

The Christmas Cycle by B.-I. Antonych in the context of dialogue between mythological-ceremonial and religious consciousnesses

Cykl świąteczny B.-I. Antonycha w kontekście dialogu pomiędzy świadomością mitologiczno-ceremonialną a religijną

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Abstract

The article deals with a complex interaction of mythological-ceremonial (archaic, pagan) and religious (Christian) consciousness in The Christmas Cycle of poems by a Polish-born Ukrainian poet Bohdan-Ihor Antonych (5 October 1909–6 July 1937). Born and raised in the Lemko village of Nowica, Antonych left his native village in 1928 to study at the University of Lviv. He died young but managed to create poems that have received recognition for centuries. Ukrainian honor him as an outstanding personality. The author pioneers a discussion of the phenomenon of intertwined folk-religious imagery in Antonych as a representation of the local (ethnic Slavic) Christian outlook and proposes an in-depth semantic analysis of the key symbolic images in The Christmas Cycle.

Abstrakt

Artykuł dotyczy złożonej interakcji pomiędzy mitologiczno-ceremonialnej (archaicznej, pogańskiej) i religijnej (chrześcijańskiej) świadomości w Bożonarodzeniowym cyklu wiersz ukraińskiego poety, urodzonego w Polsce, Bohdana-Ihora Antonycha (5 października 1909–6 lipca 1937) . Urodzony i wychowany w łemkowskiej Nowicy Antonych opuścił rodzinną wieś w 1928 roku, aby studiować na Uniwersytecie Lwowskim. Zmarł młodo, ale udało mu się stworzyć wiersze, które od wieków cieszą się uznaniem. Ukraińcy czczą go jako wybitną osobowość. Autor artykułu jest pionierem w dyskusji nad zjawiskiem przeplatających się wyobrażeń ludowo-religijnych u Antonycha jako reprezentacji lokalnego (etniczno-słowiańskiego) chrześcijańskiego światopoglądu i proponuje dogłębną analizę semantyczną kluczowych obrazów symbolicznych zaczerpniętych z cyklu Bożego Narodzenia.

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The interaction between mythological-ceremonial (archaic, pagan) and religious (Christian) consciousnesses and cultures represents an important topic in the context of the Ukrainian past, especially for historical studies of mentality and spirituality, of art and literature. The studies of the spiritual culture of the nation have for a long time been conducted with regard to this type of interaction¹.

At the same time when studying the history of culture, psychology of the nation, its conscious and subconscious psychological world one intuitively feels the enormous significance of all these pre-Christian cultural and spiritual phenomena. They are deeply rooted in the ethnic culture, the peculiar character of which is closely connected with mythological-ceremonial culture in the majority of its traits. At any rate, the investigations of spiritual ethnic culture primarily consider mythological conceptions and ceremonial practices².

We will probably come closer to solving the problem of this interaction when we realize that mythological-ceremonial and religious aspects are two different aspects of culture that cannot replace one another³.

¹ See: Г. Булашев, *Український народ у своїх легендах, релігійних поглядах та віруваннях*, Київ 1992; О. Воропай, *Звичаї нашого народу. Етнографічний нарис*, Київ 1993; С. Килимник, *Український рік у народніх звичаях в історичному освітлені*, Вінніпег; Торонто 1964; Н. А. Маркевич, *Обычаи, поверья, кухня и напитки малороссиян*, Киев 1992.

² See: Д. К. Зеленин, *Восточнославянская этнография*, Москва 1991, р. 319-424; *Культура і побут населення України*, Київ 1991, р. 141-162, 188-197; *Этнография восточных славян. Очерки традиционной культуры*, Москва 1987, in these editions look also lit. on the question.

