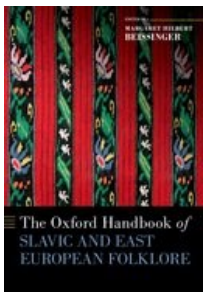

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CHAPTER

2 Russian Wedding Songs

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Abstract

Every step of the traditional Russian wedding finds expression in songs and laments. Interactions between the two parties are staged as mock conflict with blaming and teasing songs, humor, and obscenity. The largest share of songs belongs to the bride, whose loss of maidenhood, often imagined as a withered or cut flower, constitutes the central plot line. The songs dramatize the irreversible change she undergoes in ceasing forever to be a girl (free, playful, and cherished by parents and friends), her resistance, and eventual acquiescence. In her laments, the bride composes in performance, acting her own self within the world of the wedding. As the turning point in the wedding is reached, the laments cease; and the songs reflect this reversal by transitioning to praise for the newlyweds and themes of fertility and abundance.

Keywords: wedding, song, lament, bride, maidenhood, composition in performance, praise, blame, fertility

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The traditional Russian wedding, as attested primarily in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (this chapter is based on records taken between the 1850s and the 1990s), is diverse yet stable in its outline. It begins with some contact between the two families, followed by a betrothal, and then by a variable number of steps—gift exchanges and games, the presentation or "leading out" of the bride, the viewing of the groom's house, the sewing and singing gatherings of the youth, the baking of wedding breads, the bridal bath, etc. The list of events differs by region and diminishes over time, as does the "cast" of characters, which could be very large. The most important participants—two families, the *tysiatskiĭ* (master of ceremonies), *druzhki* (male agents), and *svakhi* ("matchmakers," or female agents)—on both sides often had some hierarchy among them and specific songs. Young women, the peers of the bride, would act and sing collectively, often in her voice.

The decisive moment of the wedding comes when the groom's party arrives to take the bride, her hair is dressed in the way of a married woman, there is a festive meal, and the wedding cortege takes her to her new family, where another celebratory meal lasts until late on the bridal night. Depending on the region, various events happen the next morning and for several days afterward, for example, the "awakening" and housework tests for the newlyweds. The church ceremony (the "crowning") in effect breaks up the procession to the groom's house: the wedding party goes to the church and then continues on its way.

Every event in this sequence is accompanied by songs, long and short, fixed or variable, wedding-specific or not. Their sheer number is striking, especially in regions where laments were practiced. Some rituals involved multiple actors with their sung or spoken "parts," traditional postures, and gestures. In records from Siberia, the groomsman says something in verse almost constantly (Potanina et al. 2002:185–208). In the early nineteenth century, Snegirev described the wedding as "a folk drama, or, more precisely, opera-vaudeville" (1839:119).

The mood and tone of this opera modulate over the course of it—lyrical, dramatic, playful, celebratory, and
p. 31 bawdy. There are songs of praise aiming to promote ↳ the prosperity, fertility, and health of the new family (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:16). There are songs of blame and teasing, usually humorous and sometimes obscene. The mockery is frequently tied to an occasion—the arrival of the groom's party or the newlyweds' departure for bed—and it is possible to discern a ritual significance in the blame—the acted-out resistance of the bride or the fertilizing magic of obscenity. Short songs of praise often demand a reward and can turn to blame to extort a better one. Such songs occur at multiple points during the wedding, as do erotic songs.

The agonistic aspect of the wedding is fully reflected in song. Each side praises their protagonist and disparages the other. The mutual visits and gift exchanges are staged as conflicts—the groom's party, for example, may be barred from the bride's house, only to buy their way in, all the while responding to mockery and teasing. Quick repartee is a demand of the genre, and both sides would have to find representatives with well-hung tongues.

There are songs tied to ritual—the undoing of the bride's braid, the bath, or the baking of the bread. Such songs are usually choral even if they are in the voice of a single protagonist—the bride's party voices her role; the groom's voices his. Solo singing is absent, but solo performance, called причет (translated here, imperfectly, as "lament"), was common in several regions, especially in the north (Arkhangel'sk, Vologda, and shores of the White Sea and Onega) and parts of Siberia.

The Drama of the Bride

The unmarried young women, friends of the bride, often do most of the singing, bewailing or resisting her departure from their midst, teasing the groom's party, praising the bride and, eventually, the groom. The bride sings with them or laments alongside them, and fieldwork records contain many exchanges in song and lament between the bride and her parents, her brother, or her friends.

The story of the bride—her initial resistance and eventual resignation to the loss of her maidenhood—is the central plot line that stands out against the background of the wedding. This loss is irreversible and dramatic in its finality, and even the happiest weddings involve songs expressing the bride's complaint. In some regions, this drama of the bride could take the form of a week of public laments. In regions to the south and west of Moscow, the wedding seems less dramatic, the bride (in song, at least) is more cheerful. Yet even here there are songs with familiar themes: the loss of youthful beauty and freedom, blame of the bride's parents for giving her away, and separation from her peers.

Laments are distinct from songs in meter, music, and manner of composition; solo laments are composed in performance by each lamenter. She would use traditional diction and express traditional themes; but there was
p. 32 no set text, and a talented lamenter could expand and vary her performances, adding similes, metaphors, and ↳ description. Group laments either followed a text known to all or relied on traditional diction: it was enough for the leader to start a verse, and the group would step in to finish it. Solo and group laments could be performed simultaneously in dialogue and competition, like a dissimilar duet in opera. For example, a choral song representing the bride's words could accompany a solo lament of her mother (Potanina et al. 2002:37–38).

Several features of lament are suited for composition in performance: stichic form, repetition of syntactical patterns, and abundance of traditional expressions. Laments share these features with other oral traditional poetry including epic tales (Gerd 1997:609), and it is no accident that the most expansive laments are attested in the regions where epic poetry flourished the longest (Kuznetsova 1993:6). In their size, variety, and richness of narrative elements, the famous laments of Irina Fedosova can compete with epics. Her lament of the bride, recorded by Barsov in 1867–1869, is 1,070 verses long and answered by the mother's lament of 514 verses (Chistova and Chistov 1997:277–312).

The wedding also has many points of contact with fairy (magic) tales. In wedding songs, the groom finds his bride by shooting an arrow, traverses impassable forests and mountains to find her, and has to pick her out among identically veiled figures, while the bride shapeshifts to avoid marriage, or turns into a swan, all elements attested in folk tales (Potanina et al. 2002:129–130, 213; Gura 2012:608, 683). The tale of the Frog Princess (ATU 402 "The Animal Bride"[1]) can be read as a script of the wedding and a collection of attendant beliefs (Barber 2013:153–232).

