

Comparative Musical and Literary Aspects in Laments for Unmarried Young People and Ritual Wedding Songs from Northern Moldavia

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Abstract: *Birth, marriage and death are the most important moments in a person's life, being considered rites of passage. These have their roots deeply embedded in the tradition that is preserved and transmitted over time by mankind. Within two of these rites, marriage and death, we find both different but also similar elements that blend harmoniously with each other. Thus, with regard to the bridal musical repertoire, some existing thematic motifs were also identified in the laments for the young dead, who were not wed during their lifetime.*

Keywords: *lament; wedding song; wedding; funeral; thematic motifs;*

Introduction

The three important moments in human life (birth, marriage and death) have long been considered mysteries. If at the wedding one participates consciously, in the prime of their life, at the funeral they participate unconsciously, without knowing what will happen to them. If birth signifies the dawn of life and death - its twilight, the wedding represents the noon, which is the clearest for mankind, but also the hardest because of this clarity.²

The wedding, the second important threshold in human life, is the event that marks the transition from one social status to another, in which the bride and groom participate consciously and willingly. Acts of a different nature are required during the wedding: from some ancient beliefs to those of today, being a syncretic custom that stands out for its complexity.

The funeral ceremony is considered to be the oldest and most widespread, evidenced by the fact that it was integrated by Christianity into its ritual corpus, without changing its essential moments.³

At the time of the death of a young or elderly person, their relatives consider it necessary that the separation and reintegration into the afterlife be as complete as possible, so that the soul of the deceased can leave in peace. Thus, in a study, Arnold van Gennep defined three categories of rites of passage: separation (preliminary), threshold (liminary) and aggregation (postliminary).⁴ Accordingly, the funeral ritual combines these rites, representing the ceremonial marking of the moment when the soul leaves this world. The living are obliged to ensure,

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² Ioan Alexandru. 1989. „Semnificația Nunții.” In *Nunta la români. Orații [Romanian Wedding Customs. Orations]*. Ed. By Ioan Moanță. București: Editura Minerva, p. 5.

³ Delia Stoian-Irimie. 2009. *Obiceiuri de înmormântare din zona subcarpatică a Moldovei (Suceava, Neamț, Bacău) [Funeral customs from the Subcarpathian region of Moldova (Suceava, Neamț, Bacău)]*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica, p. 22.

⁴ Arnold van Gennep. 1996. *Rituri de trecere [Rites of Passage]*, Iași: Polirom, p. 22.

through symbolic objects and texts, the separation of the deceased from this world, as well as the journey to the other world and their integration into it.⁵

1. The wedding of the young dead

In everyday life, not infrequently, death also occurs in young people who have not fully lived their lives, being considered an untimely death, in relation to the specific moment of death, as the following verses from a lament emphasize:

Nu ți-o fo' moartea să mori	It was not your time to die
Da ți-o fo' vremea să te-nsori	But the time to get married. ⁶

During life, the role of young people is to have a social status, namely to start a family. If this act cannot take place due to reasons of death, the young person is married before being buried. Thus, those who died at an age when the sacrament of marriage was not performed, at the moment of death will have a symbolic wedding, so that the soul of the deceased may find peace in the other world. It is said that this wedding has the role of tempering that tension that occurs on the occasion of the paradoxical pairing of sexuality with death.⁷

Life and death rites appear related both structurally and in content, highlighting successive processes of incorporation and separation. Thus, in the two rites there emerge a series of similarities:

Wedding	Funeral
The wedding fir tree (atop a pole)	The decorated fir tree.
The bride's (or groom's) clothing	The deceased's (bride or groom) clothing
<i>Druște, vornicei</i>	<i>Druște, vornicei</i> that follow the coffin
Leaving the parental home	Leaving home to go to the other world
to go to the husband's house	
The bride asks for her parent's forgiveness	Forgiveness asked from those they leave behind
The procession to the church	The funeral cortege
Hired fiddlers	Fiddlers who accompany the procession
Ritual wedding songs	Wedding themed laments
The wedding festive meal	The ritual commemorative meal
The ritual toast for the bride and groom	The ritual toast for the soul of the deceased

Accordingly, in the case of the death of an unmarried young person, their parents want the funeral to be thought of in the same way as a wedding. Not infrequently, fiddlers are hired to perform a repertoire specific to the wedding. The *druște*⁸ and *vornicei (vătăjei)*⁹ are almost indispensable, being permanently near the coffin of the deceased, accompanying them to the grave.