³ As for general semantic characteristics of mythological-ceremonial and religious aspects of consciousness and culture see: Г. Франкфорт, Г. А. Франкфорт, Дж., Уилсон, Т. Якобсен, *В преддверии философии*, Москва 1984; Е. М. Мелетинский, *Поэтика мифа*, Москва 1976, р. 163 and further, pp. 169-171 etc.; В. Н. Топоров, *О ритуале. Введение в проблематику*, [in:] *Архаический ритуал в фольклорных и раннелитературных памятниках*, Москва 1988, pp. 7-60; В. Тернер, *Символ и ритуал*, Москва 1983; С. А. Токарев, Е. М. Мелетинский, *Мифология*, [in:] *Мифы народов мира. Энциклопедия. Т. 1*, Москва 1980, pp. 11-20.; С. Н. Булгаков, *Свет невечерний*, Москва 1994, pp. 8-87; И. А. Ильин, *Аксиомы религиозного опыта*, Москва 1993, pp. 41-44, 65; Протоиерей Александр Мень.

Already on the surface one can see that in this case ethnically rooted (grounded in the mythological-ceremonial aspect of culture) is opposed to universally human (Christian religiousness). But it is more crucial that mythological-ceremonial and religious aspects in culture, consciousness, spiritual life represent utterly different spiritual-cultural phenomena or dimensions that are correlated with different aspects of the ontology of life and human existence, spiritual world. They cannot replace one another, that's why both of them are ineradicable.

The study of the latter in connection with the aforementioned facts and also regarding the fact that the XX century witnessed the appearance of new quasi-mythologies, mythological-ceremonial types of behavior, especially in totalitarian societies and mass culture⁴, accompanied by the development of the mythological-ceremonial way of thinking in art⁵, shows that nihilistic attitude to this issue is outdated. This draws attention to the poems by B.-I. Antonych, who once said: "I am a pagan who fell in love with life"⁶.

Regarded from the other perspective, these two aspects or different dimensions of cultural and spiritual life, in reality, are not separated by impenetrable walls. On the contrary, they interact with one another, never totally breaking up but never merging into unity either. That is why it is especially interesting to analyze the materials in which one can observe the interaction of these points, in which reflection over this interaction is needed. This is what draws attention to the two poetic texts by B.-I. Antonych, namely "Christmas" and "Kolyada". In this phase of the study, the purpose is to give an interpretation of these texts taking into consideration the interaction of mythological-ceremonial and religious dimensions of spiritual culture.

We have to note at once that mythological-ceremonial way of thinking and experiencing reality, together with religious consciousness is represented in this poetic microcycle by Antonych through their most essential characteristics and not just through the peripheral "motifs". Note that only having accepted the fact of having in these poems both mythological ceremonial and religiousness as ways of life and its representation and comprehension, one can pass to attempts at solving the main controversy of these texts: God is born on a sleigh, in the Lemko town, God's Child is the Slavic Child, He will be taken on a sleigh.

История религии в семи томах. Т. 1. Истоки религии, Москва 1991, p. 44 and further, in the last publication look also literature, p. 268-276..

⁴ See: A. В. Гулыга, *Искусство в век науки*, Москва 1978.

⁵ See: Ю. М. Лотман, З. Г. Минц, Е. М. Мелетинский, *Литература и мифы // Мифы народов мира. Энциклопедия. Т. 2*, М.осква 1982. pp. 58-65,

⁶ Б.-І. Антонич, *Поезії*, Київ 1989, p. 93.

This problem cannot be definitively solved. Although if we take into consideration not just the possibility of distanced contemplating of mythological-ceremonial culture and religiousness but the possibility of living by them, we may search and find such parts of this problem that yield to comprehension.

First of all, let's pay attention to the fact that living by mythological-ceremonial consciousness means living ceremonial life. As for the ceremony, it, if possessing any significance, most often reproduces ancient time, ancient events, initial events, initial deeds, initial word⁷. This can be the creation of the world, the sacrifice of God or the first man, and the creation of the universe out of the parts of that sacrifice, the mystery of death (sacrificial) and resurrection of God, etc.⁸.

It should be added that we speak not about *the reflection* of an ancient event in a ceremony, but about its *reproduction*. For a mythological-ceremonial consciousness, this event is *going on* here and now. Here and now at the time of winter solstice the world comes close to its destruction, comes to the brink over which there are chaos, uncertainty, disorder, monotony, randomness, absence of separate, personal, or simply non-existence. This is a very responsible moment: if you don't repeat the effort of the world creation, then the world, the life itself will die. So one needs to reproduce, literally repeat the creation of the world, or cosmogony⁹.

