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THE DUALISM OF THE ‘SACRED’ AND THE ‘PROFANE’
IN THE POETIC NARRATIVE OF ‘THE LAY OF SKIRNIR’
AND LITHUANIAN WEDDING SONGS

Comparative Indo-European poetics studies the poetic diction common to Indo-European tradition. Moreover, the Indo-European daughter traditions share a common division of mythology. With reference to comparative mythology and the roles of gods, the general division of the universe reveals the following layers: “magical sovereignty (and heavenly administration of the universe), warrior power (and administration of the lower atmosphere), and peaceful fecundity (and administration of the earth, the underworld and the sea)” (Dumezil 1988: 121). The essential aspect of archaic worldview has the following shape: “Life is lived on a twofold plane; it takes its course as human existence and, at the same time, shares in a transhuman life, that of the cosmos or the gods” (Eliade 1959: 167). This paper aims at revealing the transformations of the theme of the celestial wedding from the sacred to the profane with reference to the poetic narrative of *The Lay of Skirnir* and Lithuanian folk songs. The argument involves: (1) an analysis of the reflection of the myth theme and its motifs in the poetic narrative; (2) deciphering mythic formulas as embedded in the context of the poetic narrative. In the folk songs, the bride and the bridegroom imitate the actions of their celestial prototypes. The motif of shaking the earth, as rendered by the formulas *Jōrð bifask* ‘the ground shakes’ and *žemužė dreba* ‘the earth shakes’, is manifest in both traditions, inasmuch as it is linked to the metaphorical “shaking of the bride” in the prototypical mytheme, employed to convey the unwillingness of the bride to marry.

KEY WORDS: mythical formula, prototypical image, transformation of role, implicit mythical reference, poetic mode of thought

Remnants of the common Indo-European mythological tradition are manifest in various literary sources, viz. medieval poetry and folklore. The study of such sources points to their specific mythological content: formu-

las, narratives and stylistic devices reflecting the world view of archaic peoples. This is the subject of comparative Indo-European poetics (cf. Watkins 1995: 6) that investigates poetic devices common to the literary heritage of different Indo-European nations. According to Watkins, “comparative Indo-European poetics may be defined as a linguistic approach to the form, nature, and function of poetic language and archaic literature among a variety of ancient Indo-European peoples” (Ibid.). With the comparative method, certain similarities in the religious beliefs of the Baltic and the Germanic peoples can be traced. This paper aims at revealing the transformations of the theme of the celestial wedding from the sacred to the profane in the poetic narrative of *The Lay of Skirnir* and Lithuanian folk songs. My argument proceeds in the following way: firstly, I will trace the reflection of the myth theme and its motifs in the poetic narrative; secondly, I will proceed with deciphering mythic formulas as embedded in the context of the poetic narrative.

1. Mythic elements in a poetic text

The mythological structures underlying the songs of the *Poetic Edda* and Lithuanian folk songs may be analysed on both the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes – in accordance with the framework proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Structural Study of Myth* (1955). The paradigmatic axis presupposes distinct classes of elements that further interact on the syntagmatic axis. Lévi-Strauss describes such paradigmatic elements as mythemes, or “gross constituent units” (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 211) which “are not the isolated relations but bundles of such relations, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning” (Ibid.). Mythemes, being core units of every myth, may be seen as a kind of matrix in creating certain poetic devices, viz. *mythical formulas*. Moreover, the prototypical qualities of mythemes are employed to coin metaphors and metonymies. Poetic devices that bear mythical connotations may be equated to mythical formulas, inasmuch as they refer to mythic motifs and, correspondingly, to a poetic narrative in a broader perspective.

In his prominent work *How to Kill a Dragon: a Study of Indo-European Poetics*, Watkins introduces mythical formulas as “the vehicles, the carriers of themes; they are collectively the verbal expression of the traditional culture of the Indo-Europeans themselves” (Watkins 1995: 152). In his work *The New Science*, the pioneer of mythological research Giambattista Vico pointed out the metaphorical aspect of myth, claiming that the ancient

mode of thought, being essentially poetic, imprinted mythic content on stylistic devices, primarily metaphors (“thus every metaphor so formed is a fable in brief”) (Vico 1948: 115–116). This concept was further developed by the German scholar F.W.J. Schelling, who posited that myth is the basis of poetry as it allows connecting ideas and their representations that are usually united in one primordial image (cf. Schelling, in Meletinsky 2000: 8–9). The concept of mythical formula adopted in this paper therefore refers to a poetic expression that reveals a particular type of myth, and refers to a certain poetic narrative that corresponds to the mythical organization of thought in a particular society. The formulas in a poetic text are deciphered by unravelling a metaphorical code – reading the poetic expressions as encoded messages that refer to a common system of perception; the mythical significance of the poetic expressions in the text is hidden under the literal meaning. With reference to the opposition between the sacred and the profane, poetic expressions frequently disclose symbolic representations of the divine realm exhibited by the objects of the natural world, or to put it in Eliade’s words, “all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality” (Eliade 1959: 12). The objects of the physical world may thus become symbols for the divine entities they refer to.