Although there are many songs on the groom's side of the wedding, the repertoire is richer on the bride's side. The *devishnik*, the gathering of the bride's friends, was an especially lyrical moment where songs about the bride's loss of maidenhood predominated (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:13–14). The bride is the prima donna of the wedding opera, and the reasons are not difficult to see. She alone undergoes an irreversible transition, ceasing forever to be a girl, free and playful and cherished by her parents and friends (or such is the depiction of maidenhood in wedding songs). She enters a transitional and altered state marked by changes in her dress, the way she moves, where she can be within the house (Kuznetsova 1993:15–20; Balashov et al. 1985:33–35). Where laments were sung, the bride would, in her altered state, communicate almost entirely through lament—everyday speech was reduced to a minimum (Baĭburin 1993:66). In the end, the bride emerges from this state as if from a chrysalis, irrevocably changed. The endpoint of her transformation is childbearing, and so the bride's ability to produce new life is central to the wedding, which is permeated everywhere by fertility magic (Barber 2013:152).

The Green Orchard

One of the most widespread wedding themes is that of the bride's "green garden," the association between her maidenhood and flowers or green trees. The betrothal lament by Fedosova contains an expanded description of
p. 33 the "green orchard" full of ↳ flowers and birds, which suddenly begins to wither—the flourishing of maidenhood is over:

> И вдруг поблёкли тут цветочики лазуревы,
> И вдруг позябли тут сахарни деревиночки;
> И малы птиченьки—чего они спугалися—
> Из зелёна сада соловьи розлетались!
>
> (Chistova and Chistov 1997:285)

> And suddenly the sky-blue flowers faded,
> And the sugar-sweet trees were bitten by frost,
> And the little birds—who knows what scared them—
> All the nightingales flew away from the green orchard![2]

The same theme is present in songs recorded at different times in different places—for example, in this song from Kaluga sung by the friends of the bride while she lamented alongside:

> Остался мой зелен сад без мене,
> Заблёкнут в саду цветики алые.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:386–387, no. 261)

> My green orchard is left without me,
> The scarlet flowers will fade in it.

The bride then asks her father (or mother, in other versions) to water the garden:

> Утренней, вечернею зарёю,
> И сверх того горючею слезою.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:386–387, no. 261)

> At sunrise and at sunset,
> and also with your warm tears.

The garden, field, or forest is a verdant landscape where the maidens play, dance, and sing, their hair decorated with ribbons and flowers. Until now, the bride was one of them, enjoying her *volîa* (“freedom”), *nega* (“tender care”), and *dev'ïa krásota* (“maidenly beauty”). Now the bride is taken out, absent from the playful group of girls, as in the following lament, addressed to her mother:

> Погляди-ка ты родимая
> Кого теперь в толпе-то нет?
> Уж как нет в толпе чада милого,
> Уж как нет чада любимого!
>
> (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:109)

> Look, my dear mother
> Who is absent in the crowd?
> Your dear child is not in the crowd,
> Your beloved child is absent!

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The Bride’s Parents

In songs belonging to the early stages of the wedding, the bride reproaches her father for selling her or “drinking her away” (a reference to a betrothal custom), and the notions of betrayal, deception, and being married too young are prominent. The bride might complain about being chased away like a wild animal or that her father is selling her for a pittance. In a lament from the Kokshen’ga Basin, the bride recalls her father’s past pity for her, a contrast to his present cruelty:

> Мой корминец ты батюшко,
> Дак ты возьми меня на руки,
> Пожалей меня, батюшко,
> Старопрежней-то жалостью.
>
> (Balashov et al. 1985:37)

> My father, you brought me up,
> So take me up in your arms,
> Have pity on me,
> That old pity, like you used to.

The bride as a child, too young to marry, is a common trope in laments. In one lament by a mother, all the other girls are still playing with dolls and sticks, only her child "sits under a storm cloud" (Chistova and Chistov 1997:302).

In regions where the bride laments, her mother does likewise—in fact, she may persist in lamenting even after everyone else stops. In her laments, the mother often echoes the bride, as in this one, sung on the day of the bride's departure:

> Уж ты яблонька, ты кудрявая,
> Я садила тебя, насадила себя,
> Поливала-укрывала,
> От мороза берегла;
> Я на яблоньке цветика не видывала,
> Я сахарного яблочка не кушивала.
>
> (Koskina 1997:214–215)

> Oh my apple tree, my curly apple tree,
> I planted you, I planted you,
> I watered you, covered you,
> Protected you from frost,
> I have not seen flowers on the apple tree,
> I have not tried its sugar-sweet apples.

The implication is that someone else (the family of the groom) will eat the apples from this cherished tree. The
p. 35 beauty of trees and flowers in these songs is either unproductive, ↳ as here, or untouched by agriculture. Maidenhood is associated with growth and flowering rather than fruit and harvest, and the bride may complain that she is "ungrown grass" (Balashov et al. 1985:37) or her friends may reproach her for marrying too early, calling her an "unripe berry in the field," to which she responds that it is not her will (Potanina et al. 2002:84). To the mother's lament above the bride responds, threatening never to come to visit if her married life is unhappy.

Competing claims about the bride's "betrayal" may be voiced in dramatic, sung dialogue. In one such dialogue from the Pinega Basin, the bride laments that her parents are selling her to an utter stranger (Kolpakova 1928:122), while the maidens contradict her in a choral song, saying that she deceived them and invited in the "young prince":

> Паладья обманщица,
> Обманула своих подружек;
> Сама-то большой росла,

> Сама вину сделала:
> Молодого князя в сеницу звала,
> Со сеней в нову горенку.
>
> (Kolpakova 1928:122)

> Paladia is a liar,
> She deceived her friends,
> She grew up tall,
> She herself is at fault:
> She invited a young prince into the hallway,[3]
> From the hallway into the room.

In Pinega, the bride might conclude by lamenting in her mother's arms, asking what she did wrong (was I not obedient? did I not do my work?), describing the hardships that await her, the suddenness of the change (Kolpakova 1928:124). Such interactions between different actors of the wedding drama were both ritualized, requiring certain gestures and postures (such as holding an apron or kerchief to her eyes), and highly emotional. In Zauralye, the mother might kneel before her daughter and, rocking back and forth with emotion, *vyt'* ("howl") a lament:

> Да и, родимое ты мое дитятко,
> В эту ночку-ноченьку,
> Да и спалось тебе малешенько.
> Не видала ли ты сон,
> Свою девью красоту?
>
> (Fedorova 1997:3.4.2)

> And now, my dear child,
> In this night, this night,
> You slept so little,
> Did you see a dream—
> Your maidenly *krásota*?

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The *Krásota*

The bride's *krásota*, a symbolic object that embodies maidenhood and freedom, has a prominent place in the wedding. In practice, it could be the bride's wreath, ribbons, branches of a tree, or a small cut tree decorated with ribbons, beads, and flowers. The loss of her *krásota* corresponds to a change in the bride's hair, the undoing of her braid. By the end of the wedding, her hair is bound or covered, the ribbons given away, and the little tree, if present, denuded of its decorations.