We have to emphasize once again that for the mythological-ceremonial way of perceiving the world ceremonies do not symbolize initial events, they are neither figurative representations nor dramatic performances of these events but their real true reproductions (happening one more time again).

As for the religious way of life, thinking, and experiencing the world, we observe something not identical but similar in some respects. In the Christian worship service, the events of sacred history or the Church history are mentioned. Especially when it goes about events from evangelical history, worship service becomes the reproduction of a corresponding event that mystically is happening here and now¹⁰.

⁷ See: В. Н. Топоров, *О ритуале. Введение в проблематику*, [in:] *Архаический ритуал в фольклорных и раннелитературных памятниках*, Москва 1988. pp. 7-60.

⁸ See: В. Н. Топоров, *О ритуале. Введение в проблематику*, [in:] *Архаический ритуал в фольклорных и раннелитературных памятниках*, Москва 1988. p. 15, 47.

⁹ See: В. Н. Топоров, *Праздник*, [in:] *Мифы народов мира. Энциклопедия Т. 2*, Москва 1982. p. 330; М. Элиаде, *Космос и история*, Москва 1987, p. 82-92.

¹⁰ See: О. Юлиан Я. Катрий, ЧСВВ, *Пізнай свій обряд. Літургійний рік Української Церкви*, Нью-Йорк; Рим 1982, especially chapters "Our liturgical year", "Spiritual

It can be explained in the way metropolitan Antony Surozhsky expands on that: “Events which the Church represents liturgically in prayers and sequences of worship services did take place in the past, but at the same time they go on happening every day until the world stands, they remain the definite strong reality of the present time”¹¹. So, “events of the past are transferred into the present, mightily acting within the time we live in”¹². Thus a worship service “is not a poetic development of memories about past events, but everyday participation in the events that are eternally resounding and that imperiously act in the world”¹³.

So, one can assume, that the mystical transference of initial events from the ancient time to our “here and now” is connected with the fact that in the worship service we touch upon the eternity that has no time, no continuity, in which all the events and all the periods are simultaneous, thus existing in the “space” of eternity. That is why it is enough to touch upon the eternity and actualize this or that event in the liturgical reminiscence and it passes into our “present” and starts happening here, now – in this very church or cathedral.

Here young shepherds see angels at the moment of Christ’s birth, here the singing of Angels can be heard, here on Candlemas Old and New Testament meet one another, here on Good Friday the body of Christ is laid for the last kisses.

But for religious consciousness eternity is perceived here and now. We come into the realm of eternity and through this touch upon the event which happened once in its own time, it does not happen again. The event which happened in history once remains in the eternal “now” so that we can experience it once again in the liturgical present through which we join that eternal “now”. At the same time for mythological-ceremonial culture, the initial event takes place or rather is repeated here and now because the eternal circulation, eternal returning, recurrence are the essential peculiarities of mythological-ceremonial perception of the world¹⁴.

So, the birth of God in the Lemko town is the remark produced by mythological-ceremonial way of thinking, though its possibility is caused in this context by the fact that for religious consciousness the event of Christ’s birth also mystically happens here and now. These “here” and “now” within this

meaning of liturgical year”, “How our church year came to being” p. 7-24; comp.: С. Н. Булгаков, *Православие: очерки учения православной церкви*, Москва 1991, с. 226

¹¹ Митрополит Сурожский Антоний, *Беседы о вере и церкви*, Москва 1991, p. 133.

¹² Ibidem, p. 134.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 135.

¹⁴ See: М. Элиаде, *Космос и история*, Москва 1987.

cycle form ground for the dialogue between mythological-ceremonial and religious consciousnesses, though each of them interprets it very specifically.

Liturgical representation of Christ's birth is possible in the town of Dukly just as it is in thousands of other towns. But here appears the Slavic Child. It's understood that Lemko people here replace little shepherds who come to worship the Holy Baby, but they also replace the Magi who bring presents. But they appear in hats and bring the full moon. It is known that in the Orthodox iconography the crucifixion is often accompanied by the Sun and the Moon which symbolize the inclusion of this event into the context of the cosmic scale. But neighboring these is the group of symbols which tend to the Slavic ethnic-culture of pre-Christian pagan character.