Further on, considering the syntagmatic disposition of mythological elements in a poetic text, the insights of the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp introduced in his study of folktales (*Morphology of the Folktale*) may be employed as the basic scheme regarding the narrative, not only of the folktales but of other genres of folklore, as well as of oral poetry. According to Propp, “the names of the dramatic personae change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor functions change” (Propp 1968: 8). In addition, not only the names but also the characters themselves may undergo change – “just as the characteristics and functions of deities are transferred from one to another, and, finally, are even carried over to Christian saints, the functions of certain tale personages are likewise transferred to other personages” (Ibid.). Transfer of functions refers to the transformation of mythic characters, (e.g. from gods to heroes in the Germanic tradition, from mythic characters to lay people in Lithuanian folk songs), whereas the narrative with its essential stages of development remains unchanged across a variety of poetic texts. Propp further maintains that the functions of acting personae may be compared to the motifs described by Russian scholar Alexander Veselovsky as “the simplest narrative unit[s], corresponding imagistically to the diverse needs of a primitive mind and to the needs of ordinary perception” (cited in *Thematics: New Approaches* 1995: 22). This approach leads to the premise that functions,

or motifs, may be viewed as the main components of narrative, whereas acting characters may be subject to transformation.

The roles of gods may also be regarded as a metaphorical reflection of the social organization prevailing in a particular community; in Dumézil's words, "we can still recognize, in various formulas, in divine groupings, in the general division of the mythology, that great triple division of cosmic and social functions: magical sovereignty (and heavenly administration of the universe), warrior power (and administration of the lower atmosphere), peaceful fecundity (and administration of the earth, the underworld and the sea)" (Dumézil 1988: 121). The tripartite division, however, might happen to be easily exhaustible, whereas the functions of different gods seem to intermingle at times; yet, the roles of gods still stand as the organizing principles of mythic narrative. For example, in the Germanic tradition, warrior power is ascribed to Thor; nonetheless, Thor may also be associated with fertility and peaceful fecundity – accordingly, different social roles are ascribed to the same god. With reference to Propp's idea of the interchangeability of functions, the narrative predetermines the transformations of gods: their basic functions are ascribed to epic heroes or acting personae of folk songs in order to repeat mythic pattern and unite the sacred and profane spheres. Thus, the poetic texts under consideration should not be read as a source of direct mythic references; the challenge lies in unveiling the transformations of the mythical acting personae and deciphering the mythical formulas embedded in the narrative.

The characters introduced in the poetic narrative have to be compared to their Indo-European archetypes (the "archaic remnants", or "primordial images" in the Jungian sense (Jung 1968: 57)); hence, with reference to the formula *the sky and the earth* (cf. the Creation myth) in the Old Icelandic poem *The Lay of Skirnir*, the deities Freyr and Gerth can be connected with their archetypes in cosmogonic myth, viz. Freyr is the Sky personified, whereas Gerth is the Earth personified. Inasmuch as "the myth proclaims the appearance of a new cosmic situation or of a primordial event" (Eliade 1959: 95), a mythological poem introduces the poetic rendition of mythic narrative, i.e. events and characters described in the mythological poem gain symbolic meaning. Furthermore, in the profane world, the bride and the bridegroom imitate the actions of their supernatural prototypes, Freyr and Gerth, in order to repeat the primary *hierogamy* of sky and earth through the ritual. In folk songs, the bride and the bridegroom are introduced as profane acting personae whose actions retain their symbolic meaning by implicit references to the myth. Thus, in ancient societies where mundane life gains value only when contact with the divine sphere is attained, "religious

man periodically becomes the contemporary of the gods in the measure in which he reactualizes the primordial time in which the divine works were accomplished" (Ibid. 87).

Although the Indo-European formula *the sky and the earth* does not retain its components in *the literal mode*, it nevertheless sustains its significance in terms of the allegorical mode. Thus, mythical formula, being the "carrier" of a theme, refers to a certain narrative unit, which includes mythologically significant recurring motifs. These recurring motifs, to return to Propp's theory, are rendered in certain actions or roles of gods, which may undergo transformations, but still form a defined sequence within a narrative. In this way, one of the main Indo-European formulas, the semantic structure of which is presented by Watkins as "Hero Slays the Serpent" (Watkins 1995: 299) implies a narrative where the God of Thunder confronts and defeats an adversary – the serpent. The formula may be subject to various transformations – inclusion of an additional element (usually a weapon or a companion), paradigmatic (an epithet, synonym instead of a name) and syntagmatic replacements (changes in tense, voice) (Watkins 1995: 301–302). For example, in the Lithuanian tradition, the image of the mythic world tree undergoes a paradigmatic change, viz. it is transformed into various types of tree – oak, apple tree, maple tree, whereas in the Germanic tradition the ash tree Yggdrasil represents a transformation of the world tree.

