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A wedding ceremony in the eastern cultural borderland - tradition and modernity

(an area of Southern Podlasie)

Summary of the doctoral dissertation

The doctoral thesis is devoted to an analysis of a wedding ceremony - one of the most vital family rituals. Despite the fact that the ritual possesses a rich tradition, at the same time it is opened to the changes and innovations. It has attracted the attention of such researchers of culture as sociologists, ethnographers, culture researchers, dialectologists, ethnolinguists and folklorists for a long time. The aim of the work was to reconstruct a traditional model of a rural wedding ceremony from the eastern cultural borderland of Poland (i.e. from Southern Podlasie) with regard to the changes which occurred in the past and which have still taken place in this ritual. Following such researchers of the culture of this area as Alicja Mironiuk, Janina Petera and Celestyn Wrębiak, the authoress treated Southern Podlasie conventionally, that is as an area of the former Biała Podlaska Voivodeship (including the Biała Podlaska, Radzyń Podlaski and a part of the Parczew counties).

The analysis was based on descriptions of wedding ceremonies (from the 19th to 21st centuries) and reports from 201 places. The documentation included linguistic data and descriptions of practices that come from printed source materials (among others from the works by Oskar Kolberg, Mikołaj Jańczuk, Feliks Olesiejuk, Aleksander Oleszczuk, Jan Ignaciuk, Jan Adamowski, Wacław Tuwalski, Janina Szymańska), the authoress' own field research (a total number of 1700 minutes of recordings) done according to a questionnaire self-prepared for researching wedding rituals as well as archival materials (including many unpublished records) obtained from various Polish archives and museums (including the Museum of Southern Podlasie in Biała Podlaska, the Archive of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas in Cieszyn, the Archive of the Institute of Cultural Sciences of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, the National Museum in Lublin). Videos and photographic documentation from the informants' archives were also analysed.

The work consists of six chapters (four ones are theoretical and two ones are analytical), an introduction, conclusion, bibliography and annex which contains photographs collected by the authoress and documenting the wedding ritual in Southern Podlasie (from 1962 to 2022), photos of contemporary wedding gadgets and invitations (from 1984 to 2022). The dissertation is also

enriched with maps of the studied area (i. e. maps coming from archival sources as well as made purposely for this work at the Department of Cartography and Geomatics of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin).

In the introduction, the authoress presented an aim of the work, motivation of a choice of the subject (which she argued, among others, by a lack of the synthetic description of the wedding ceremony from Southern Podlasie) as well as a thematic scope and structure of the dissertation. She also showed a state of studies on wedding rituals in the analysed area and her own point of view to selected works on wedding rituals in other regions of Poland.

In the first chapter entitled *Southern Podlasie as a cultural area*, the authoress discussed the etymology of the name *Podlasie*, citing dictionaries and encyclopaedias. She showed the findings concerning the demarcating of the borders of the studied area which had changed its state and administrative affiliation (gouvernements, voivodships) in various historical periods. The variability of borders made them difficult to determine precisely and that was a reason why demarcating the area of her researches the authoress adopted cultural criteria and defined Southern Podlasie as the area of the former Biała Podlaska Voivodeship. She also added that Southern Podlasie refers, first of all, to a cultural area but not to a geographical one.

The second chapter, *Methodology and the material base*, was devoted to discussing various methodologies of scientific work as well as techniques and tools of research on culture. The authoress presented the methodology of describing a ritual suggested by Nikita I. Tołstoj who had perceived the ritual as a text of culture, implemented by various cultural codes (verbal, action, objective, temporal and locative ones), which due to complementing each other in the ritual, created a common syncretic code. She also referred to the research methodology that had been elaborated at the Lublin ethnolinguistic school. This methodology allows to reconstruct culture from the linguistic level. In this chapter, the authoress discussed the material base of the work, too. She characterized a questionnaire as a research tool, analysed types of questions included in a questionnaire and its layout which corresponded to the various stages of the wedding ceremony. She also presented the characteristics of the informants who were the indigenous inhabitants of the researched area, believers of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The oldest informant was born in the early 20th century and the youngest one in the 21st century. Interviews conducted with them revealed a number of interesting details about wedding rituals in Southern Podlasie.

In the third chapter, *The concept and determinants of the eastern cultural borderland*, the authoress cited definitions of the terms "border" and "borderland" which are the subject of interest of various scientific disciplines. In her considerations, she referred in particular to the eastern cultural borderland and focused on theories concerning this area in selected works, among others from such disciplines as sociology (f.i. works by Andrzej Sadowski) and geography (f.i. works by

Marek Barwiński). She discussed issues related to a formation of the contemporary eastern border of Poland, which is the result of, among others, many-centuries-old Polish-Russian struggles. She presented the socio-cultural characteristics of the researched area and analysed its multi-ethnicity which resulted in the interpenetration of different cultures. She drew attention to the determinants of the eastern cultural borderland, which are emphasized on the linguistic (f.i. dialect) and cultural (material and spiritual culture) level. In this area, border cultures (Polish, Belarusian, Ukrainian ones) influence each other, and cultural borders do not divide the world in an absolute way into "we" and "you". The authoress also tried to prove that the mutual influence of these cultures is a factor that unites members of the border community and contributes to a creation of the new cultural quality in this area.