⁵ Delia Stoian-Irimie, *op. cit.*, p.23.

⁶ Gail Kligman. 2005. *Nunta mortului, Ritual, poetică și cultură populară în Transilvania [The Wedding of the Dead. Ritual, Poetics and Popular Culture in Transylvania]*, 2nd ed. București: Editura Polirom, p.163.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 164.

⁸ *Druște* = girls who accompany the bride to the wedding and who have certain attributions.

⁹ *Vornicei (vătăjei)* = at weddings, people in charge of organization.

The deceased young woman is dressed in white wedding clothes, and the deceased young man wears the groom's clothes. If during their life they had a boyfriend/girlfriend, then he/she will have the role of bride/groom during the entire procession.

A custom encountered both in Bucovina and in other areas of the country is to prepare a fir tree at the death of young people. In Transylvania, a tall fir tree is brought from the forest, whose branches are cleaned, leaving only the top ones. The tree is taken from the forest by a group of boys, friends of the deceased. As the procession makes its way to the cemetery, the tree is carried in front while a group of girls sing a ritual funeral song called *Cântecul bradului* (Song of the Fir Tree). The tree is placed in the ground near the grave and left there until it dries.

In Bucovina, the tree is decorated with different flowers, branches, fruits, a wreath and a candle, after which it is placed in front of the house, right from the first day after the death occurred, to signal that a young man died at that house.¹⁰ When the deceased is taken to the cemetery in a bullock-drawn hearse, four smaller fir trees are placed in each corner of the hearse, and at the end of the ritual, they are placed in the four corners of the grave.

Unlike Transylvania, which has the Song of the Fir Tree, in Bucovina no ritual song specific to this custom is known. However, it is assumed that such a custom existed in the past, evidenced by a few lines from a song collected from Horodnicul de Jos, Rădăuți area.¹¹ The custom of the fir tree on the occasion of the funeral of the young dead was borrowed from the Romans, who used cypresses,¹² which indicates that it is a very old custom.

2. The musical repertoire encountered during the wedding/wedding of the dead

During the wedding ritual, the most important musical repertoire is *the ritual song of the bride*, which is performed in a group by the women, at different times: the night before the wedding, at the bride's home, on the day of the wedding, at the *înhobotat*,¹³ before the departure of the bride from her parents' house, during the change of the girl's hairstyle to the wife, as well as in other moments of the ceremony.

From a musical point of view, it is interpreted freely, *parlando rubato*, being richly ornamented and having a strophic form.

From the point of view of versification, the ritual wedding songs fall into the category of 7-8 syllables, forming pyrrhic tetrapodies with the two forms: *acatalectic* and *catalectic*.

¹⁰ Delia Stoian-Irimie, *op. cit.*, p.44.

¹¹ Simion Florea Marian. 1995. *Înmormântarea la români [The Romanian Funeral Customs], Ethnographical study*. București: Editura „Grai și suflet-Cultura Națională”, p. 71.

¹² *Ibidem*, p.74.

¹³ A *înhobota* = to put a wreath of flowers on the bride's head.

Zinovia Țimpău, 49 a, 1969
Pojorâta, Suceava

Parlando rubato

Tran - da - fir în cor - nu me - - sii,
Tran - da - fir în cor - nu me - sii,
Mân - dru plâng o - chi mi - re - sii.

Fig. 1 *Wedding song*¹⁴

As for the musical repertoire encountered at the death of young unmarried people, there is no specific repertoire. Here, one notices only laments, which are performed in the same way as for any deceased. The lament is considered a folkloric species, which is performed individually and contains a cathartic (purifying) function. They express a feeling of pain, which is caused by the loss of a close person. Laments are performed at several moments during the ceremony: for three days while the body is laid in the house, at their head, while the bells are rung, when s/he is taken out into the yard, on the way to the cemetery, by the pit and at the grave a few days in a row.

In Bucovina, there are laments with a strophic form, consisting of 2-4 melodic lines. They are slightly ornamented, with a free rhythm, in *parlando rubato*, the basic pulsations are the eighths, among which are interspersed various stretches containing indefinite durations. As for the versification, they belong to the pyrrhic tetrapody, with the acatalectic and catalectic form. The sound structures of laments contain a small number of sounds, falling into prepentatonic, pentatonic, premodal diatonic scales, sometimes chromatic. This aspect places the laments as part of an archaic layer.