Overcoming the adversary, the embodiment of chaos and imbalance, leads to harmonization of the cosmos, and in this respect may be viewed as the basic creation myth, or, as Watkins puts it, "The dragon-killing myth represents a symbolic victory of order over the forces of chaos, as we have seen; of growth over stagnation in the cycle of the year, of rebirth over death" (Ibid. 446). Hence, there is a transition from the Thunder God as a warrior towards the Thunder God as a patron of harmony and fertility. The God of Thunder is often seen as having evolved from the figure of Father Sky, retaining some of his functions, viz. the control of weather, thunder, and storm; thus, the vital role of the Thunder God is that of "the controller of the weather and hence of the fertility of the crops" (West 2007: 250). Gintaras Beresnevicius interprets the division of the roles of the Lithuanian Sky God *Dievas* and the Thunder God *Perkunas* as follows: "Lithuanian mythology describes Perkunas as the master of thunder and lightning, living on a high mountain and in charge of worldly matters. To do that he was empowered by Dievas, who does not afterwards pry into worldly matters¹. Thus Dievas

¹ Cf. the insights of A. J. Greimas on 'Diviriks' – the name of one of chief gods in Lithuanian pantheon as recorded in historical sources and considered to be a euphemism for Perkunas, meaning 'Gods' organizer of things, overseer' (Greimas 1990: 390–393).

hands his might and actual power to Perkunas, and the latter becomes the senior god” (Beresnevicius 2000: 33–34). The God of Thunder as a fertility deity is implicitly involved in worldly matters through the ritual of marriage.

The ritual of marriage is also closely connected to the seasonal and vegetation myths, references to which are manifest in *The Lay of Skirnir*. The marital rite between the representatives of the two worlds of Germanic mythology – Vanir (the realm of fertility gods) and Jotunheim (the realm of the giants) – may be interpreted as a reflection of the seasonal myth, which was “inspired by man’s fear of starvation, and a “sacred wedding” between the powers who protected his fields and made his corn grow was the means by which he hoped to ensure a good harvest” (Talbot 1982: 44). It should be noted that the acting personae of the poetic narrative leading to the sacral wedding – “Freyr as the fertility god, his delegate Skirnir (the bright one) as the fructifying sun, and Gerðr (connected with *garðr* “cultivated yard”) as the earth to be made fruitful” (Murdoch, Read 2004: 180) of the Germanic context differ from those of the Baltic. While both *The Lay of Skirnir* and folk songs may be ascribed to the oral tradition, their genre-dependence evokes the main distinction: *The Lay of Skirnir*, being a mythological poem, has a closer connection to the fertility rites and practices employed by ancient Germanic societies, whereas Lithuanian folk songs (which were documented much later, centuries after the period when the pagan religion of Lithuania had disintegrated) bear a lyrical character and retain only implicit references to the affinity of marriage with the rituals dedicated to the fertility of the soil.

2. The wooing of a bride in poetic and folk narrative

Interestingly enough, in the poetic narrative of the *Poetic Edda* and in folk songs, the wooing of a bride is accompanied by threat, fear, resistance and lament as the traditional elements in the course of the proposal. According to Ursula Dronke, the Eddic poem *Skírnismál* (“The Lay of Skirnir”) repeats “the ancient pattern of the hieros gamos, the sacred marriage of Sky and Earth [...] which recurs in so many mythologies” (Dronke 1962: 253); it also alludes to the implicit role of the Thunder God in the sacred ritual of marriage. In *The Lay of Skirnir*, the Thunder God Thor undergoes allegorical transformation into the servant Skirnir, who is going to woo the beautiful maiden Gerth for his master, the god Freyr. This claim is supported by the thunder-like sound that accompanies Skirnir’s arrival to the home of Gymlir, cf.:

14. *Hvat er þat hlým hlýmja, | er ek heyri nú til* '14. What noise is that which now so loud
ossum rönnum í? I hear within our house?
Jörð bifask, | en allir fyrir *The ground shakes, and the home of Gyimir*
skjalfa garðar Gyimis. Around me trembles too.'
 (translation by Henry Adams Bellows)

An allusion to the Thunder God may be seen in connection with the prototypical qualities of the mytheme, namely, the loud noise and supernatural strength (reflected in the phrase *Jörð bifask* 'the ground shakes', which refers to the personified Earth).

In Lithuanian folk songs, the bride-to-be is depicted as being frightened to come to a foreign country with the bridegroom, or to be deprived of her chastity (the symbolic *rūtų vainikėlis* 'wreath of rue'), cf.:

14. *Vai, cik pabijojaui, leliumai,*
Jauno bernužėlio, leliumai,
 15. *Kad jis neatjoty, leliumai,*
Ant bėro žirgelio, leliumai,
 16. *Kad jis nenujimtų, leliumai,*
Rūtų vainikėlio, leliumai. (*Lietuvių liaudies dainynas* 1983: 178–179)²

A similar motif is reflected in Latvian mythological song, where the sons of God are depicted as taking away the wreath (*vainadzīņš*) from the daughter of the Sun:

- Kalab gaisi šovakari*
Dūmonaiņi, mākonaiņi?
Dievu dēli Saules meitām
*Noņēmuši vainadzīņu.*³

If the extract from the Latvian folk song is to be viewed as a mythical motif, its counterpart in the profane sphere may be found in the following Russian folk song, (*venok* is the paradigmatic equivalent of the wreath), cf.:

- Дуня плачет в светличке, приложив голову к сестричке;*
девушки спрашивают; ответ: она свила венок.
*Ваничка его разорвал, самое к себе взял.*⁴ (*Veselovsky* 1989: 110).

² 'I was afraid, leliumai, of the young man, leliumai, that he would come riding, leliumai, on his bay horse, leliumai, that he would take away, leliumai, the wreath of rue, leliumai' (Hereinafter translations are provided by the author of the paper unless indicated otherwise).

³ 'Why is the air misty and cloudy this evening? The sons of God took away the wreath from the daughter of the Sun'.