And the first symbol in that group – a sleigh. God is born on a sleigh. Of course, one can remember that in Ukrainian stable the cart is placed for winter and in summer a sleigh is kept there. On a sleigh there is hay and the cattle is fed directly from a cart or a sleigh. Christ is born in a stable near the cattle. It is quite possible (in this ethnic context) that He is born on a sleigh. But this is just household motivation. The other thing is essential.

It is known that a sleigh is an element of the burial ceremony, up to a very recent time even in summer people were buried on a sleigh¹⁵, moreover, there was a time when collocation “to sit on a sleigh” meant to kill for a ceremonial reason, “to send to the other world”, or, in other words, to make a sacrifice¹⁶. Here it should be mentioned that B.-I. Antonych had to realize that the acceptance of Christianity by our ancestors, mainly peaceful and non-violent spreading of it through the lands of ancient Rus is caused by the fact that the ethnocultural symbolic system was adjusted to the dialogue. Moreover, in many respects in terms of meaning our old mythological-ceremonial culture, though being pagan, before the acceptance of Christianity contained the ideas and motifs that formed the ground for its further dialogue and interaction with the Christian worldview. Among these, we should mention a meaningfully significant understanding of self-sacrifice, voluntary sacrificial death¹⁷.

So, God is born on a sleigh where death is dominating, where people die, prepare to die, or wait for it. Anyway, birth acts as the overpowering of death. This, of course, reminds us of the Easter Troparion: “God resurrected from the dead, overpowered death by death”. We may also correlate this with the iconography of Christ's birth when on some old icons the mountain with the

¹⁵ Митрополит Іларіон, *Дохристиянські вірування українського народу. Історично-релігійна монографія*, Київ 1992, р. 250–251.

¹⁶ Н. Н. Велецкая, *Языческая символика славянских архаических ритуалов*, Москва 1978, р. 42–78 and other.

¹⁷ Ibidem, р. 12–42 and other.

cave is depicted. Inside the cave there is a crib, animals are near and there lies God's Child¹⁸.

The cave acts as the entrance to the precipices of earth, it also reminds a womb from which a baby appears, and the belly of the whale in which there was Iona, and the Coffin of God. The mountain in its course resembles the mountain of Transfiguration, the mountain of Ascension and Golgotha. The entrance to Hell – the land of death, is usually depicted under the last mountain. So, in the symbolism of an icon, the place of birth is at the same time connected with the higher, upper world and also with the lower world. This lower subterranean world in many cultures symbolizes the realm of death, the space of the past, the world of ancestors¹⁹. From there comes Christ – from the past to give new meaning, the New Testament, to open the future coming world, to overpower death. In such a way the corresponding symbolism is motivated within the Christian culture.

The birth on a sleigh in the mythological-ceremonial tradition has its motivation. In this case, it is important to regard the semantically meaningful in this context circulation, which is connected with the formula “life – death – life”; the other variant of it is: “death – life – death”. Death is preceded by life. But life is superseded by death. The one comes into the other, the one imitates the other. Then what is the source of life? Birth is preceded by non-existence, and so, by death. From non-existence, from the beyond any child comes into this world. All the more, God himself does so.

At the same time, the motif of overpowering death, or turning death into life is almost always present in traditional ceremonies of the archaic culture²⁰. The archaic ritual of winter holidays is carried out in order not to stop the circulation of “life – death – life”. The ritual gives a new link to it – the link of life which will unite past and future in the most responsible moment when

¹⁸ See: В. І. Свенцицька, О. Ф. Сидор, *Спадщина віків. Українське малярство XIV-XVIII століть у музейних колекціях Львова*, Львів 1990, ill. 33-34.

¹⁹ See: Baldock J. *Symbolika chreścijańska*, Poznań 1994, p. 70; comp.: С. С. Аверинцев, *Голгофа*, [in:] *Мифы народов мира. Энциклопедия. Т. 1*, Москва 1980, pp. 308-309, p. 308.