From a musical point of view, the laments for the young dead do not differ in any way from those performed for the elderly. They circulate on the same melodies, the difference being noticed only from a literary point of view.

Parlando ♩ = 150

1. Scoa - li Lă - cră mioa - ri, scoa - li, Scoa - lă - ti di pe iest pa - tu,
Și hai - da pi șe - la - lan - tu.

Fig. 2 *Lament*¹⁵

¹⁴ Pavel Delion. 1981. *Melorii și cântece populare din Moldova*. [Folk Tunes and Songs from Moldova], Comitetul Județean de Cultură și Educație Socialistă. Iași: Centrul de îndrumare a creației populare și a mișcării artistice de masa.

¹⁵ Delia Stoian-Irimie. 2009. *Repertoriul funebru din zona subcarpatică a Moldovei (Suceava, Neamț, Bacău)* [The Funeral Repertoire from the Subcarpathian Area of Moldova (Suceava, Neamț, Bacău)]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica, p.77.

3. Comparative thematic elements found in ritual wedding songs and laments for the young dead

Given the fact that we encounter an obvious similarity between the wedding ritual and that of the burial of the young dead from a literary point of view, a multitude of similar or even identical thematic reasons have been noticed. Also, in the texts of the laments we also find various analogies regarding the wedding ritual. Some folklorists claim that some of the lyrics of the laments for the young dead were collected during actual weddings.¹⁶

If in the laments for the elderly are indicated specific recipients (mother, father, brother, sister), or even individual names (Maria, Gheorghe), for the laments of the young dead we find other terms that emphasize the social status of the deceased, as well as the metaphorical relationship between death and marriage. Thus, the deceased is called the bride/groom, the same as in the ritual wedding songs:

Naframuța lui di mniri	His bridegroom kerchief
Tu-ai legat-o la nasâli,	You tied it to the coffin,
Naframuța di mnireasî,	The bride's kerchief,
Ț-ai pus-o la cruși-n casî.	You put it on the cross at home. ¹⁷

We notice both in the wedding songs and in the texts of laments for the girl, a rather frequent theme, namely asking for forgiveness from everything she loved most (as long as she stayed with her mother), as the following verses recount:

Lament:

Scoală, scoală și te uită,	Wake up, wake up and look,
Și te uită prin grădină,	And look around the garden,
Și-ți ie rămas de la mamă.	And say goodbye to your mother.
Și te uită pi la flori,	And look at the flowers,
Și-ți ie rămas de la frați,	And bid farewell to your brothers,
Di la frați, di la surori.	Your brothers, your sisters.
Di la tată, di la mamă,	To your father, to your mother,
Di la grădina cu flori,	To the flower garden,
Di la fete, di la feciori.	To lads and lasses. ¹⁸

Wedding song:

Ie-ți, copilă, iertăciune	Ask for forgiveness, child
De la toate de pe lume,	From all the world
De la frați, de la părinți,	From your brothers, from your parents,
De la icoane cu sfinți,	From the icons of the saints,
De la frați, de la surori,	From your brothers, from your sisters,
De la grădina cu flori.	From the flower garden. ¹⁹

¹⁶ Gail Kligman, *op. cit.*, p.167.

¹⁷ Delia Stoian-Irimie, *Repertoriul funebru*, ed. cit., p.130.

¹⁸ Alexandru Voevidca. 2015. *Repertoriul ritual-ceremonial vocal*[*The Vocal Ritual-Ceremonial Repertoire*], vol. I, Critical edition and musical typological catalogue by Constanța Cristescu, PhD. Suceava: Editura Lidana, p. 235.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 258.

A recurrent thematic motif in wedding ritual songs is when the bride is preparing to leave her parental home, lamenting the insecurity that awaits her in her future home. This motif is also present in the laments for unmarried girls:

Ti-ai îmbrăcat di mnireasă,
Di mâni ti duci di-acasă,
Sî ti duși pi-un drum di pciatrî
Undi n-ai fost nișiodatî,
Sî ti duși pi-un drum di fieru
Undi n-ai fost niși di fielu.