⁴ 'Dunya cries in a bright room, her head resting on sister's shoulder; girls ask her, and she answers: she made a wreath. Vanichka broke it, took it for himself'.

The sons of God and the daughter of the Sun in the Latvian song may be seen as mythical prototypes, whereas *Vanichka* and *Dunya* in the Russian song constitute their profane counterparts in the narrative of courtship.

Reluctance of the bride may be further observed in the Slavic tradition, viz. the following stanza from a Ukrainian folk song:

*Ой сідай, сідай, коханя моє,
Бо ти не допоможе плаканя твоє,
Твій велький жаль не допоможе,
Бо коники стоять з' возі
Позапрігани. (Ukrainiski narodni pisni 1972: 56).⁵*

In this example, the forthcoming marriage is presented to the distressed bride-to-be as an imminent event implied by the might of her groom, whose horses and carriage are waiting.

The course of proposal includes the significant element of offering gifts to the bride, inasmuch as the bride has traditionally to receive gifts in order to establish “fundamental institutionalized gift-exchange relations and consecrated customs” (Watkins 1995: 446). In *The Lay of Skirnir*, golden apples, offered by Skirnir to Gerth as a gift provide a reference to fertility, cf.:

19. *Epli | ellifu hér hef ek algullin,
þau mun ek þér, Gerth [...]*

‘19. Eleven apples, all of gold,
Here will I give thee, Gerth [...]
(translation by Henry Adams Bellows).

According to the myth, golden apples are protected by the goddess Idunn as a source of immortality and youth (section 26 of the *Prose Edda*, book *Gylfaginning*). In Lithuanian wedding songs, apples are also offered as a gift:

7. *Ar priims davanelas-
Raudanus karalalius,
8. Raudonus karalalius,
Saldziuosius abuolalius⁶
(Lithuanian Folk Songs 1994: 149).*

⁵ ‘Oh sit, sit, my dear, your lament is of no aid, your grudge so great will not help you because horses wait in harness’.

⁵ *Eleven apples*: are usually the attribute of *Idunn*, the goddess associated with apples and eternal youth. Eleven is not normally a significant number in Norse and the use of the number eleven in the translation may not be correct. The confusion might have occurred between *ellifo*, ‘eleven’, as the manuscripts reads, and *ellilyf*, ‘old-age drug’, which would confirm the connection with *Idunn* (cf. Larrington 2014: 291).

⁶ ‘Will [she] take the gifts- the red beads, the red beads, the sweet apples’.

Although in the Lithuanian folk song poetic devices with reference to apples do not point to precious possession or magic power as they do in the heroic Germanic tradition, they should be considered as a metaphoric presentation of the harmonious and peaceful life being proposed by the young man; thus, such images reveal a deeper layer of meaning. The circular shape of the red beads corresponds to the circular shape of the apples and represents the notion of continuity, in this context – the continuity of life. Moreover, red beads as an element of adornment refer to the bride as a paragon of beauty (the parallel between bride and morning star, discussed in the following chapter, includes beads of the bride as the metaphor for ‘beads’ of dew associated with dawn (Razauskas 2011: 20)).

Yet another gift, offered by Skirnir to Gerth, is the golden ring of Odin:

<p>21. <i>Baug ek þér þá gef, þann er brenndr var með ungum Óðins syni; átta eru jafnhöfðir, er af drjúpa ína níundu hverja nótt.</i></p>	<p>‘21. Then do I bring thee the ring that was burned Of old with Othin’s son; From it do eight of like weight fall On every ninth night.’ (translation by Henry Adams Bellows)</p>
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The ring referred to in stanza 21 is considered to be Draupnir – a magical ring of Odin, which has the ability to multiply itself. This ring is of great importance in relation to the cycle of death and rebirth, as it is placed on Baldr’s funeral pyre by Odin and retrieved from Hel by Hermod, as attested in Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*⁷; therefore, as John Lindow states, “the passage of Draupnir through funeral fire and the world of the dead must truly have enhanced its value” (Lindow 2002: 98). In this way, the self-reproducing golden ring embodies not only prosperity and fertility, but also the possibility of rebirth, or return from the world of the dead, which may be traced back to the cycle of seasonal rituals in connection to the fertility of soil.

Meanwhile, in the course of the proposal the precious gifts do not always seem to suffice, cf.:

<p><i>Gerður kvað: 20. Epli ellifu ek þigg aldregi at mannskis munum, né vit Freyr, meðan okkart fjör lífir, byggjum bæði saman.</i></p>	<p>‘Gerth spake: 20. I will not take at any man’s wish These eleven apples ever Nor shall Freyr and I one dwelling find ; So long as we two live.’ (translation by Henry Adams Bellows)</p>
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⁷ ‘Odin laid on the pile the gold ring called Draupnir, which afterwards acquired the property of producing every ninth night eight rings of equal weight.’ (Translation by I.A. Blackwell).

The motif of the recalcitrance of the bride is followed by the motif of threatening the bride, viz. the maiden Gerth, cf.:

Skírnir kvað:

23. Sér þú þenna mæki, mæer, | mjóvan,
málfáan,
er ek hef í hendi hér?
Höfuð höggva | ek mun þér hálsi af,
nema þú mér sætt segir.