The green landscape from which the bride is excluded is also the one into which her *krásota* escapes, though the escape is never a happy one. In a Siberian song, the *krásota* clings to a dry tree, a symbol of the irrevocable loss of maidenhood:

> Пошла дивья красота
> Во зелёные луга,
> Во дремучие леса,
> Привилась дивья красота

> К сухому этому дереву,
> Не бувать ему зелену.
> Тебе, Анна Ивановна,
> В красных девушках не бывать,
> Весёлых песен не певать,
> С нами, с подружками, не гулять!
>
> (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:159, no. 855)

> The maidenly *krásota* has gone
> To the green meadows,
> To the forest thickets,
> It has grafted itself
> To a dead tree.
> This tree will not be green,
> And you, Anna Ivanovna,
> Will not be a maiden,
> Will not sing joyful songs,
> Will not play with us, your friends!

In some songs, the bride looks for a place to put her *krásota*, a place where it would turn into flowers (Potanina et al. 2002:132). Yet nothing will save her *krásota*—it is taken to a beautiful meadow, only to be destroyed by grass-cutters:

> “Да унесу я дивью красоту,
> Да во чисто поле, на травинку,
> Да под кусточек ракитовый,
> Да под цветочек лазоревый!”
> Да тут и шли сенокоснички, ↳
> Да мужики деревенские,
> Да подкосили девью красоту,
> Да подкосили и подрезали,
> Да матушку дивью красоту!
>
> (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:188, no. 904)

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> “I will take my maidenly *krásota*
> To the open field, to a blade of grass,
> And put it under a bush of broom,
> And under a sky-blue flower.”
> But then some hay-cutters were passing by,
> Peasants from a village,
> They mowed the maidenly *krásota*,
> They mowed it and they cut it,
> The mother, the maidenly *krásota*!

The *krásota* is often personified and voiced by the bride’s friends as a chorus or actually impersonated by one of them (Potanina et al. 2002:127), being variously depicted as offended or abandoned by the bride, crying, and begging to be picked up (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:187, no. 902).

In regions where a visit to the bathhouse was practiced, this is often the moment when the *krásota* is lost. In a lament from Mezen', the bride says she washed off her maidenly *krásota* and asks her sister to fetch it from the bathhouse; but the sister opens the door too wide, and the *krásota* escapes. It flies into the "wide field," perches on top of an aspen, and "howls like an animal, and whistles like a nightingale." Still lamenting, the bride asks her brother to cut down the aspen and retrieve her *krásota*, to which the brother responds, in everyday speech, "I went, but there was nothing there, I missed it, that's it. It flew away! A maiden's *krásota* is not coming back, no way!" (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:143, no. 13).

In parts of Siberia, the removal of the bride's *krásota* (symbolized by her wreath and ribbons) took the form of a dramatic act with several family members taking off some part of it. For each participant, the bride's friends would sing a request, in her voice, to take off her *krásota* because не приладилась по старому, не приладилась по прежнему ("it does not sit as it used to") (Potanina et al. 2002:126).

The equation of the bride's *krásota* and her headdress is common, and her separation from peers is often expressed in terms of hair, as in the following example, which is also typical in depicting the bride as the only sad one in a crowd of joyful maidens:

> Из саду, сада,
> Из сада-вишенья
> Там и шли-пришли
> Весёлых девушек толпа.
> Они все девушки,
> Они все красныя,
> p. 38 Да все весёлыя идуть! ↳
> Буйны головы у их учёсаны,
> Косы русые у их уплётены.
> Ленты алые да в косах ввязаны,
> Шёлковым платком они повязаны.
> Только одна Леночка
> Невесёлая идет.
> Буйная голова у ней не учёсана,
> Русая коса у ей не уплётена,
> Лента алая в косы не вплётена,
> Шёлковым платком не подвязана.
>
> (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:181, no. 889)

> From the orchard, orchard,
> From the orchard, the cherry orchard
> There was coming, arriving
> A crowd of joyful maidens.
> They are all maidens,
> They are all pretty,
> They are all joyful as they walk along!
> Their luxuriant hair is combed,
> Their blond braids are made,
> Their silk ribbons are braided in,
> They are covered with silk shawls.
> Lenochka alone
> Is sad as she walks along.
> Her luxuriant hair is not combed,

> Her blond braid is not made,
> Her red ribbon is not braided in,
> Nor tied with a silk shawl.

The head of a maiden is often described by the adjective *buĭnyĭ* (“tempestuous”), applied also to epic heroes and referring to willful thoughts as well as hair (Dal’ 1981: under *buĭnyĭ*). The luxurious and brightly decorated hair of a young woman is an expression of her “potential energy,” her burgeoning but as yet unspent fertility, and her *volîa* (“freedom”)—qualities lost in marriage.

When the bride’s braid was made for the last time, it was often made especially tightly and with knotted ribbons. In songs, the bride asks her helpers to make it in such a way that the groom’s agent, *svakha* or godmother, will not undo it; for example, she may ask her mother to put knives and sabers into her braid:

> Заплети-ко кормилица
> Ты в мою русу косу
> Два ножа, да два булатные,
> Две сабельки острые,
> p. 39 Две иголочки колючие! (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:135, no. 755) ↳
>
> Braid, mother,
> Into my long braid,
> Two knives, two damask knives,
> And two sharp sabers,
> And two prickly needles!

Once undone, the braid is divided into two (or more) parts, which were usually wound around the bride’s head under her new headdress. The conventional cruelty of the “godmother” who “tears” the braid dramatizes the bride’s resistance and the dark vision of the groom’s family that often prevails before crowning:

> Приехали свашеньки немилосливы,
> Немилосливы.
> Стали её косаньку всю рвать-порывать,
> Всю рвать-порывать.
> Стали её русую на две разделять,
> На две разделять.
>
> (Potanina et al. 2002:299, no. 291)

> The pitiless *svakhi* arrived,
> The pitiless ones,
> They began to tear and rend the braid,
> To tear and rend,
> They began to divide it, the blond one, in two,
> To divide it in two.

Violence, Hunt, and the White Swan

The sexuality and violence implicit in the image of the torn braid are persistent themes in wedding songs. In an image that echoes torn hair, the bride is depicted as a bird whose feathers are pulled out. In a song recorded in Arkhangel'sk, the falcon finds a mate, but she asks to be released, to return to her own "warm nest." The falcon responds:

> Я тогда тебя спущу, ой рано рано да
> Крылья-перья ощиплю, ой рано рано да
> Право крылышко уломлю, ой рано рано да.[4]
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:114, no. 375)

> Here's when I'll let you go—oh, early, early, yes
> Once I pluck your wings and feathers—oh, early, early, yes
> Once I break your right wing—oh, early, early, yes.

p. 40 In a song from the Kursk region, the bride is a "sparrow-cuckoo" who begs the falcon to let her go *sy vorobkami popyrkhat'* ("to flutter about with other sparrows"), but he responds that he will let her go only once he plucks out her крылья-перышки ("wings and feathers") (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:114, no. 376). In a song from the Sevskii district, it is a swan that has her wing broken (Slavianina 1978:59, no.99). The story then repeats on the human plane, with the bride's undone braid (*kosatku raspleli*) corresponding to the broken wing.