²⁰ See: Н. Н. Велецкая, *Языческая символика славянских архаических ритуалов*, Москва 1978; Л. Н. Виноградова, *Зимняя календарная поэзия западных и восточных славян*, Москва 1982; М. С. Грушевський, *Історія української літератури. Т. 1*, Київ 1993; М. В. Попович, *Мировоззрение древних славян*, Киев 1985, p. 119; В. Н. Топоров, *О ритуале. Введение в проблематику*, [in:] *Архаический ритуал в фольклорных и раннелитературных памятниках*, Москва 1988, pp. 7-60; В. Н. Топоров, *Праздник*, [in:] *Мифы народов мира. Энциклопедия Т. 2*, Москва 1982, pp. 329-331; В. Н. Топоров, *Пространство и текст*, [in:] *Текст: семантика и структура*, Москва 1983, pp. 227-284 and other.

the powers of the sun at the end of the year have emaciated and so there is a necessity for the new turn of the circle of life. For this new one has to renew the connection with God so that He can come to the earth so that He can be newly born, because the old sun year has already finished, and so, the old sun god is already on a sleigh, but His end will have to be the start, death will have to become birth. In the mythological-ceremonial culture in some ritual forms, they carry out the unification of the earth with God, of people with the world of beyond²¹.

A similar motif can be observed in worship service texts for Christmas: “Today the Earth and the sky have copulated”²². Although here, of course, it has symbolic meaning as the unification of the spiritual world (which is divine) with the world of men, as the restoration of the connection between God and a person who has torn ties with the time. So, in religious texts, there is a motif: “Let all the creatures alive exult because Christ comes to renovate you”²³. But whereas in mythological-ceremonial culture the renovation happens in the annual ritual, in the realms of Christian culture, it is not the renovation of nature. This is the renovation of the historical existence of humanity, of a person that fell away from God counting only on his or her powers. Then this person exhausted those powers and appeared to be doomed without the interference of God, that’s why this human being needed His renewing force.

Lemko people bring “a full moon” as a present to Maria. This has a strong resemblance to the round loaf. The round loaf on which in ancient times the world tree, the moon, stars, the sun, etc. were depicted²⁴, is a symbol of the universe, the world to which people belong. To present a round loaf in this as in other ceremonies means to give your world as a present, to give the world

²¹ See: Л. Н. Виноградова, *Зимняя календарная поэзия западных и восточных славян*, Москва 1982; С. Килимник, *Український рік у народніх звичаях в історичному освітлені*, Вінніпег; Торонто 1964; Митрополит Іларіон, *Дохристиянські вірування українського народу. Історично-релігійна монографія*, Київ 1992; М. Москаленко, *Фольклорний алфавіт давньоруського космосу*, [in:] *Золотослов: Поетичний космос Давньої Русі*, Київ 1988, pp. 5–46; М. В. Попович, *Мировоззрение древних славян*, Киев 1985; А. А. Потебня, *Объяснения малорусских и сродных народных песен. II. Колядки и щедрилки*, Варшава 1887; А. А. Потебня, *О мифическом значении некоторых обрядов и поверий*, Москва 1865; В. Н. Топоров, *Праздник*, [in:] *Мифы народов мира. Энциклопедия Т. 2*, Москва 1982, pp. 329–331.

²² *Миня. Декабрь. Т. 4, ч. 4.*, Москва 1982, p. 342.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 343.

²⁴ See: Вяч. Вс. Иванов, В. Н. Топоров, *Исследования в области славянских древностей*, Москва 1974, p. 243–258.

in its entirety. By round loaf we symbolize our Earth, give it as a present, establish the unity of it with the one who receives this present.

Even if we wanted to discharge this association with the round loaf, all the same: the act of giving full moon as a present can symbolize one of the crucial parts of space. So, not without reason in the Ukrainian Christmas carols, we often have a dispute among the sun, the moon, and the rain (or the wind) that all together reflect the earth and space existence in its entirety²⁵. Just as the sun is connected with daytime, so the moon is connected with the night, together this is a complete day. It may also symbolize the completeness of time, human life, and history.

Let's recall, that in Christmas carols mother-hostess was called the sun, father-host – the moon, and children – stars²⁶. Here once again the completeness of the space is symbolized. Besides, we can interpret it the following way: hostess-sun is given the sign of the host – the moon. The host is given into her hands, into her full authority. God's mother does have the power over the host on the earth, as over the earth in its entirety, or over the existence of the universe. And Her Host is the Heavenly Father.