‘Skirnir spake:

23. Seest thou, maiden, | this keen, bright
sword
That I hold here in my hand?
Thy head from thy neck | shall I straight-
way hew,
If thou wilt not do my will.’
(translation by Henry Adams Bellows)

The motif of threatening the maiden in the case of her repeated refusal is found in Lithuanian folk songs as well, cf.:

*Pasiklausyki, mano mergele,
Kaip čia žemužė dreba,-
Taip tu drebėsi, mano mergele,
Kai mano valioj būsi!*⁸
(Juška 1954: 28).

Here again, the manifestation of the power of the bridegroom refers to the prototypical quality of the Thunder God, i.e. his extraordinary strength. The fertility motif here is closely related to the motif of shaking the earth, from which it can be assumed that it is one of the main aspects connecting the bridegroom with the God of Thunder by his main function – the assurance of fertility. The motif of shaking the earth is embedded in the formula, cf.: *Jörð bifask* ‘the ground shakes’, *žemužė dreba* ‘the earth shakes’.

In connection with seasonal myths, one should note the important curse uttered by Skirnir, where he threatens Gerth that she will “be like to the thistle”. According to Joseph Harris, “the thistle is anthropomorphic; and its brittle dryness in autumn is the antithesis of the fluid suppleness of a nubile girl in the spring of life” (Harris 2002: 85). Gerth herself is threatened with becoming the symbol of sterility: “all the elements of the curse proper are negative transformations of the hoped-for world of the maiden Gerdr and systematically threaten the inversion of all the hopes and expectations of fruitful womanhood” (Ibid.). H. R. Ellis Davidson draws a comparison between Gerth and Persephone from the Greek vegetation myth: “since it is made clear that if (Gerth) remains below in the dark kingdom of the underworld there will be nothing to hope for but sterility and famine. She does not become the bride of the underworld, however; her bridal is to be in the

⁸ ‘Listen, my maiden, how the earth shakes – you will shake alike, my maiden, when you will be at my will’.

upper world when she consents to meet Freyr at Barri.” (Davidson 1999: 86). The union of Gerth and Freyr thus symbolises the victory of fertility (fruitfulness of spring) over the reign of death (winter).

To illustrate the relationship between ritual and folk tradition, it should be noted that the depiction of the traditional proposal sometimes includes sequences of questions and answers in the form of a riddle. In various Indo-European traditions the narrative describing a wedding is closely related to ancient rituals as revealed by the elements of magic and spells. For example, Lithuanian folk song introduces solving a riddle as a condition to be implemented for the marriage to take place:

*Mergele mano,
Jaunoji mano,
Užminsiu tau mįslelę,
Užminsiu tau mįslelę.*

*O jei atminsi mano mįslelę,
Mano mįslelę,
Tai būsi mano miela,
Tai būsi mano miela.*
(Laurinkienė 1990: 156).⁹

This extract may be compared to Russian *kolyadka*, Christmas song, where the young man asks a girl to answer the riddle “what burns without frying?” in order to become his wife, to which she answers “stone, fern, fire” (Veselovksy 1989: 110). Meanwhile in Germanic society, runic inscriptions were employed for different sorts of magic actions: from achieving military victory to ensuring fertility and affecting the weather (Kieckhefer 2000: 48). In relation to *The Lay of Skirnir*, the magic incantations employed by Skirnir to persuade Gerth should also be seen as part of the magic ritual, cf.:

36. *Purs ríst ek þér | ok þría stafí,
ergi ok æði ok óþola;
svá ek þat af ríst, | sem ek þat á reist,
ef gerask þarfar þess.*

‘36. I write thee a charm | and three runes
therewith,
Longing and madness and lust;
But what I have writ | I may yet unwrite
If I find a need therefor.’
(translation by Henry Adams Bellows)

Magic, in contrast to offerings and threats, is of imposing nature – “the incantation or ritual, if correctly uttered or performed, automatically produces the desired result” (West 2007: 326). In both Germanic and Lithuanian tradition, the solution of the riddle as well as the utterance of an incantation are seen as a process with a finite effect – consent of the bride.

The subsequent ending of the proposal course in both traditions is embodied in welcoming the bridegroom/matchmaker by offering him a beverage: ‘Find welcome rather, / and with it take/ The frost-cup filled with

⁹ ‘My girl, my young girl, I shall propose a riddle for you, I shall propose a riddle for you. If you solve my riddle, my riddle, you shall be my beloved, my beloved’.

mead' (*Heill ver þú nú heldr, sveinn,/ ok tak við hrímkálki/ fullum forns mjaðar*), and:

*Sėskit, sveteliai,
Už baltųjų skomelių,
Gerkit, sveteliai,
Saldų gardų vynelį.*¹⁰
(*Lietuvių liaudies dainynas* 1983: 210)

In the Germanic, as well as in the Lithuanian tradition, the mead-cup offered by the maiden to her lord symbolises betrothal; it also figures prominently in welcoming an important guest, as seen in the Old English poem *Beowulf*:

*þæt hío Bėowulfe, bėaghroden cwėn
móde gepungen medoful ætbær [...]*
(lines 624–625).

‘when the ring-graced queen, the royal-
hearted,
to Beowulf bore the beaker of mead.’
(translation by B.F. Gummere).

The epithets describing the beverage may be considered to have formulaic status (recurrent expressions *mead* and *sweet wine*) and point to the mythical drink of gods granting them eternal life, with reference to the semantic opposition *sacred* versus *profane*. On balance, both Old Icelandic and Lithuanian sources demonstrate a similar course of proposal established by social norms and resulting in completion of the marriage ritual.

