

Kur sakalalis The Falcon and the Cuckoo

Lithuanian folk song

Variations by Raimundas Martinkėnas

"The falcon and the cuckoo" is a wedding song. It tells the story of a cuckoo and a falcon, who flew into the same orchard, perched in the same tree, ate berries from the same cluster, and drank dew from the same leaf. The song continues in a parallel mode, substituting a young man and a young woman. They both came to the same homestead, sat at the same table, nibbled at the same morsel of cake, drank wine from the same goblet, and made the same promises.

The song is replete with symbolism, which clarifies the deeper meaning of the song.

The cuckoo is one of the most significant birds in Lithuanian folklore, especially in sung folklore. Some believed that at the end of summer, a cuckoo would transform into a hawk or falcon. It was thought that the cuckoo was a medium, communicating between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In wedding songs, the cuckoo, the raven, and the falcon were considered to be all-knowing. In Lithuanian mythology, a cuckoo or a falcon perched on the gunwale of a boat was known as a messenger of bad news – a harbinger of death. It is evident that the roles assigned to these birds are many and varied. The actual role depends on the song and possibly some guesswork, as to what the author may have had in mind.

We can limit ourselves to the sung folklore tradition, particularly this song, and say that the cuckoo and the falcon make a pair, reflecting the wedding couple. The two birds flew into an **orchard**. The orchard filled with fruit trees signifies a place of shelter for the soul. It indicates a particular state of being – orderliness, freshness, and purity.

"They perched in the same **tree**". A tree is considered the axis of the world. Its roots draw water from the earth, while its branches reach the sky and eternity. The tree symbolizes endless life energy, the power of the earth, growth, and upwards expansion. The tree also has a protective function and represents a place of holiness.

"They ate **berries** from the same cluster". Berries can have multiple meanings. They can be a symbol of troubles, heartache, and tears. But equally they can represent love and kisses. Berries, especially red and sweet ones, hint at a young woman's beauty, mutual attraction, enticement, and courtship. So in this song, surely the berries are sweet, fragrant, and indicative of love.

"They drank **dew** from the same leaf". Dew consists of a drop of water. Water is the symbol of life and the source of all creation.

The subsequent stanzas repeat the same ideas, but with the young man and woman instead of the birds. "They both came to the same homestead". Home is home – a place dear to one's heart, whether it be a poor peasant's shack or a nobleman's mansion.

Song Analysis

“They sat at the same **table**”. The table in the home is a special, holy place: where the family gathers, where bread is shared, a place of sustenance, a place for discussions, a place for decision-making, a place for prayer. The table is decorated for various holidays and feasts; guests are invited to the table. The table is a family’s holy place, a place for family traditions, communal prayers, mutual respect – as though the table is an altar to the family’s history.

“They nibbled at the same morsel of **cake**”. “Cake” was the term used for bread, sometimes even known as “white cake”. In earlier times it was baked only on special occasions, such as weddings. The breaking of bread symbolized the union of the two families.

“They drank **wine** from the same goblet”. Drinking wine from the same wineglass is a tradition that has endured to our times. Traditionally, the newlyweds are welcomed and blessed by their parents, with an offering of bread, salt, and wine – symbols of life and fruitfulness.

“They made the same **promises**”. The promise is their vow to stay together for life, to share a common path in life, to love forever.

The song ends with the words: “where there is a falcon, you will find a cuckoo” – as though we were wishing the young couple all the best, and that they always remain at each other’s side.

Sources:

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V. Stukaitė – “Birds – interpreters of our way”.

A. Valiukevičienė – “The tree in the Lithuanian world”.

O. Gaidamavičiūtė – “Three speckled cuckoos flew by”.

L. Kudirkienė – “The image of the cuckoo in folklore”.