The bride can be a sparrow or cuckoo, a dove, or a jackdaw, while the groom is often the nightingale or falcon. Songs about the nightingale looking for his cuckoo are especially widespread to the south of Moscow. Most often, however, the bride is a *belaîa lebëdushka* ("white she-swan"), presumably because swans are especially associated with abundance and fertility (Barber 2013:181–183). In a group lament from Mezen', the bride is the only wounded swan in the flock:

> Как во стаде да лебединому
> Есть одна только лебедь подстрелена,
> Как во кругу, роду девьем
> Красна девушка есть запоручена.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:193, no. 67)

> In the flock of swans,
> there is one swan who is shot,
> In the circle, in the family of maidens,
> There is one maiden beauty betrothed.

In their laments, the brides sometimes sing about being unable to walk up the stairs or to see clearly, as if they were bodily hampered in their altered state, physically unable to run and dance with the other girls, like a wounded swan who cannot fly with the others (Balashov et al. 1985:36; Kuznetsova 1993:79–81). Separated from her flock, the swan-bride finds herself in a flock of geese, who begin to peck at her, a metaphor for her change of family.

> Отставала да лебедь белая,
> Как што от стада да лебединово,
> Дак приставала да лебедь белая
> Ко стаду—серым гусям.

(Balashov et al. 1985:243)

A white swan fell behind,
Separated from the swan flock,
A white swan joined
A flock—of gray geese.

In a widespread folk tale, "The Swan Maiden" (ATU 400, "The Man on a Quest for His Lost Wife"), swan-maidens dance on the shores of a lake and are spied by a hunter. He steals the feathers or dress of one of them,
p. 41 and she becomes his wife but eventually ↳ regains her dress and flies away (Barber 2013:13–27, 202–207; Hatto 1961:331–333). These swan-women are allied with other dancing groups of girls in nature—the *vily*, *rusalki*, and other "nymphs." These "dancing goddesses," to use Barber's term, are figures of fertility and have many points of contact with the bride, herself such a figure. A belief that the brides who died before consummating their marriages became *rusalki* or *samodivy* was widespread (Gura 2012:677). The swan and hunter meet again in wedding songs but with a different outcome. In Mezen', when the party of the groom arrives at the bride's house, they are told that she has disappeared. One of the excuses given is the following:

Она ранним утром вышла на взвоз,
Обвернулась белой лебедью
И улетела по поднебесью.
Вот вы там, надь, дак ей и ловите.

(Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:279, no. 538)

Early in the morning she came out to the porch,
Turned into a swan,
And flew away in the sky.
So, go catch her there.

Sometimes, the bride also turns into a pike, another egg-laying creature associated with fertility. But the bride, of course, will not escape her wedding; and in the dialogue from Mezen', the groomsmen respond:

У нашего князя молодого Степана Матвеевича
Есть собаки порато гонкие,
Охотники ловкие,
Ружья наши шибко меткие,
И мы, как об этом узнали,
И сразу же её догнали.
И не стреляли, не ранили
И в полной сохранности сюда ей доставили.
И здесь она находится.

(Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:280, no. 538)

Our prince young Stepan, son of Matvei,
Has very swift dogs,
Agile hunters,
And our guns have very good aim.
As soon as we learned about it [that the bride turned into a swan]
We caught up with her right away.
We did not shoot or wound her,

> But brought her here completely safe and sound,
> And that's where she is.

The groom himself is frequently a hunter, while the bride is his prey. He might be urged to "hunt the marten"
p. 42 (an animal standing for the bride) (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:252, ↳ no. 128), or his party might be on the trail of a *kunitsa-lisitsa* ("marten-fox") (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:272, no. 535). Often, the instrument of the groom's hunt is the unmistakably sexual arrow, just as it is in the folk tale of the Frog Princess (Afanasiev 1855–1864:no. 267–269). In a song from the region of Onega, the groom is described in a near-epic way as a young hero sailing on a ship. He walks on deck and combs his curls so that they spread down his white neck. Then he takes out his bow and aims his arrow with the following prayer:

> Уж ты стрелка, ты стрелка моя, да,
> Да калёна да муравлёная да,
> Полети, моя калёная стрела да,
> Высоко вверх под облако,
> Да далёко во чисто полё да,
> Застрели, моя калёная стрела да,
> Черна ворона под тучею,
> Ясна сокола во полуволоку,
> Да белу лебедь на перелети да,
> Серу утицу на заводи да,
> Красну девицу в высоком терему да
> Да Анну-от Ивановну.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:342)

> My arrow, my arrow,
> My tempered, slender arrow,
> Fly, my tempered arrow,
> High up under a cloud,
> Far away into the open field,
> Hit, my tempered arrow,
> A black raven under a dark cloud,
> A bright falcon under a light cloud,
> A white swan in flight,
> A grey duck on water,
> A pretty maiden in her high bower,
> Anna Ivanovna.

The bride asks him not to shoot, and the groom dismounts from his horse (the boat being, apparently, forgotten), lowers his arrow, and gets congratulated. In some songs, he does let the arrow fly—and in all cases, he gets the bride.

Water

Water birds, boats, and riverbanks are elements of another theme in wedding lyric, that of water, and especially rivers with their vivifying powers. The bride and groom meet by the water, where he waters his horse and she
p. 43 washes clothes (Kulagina and Ivanov ↳ 2000:311, no. 182), and riverbanks are the favorite haunts of the maidens. Whatever the local river may be, in wedding songs it is often the mythologized "Danube," the river of maidenhood and marriage (Ivanov and Toporov 1995:172) or else "Jordan" (Fedorova 1997:3.2). Fedorova describes an old custom of choosing the brides "by the water": on a day in January, young women, dressed in their best, would arrive in sleighs at the river and line up "by the Jordan," to be seen by potential grooms and matchmakers.

Wind and water also mark the manner of the bride's transition to her new life (Gura 2012:638–645). The morning of the crowning day often features songs about black clouds and storms that fell forests and disturb lakes, a metaphor for the force that compels the bride (Yamaguchi 2020). It is often this storm that separates the one swan from her flock (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:338, no. 211), while the arrival of the groom's party is described as wind:

> Не было ветру—да ветры дунули, да ветры дунули, эх,
> Не было гостей—гости наехали, гости наехали, да.
>
> (Potanina et al. 2002:241, no. 222)

> There was no wind—and then the wind picked up, then the wind picked up, eh,
> There were no guests—and then the guests arrived, then the guests arrived, yes.

In harmony with this mood, the bride reports a terrifying dream when she is woken up by her mother on the crowning day, the content of the dream being as traditional as its occurrence and often involving fast rivers or floods:

> И приснился мне, родна матушка, страшный сон:
> Речка быстрая и в этой речке быстрой
> Я купалася,
> Предо мною, родна матушка,
> Сильная волна колыхалася,
> А я, родна матушка,
> Её напугалася.
>
> (Koskina 1997:235, no. 42)

> And I saw, dear mother, a terrifying dream:
> A swift river, and in that swift river
> I was bathing,
> In front of me, dear mother,
> A big wave rose up,
> And I, dear mother,
> Was afraid of it.