3. The celestial prototypes of the bride and the bridegroom in folk narrative

If human life is seen as embracing the opposition between the sacred and the profane, „[...] the cosmogonic myth is re-eminently the paradigmatic myth; it serves as model for human behaviour. This is why human marriage is regarded as an imitation of the cosmic hierogamy” (Eliade 1959: 145). Ancient thought modifies the paradigm of cosmic hierogamy to include profane people as the imitators of divine acts in order to sanctify the world (Ibid. 99). Such imitations are expressed by poetic means both in the poems of the Poetic Edda and Lithuanian folk songs, as well as in the folk songs of other culturally akin traditions.

In Lithuanian folk songs, direct mythical references are rare occurrences; poetic implications for mythic characters are conveyed by means of simile

¹⁰ ‘Sit down, dear guests, at the white table, drink, dear guests, sweet wine’.

and parallelism instead. A common parallel found in Lithuanian songs is that between the morning star (*Aušrinė*) and the bride: in the ritual song of the Feast of St. John, *Užteka saulužė* (‘The Sun Rises’), a parallel is drawn between “the brightest star which was the first to arise” and the eldest daughter who “was the first to wake up”:

5. *Šviesiausios žvaigždūžės, daulėliu lėliu,*
Kur anksti užtekėjo, daulėliu [...]
 11. *Vyriausios dukružės, daulėliu lėliu,*
Kur anksti atsikėlė, daulėliu [...]
 (Juška 1955: 538–539).

In Lithuanian mythology, *Aušrinė* is the personification of the morning star (from the Lithuanian *Aušra* ‘Dawn’); she is usually defined as an exceptionally beautiful sky goddess, the lover of the moon¹¹. According to Razauskas, *Aušrinė* is the mythical prototype of a bride (Razauskas 2011: 21). Apart from *Aušrinė*, there are other important mythological figures related to the sky, viz. the daughters of the Sun – *Saulės dukrytės*. As West suggests, in Indian Veddas, the daughter of the Sun “has a special role as the divine model for the mortal bride” (West 2007: 227). Lithuanian folk songs demonstrate a similar motif, e.g. in the song *Po kleveliu šaltinatis* (‘A Spring under the Maple Tree’, Rėza 1958: 173), the passage depicting the daughters of the Sun (*Saulės dukrytės*) serves as a mythological introduction to the narrative that further explores the theme of courtship. The narrative proceeds with a girl washing her face and losing her ring – then *Dievo suneliai* (‘the sons of God’), arrive and recover the ring from the water. The Indo-European tradition demonstrates the daughters of the Sun in close relationship with the sons of God, they are usually their suitors (West 2007: 229); this connection may be traced back to the motif of the celestial wedding. The motif of the lost and recovered ring is of great significance in relation to the ring Draupnir in *The Lay of Skirnir* – they both signify rebirth, and in relation to the circular shape of the ring – the cyclical nature of rebirth.

The wedding songs imitate the celestial wedding and express the essential aspect of the archaic world view: “life is lived on a twofold plane; it takes its course as human existence and, at the same time, shares in a transhuman life, that of the cosmos or the gods” (Eliade 1959: 167). Such parallels may be found in the previously introduced song: respectively, the daughters of the Sun are represented by the young girl, the bride-to-be, and the sons of

¹¹ The Moon is the husband of the Sun; it is noteworthy that in Baltic mythology, the Moon is of masculine gender.

God are represented by the young man, the bridegroom-to-be, thus uniting the divine world of the primeval myth with the profane world of lay people. In addition, Lithuanian folk songs usually demonstrate a marked quality of *epitheta ornantia* – phrases adding little to the content but rendering “a permanent or ideal characteristic of the thing” (West 2007: 83). However, if the epithets are interpreted in the context of parallelism characteristic of a number of Lithuanian folk songs, they may be viewed as indirect symbolic comparison of the sacred with the profane, viz. the daughters of the Sun come to wash themselves; the young girl comes to wash her ‘white mouth’ (*baltą burną*). Here the epithet ‘white mouth’ refers not only to such qualities as brightness and chastity, but also allows for the protagonist, the young girl, to be compared to one of the previously mentioned daughters of the Sun. The brightness and chastity of the bride-to-be are also referred to in *The Lay of Skirnir* where Freyr describes Gerth as follows:

6. *armar lj́stu,*
en af þaðan
allt loft ok lögr

‘6. Her arms glittered,
and from their gleam
Shone all the sea and sky.’
(translation by Henry Adams Bellows).

In the context of the Lithuanian tradition, Gerth could also be interpreted as a transformed image of Aušrinė, the Morning Star (in the contextual meaning of the bride), and Gerth’s arms shining over the sea and the sky may be considered a valid description of the star. Examples from other traditions also describe the young girl as a paragon of chastity and purity, e.g. in a Czech song the girl is described as ‘golden’:

Komu ty se dostaneš,
*Má zlatá holčičko? [...]*¹²
(Veselovsky 1989: 110).

In the following stanza from a Polish folk song, the image of the young girl is also related to the celestial domain (comparison to the sky), as well as to the life-giving aspect of nature and chastity expressed through the colours green and white respectively:

Przykryto się niebo obłokami,
Przykryła się Marysia rąbkami,
Okrył się jawór zielonym liścieńkiem,
*Młoda Marysia bielonym czepeńkiem.*¹³
(Ibid.)

