

# The Role of the Game and the Festival in the Forming of Gender Stereotypes (On the Example of the Festive Culture of Spain)

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## Abstract

This paper considers the game aspect of the courtship rituals during holding the traditional spring and autumn holidays in Spain. The nature of the calendar holidays during this period had the link with the ancient rituals of fertility, that was considered in the classical paper of J. Frezer. The sense content of the May tree holiday was emphasized by the choice of the most beautiful girl and boy of the country. Swings were an important element of the party. Due to the interference of the court and folk cultures it took the image of the gallant courtship of the girl, the semantics of which were rethought, the sacral content of which was replaced by the game one. In this game the gender stereotypes were transmitted to the society. The installation of swings eventually spread over the whole country. Over the centuries this tradition was held in all the regions of Spain, though due to the second demographical transition it gradually lost its significance. The author comes to a conclusion that the vanishing of this ritual from the autochthonous culture was determined by the social processes, migrations and urbanization. The change of value dominants and ideological markers leads to the vanishing of the basic semantics of this ritual and the very party. Nowadays the relic of this tradition is kept in some villages and is recognized as a part of non-material heritage of Andalusia. This enables to execute the tradition transmission in a new form for the next generations.

**Keywords:** festive culture, gender, games, tradition, ritual, Spain.

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## Introduction

The game element as the element inherent to different kinds of human activity was emphasized by Heisinga. Homo ludens and homo festivus are different faces of celebrating subject. The game as a part of the ritual has a direct relationship with the activity of the folk theatre, with traditional holidays and their semantics. The game gradually squeezes out the sacral content of the party, takes the symbolic meaning and forms a special area, in which the execution of those or these rituals that are inherent to autochthonous cultures takes place. The formation of a special autochthonous matrix which is absorbed by the celebrating subjects and is transferred from one generation to another takes place.

## Methods and materials

The main method of conducting this study was the factor analysis of the field material collected by the author. For the system solving the tasks a series of historical sources, in particular, "The Treasure of Spanish Language" S. de Kovarrubias, was brought. Besides, the literature creatures of the Golden age epoch were analyzed ("A book of good love" of J. Ruis<sup>1</sup>, an earlier source, the comedies of Lope de Vega<sup>2</sup>, "Don Quixote" of M. de Servantes<sup>3</sup>, poems of L. de Gongora<sup>4</sup>, "The life of rascal named Don Publos" F. de Kevedo<sup>5</sup>, "Gusman de Alfarache" of M. Aleman<sup>6</sup>), of the XIX century (creatures of B Mas y Prat<sup>7</sup>, "The Street Madrid" of Gutierrez Solan<sup>8</sup>, the collection of songs and folk poetry) and of the XX century (creatures of A. Buero Vallejo<sup>9</sup>). From the common canvas of the creature those features that belong to the ritualism and that can supplement or clarify the details appeared in other sources were removed. For the systemic solvation of tasks the creatures of Spanish paintings devoted to special kinds of the party were attracted. One should emphasize a series of paintings of Fransisko de Goya devoted to the May tree party and other public events.

## Results

Within a context of studies of the archaic traditions kept for a long time in the agriculture area in Spain and having the Roman roots one should consider the May tree party that was widespread in many regions of Europe, Asia and America. J. Frezer connected the habit of planting near the house of beloved the tree or the bush with the ability of the tree spirit for fertility<sup>10</sup>. The customs connected with fertility were conducted in May across all Europe, and among them one can emphasize the rituals calling for rain. The expression *comoagua de mayo* (as the May water) in the meaning "coming by the way" still has a wide use in the Spanish language. Though at the heart of the rites held at the beginning of spring, the time of love, according to the expression of Caro Barokha, the interrelations between the young people having the matrimonial objectives took place.

The party inherited from the Romans has kept in its naming the name of goddess Maya, Mercury's daughter, to whom the celebrations were devoted. Among the researchers who were engaged in studying this party the view that in pre-Christian Europe the tree cult was very widespread took root, and in the Roman epoch it was connected with one of the gods of its pantheon, such as Maya, Mercury's daughter, both these phenomena were, in their turn connected with glorification of the spring. We should take into account this view. In many cities of Spain and Europe there is a custom in the last day of April and later to put a big tree or a column called May at the main square of the city. They are decorated with ribbons and dances are held round them. Sometimes the tree is replaced by the branches, also it has the romantic meaning when the young people put it near the house of their beloved. The tree is usually the only object for all the community, which is decorated by the flowers, ribbons and branches, at the top of it usually the food, scarves and other gifts are placed.