In a lament from the Povetluzhie, the bride, carried away by water, tries in vain to hold on to a "white birch tree" and, at last, grasps two plants that are painful to touch—the cutting sedge and the prickly shepita. The white birch, the last verses explain, is her mother, the sedge her future mother-in-law, and the shepita her future father-in-law (Lobanov et al. 1998:111).

p. 44 In other songs of the crowning morning, the mother calls out to her daughter to return because she has forgotten her “golden keys.” The bride responds that she will not return; it is not her keys but her maidenhood that she has forgotten:

> Позабыла я, матушка,
> Всю волюшку батюшкину
> И всю негу матушкину,
> Всю красу свою девичью
>
> (Snegirev 1839:175, no. 9)

> I forgot, my mother,
> All the freedom of my father,
> All the tender care of my mother,
> All my own maidenly beauty.

The Work of the Bride

Neither the *krásota* nor “the keys” exhausts the list of the bride’s losses: the songs speak also about the loss of her handiwork. The bride’s peers are still filling up their wedding chests, sewing shirts and embroidering the towels they will distribute as gifts; but the bride’s chest is now being emptied. Near Sevsk, the two families would gather on the eve of crowning and exchange gifts. One of the songs sung on this occasion was the following:

> Плакала Маринушка,
> Плакала Гавриловна,
> К сундуку привпадала,
> К сундуку привпадала:
> —Я не год не два пряла,
> Я не год не два пряла,
> Не неделюшку ткала,
> Не неделюшку ткала,
> Не лето белила,
> Не лето белила,
> А за час раздарила.
>
> (Slavianina 1978:32, no. 34)

> Marinushka was crying,
> Gavriolvna was crying,
> She was falling on her chest,
> She was falling on her chest:
> —I spun not for one year only, not for two
> I spun not for one year only, not for two
> p. 45 I wove not for one week only ↳
> I wove not for one week only,
> I bleached not for one summer only,
> I bleached not for one summer only,
> But I gave it all away in one hour.

There are also songs about her family's loss of the bride as a worker. In a song about two fathers, the father of the bride complains: she will no longer be there to help in the fields or to clean the house or to honor her parents; the father of the groom rejoices: now it is he who will reap these benefits (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:358–360, no. 232, 233).

The Bride and the Two Families

The undoing of the braid was often also the moment for the bride to receive blessings from her family, and, at this point especially, the completeness of the family seems to have a magical significance, a prediction, perhaps, of future good fortune. An orphan bride was a special case, and for her there were separate "orphan" songs, in which she often asks a relative to ring the big church bell and to wake up her parents:

> Не расступится ли мать сыра земля?
> Не расколется ли дубова доска?
> Не услышит ли родна маменька?
> Не придёт ли благословить меня?
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:397, no. 271)

> Perhaps the dank earth will part for my mother?
> Perhaps the oak board [of the coffin] will split?
> Perhaps my dear mother will hear me?
> Perhaps she will come to bless me?

Sometimes orphan brides would go to the cemetery to perform such songs (Teplova 2017).

At this point in the wedding, the songs begin to persuade the bride to accept her fate. Prior to this moment, the bride's future in-laws appear in her songs as strange, foreign, and harsh, her future life as unending work, poverty, and oppression (Balashov et al. 1985:51–52). But eventually the bride must acquiesce, and the songs speak of her "reasonableness" and give her advice on how to live in the "foreign land" of her future husband:

> Ты не плачь-ка, наша умница,
> Не тужи, наша разумница,
> Мы тебя ведь не в полон даём,
> Мы тебя ведь замуж выдаём.
> p. 46 Брат сестрицу уговаривал, ↳
> Брат сестричушке наказывал:
> —Ты сестрицюшка родимая
> Туды выйти надо навеки,
> Жить-то надо там умеючи,
> Носить злата там, не снашивать,
> Терпеть горя, не рассказывать.
>
> (Kuznetsova and Loginov 2001:221)

> Do not cry, our sensible one,
> Do not cry, our intelligent one,
> We are not giving you away into captivity,
> We are giving you away in marriage.
> The brother was persuading his sister,

> The brother was instructing his sister:
> —My dear sister,
> You have to go there forever,
> You have to know how to live there,
> There you have to wear gold and never wear it out,
> You have to tolerate grief and never tell it.

Such songs about brotherly persuasion often end with the bride's objections, such as this one, in which the bride paints a dire picture of her future life:

> Ведь мне будет настояться
> У жернова, у ступы-ти,
> Вот поганого корыта,
> Ведь не будет допроситься
> Рабодатного кусочка.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:431, no. 304)

> I am sure I'll get my fill of standing
> by the mill or by the mortar
> or by the refuse trough.
> I am sure I'll keep asking in vain
> for a piece of bread for all my work.
> Such grim visions are sometimes expressed in song even during the journey to the groom's house.

Just as there is only one possible outcome to the bride's resistance in the wedding script, so there is only one way for the "foolish white swan" to become "reasonable" and "intelligent"—to accept her fate without complaint (Chistova and Chistov 1997:302.38; Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:105). A song about how the bride who "was sitting tallest of all, bent her head lowest of all" to think about marriage occurs in several regions:

> Сама она садилася—была выше всех,
> Склонила головушку—стала ниже всех. ↳
> —Подумайте, девочки, подумайте мне: (twice)
> Как же мине быть, как замуж идти?[5]
>
> (Potanina et al. 2002:93, no. 40)

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> She sat down—she was taller than all,
> She bent her head—she became lower than all.
> —Think, girls, think for me: (twice)
> What should I do, how should I marry?

The song concludes with the bride's decision to call her parents-in-law "mother" and "father."

"Do not give me away" is perhaps the most dominant theme in the laments before crowning. The following song, which enacts a dialogue between a daughter and her father, exists in many variants, often with the mother rather than the father as the bride's addressee:

> —Тятенька родимый, тятенька родимый,
> Колокольчики звенят, да колокольчики звенят.
> —Мила моя дочь, да мила моя дочь, да

> Не убойся—не отдам, да не убойся—не отдам.
> —Тятенька родимый, тятенька родимый,
> Женихи-то у ворот, да женихи-то у ворот
> —Мила моя дочь, да мила моя дочь, да
> Не убойся—не отдам, да не убойся—не отдам.
>
> (Potanina et al. 2002:182 no. 151)

> —Dear daddy, dear daddy,
> The bells are ringing, the bells are ringing!
> —My dear daughter, my dear daughter,
> Don't fear—I will not give you away, don't fear—I will not give you away.
> —Dear daddy, dear daddy,
> But the groom's party is at the gates, the groom's party is at the gates!
> —My dear daughter, my dear daughter,
> Don't fear—I will not give you away, don't fear—I will not give you away.

