

Between Literature and Folklore: The Maiden without Hands

Vihra Baeva

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(Summary)

The article is focused on an internationally known plot type: the story of a maiden whose hands were cut off and miraculously restored. The author studies the variants of the motif and their symbolism in Bulgarian milieu, and suggests the hypothesis that it has originated as an element of archaic initiation rites. From there, it permeates the folk tale, where its symbolism refers to the heroine's passage from a maiden into a wife and mother. At a later stage, this motif is utilized in religious literature and acquires Christian interpretation. In the course of time, a series of borrowings and mutual influences take place in both directions. Thus, the Christian and the folkloric narratives share a common thesaurus of plots, motifs, images and symbols. These refer to an ancient archetypal basis, but preserve their ability to assimilate versatile meanings in different contexts.

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Vihra Baeva
Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies
with Ethnographic Museum
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Bl. 6 Acad. Georgi Bonchev St.
1113 Sofia, BULGARIA
vihra.baeva@iefem.bas.bg