

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WEDDING AND INITIATION RITES AS REFLECTED IN FOLK SONGS

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### Summary

The author of the article aims at discussing particular episodes in the folk songs' discourse, characterized by peculiar symbolism. These include scenes displaying meeting of the two young people by the water and some adventures they happen to experience there, quite common in Lithuanian wedding songs, love songs and some other types of folk songs. When extracted from the 19<sup>th</sup> century printed sources and systematized, these folk song motives alone unexpectedly reveal themselves as an impressive ritualistic and mythopoetic mystery, existing exclusively in folk songs and narrated in an archetypical language. The following scheme reveals the general contents of this mystery.

The maiden and the young guy happen to meet by the water; the place may be characterized either as the usual ethnographic landscape, or its mythologized version may be presented. During this meeting several fatal events are bound to happen. Their narration, however, may proceed in two slightly different ways. The first one includes motives signifying loss of symbols and signs, associated with youth and maidenhood. Here are the several typical versions: the guy seduces the maiden, "over persuading" her, and her wreath withers, also the water clouds up – the maiden weeps; the guy asks the maiden for the water for his horse, and as she does not give it, he forcefully tears off her wreath, strips down the ribbons, breaks the buckets and the yoke – the maiden weeps; the maiden's wreath gets blown away into an open sea, her ring or even herself are drowning – anyway, she asks the guy for help, agreeing to marry him, while the guy sometimes refuses to help, but more often he attempts at saving the above mentioned things and the maiden: sometimes he succeeds, but gets drowned himself, and the wreath either floats away and out of sight or gets carried away by the swans – the maiden weeps. The second line consistently develops the theme of crossing the waters to the other side. The guy and the girl are initially on the different sides, so several ways of crossing the waters may be employed: the guy either attempts at swimming across on his horse, or makes a ship in order to reach the girl and bring her over, or builds a bridge; the maiden either asks a ferryman for help or attempts at wading the waters over by herself – anyway, she always fails and weeps as a consequence.

That all the goings to the water have nuptial allusions in folk songs, seems almost a certainty today. Likewise, it is considered a certainty, that bride's separation rituals, belonging to the rites of passage, are performed during weddings. Nevertheless, here an interesting and hardly ever noticed semantical aspect can be pointed out: the separation is partly described as an initiation, quite reminiscent of the formerly existing male maturity initiation rituals. Anyway, it used to be quite commonly assumed, that real acknowledgment of the feminine maturity came at her wedding, as only married women had real possibilities of integrating themselves into the social life of the community. True, numerous parallels and ritual similarities between weddings and initiations can be established. Cutting of bride's hair, undoing her plaits, depriving her of the wreath, and constant crying of the bride (creating an impression of a suffering, even a tortured, human being), can be reasonably associated with even more brutal physical injuries, implemented during male maturity rituals (ceremonial circumcision, body painting, knocking out teeth, shaving of hair, etc.). In both cases, the meaning of the performed actions is similar: they signify the change of the status on the ritual level. It is interesting to note, however, that such change gets even more distinctly featured in folk songs, acquiring form of a feminine drama. Precisely this idea gets reflected by the aquatic symbolism in folk songs' motives, analyzed in the present article: these are frequently understood as purely metaphorical language, which only verbally, i.e. solely in imagination, creates sights reminiscent of initiations, including forceful ruining of wreath and other signs of maidenhood. The symbolism of drowning the wreath and the ring is among the most favored ones in folk songs. Thus, use of metonymic description creates an impression of a radical personal change. Motives including drowning of the maiden herself are also quite numerous. True, this is nothing else as a metaphor of death, enhancing the dramatic tension and of its own accord corresponding with a temporary, fictitious death, enacted during initiations. According to the ritual ideology of passages, it is after such death that a new human being springs up, ready for a new life. Therefore motives of drowning, associated with wedding rituals, and the drowned people, mentioned in agrarian magic, can be assumed acquiring additional fecundity connotations.