In this way, the song continues step by step, with the groom opening the door, entering the house, and finally taking the bride by the hand, at which point the father says:

> —Мила моя дочь, да мила моя дочь, да
> Теперь воля не моя, да воля Сашина
>
> —My dear daughter, my dear daughter,
> Now it's not my will, it's Sasha's [the groom's] will.

The sudden reversal of this song is iconic and matches the reversal at the core of the wedding, which is often
p. 48 expressed by paradoxical wording, as in the song about a falcon ↳ summoning a dove from her "green orchard"—she does not want to go, but then she just does.

> Она не хотела, она не хотела, да,
> Вот и за им полетела, да.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:342, no. 214)

> She did not want to, she did not want to,
> And so she flew with him.

The Crowning and the Songs of the Groom

The day of the crowning is one of the occasions for songs claiming that only the groom can do something at which everyone else fails and that is why he gets the bride. It is the conceit of the wedding that the bride is the best of the maidens—the most beautiful, the best singer, and the leader (Balashov et al. 1985:226)—and when they lose her it is as if a tree is losing not just a branch but its very top:

> Да на тебе ли, ёлка-сосенка,
> Да много сучьев, много отраслей,
> Да одного сучочка нетутко,
> Да что сучка, самой вершиночки.
>
> (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:194)

> You, our fir-tree-pine,
> Have many branches, many twigs,
> But one branch is missing,
> And not even just a branch, the very top.

Songs about the groom participate in the same system of metaphors and follow the same logic, only here the inaccessibility of the bride is transformed into an exceptional quality of the groom, who alone can find or catch or save her. In a song from Pomorye, the bride is hiding behind exactly the kind of tree that elsewhere stands for the bride—a green, "curly," and flourishing tree atop a tall mountain. She boasts that no one will find her, but the groom hears her and promises:

> Я один тебя повысмотрю,
> Я повысмотрю, повыгляжу.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:310, no. 180)

> I alone will spy you,
> I will spy you and notice you.

p. 49 In a song from Kaluga, the bride is unable to cross a river, standing on a "white stone," crying, and looking at the "steep banks." Her father does not have enough pity to help her, nor does her mother, but the groom does.

> У Ванюшки жалости побольше,
> Он снял меня с камушка с белого.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:51, no. 330)

> Vanyushka had more pity,
> He picked me off the white stone.

In a song from the vicinity of Sevsk, the bride is weaving and will not come out to the guests. Her father asks her, then her mother, and she sets her conditions, but still does not come:

> Сметайте дворы—я пойду,
> Стелите ковры—я сяду,
> Наливайте чару—я выпью.
> Сметали дворы—не пошла,
> Стелили ковры—не села.
> Наливали чару—не пила.
>
> (Slavianina 1978:77–78, no. 139)

> Sweep the yard—and I will come,
> Spread the carpets—and I will sit down,
> Fill my cup—and I will drink it.
> They swept the yard—she did not come,
> They spread the carpets—she did not sit down,
> They poured her cup—she did not drink.

Finally, the groom asks her, and she comes out. These songs dramatize the bride's resistance but also shift the focus from her "unfreedom" to the suitability of the groom and the willingness of the bride to come to him.

The Journey and the Feast

As the bride's momentous departure approaches, the mood of the wedding shifts. The laments decrease and finally cease, replaced by songs of praise. The transition is often a gradual one. In the Kokshen'ga Basin, for example, the bride would still lament as she was led out by her father for the last time. She had to turn back three times—to say goodbye to her "green orchard," to "part with her *krásota*," or "because she forgot her
p. 50 friends"; but once the father hands her over to the groom, saying, "I have given my daughter to you," ↳ a decisive break occurs in the mood: the maidens gradually switch to songs of praise, and, once this happens, the bride's laments also cease (Balashov et al. 1985:219). Balashov and colleagues describe the transition: "For some time these two elements (the laments and the praise-songs) struggle with each other, overlapping in a peculiar way, and then the joyful element wins over: soon it is time for the crowning" (1985:220). From now on, joyful songs overtake the wedding, and themes that so far were sung primarily on the groom's territory begin to dominate. In some regions, this stage of the wedding is full of jokes and humorous teasing. Near Sevsk, for example, the table was first occupied by a fake bride, who was eventually rejected by the groom's party. Then the girls, here called *igritsy* ("players"), sang insulting little songs about the groomsman and his party (Slavianina 1978:83, no. 153), who responded in kind. The main agents on both sides would be subjected to personal mockery (the groomsman has a frog on his nose, the *svakha*'s cap is moving because of lice underneath, etc.). One frequent caricature is that someone is extremely big and heavy—the benches groan underneath them, and the *svakha* is so heavy that seven horses cannot pull her (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:61–62, no. 337). Eventually, the groomsman would suggest reconciliation, offer wine and money to the girls, and they would cede the table.

The actual journey to the groom's house was seen as the most dangerous and precarious moment of the wedding, and precautions were taken (the ground swept for the bride to walk on, salt placed in various places, and needles stuck in the hem of her dress). There are tales about whole wedding companies turned into animals, bears, or wolves (Balashov et al. 1985:289). In song, the bride's mother describes her daughter's journey as going "beyond the tall mountains, beyond the swift rivers, beyond the dark forests."[6] Some spell-like songs ask the horse not to stumble or ask the "noblemen" to be careful on the way (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:266, no. 519, 520; Kolpakova 1973:141, no. 273). Sometimes, choral songs were sung on the way, for example, ones about the bride walking in a meadow and coming across a smithy where her golden ring is being made (Slavianina 1978:53–53, no. 81).

The arrival of the bride and the festive meal at the groom's house were events full of praise: in Zaonezhye, this meal was called *khvalenie* ("praise") (Kuznetsova and Loginov 2001:236). The father-in-law would "open" the bride—pick up her shawl and three times circle the heads of the newlyweds with it. At this moment, the *svakha* exclaims, *khvalite moloduîu!* ("Praise the young (wife)!"), and everyone shouts, *khorosha, khorosha molodaîa!* ("Fair, fair is the young wife!") (Balashov et al. 1985:295). Fertility magic is abundant at this stage—sitting on furs, being showered with grain and hops, the bride being given a child to hold in her lap, etc.—and the songs also display the exuberant imagery of fertility and productivity. The ungrown grass and trampled flowers of the bride's laments are replaced by flourishing grapes, red apples, and ripe berries. From the beginning, "grape trees," and roses are mentioned in the groom's songs, but now they come to dominate. The following song is typical:

> Виноград в саду цветет,
> Виноград в саду цветет,
> p. 51 А ягода, а ягода созревает, ↳
> А ягода, а ягода созревает.
> Виноград-то—Иван сударь,
> Виноград-то—Иван сударь,
> А ягода, а ягода—свет Прасковья его,

> А ягода, а ягода—свет Прасковья его.
>
> (Kolpakova 1973:158, no. 312)

> A grapevine blooms in the orchard
> A grapevine blooms in the orchard
> And a berry, a berry ripens
> And a berry, a berry ripens.
> The grapevine is master Ivan
> The grapevine is master Ivan,
> And the berry, and the berry—his Praskovia,
> And the berry, and the berry—his Praskovia.