You dressed like a bride,
From tomorrow you leave home,
And you go on a stone road
Where have you never been
And you go on an iron road
Where you have never been.²⁰

Many times, the predominant emphasis in laments falls on the metaphor of the wedding, but the idea of death comes across constantly. The death-wedding analogy can also be found in the following verses, where the bride cannot speak at her own wedding, and the mourners, instead of walking around the village to invite people at the wedding, go to ring the bells, announcing the sad news:

Draga noastră, fată mare,
Că ne-ai făcut supărare!
Ce fel de nunt-ai făcutu,
Au vorbești parcă ești mută!
Vătăjei prin sat n-îmblând,
Numai clopote trăgând!
Vătăjei cu capul gol,
Cum nu ni-o fost noauă dor!
Și druștele despletite,
Cum ni-s nouă mai urâte!

Our dear, unmarried girl,
That you made us upset!
What kind of wedding did you have?
You talk like you're mute!
The *vătăjei* wander through the village,
Tolling only bells!
Vătăjei with bare heads,
We didn't miss them!
And the unbraided *druște*,
As we most dislike them!²¹

Similarly, in the verses of the laments appears the motif when the young man is asked to get up to prepare for the wedding, because his relatives have come to dress him and be with him at such an event:

Scoală, scoală și ti spală,
Și ti spală pe obraz,
Și mai uită de năcaz.
Dar ce stai așa scârghit?
Neamurile ți-o venit
Și de nuntă te-o gătit.
Dar nu știu ce feli de nuntă ai,

Get up, get up and wash yourself,
And wash your face,
And forget about the trouble.
But why are you so sad?
Your relatives came to you
And they dressed you for the wedding.
But I don't know what kind of wedding you
have,
[With] horseless *vătăjei*,
Unbraided *druște*,
And sad relatives.²²

Vatajeii fără cai,
Druștele despletite
Și neamurile scârghite.

²⁰ Delia Stoian-Irimie, *Repertoriul funebru*, ed. cit., pp. 206-207.

²¹ Alexandru Voevidca, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 229.

The bride is urged to stop being upset, and if she doesn't like how she is dressed - to take the cloth off her head to arrange herself the way she wants. The relatives are sad because she does not speak to them, nor to the groom who is standing next to her:

Ian dă-ți pânda pusti capu,	Put the cloth over your head,
Și tei-mbracă cum ți-i dragu.	And dress as you like.
Da' ce fel de mireasă iești,	Yes, what kind of bride you are,
Cu nările nu grăiești,	You don't talk to the groom,
Nici nuntașii nu-i cinstești! ²³	You don't even honour the wedding guests!

The theme of laments for the young dead is much richer and more varied, combining different motifs that are also found in wedding songs. Thus, the structural relationship between marriage and death appears quite obvious, and all those who die too early have a symbolic wedding, leaving for the other world with reconciled souls.

4. Conclusions

In village communities where folk traditions are preserved, wedding and death have a special meaning, being considered rites of passage, in which the main protagonists participate consciously or unconsciously. Both the wedding and the funeral are large events, in which the whole community participates.

Researching the two rituals - the wedding and the funeral of young unmarried people - I noticed a number of similarities, but also differences.

As for the burial of unmarried young people, it was found that this ritual is considered a symbolic wedding, where the deceased young woman is called - *bride*, and the young man - *groom*. Due to the fact that the deceased who did not have a wedding in their lifetime, the accessories of the *bride's/ groom's* clothes are converted into funeral attire. Thus, the ritual of the burial of young people is carried out in the same way as a wedding.

If the ritual of the funeral of the young is similar to that of the wedding, the musical repertoire emerges as being different. During the wedding, the specific songs are the bridal rituals. They are performed in groups, by women, at different moments of the ceremony, having a free rhythm, parlando rubato and a strophic form. Within the ritual of the burial of the young dead, we encounter laments that are not melodically similar to wedding songs. They are performed individually, by the mourners, at different moments of the funeral ceremony, having a simple melodic line, slightly ornamented, with a strophic form. As a conclusion, we may say that from a melodic point of view we do not find a similarity between the two musical genres.

Regarding the literary texts of the wedding ritual songs and the laments for the young dead, since it is a symbolic wedding of the deceased young people, the literary theme appears quite similar to that of the wedding ritual songs. Various themes were encountered, such as: separation from loved ones, leaving the parental home, the insecurity that awaits the bride in her *new home*. Also, the wedding-death analogy appears, where the young man/woman attend their own wedding, but unconsciously.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 233.

Even if this posthumous wedding is arranged for the deceased young person, it can barely ease the grief of the bereaved relatives and friends.

5. References

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