

OUT OF FOLK SONGS POETICS: THE IMAGE OF WINE AND ITS CONTEXT

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Summary

The aim of the article is to discuss the whole wine-related tradition in Lithuanian culture and investigate its reflections in Lithuanian folk songs. After having analyzed what kind of wine, when and to what extent it had been used in Lithuania during calendar, work and family festivals, the author makes a conclusion that although Hungarian, French, Italian, and Rhenish wine had been imported to Lithuania since the 16th century, it has never really overshadowed the ancient and established tradition of drinking mead, beer, and schnapps / vodka. Still, in Lithuanian folk songs the image of wine and various poetical situations created around it are quite numerous. Such popularity of wine in folk songs poetics was determined by high cultural prestige of wine, inherited from countries with highly developed wine industry. Lithuanian folk songs most probably inherited wine code from Slavonic traditions, and interpreted it in their own way. Stereotypic formulae and semantically related inclusions of wine, constantly repeated in similar situations, provoke interpreting them as a meta-history of wine formed solely in the folklore sphere. Such interpretation is supported by several separate blocks of independent motives, detached from songs and provisionally interrelated. Their functions embrace quite a broad scope: from drawing an idealized history of wine, asserting its high status in the verbal rites and its real role in the legal practices, till small details, related simply and solely to drinking. The first block of motives is not numerous and does not have clearly developed plot scheme: the history of wine in folk songs is described by fits and starts only. If mentioning its origin at all, folk songs describe wine as expensive, fancy drink, brought from far away. Wine is associated with the vision of urban, “genteel” life, songs mention acquiring it from the “royal wine-cellar”, etc. Wine is placed at the very peak of its ritual glorification. Therefore flowing of wine in Lithuanian folk songs often resembles a miracle, the great mystery of wine being ascribed to the sacral powers of the maidenhood: *Ėjo merga vyno leisti, Pati savim dyvojos, Iš kur vynas tekėjo: Ar iš baltų rankužių, Ar iš aukso žiedužio? Ne iš aukso žiedužio, Tik iš deimanto akužės, Iš deimanto akužės – Į qžuolo bonkužę* (‘The maiden went to get wine, wondering at herself: Where from did the wine flow? Did it flow from the white hands, or from the golden ring? Not from the golden ring, just from its diamond eye, and straight into the oaken bottle’).

Another block of wine-related motives comprises several different levels of poetic glorifications at wedding rituals. Among them, poetic phrase *žalias vynas* (‘young wine’, literary ‘green wine’) is especially outstanding. This lexical compound, borrowed and translated directly from Slavic languages (Russian, Byelorussian, Ukrainian), has acquired special connotations in Lithuanian poetics. From the perspective of ritual vision, such image like the ‘young’ wine is essentially related to the time category, directed at the idealization of maidenhood. Thus only during her maidenhood the girl is supposed to be able to see rivers of wine; being able to symbolically soak her wreath and plaits in wine, water her rue with wine, wash her face in it and give it to the birds to drink.

However, in the whole context of wine-related motives, the most prominent are those reflecting ritual actions, i. e. toasting. These motives are endowed certain semantic autonomy in songs, being almost directly transferred from Lithuanian rituals, or customs. After having discussed the particularly ancient tradition of drinking “collective” beer (i. e. procured together, by joined means) during the most important annual festivals, the author points out how wine, appearing in this context, adds certain air of holiness, mysticism and exceptionality to the ritual of toasting itself. Especially popular toasting was in family rituals, although toasting with wine has been recorded during weddings only, where it doubtlessly signifies allusion to fertility. Such toasting is characterized by matchmaking intentions, its occurrences being very numerous and particularly stable in our folk songs. They constitute a common paradigm, characterized by particularly stable formulaic expressions. The same formulae are used not only in the matchmaking songs, but also in almost the entire repertoire of the

wedding songs. Only the actors, the toasters and the toasted, may slightly vary in dependence to the particular ritual scenes.

The author of the article also attempts discussing wine tradition in terms of the drinking situation. These reflections are especially pronounced in the late, humorous and didactic folk songs, although they are by far surpassed by the much more intense echoes of vodka consumption. By the way, if appreciated with regards to the nowadays ethnographic context, the high status of wine in folk songs seems to have fairly well “guessed at” or even determined the nearest perspective for the wine usage: it’s characterized by exceptional, prestigious and representative role in the whole sphere of our modern culture.