Vinogradië krasno-zelënoe ("Red–green grapevine") is a frequent refrain in such songs, as is *roza, roza, roza—alye tsvety* ("rose, rose, rose—red flowers") or *sladko îablochko nalivchato* ("sweet apple full of juice") (Kolpakova 1973:158, no. 313).

Some of the themes familiar from the bride's songs and laments persist throughout but appear in happier variations. A song that could be sung almost at any point during the wedding features familiar themes: the bride washes clothes in a river, the groom walks on the banks, he aims his arrow at a swan:

> Он и хоча бить бела лебедя на воде,
> Он и хоча взять вот Шурочку за себе.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:104, no. 366)

> And he wants to hit the white swan on the water,
> And he wants to take Shurochka to be his wife.

In this song, however, there are no broken wings, lonely swans, or pecking geese. Instead, at the end we have a happy pair:

> Да у лебедя лебёдушка под крылом,
> Да у Колечки вот Шурочка под бочком
>
> A he-swan has a she-swan under his wing,
> Kolechka has Shurochka under his side.

Even "green orchard" appears in a new guise. In one of the плясовые ("dancing") songs for the concluding feast, the young wife wakes up her husband and tells him that his "raven horse" broke free and got into his green orchard:

> Заскочил конь во зелёный сад,
> В сад со калиной, со малиной,
> С чёрной ягодой смородиною. (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:128, no. 380; cf. 379, 381, 382) ↳
>
> The horse jumped into the green orchard,
> The orchard with viburnum and raspberries,
> With black currant berries.

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This orchard is filled not with pretty flowers but with ripe berries, and when the horse tramples the garden, no tears are shed. Instead, the young husband consoles his bride—they'll grow a green orchard together:

> Не печалься, красна девица душа,
> Наживём с тобой зелёный сад
>
> Don't be sad, pretty maiden, my soul:
> You and I will grow a green orchard.

Songs about the groom come to the fore now, and in them he rides up to the bride on his "raven-colored" horse, whip in hand. In one song, the groom is going to church: he puts on his boots, washes his face, puts on a marten fur coat and a black hat, "crosses himself as it is written, bows in a learned way" (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:83, no. 354). His most impressive attribute—most frequently mentioned in all regions—are his curls, no doubt a sign of his youthful virility, corresponding to the bride's "tempestuous" hair. His curls are usually gold:

> На главе-то золоты кудри свиваютсе,
> В три ряды его кудри да завиваютсе.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:83, no. 354)

> On his head the golden curls are rolling
> His curls are curling three rows deep.

All the "noblemen" wonder whether perhaps such a brave and handsome youth has the moon for his father and the dawn for his mother, a typical praise for the groom:

> Не светёл ли месяц-батюшко взосеял молодца?
> Не заря ли тебя да спородила молодца?
>
> Was it perhaps the bright father-moon that sired such a lad?
> Was it perhaps dawn that gave birth to you, such a lad?

The groom responds by naming his father and mother and adds that it was his sister that curled his hair.

Hair is so important in the lexicon of the wedding that sometimes it can stand metonymically for the newlyweds, as in the following song from Zaonezhye, performed after the bride's hair was done up in the fashion of a married woman. The groom puts his hand on the bride's hair, turns the bride around three times, and then kisses her as the maidens sing:

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> Жёлтые кудри за стол пошли,
> за стол пошли
> Русую косаньку вслед повели,
> ой, вслед повели.
>
> (Kuznetsova and Loginov 2001:231, no. 151)

> Yellow curls went to the table,
> went to the table
> They led the blond braid after them,
> oi, after them.

The symmetry of this song belies a difference between the hair of the bride and that of the groom: nothing happens to the groom's curls; they are as golden and flowery as ever at the concluding feast, in contrast to the bride's maidenly hair, which is celebrated and then undone.

The loss of the bride's *krásota*, however, is now firmly in the past. In songs, she chooses the groom, waits for him, and desires him (Kolpakova 1973:145, no. 284). A typical example is a much-varied song beginning with the question *Kto u nas khoroshiĭ, kto u nas prigozhiĭ?* ("Who here is good, who here is handsome?"). The answer is, of course, the groom, depicted as mounting his horse and arriving at the bride's bower to be welcomed by her:

> Долго я тебя ждала,
> Долго дожидала,
> Со скуки пропадала,
> Со скуки пропадала да,
> С горя помирала.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:90, no. 359)

> How long I waited for you,
> how long I waited,
> I was perishing from boredom,
> Perishing from boredom, yes,
> Dying of grief.

The groom, for his part, is also free and chooses for himself the best bride among many:

> Перебор, перебор,
> Часты звёздушки,
> Перебрал, перебрал,
> Часты звёздочки!
> Выбрал себе, выбрал себе
> Да заряночку!
> Маленьку, маленьку,
> Да ясненьку! (Shapovalova and Lavrentieva 1985:280, no. 1292) ↳
>
> p. 54
>
> Looking through, looking through
> The countless stars,
> He chose among, he chose among,
> The countless stars!
> He chose for himself, he chose for himself
> The dawn star!
> A little one, a little one,
> But a bright one!

Songs of praise celebrate the bride's beauty and ornate dress (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:93, no. 361) but also the future work she will do for her new family. The mother of the groom is depicted rejoicing at the help she will get:

> А взрадовалась Иванова матушка: А теперь у меня и топлёная горенка,
> А теперь у меня и метёные сенюшки.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:103, no. 365)

> Ivan's mother rejoiced:
> Now my main room is warm,

> Now my entrance way is swept.

The idea that the groom's family acquires another daughter is often expressed though the contrast between the two children—their first child is born (*Pervoe ditë rozhënoe*), but their second child—the bride—is fate-given (*A vtoroe suzhënoe*) (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:141, no. 385). A widespread song contrasts the "three griefs" of the bride's mother and the "three joys" of the groom's mother. The former cries when she gives birth to her daughter, brings her up, and gives her away in marriage. The latter rejoices when she gives birth to her son, brings him up, and sees him married (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:146, no. 390).

It was not all praise for the bride, however. If the groom received his fair share of mockery earlier, now it is the bride's turn. Blame songs for the bride are not as frequent as those for the groom and especially for his party, the main butt of attacks; but when she is blamed the themes of her songs are transmogrified. Instead of lyrical laments about being too young, now it is the mother of the groom who complains:

> Ты куда, дитя, ездило?
> Ты кого, дитя, привезло?
> Она худым да худёшенька,
> [Она] малым да малёшенька.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:209, no. 445)

> Where did you go, child?
> Whom did you bring, child?
> She is so thin,
> She is so small.

At issue is the bride's ability to work. Most often, however, the bride is blamed for her pride: she is гордёна
p. 55 ("the prideful one"), who refuses to go into the groom's house ↳ because it is not up to her standards—the rooms are dirty and dark, full of flies and mosquitoes. The bride's earlier fears of hardship and poverty are echoed in these songs, but now she gets little sympathy:

> Да гордёнушка гордлива,
> Да молодушка ломлива.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:208, no. 442)

> This prideful one is proud,
> This young wife is demanding.