On the other hand, the connection of the moon with the night produces some nightly, dark associations, it is a link to the world of death, with dark, malicious, or, at least, the ambivalent world of beyond, with pagan magic, conjuring, exorcism all of which do not exclude contact with the dark unclean force²⁷. To bring means to sacrifice all of these, to renounce these forces, give them to the power of Her, the One connected with the sun, that symbolizes light and clean world of beyond. This world doesn't possess ambivalence because it can be only good. By the way, the Sun or the Sun of Truth is the name of Christ in the texts of prayers²⁸.

Maybe that's why night (being dark and not always clear) in its blizzard (winter, snow are connected with death, darkness, and the malevolent world of beyond²⁹) only swirls around the roofing not being able to enter the house and bring something dark, nightly, cold and deathly into it. In the mythological-ceremonial context the house is a completed, protected, well-treated,

²⁵ See: А. А. Потебня, *Объяснения малорусских и сродных народных песен. II. Колядки и щедривки*, Варшава 1887, р. 180-188.

²⁶ See: А. А. Потебня, *Объяснения малорусских и сродных народных песен. II. Колядки и щедривки*, Варшава 1887, р. 612 and further.

²⁷ See: Вяч. Вс. Иванов, В. Н. Топоров, *Славянские языковые моделирующие семиотические системы*, Москва 1965, р. 133-137.

²⁸ See: Минея. Декабрь. Т. 4, ч. 4. Москва 1982, р. 338, 339, 344 and other.

²⁹ See: Вяч. Вс. Иванов, В. Н. Топоров, *Славянские языковые моделирующие семиотические системы*, Москва 1965, р. 112, 126.

human, “humanized” universe, space which is the opposite to chaos³⁰, so just the very thing that winter solstice ceremonial should restore and establish.

Ukrainian word “strikha” (roofing) etymologically meant “the thing that was built”, so it meant something built up a building. By the way, Ukrainian strikha-roofing was, as a rule, made of hay. Hay plays a very important role in the Christmas carolling ceremonials – it is spread all over the floor, bunches of it are attached to the ceiling, it is put on the table, trees are tied with it. Hay must be used both in wedding and burial ceremonies which emphasizes its ceremonial function: the overpowering of death, passing to a new life – the stalk binds top and bottom, subterranean with epiterranean, the past with the future, a grain that has fallen into the soil with a new ear, death with life. Both grain and stalk symbolize the circulation “life – death – life”. This shows the meaningfulness of the material from which a certain part – in our case, the top – of a house is built, here we have multiple symbols of overpowering of chaos and death. The pagan universe in its turn is a universe that was built once but which is ceremonially rebuilt – with the act of winning over death.

In the next poetic text, the word “carpenter” appears. Here this word is not accidental at least because Jesus Christ was a carpenter and “the son of a carpenter” (a carpenter – His trustee Joseph). The main operation that the carpenter performs is the building of houses. In the worship-service and theological texts, it often goes about “housebuilding” of God: the building of universe, of a temple, of a soul of a person as of the house of God, and taking care of that house is the most significant worry of God. Christ in His turn builds the temple of the new faith, the Church which metaphysically is the body of Christ and at the same time – the house: “We are His house” [To Jews, 3, 6]. So, the motif of roofing and a house as symbols of construction of the universe finds correspondence in the housebuilding of Christ. The house erected by Christ stands and no force, no “night in a blizzard” can ruin it, it can just swirl around its roofing.

And eventually the moon – the golden nut appears on the palm of Mary. Gold often symbolizes death, the world of beyond, eternity, eternal life³¹. The moon in its dark, nightly feature is destined to death just as the old conjuring that did not renounce the unclean forces. The moon appearing on a palm is reduced showing the hierarchal subordination to Mother of the Son, Who in texts of Christmas carols becomes the Sun Herself. The whole universe is subordinate to Her. This motif finds its correspondence in the worship ser-

³⁰ See: A. K. Байбурин, *Жилище в обрядах и представлениях восточных славян*, Ленинград 1983, p. 3-18.

