in “millions” and “hundreds of thousands.”

10. As a way of returning to the lyrics after a dedication, the singer may announce: *I-auzi ce spune!* [Listen to what he/she/it says!], a remarkably ambiguous expression that could refer either to the giver, the addressee, or the song itself. The singer withdraws explicitly from the potential senders but leaves all other interpretations open.

11. Smaller synthesizers are sometimes used for melody. They are played by different musicians and are called *chibord* [keyboard].

12. A *manea* band often features a pair of *bongos*, a *darbuka*, or a *rototom* set, but the role of these drums is merely to enhance through ornaments the percussion pattern emanating from the synthesizer.

13. <http://manele-in-romania.ro/manele-i/ch8/8-3-video.html>.

14. This effect became a favorite. I witnessed several live performances where listeners ordered the song specifically asking the musicians to include that trick. Their wording could be, for example, to play it *cu motor cu tot* [complete, with the engine].

15. The whole idea of singing that someone is a “bomb” may actually be interpreted in relation to the physical shape of many “bosses” and wise guys who tend to assert their round bellies and massive necks proudly. In the *manea* universe, fatness can indeed be praised explicitly, like in the song *Sunt gras și frumos* [I’m fat and beautiful] by *Florin Salam* [lit., Florin Salami].
16. <http://manele-in-romania.ro/manele-i/ch8/8-4-video.html>.
17. See www.svictor.net/boyar.
18. Other images show Mr. Juve and Susanu in the back seat of a car with another woman. In a “rap” flow of lyrics, they explain straightforwardly to the listener how they will make love to her once she accepts their money (not included in video clip on www.svictor.net/boyar).
19. <http://manele-in-romania.ro/manele-i/ch8/8-5-video.html>.
20. See www.svictor.net/boyar.
21. An example is *Portofele portofele* [Wallet, o wallet] by Dan Ciotoi and Generic. In the lyrics, the narrator recalls how one day when he was starving, he reached out to grab a wallet and ended up in prison. The whole song is constructed as an address to the wallet. Lyrics such as these could not be sung or recorded legally under the communist regime.
22. <http://manele-in-romania.ro/manele-i/ch8/8-6-video.html>.
23. *Cenușăreasa*, by Odeon and Costel Geambașu. Initial recording on a tape circulated illegally between 1984 and 1989. Reissued on a compilation CD accompanying the magazine *Taiifasuri* nr. 194, 13, 19 November 2008.
24. Cristi Nucă and his band playing live in a wedding in Iași, 2005. <http://manele-in-romania.ro/manele-i/ch8/8-7-video.html>.
25. See www.svictor.net/boyar.
26. Some connoisseurs hold that the name Salam refers to the typical salutation used throughout the Turkish and Arabic world. Most Romanians are, however, unaware of this possible reference and use *salam* in daily parlance to refer to salami sausage.