<sup>1</sup>Ruis J. Archpriest from Ita. The book of good love. Leningrad: Science, 1991. 422 p.

<sup>2</sup>Lope de Vega. Obras completas Madrid, 1939.

<sup>3</sup>Servantes Saavedra M. de, Don Quixote. In two volumes. Moscow, AST, 2003.

<sup>4</sup>Góngora L. de. En Poetas liricos de los siglos XVI y XVII, I, BAE, XXII, 1854.

<sup>5</sup>Kevedo y Viliegas F. de "The life of rascal named Don Publos" A picaresque novel. The library of the world literature. Moscow: fiction. 1975. 560 p.

<sup>6</sup>Aleman M. "Gusman de Alfarache" The State publishing house of fiction. Moscow. 1963.

<sup>7</sup>Mas y Prat Benito Las cruces historia, tradición y costumbres. La Ilustración española sup ·1Madrid 1881

<sup>8</sup>Gutiérrez Solana J. Madrid callejero. Ed Castalia. Madrid, 1995

<sup>9</sup>Buero Vallejo A. Hoy es fiesta. El tragaluz. Ed. Mariano de Paco. Cátedra Letras Hispánicas. 2011.296pp.

<sup>10</sup>Frezer J.J. The golden branch. Moscow. Terra, The book club, 2001, 528 p. pp. 166-170.

The tradition of choosing Maya and to put the May tree was widespread on all the territory of Spain and had a mass nature. In the XVII century it was deliberately described by Sebastian de Covarrubias: “the form of presentation which is done by the young men and girls, placing on the platform one young man and one girl, which mean a married couple, and this custom comes from the ancient time, because this month it was prohibited to get married, and as we would say today, it was closed for getting married”<sup>11</sup>. In this fragment one should pay attention to the notion about one of the most widespread superstitions connected with marriage. The period from 29 April to 28 May was associated among Romans with the evil ghosts, still May was the less popular month for marriages. Among the Slavic people the month May wasn't also accepted for getting married, which was reflected in the proverbs “One shouldn't get married in May. Otherwise all the century one should toil”. Or “I would be glad to get married, but May doesn't allow to do it”.

The first evidence on the existence of swings as the element of May parties we find in the works of Rodrigo Karo<sup>12</sup> and Sebastian de Covarrubias in the editions of the beginning of the XVII century. In “TheTreasureofSpanishLanguage” in thearticledevotedtothe swings he writes: «“Latine oscillum, oscillatio, pensilismotio; es una sogas fuerte, y doblada, que se echa sobre alguna viga del techo, y subiéndose en ella una persona, las demás la bambolean de una a otra parte, y en el Andalucía es juego común de las mozas. 2. y la que se columpia está tañendo un pandero y cantando. Es un juego muy antiguo, del cual hacen mención algunos autores, y en especial Julio Pólux<sup>13</sup>». (from the Latin oscillum, oscillation, pensilismotio, the hard rope folded in half which is tied to the balk on the ceiling, a human being is sitting on it, and others swing it from one side to another, in Andalusia it is an ordinary fun for the girls. 2. That girl that is swinging, beating the tambourine and singing. It is a very ancient fun, about which many authors are talking, especially Yuly Poluks).

The custom to swing on swings during the parties Maya hasn't such wide spread as the tradition to put the May tree. The swings as the attribute of may parties was widespread in Andalusia, Aragon, Rioxh and Castilia and Leon. This custom had the sacral sense still in the Ancient time. In the range of modifications, to which this ritual of the first gallantness was subjected to, the emergence of a special literature tradition, so-called verses for swings (coplas de columpio) came. R. MenendesPidalsupposed that this literature form came from the court area and was connected with the courtly tradition<sup>14</sup> preceding to it and then turned into the game. The text of these songs suggests on the century tradition, which had all its force before the beginning of the XX century and then because of the Civil War and then of the social processes of the last decades gradually vanishes. The verses for the swings could be author's (for example, there are several such creatures of F. Lope de Vega) and folk ones, the wide repertoire, collected in different times, allows us to see and to study the party ritual.

The swings in the Spanish version of spring courtship often was connected with the travelling to the other world and returning from it<sup>15</sup>. The walks, dances and noisy gathering gathered in other times the youngest men and women in the public places, where the supervision of elder people

<sup>11</sup>Covarrubias y Orozco S. de, Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española, ed. Martín de Riquer, Barcelona, 1943

<sup>12</sup>Rodrigo Caro, Días geniales o lúdicos, h.1626. Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1978. Vol. II, Diálogo VI, II (“Columpios y otras fiestas de mujeres”), pp. 189-197

<sup>13</sup>Op.cit. Covarrubias.