³¹ See: В. Я. Пропп, *Исторические корни волшебной сказки*, Ленинград 1946, p. 263; Н. Н. Велецкая, *Языческая символика славянских архаических ритуалов*, Москва 1978.

vice texts: “Now the Lady is wider than heaven”³². Here, however, it has a little different motivation: the Lady contains God, who by His nature is impossible to be contained, that’s why She is wider than heaven which metaphysically is the spiritual world to which God and His angels belong.

The moon becomes “a nut” because the nut is also a meaningful symbol. It is the analog of grain and egg. Let’s recall the ceremonial sprinkling in which grains and nuts can be used as sprinkling material³³. Both grain and egg symbolize eternal circulation and eternal procuring of life through death. In riddles which often reflect the archaic layer of cultural consciousness, a nut is a way of designating a person, a house, a person in a coffin. So, the moon – golden nut symbolizes the structure of the universe, the eternal circle of life, the overpowering of death because from the world of death we go into a new life.

So, we get back to the initial motif: the birth from death. And since complicated texts allow multiple parallel interpretations we can offer one more variant: the moon as a host is given in form of a present, it is turned into a nut to be sacrificed – to fall into the soil and die, thus giving rise to a new life.

The symbolic perspective of the host (Lord) is to be sacrificed. It connects the first text of the cycle with the second where the carpenters produce a sleigh instead of a house – the archaic catafalque on which a person who is sacrificed and destined to death is driven away. This sleigh is made of silver – a precious metal which symbolically is the analog of gold, so it’s also connected with death and all the corresponding associations. It is indicative that in Christmas carols and ceremonial texts gold and silver are often united (there is, for instance, the motif of the golden grain and silver stalk, there is a motif of the golden boat and silver oars).

In the archaic texts, we have a motif of connection of gold and silver with the ritual of giving away a child – maybe for a sacrifice? Because this is how the servants of the host pay to the gatekeeper for opening the gate: “- And what else will you give? – A little baby!/- And what is the baby dressed in? – In silver and gold!/- And where does the baby sit? – On the golden armchair!/- What is the armchair upholstered with? – With black velvet!/- And what does the baby play with? – With a golden apple!/- And what does the baby cut with? – With a golden knife!”³⁴.

³² *Миня. Декабрь. Т. 4, ч. 4, Москва 1982, р. 342.*

³³ See: А. А. Потебня, *О некоторых символах в славянской народной поэзии*, Харьков 1914, р. 78; 10; 20.

³⁴ *Народні пісні з голосу Дніпрової Чайки та в її записах*, Київ 1974, р. 15–16:

In the context of a poem and traditional comparisons, silver is related to snow and ice and these are the signs of death³⁵. It is this kind of sleigh that will be used for transporting the Child of God. In archaic Christmas carols, there is such a motif of sending a child by the golden boat with a silver oar to the Danube or the blue sea³⁶. Let's recall that in the ancient culture a boat was used as a coffin³⁷, and that water, a river, or a sea are correlated with the other world, with the world of death³⁸. This is what motivates in mythological-ceremonial context the appearance of the unknown "blue far". The attribute "unknown" appears because death is "a riddle without answer" and the land of death is alien and unknown. The child goes to the unknown blue far, because the one who is sacrificed is a mediator, he renews the connection between earth and heaven.

The remark of the Christian tradition here is not included in the text: the Son of God was born in a crib where among others sheep live and where lambs are born; lamb as a sacrificial animal is so typical that Christ is called "The Lamb of God", there is also a traditional comparison "was taken as a lamb for sacrifice". The Child of God was sacrificed from the very birth. Death is ahead of Him. It is understood that because of this His way is full of snow.

Spring dreams are the end of the way from the winter holidays to the spring holidays. In the context of mythological-ceremonial culture "summer is unlocked, winter is locked". But that is also the end of the way of God's Son. Among the dreams we may find the following: "I had a strange dream,/ The whole yard of falcons arrived,/ All over the yard black silk is unwoven/And it was strewn with gold and silver"³⁹.

