

Ne dėl žalio vyno Not for the Green Wine

Lithuanian folk song
Variations by Vilija Mažintaitė

The color green is frequently encountered in Lithuanian folk songs. Greenery that keeps its color the entire year is worshipped and believed to have supernatural powers. The song “Not for the green wine” was most popular in the Dzūkija region of Lithuania, generally sung during Advent. It was also sung in other parts of Lithuania, albeit with somewhat modified lyrics. The song tells the story of a young man who got up early in the morning, washed, dressed, saddled his horse, and rode off to war, where he perished. The continuing refrain “Not for the green wine, but for the verdant greenery” seeks to emphasize his motivation for going off to war.

Aušra Kavaliauskienė helps explain the song in her article titled “Symbolism of the color green in the worldview of Lithuanian folklore”. “...In Lithuanian folklore, mythology, folk art, and traditions the color green was considered magical. It was believed that green symbols would ensure vitality and fruitfulness not only in nature, but also in one’s life. The color green signified eternal life, so that green symbols also indicated a protective function.”

Green wine

Folklore researchers have attempted to ascertain the source of the image “green wine” in Lithuanian folk songs. There is no green wine in Lithuania, and none of the traditional Lithuanian drinks (mead, kvass, beer, whiskey) are green. So it is thought that the image is not of Lithuanian origin and borrowed from neighboring countries, where the same sounding word could mean different things: green vine (the vine tree) = green wine (the drink). One way or another, the term became popular in Lithuanian folklore. “Green wine” can be taken to mean almost any alcoholic drink, particularly what is drunk during feasts and celebrations. What is significant in this song, is that the young man rode off to war not motivated by alcohol, but by a higher purpose. (A. Kavaliauskienė)

“Green wine” in Lithuanian folklore not was not only used to denote a special, expensive drink of high quality. It could also indicate „water“. For example, „the young woman washed her face with green wine“. Or „the girl drew green wine from the well“. On Christmas Eve water was said to turn into wine. During wedding celebrations, there were songs about a fountain or river of green wine. To identify a drink as “green” could also symbolize that it was a magical potion.

Verdant greenery.

The first greenery would appear typically in the month of April, at which time the arrival of spring would be celebrated. However, it was sought to guarantee the rebirth of nature much earlier – the „approaching greenery“ was celebrated during the time of Advent and Christmas. Images in Lithuanian folk songs frequently use the color green

Song Analysis

when describing weddings, life, vitality, and the notions of change and rebirth. The growth and verdancy of trees is used to describe the time of life when a young man or woman grow into maturity. Trees which are green the entire year symbolized the eternal wheel of life. In the context of wedding songs, we see references to green silk, green bridges, green carriages, and green boats.

Greenery was used during the feast of Pentecost to decorate homes, entrance gates, and barns. Young birch tree branches and other greenery were used to beautify gardens. Churches and wayside shrines were similarly adorned. People would drive to Pentecost services dressed up with greenery. Flowers, boughs of trees, and other greenery were used as decorations when celebrating holidays as well as traditional family ceremonies – baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.

“Verdant greenery”, as in this song, was symbolic of eternal life, renewal, and rebirth – as much in nature as in one’s own life.

Sources:

Aušra Kavaliauskienė – “Symbolism of the color green in the worldview of Lithuanian folklore”.

Bronė Stundžienė – “From the poetry of songs: the image and context of wine”.