These songs are a vivid reminder of the women's hardships since the remedy for the bride's pride is found at once, and it is a whip. A song from the region of Kaluga laconically states:

> На эти-то мухи—лиственой веник,
> На эту гордёну—шелковую плетку!
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:209, no. 444)

> For these flies—a broom with green leaves,
> For this proud one—a silken whip!

As with the groomsman earlier, blame for the bride can turn into praise, depending on her response. In a report from Vyatsk, as soon as the newlyweds entered the house people from the village would start to blame the

bride, comparing her body parts to various household implements (the technique often used on the groom's party). Then she would stand up and bow to the singers, and the song, to the same tune, would change:

> Учёная дитя, учёная дитя,
> Она выучена, она выучена, ой,
> Выучена, выучена,
> В люди вывезена, в люди вывезена, ой
> Умиет она, умиет она
> На резвые ножки встать, на резвые ножки встать, ой
> Умиет она, умиет она
> Поклон воздать, да поклон воздать.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2001:211–212, no. 446)

> She is an educated child, an educated child,
> She is well brought up, she is well brought up,
> Well brought up, well brought up
> She's been taken out, taken out to show the people, oy
> She knows how to, she knows how to
> Stand on her swift feet, stand on her swift feet, oy,
> She knows how to, she knows how to,
> Bow respectfully, bow respectfully.

The blame turns to praise, but it is clear what is expected of the bride: modesty, resignation, and hard work. Songs advising the bride to bow politely are very common (Slavianina 1978:232).

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Sexual Songs

Songs on either side of the nuptial night often have transparent sexual overtones, and sending the newlyweds off to bed was the prime occasion for obscene songs, plentiful in the wedding (Kolpakova 1928:157; Varagova 1995:150–151). In a song attested in numerous variations, the noblemen ride along and see a cunt atop a tall haystack (*shakshu na zarode*). They don't know how to get it down until the groom comes to the rescue, giving the familiar "top of the tree" and "only the groom" tropes a bawdy twist:

> Как мы будем доставати,
> доставати?
> Да вилами доставати, дак проколешь,
> дак проколешь,
> А граблями доставать—расцарапашь,
> расцарапашь,
> Да у нас ведь Сергей-то догадлив,
> да догадлив,
> Он ведь праву полу загибает,
> загибает,
> Толстый хер из штаны вытягает,
> вытягает,
> Да с зароду шакшу он снимает,
> да снимает.
>
> (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:302–303, no. 174)

> How will we get it,
> will we get it?
> If we get it with a pitchfork, we'll pierce it,
> we'll pierce it,
> If we get it with a rake, we'll scratch it,
> we'll scratch it.
> But our Sergei is quick thinker,
> yes, quick thinker,
> He lifts, he lifts the right flap of his coat,
> lifts it up,
> He takes out, he takes out his thick dick,
> takes it out,
> And he takes down the cunt from the haystack,
> yes, takes it down.

According to some reports, sexually explicit songs were sung by old women, who take on a disparaging role in other ways as well—for example, in songs about the bride's future work (Ivanova and Kliaus 1995:167).

The joking mood would often return the next morning, when the bride's party would come back to look for
p. 57 their "lost heifer," sometimes even with jesters in costume ↳ (*rîazhenye*) (Kulagina and Ivanov 2000:84–85; Kulagina 1995:174). Around Sevsk, songs similar to the ones above could be sung at festivities after the first night (Slavianina 1978:102–110). The newlyweds would usually visit the bride's family the next day (Balashov et al. 1985:298). The songs on that occasion, however, were already outside the wedding "libretto"—the "opera-vaudeville" was over.

Conclusion

This is a superficial picture: behind the generalizations and simplifications of this chapter lies an astonishing complexity of available material. A look at the laments, for example, of the White Sea region reveals subregions with different melodies and meters (Efimenkova 2008); and similar complexity is to be found in Siberia, where the songs of the bride and the groom were musically different and local traditions more distinct musically than in genre, plot, or themes (Potanina et al. 2002:39, 45). The music of the wedding song requires a separate chapter.

Questions remain about the antiquity and spread of this type of wedding. Many of its elements find parallels in ancient Greece, for example—including the laments of the bride, her interrupted weaving, trampled flowers, meeting by the river, girls dancing in groups in a flowering landscape, the inaccessible bride, humorous songs about the size of the wedding participants, the bride's luxurious hair, and the groom's tight curls. This points to the systemic and diachronic persistence of wedding poetics of similar magic and ritual logic across time and space.

The fieldwork on the Russian wedding contains a treasure trove of interviews with the singers, a glimpse into the ways people related to the traditional wedding. There is no ready-made category for describing what the bride does when she performs her laments. Is she acting? To some extent yes, since she is supposed to lament and cry even if she feels quite happy. As one respondent commented,

> Хоть пошла за любого, так людей-то стыдно—охота не охота, а реви!
>
> (Balashov et al. 1985:33)

> Although I married for love, still, you feel shame in front of people—whether you want to or not, you have to cry!

Is the bride expressing her personal emotions? This is also true, and many former brides recall the passion and sincerity of their laments and the emotional responses of their families. There are reports of the brides fainting from strain and emotion, of mothers "falling as if dead" at the sound of their daughters' laments (Kuznetsova and Loginov 2001:43), of a father so moved by his daughter's lament that he stopped leading her, announcing "I can't do this! Go on your own!" (Balashov et al. 1985:219). When the bride was forced to marry against her will, her resistance could be in earnest. As Shmelyova ↳ remarks, the bride's laments are "like monologues of the wedding's main actor" and express both her emotion and the wedding "script" (1980:111–112). The language of laments is traditional but fluid, the degree of play-acting and self-expression in each performance is unique. It would be facile to say that such performances are a mixture of the personal and the traditional: the two elements are never separated in the first place. The wedding follows a traditional scenario, and in it the bride plays the bride, acting her own self within the world of the wedding. Her words reflect both deep and more recent traditions of song, tale, and ritual, just as they reflect human life shaped by agriculture and, in particular, life in Russian villages of different times and places. In the case of solo laments, they reflect the creativity, personalities, and emotions of individual performers. None of this is easy to disentangle, but the possibilities for future study are immense.

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Notes

1. The Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) Tale-Type Index is an international catalogue of folk tales.
2. Translations here and subsequently are my own.
3. In the language of the wedding, the groom is always a *князь* ("prince"), the bride a princess, and the other participants *бояре* ("noblemen").
4. The refrain, translated here literally as "oh, early, early, yes," is, in effect, a musical feature.
5. Potanina et al. (2002:93, no. 40). The authors (p. 74) hypothesize that this song belonged to the ritual of *posad* "seating" (no longer practiced at the time of recording) in which the bride and the groom would be brought (seated) together.
6. See Gura (2012:672) on mountains in the wedding.

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