The fourth chapter, *The wedding as the rite of passage*, discusses the terms "ritual" and "rite of passage". She cited the findings on the essence of rituals made by such researchers as f.i.: Émile Durkheim, Martine Segalen and Michał Buchowski. She presented selected typologies of rituals, among others, by Adam Fischer, Oskar Kolberg, Jan Stanisław Bystron, Krystyna Kwaśniewicz and Jadwiga Klimaszewska. She stressed that an important element of the ritual was a presence of the sphere of the *sacrum*. She characterized the theory of the rite of passage according to Arnold van Gennep. She pointed out that a wedding was one of the rites of passage - in its structure we will find various determinants of passage such as a change of marital status from a fiancée to a wife, a removal from the world of maidens to the world of married women.

The next chapter - the fifth chapter entitled *Stages in the model of a traditional wedding ceremony from the Southern Podlasie region* begins an analytical part of the work. The authoress presented a model of the traditional structure of the wedding ceremony in Southern Podlasie. She discussed the various stages of the wedding, which she distinguished on the basis of literature (among others works by Jan Adamowski, Mikołaj Jańczuk, Feliks Olesiejuk, Aleksander Oleszczuk, Adolf Pleszczyński, Janina Szymańska) and her own research. They are: the *rajenie* [recommending somebody], matchmaking, the *ogłedy* [having a look at a fiancée's property], engagements, wedding announcements, inviting guests, preparations for the wedding, bachelorette and bachelor parties, baking the *korowaj* [baking a wedding cake], arrival of a groom to a bride's house, blessing, way to the church, wedding gates, wedding ceremony, return from a church and greeting in a wedding ceremony house, wedding dinner and dances, the *rozpleciny* [unbraiding and/or cutting the bride's hair] and *oczepiny* [taking off a wedding veil and/or putting a coif on the bride's head], bringing and sharing the *korowaj*, the *pokładziny* [wedding night], the *poprawiny* [additional wedding reception(s)] and the *przenosiny* [moving].

In the sixth chapter entitled *Paradigmatic characteristics of the wedding ceremony*, the authoress discussed a paradigmatic structure of the wedding ceremony which consists of the

following components: 1) time and space, 2) acting characters and their symbolic attributes of the wedding ceremony, 3) word, song and instrumental music, 4) non-verbal codes of the wedding ceremony, 5) belief-motivated behaviors (they refer to various stages of the wedding). In the subchapter, *Time and space*, the authoress emphasizes that in the wedding rite time and space are essential elements of the ritual action. In the wedding ritual, she distinguishes the chronological time (one referring to successive ritual activities in other words to subsequent stages of the wedding ceremony), social time (a wedding is an important time for the community in which the ritual takes place, for the given family, and even for the entire village), predicting time (certain ritual activities had to be performed, f.i. at the given moment (time) of a year or day, to ensure a success of the undertaken actions). Up to now, f.i., it has been believed that people should get married in the months with the letter "r" in their names since it is supposed to ensure the young couple prosperity). Events related to the wedding ceremony also take place in a specific space. The authoress divided a wedding space into social (a village, church, inn) and individual ones (a house of a groom and a bride). In the next subchapter, *Acting characters and their symbolic wedding attributes*, she presented the roles and attributes of individual wedding guests. She described figures of the bride and the groom, figures belonging to the wedding team (including *the wedding bridesmaid, the wedding bridesman, the matchmaker, the marshal, the wedding-host, the wedding-hostess*), the young people's parents, godparents and families, members of the wedding band and the music group, figures of the wedding dance leader and the priest, wedding guests, especially uninvited ones as well as contemporary wedding service providers. The authoress also stressed that singing, music and gestures played an important role in the wedding ceremony (f.i. making a sign of the cross during blessing, sprinkling a wedding procession with holy water before leaving for the wedding). The issues mentioned-above were discussed in subchapters entitled: *Word, song and instrumental music* and *Non-verbal codes of the wedding ceremony*. The chapter is closed with the subchapter, *Belief-motivated behaviors (ones concerning various stages of the wedding)*, in which the authoress presented various behaviors and predictions related to a future fate of the spouses. She divided them into: a) *Prophecies regarding a change in marital status* (f.i. a future bride leaving the house where she has just invited for the wedding ceremony, she should not close the door behind her so that the singles, who live there, would quickly get married), b) *Prophecies regarding a prosperity in a married life* (f.i. a sunny and bright wedding day was an omen of happiness in a marriage, and a cloudy an rainy day was a bad omen), c) *Magical behaviors regarding a protection against misfortune on the way to the wedding* (f.i. the young people should not go on foot to place of the wedding since in that way *they will go through their common life* and their marriage will be unhappy).

In conclusion, the author compared a contemporary wedding ceremony from Southern

Podlasie with its traditional model. She showed the changes that have taken place in the wedding ceremony from the 19th to the 21st century. Some elements of the ritual totally disappeared (f.i. *the rajenie*, baking the *korowaj*), while the others were only replaced by their contemporary equivalents (f.i. a wedding cake is shared instead of the *korowaj* during the wedding dinner). New phenomena have also appeared (such as honeymoons, specialized wedding services companies). The wedding ceremony in the area of the eastern cultural borderland is visibly determined in the linguistic and cultural sphere, too. The authoress proved in her thesis that tradition has intertwined with modernity in the wedding ceremony in Southern Podlasie, and a wedding ritual has still evolved in the villages.

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