¹² ‘Whose shall you be, my golden girl?’.

¹³ ‘The sky has covered itself with clouds, Marysia has covered herself with a scarf; the sycamore has covered itself with green leaves, young Marysia has covered herself with a white cap’.

Further on, the other participant of the profane pair imitating the celestial hierogamy is the bridegroom. In the Lithuanian tradition, the male protagonist and bridegroom, the 'young man' (*jauns bernytis*), may be viewed as a transformed image of one of the 'sons of God' (*Dievo sūneliai*) – his possessions, such as 'the horse with golden horseshoes' (*žirgatis aukso patkavatėmis*) reveal his nobility and ability to ensure prosperity. Thus, the folk song indicates transition from the mythic union of the divine beings, or the celestial plane, to the union of the lay people, or the profane plane, who imitate the divine pattern of life in order to be connected to the sacred world. It could be added that the image of a young man, the bridegroom in Germanic and Lithuanian traditions, demonstrates cultural differences based on the organization of society. While Skirnir requests a magic sword – 'the sword as well / that fights of itself' (*ok þat sverð, er sjalft vegisk*), in the Lithuanian tradition the main attribute of the male protagonist becomes his tools used in field work, i.e. a scythe, a rake:

*Mon dalgėla sidabrina
Dobilalius gražiai skina*¹⁴
(*Lietuvių liaudies dainynas* 1997: 105).

Another important attribute of the young man in the Lithuanian tradition is his horse – an essential possession required to conquer the distance between him and his beloved:

– *Žirgužėli, juodbėrėli mano,
Vai, ar eisi su manim drauge,
Ar padėsi kelelį keliauti?*¹⁵
(*Lietuvių liaudies dainynas* 1989: 94).

Not only is the horse a companion in the young man's quest, but it may also be seen as an anthropomorphic creature having supernatural powers: the horse is depicted as being capable of providing information about its owner, the young man, to his future father-in-law:

*Žirgelis atsakė,
Bėrasai atsakė:
– Skaistus žento būdelis*¹⁶
(Ibid. 108).

¹⁴ 'My scythe is made of silver, it cuts down clovers handsomely.'

¹⁵ 'My horse, my dark horse, will you come with me, will you help me in my journey?'

¹⁶ 'The horse answered, the bay horse answered: chaste is the spirit of the son-in-law'.

The horse of Skirnir may be seen as retaining magical qualities as well:

8. *Mar gefðu mér þá
þann er mik um myrkvan beri
vísan vafrröga [...]*

‘8. Then give me the horse | that goes
through the dark
And magic flickering flames [...]
(translation by Henry Adams Bellows)

This image of a horse corresponds with the Indo-European tradition, where “the horses are represented as intelligent, indeed wise, as well as brave and loyal, and often gifted with mantic knowledge” (West 2007: 467). The horse of the young man – *žirgelis* – thus retains certain magical qualities of its supernatural prototype – the archetypal horse. The paradigm related to the image of the horse, centred on this prototype (be it the winged Greek Pegasus or eight-legged Germanic Sleipnir – the steed of Odin known to have the capability of travelling through the air and to the underworld (Davidson 1965: 142)) includes the horse of the profane man as one of its possible transformations. Ursula Dronke posits that the wall of fire Skirnir has to cross may be seen as a traditional barrier marking the entrance to the underworld (in relation to Greek mythology, the hounds of Gýmir then are viewed as a transformation of Cerberus). Therefore, the mythical motifs in *The Lay of Skirnir* suggest both “a wooing and a release of new life from the world of the dead, whose enclosure is traditionally of flame” (Dronke 1997: 267). The element of fire bears sacral character and emphasizes the passage from life to death and vice versa in mythical consciousness.

In Latvian folklore, mythical prototypes of the bridegroom are the sons of God who reveal the supernatural qualities of strength (which makes the daughter of the Sun shiver) and prosperity (indicated by the golden rafters of the house)

*Dieva dēli klēti cirta,
Zelta spāres spāredami;
Sauls meita cauri gāja
Kā lapiņas drebedama.*¹⁷

Building a house is a deed closely related to the ritual – “the man of traditional societies could only live in a space opening upward” (Eliade 1959: 43), and the golden rafters of the house indicate its orientation towards the sky (the upper part of the house is made from the most valuable material). In this respect the image of a mountain in *The Lay of Skirnir* may be also taken into consideration as a sacral place:

¹⁷ ‘The sons of God were building the barn with golden rafters, the daughter of the Sun was trembling like a leaf’.

<p>11. <i>Segðu þat, hirðir, er þú á haugi sitr</i> <i>ok varðar alla vega:</i> <i>Hvé ek at andspillli komumk ins unga</i> <i>mans</i> <i>fyr greyjum Gyms?</i></p>	<p>11. Tell me, herdsman, sitting on the hill, And watching all the ways, How may I win a word with the maid Past the hounds of Gymir here? (translation by Henry Adams Bellows)</p>
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The motif reveals that the house of Gymir (father of maiden Gerth) is situated on the hill, and implicitly refers to the mythical aspect of the introduced space that serves as a mediator between the domains of sky and earth.