Birds that appear at farmsteads or in a house prophesy death. The same meaning is conveyed by gold and silver and unwoven silk, the unwoven thread leads like a path to the black world. In the song itself, this symbolism is interpreted as the one prophesying the wedding. But it does not alter

³⁵ See: Вяч. Вс. Иванов, В. Н. Топоров, *Славянские языковые моделирующие семиотические системы*, Москва 1965.

³⁶ *Календарно-обрядові пісні*, Київ 1987, p. 295.

³⁷ See: Н. Н. Велецкая, *Языческая символика славянских архаических ритуалов*, Москва 1978.

³⁸ Б. А. Успенский, *Филологические разыскания в области славянских древностей*, Москва 1983, p. 56.

³⁹ *Українські народні пісні в записах З. Доленги-Ходаковського*, Київ 1974, p. 191-192.

the deep underlying sense because a wedding in the symbolic aspect is also death, passing to a different world⁴⁰.

In Christian tradition, the “spring dreams” are believed to foretell death, because in spring at the time of the Great Fast and especially at the time of the Holy week people recall and mystically experience in worship services the torment, death, and burial of Jesus Christ. All of these events historically happened in spring. And the unknown blue far on the Orthodox icon can be connected with the light blue or blue mandorla (or in other words “glory”) that Christ is wearing after death. The appearance of Christ “in glory” is the sign of His belonging to the upper world of beyond, it is the sign that He comes from the spiritual world, that His body, transformed by resurrection, is already spiritual, etc. With His soul in glory, He descends to hell to take the souls of righteous men out of it. In glory, He rises to heaven. In glory, He appears to take the soul of God’s Mother at the time of her Assumption, etc. So to the unknown blue far means death and resurrection to the upper world of beyond.

Isn’t it there, to the unknown blue far that the Fair Lady is looking? Maybe that’s why she has eyes like a chamois? It means in the portrait characteristic that these eyes are sorrowful, anxious, frightened. Behind the image of a chamois, one can see, though in a distant perspective, the contours of the ancient legend about a fallow deer mother that every year on a certain day brings its child to people for sacrifice⁴¹. Essential here is the sacrifice of a child, a son. One way or the other children are the most precious, the most valuable treasure. A mature person would opt for self-sacrifice instead of giving a child as a sacrifice by parents. Nevertheless in archaic culture, these are children who are usually sacrificed, because only the sacrifice of the most precious thing is a real and valid one. Until people see some sense in sacrificial acts they sacrifice the most precious things. This motif appears in the given Christmas carol and the aforementioned legend.

Just the same way God Father gives His Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. God’s mother was warned about it by Holy Simon. She knows what the way of the Son of God will be before He comes into His Glory before He reaches the unknown blue. But this is far ahead. Now the ritual of the sunlight is performed – that’s why the sun is wearing a hat. The Sun is still

⁴⁰ See: Н. Н. Велецкая, *Языческая символика славянских архаических ритуалов*, Москва 1978; М. С. Грушевський, *Історія української літератури. Т. 1*, Київ 1993; Д. К. Зеленин, *Восточнославянская этнография*, Москва 199; М. Москаленко, *Фольклорний алфавіт давньоруського космосу*, [in:] *Золотослов: Поетичний космос Давньої Русі*, Київ 1988, pp. 5–46.

⁴¹ А. А. Потебня, *О мифическом значении некоторых обрядов и поверий*, Москва 1865, p. 36–37.

a Child, and the Child is still sleeping. But the road of His life has already started and as its pinnacle and purpose, as its sense and justification, His life has death and self-sacrifice. The life as the road creeps with deathly snow. And a sleigh is already on its way. That's why, perhaps, the lady is crying.

So, an attempt to interpret these texts in the context of the dialogue of mythological-ceremonial and religious cultures is completed. But it seems that it's still too early to make sweeping conclusions. But one fact attracts attention and excites: the interaction under analysis just before our eyes builds up into a dialogue of the congenial cultures and this dialogue is meaningful not only at the level of separate symbols and motifs but at the level of most essential basics of mythological-ceremonial ethnic culture and religious consciousness. Between them exists a very enigmatic and very significant for us commonality which proves indestructibility of both cultures, commonality which can be grasped only if we come

To the bottom, to the essence, to the root of the thing, to the bosom
To the depth of the word and to the depth of the sun.

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