The sacral meaning of the upward orientation is closely related to the symbolic *axis mundi*, a vital notion in the organization of mythical space: “the discovery or projection of a fixed point – the center – is equivalent to the creation of the world” (Ibid. 22). Such *axis mundi* in mythic cognition is the world tree, a central image in the tripartite division of the world: a maple or linden tree (Lithuanian and Slavic tradition) or the ash tree Yggdrasil (Germanic tradition). A sacred spring under the roots of the world tree is also a recurring motif, which may be reduced to the formula *spring under the tree* (Urth’s well under the roots of Yggdrasil and Lithuanian *A Spring under the Maple Tree*). The image of the world tree located near the water is recurrent in the folk songs of other traditions, e.g. Czech, cf.:

U našeho jazera,
Stóji lípka zelena,
A na téj lipě, na téj zeleněj,
Zpivaju tři ptačkove [...] ¹⁸
 (Veselovsky 1989: 110).

Polish folk song includes the same arrangement of mythic spatial markers, cf.:

Na polu lipa, pod lipą woda,
Tam stojąta dziwczyneczka, psiekna uroda. ¹⁹
 (Sliuzinskas 2006: 114).

Thus, the image of a tree in folk songs is an instance of a profane object turned into a marker of a mythical place: it structures the chaotic profane space and indicates its centre in order to attain transcendence to the sacral sphere, which is vital for the ritual of marriage to take place.

¹⁸ ‘Near our lake a green linden tree grows, and in that tree, in that green tree, three birds are singing’.

¹⁹ ‘There is a linden tree in the field, and water lies below the linden tree, a girl was standing there, a beautiful girl’.

Conclusions

With reference to the Old Icelandic poem *The Lay of Skirnir* and Lithuanian wedding songs, the following archetypal images/common motifs are embedded in the narrative structure, viz. the exchange of gifts (*golden apples* versus *sweet apples*; *magic ring* versus *red beads*), the image of the horse as a companion of the bridegroom/matchmaker, the unwillingness of the bride towards marriage/the bride's lament, offerings and threats of the bridegroom/matchmaker, welcoming the bridegroom/matchmaker by giving him a beverage. The beverage – *the mead* and *the sweet wine* is culture-specific. In *The Lay of Skirnir*, threatening the bride alludes to incantation and magic (the magic of runes). The difference between the Germanic and the Baltic traditions is manifest in the closer connection of the *The Lay of Skirnir* to seasonal myths: Gerth might be viewed as a deity of the underworld (Jotunheim) representing the barren earth whose sterility is overcome by union with the fertility god.

It is the motif of shaking the earth, as rendered by the formulas *Jörð bifask* 'the ground shakes' and *žemužė dreba* 'the earth shakes', that is manifest in both traditions, for the metaphorical "shaking the earth" in the sense of providing fertility for the soil may be linked to the metaphorical "shaking the bride" (in the prototypical quality of the mytheme employed to convey the unwillingness of the bride towards marriage). Moreover, in Lithuanian wedding songs the celestial beings *Aušrinė*, *the daughters of the Sun*, appertain to the mythical prototypes of the mortal bride; the mythical *sons of God* – to the mythical prototypes of the mortal bridegroom. In *The Lay of Skirnir*, the deities *Freyr* and *Gerth* can be traced to the archetypal pair of Heaven and Earth.

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DUALIZM SACRUM-PROFANUM W POETYCKIEJ OPowieści SKÍRNISMÁL
I LITEWSKICH PIEŚNIACH WESELNYCH

Poetyka indoeuropejska bada słownictwo wspólne dla różnych języków w ramach całej rodziny językowej. „Mniejsze” tradycje na obszarze indoeuropejskim mają także wspólne elementy mitologiczne. Mitologia porównawcza badająca rolę bogów odsłania następujące warstwy: „magiczną suwerenność (i niebiańskie zarządzanie wszechświatem), moce wojownicze (i zarządzanie niższymi warstwami atmosfery) oraz pełną pokoju płodność (i zarządzanie ziemią, podziemiem i morzem)” (Dumezil 1988: 121). Najistotniejszy aspekt archaicznego obrazu świata przejawia się w sposób następujący: „Życie odbywa się na dwóch płaszczyznach – jest ludzką egzystencją, a jednocześnie ma udział w życiu transludzkiem, życiu Kosmosu i bogów” (Eliade 1961: 167). Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy transformacji motywu niebiańskiego ślubu, przejścia od *sacrum* do *profanum* z odniesieniem do poetyckiej opowieści *Skírnismál* i litewskich pieśni ludowych. Przeprowadzono: (1) analizę realizacji motywu mitologicznego w ww. opowieści; (2) odszyfrowanie formuł mitycznych wprzęgniętych w kontekst tej opowieści. W pieśniach ludowych panna młoda i pan młody naśladują czynności swoich niebiańskich pierwowzorów. Motyw trzęsącej się ziemi oddany jest formułami *Jörð bifask* i *žemužė dreba* ‘ziemia się trzęsie’, obecnymi w obu tradycjach, i łączy się z metaforycznym „drżeniem panny młodej” w prototypowym mitemie, przywoływanym w celu wyrażenia jej niechęci wyjścia mąż.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: formuła mityczna, obraz prototypowy, transformacja roli, implicytne odniesienie mityczne, myślenie poetyckie