<sup>14</sup>Menéndez Pidal, R.Romancero Hispánico. Ed. Espasa-Calpe, S.A. Madrid. 1968.Tomo II. P. 385. Cap. XI “Como vive hoy el Romancero Oral”

<sup>15</sup>RuizM.J., FraileGilJ.M., Weich-ShahakS. Alvaivéndelcolumpio. DiputacióndeCádiz, 2008.p.23

wasn't so evident and where the allowed ability to look at each other and even to touch somebody lightly became the main objective. In this context the swings allowed all the elements for fast development of courtship: the throne to show oneself, the ropes, with which the young man could provide the girl who was swinging his physical force, some interval of freedom, or to say better, the allowance of that thing that was usually restricted and several verses to express those things that are usually not allowed.

The swings were tied to the special trees in the forest or in the field, sometimes to demonstrate the braveness and the spirit force they could be installed on the trees growing near the cliff<sup>16</sup>. In the villages the ritual described had no clearly set date in the calendar could be performed almost at all the folk parties. In several settlements of the Basque Country, Navarre and Aragon the swings were installed near the white poplars or other white trees, which were used in the love magic<sup>17</sup>.

By the second half of the XIX century the gallant custom of courtship of the woman at the swings connected with the May tree party was widespread in the south regions of Spain<sup>18</sup>. It has the extensive, as well as the intensive nature, that is the installation of swings was spread over other parties, including the Carnival. The diverse terminology connected with using swings. These terms are used also to denote verses, but in this case the denomination doesn't correlate with the denotation of games. So, in Cadis the songs will be called bamberas, and in Granada remerinos. All these things suggest that initially these terms didn't denote the same practice, though one can certainly argue that bamba and columpio eventually became to denote a game, keeping at the same time different meanings.

The swings described by Caro Baroja, installed in the city area on the grilles or logs were inherent for the Christmas or Carnival. For the May or November swings the things were other. In this case the swings were tied to the trees in the forest or in the field, sometimes to demonstrate the braveness and spirit force they could be installed on the trees growing near the cliff<sup>19</sup>. In the villages the ritual described hadn't clearly set date in the calendar and could be performed at almost every folk parties. In the country regions of Aragon in the XVII century during the May party in the neighborhood of the tree the swings were installed, at which the young men were swinging the girls and admired them. They performed the verses accompanied by the guitar<sup>20</sup>.

The ritual itself had a pronounced gender coloring. The song performed during this game was traditionally started by a man. The girl answered in an appropriate manner. Her behavior at the first verbal contact corresponded to the stereotype of a lady as a fortress to be conquered. Thus, the traditional and transmitted from generation to generation actions carried out during the courtship were emphasized.

The tradition of installation of swings and gallant ritual considered by us today has lost its actuality as the format of interrelation between the sexes and the very process of getting married changed. Though today in Ubrique, the settlement, where this tradition still is existing, the compliments are coming from the mouth of women (because they remember the verses), according to the memoirs of participants and the very texts of verses the glorification of swinging people was

<sup>16</sup>Ruiz M.J., Fraile Gil J.M., Weich-Shahak S. *Al vaivén del columpio*. Diputación de Cádiz, 2008. P.35

<sup>17</sup>The field material collected by the author. Saragosa 2009, Bilbao, 2017, Pamplona, 2018.

<sup>18</sup>Caro Baroja J. *El Carnaval*. Antropología Alianza Ed. 2006. Pp.61-63

<sup>19</sup>Ruiz M.J., Fraile Gil J.M., Weich-Shahak S. *Al vaivén del columpio*. Diputación de Cádiz, 2008. P.35

<sup>20</sup>Andolz, Rafael. *Diccionario Aragones*. Ed. Librería General. Zaragoza. 1977. P. 32

the business of men, and even the initiative in the song belonged to them, and the girls only answered them. That means that the gender factor played the major role, because the ritual was connected with the matchmaking. That part of the ritual which belonged to the compliments, maybe is very similar with the common corpus of the panispanic lyrics, and that is why less specific. In any case its abundance makes evident the primary theatrics, in which the swings visualize the altar and that girl that is swinging at them takes the place of sacral femininity and virginity. A woman is a paradigm of the most beautiful flower in the garden of willing, and being on the throne, her figure hyperbolizes, reaching identification with holiness or king dignity.

As our field materials suggest, in Ubrik, little settlement near Cadis today many witnesses of extinction of this tradition, which by the 1970-s accompanied two main parties of the May Christ and the Day of all the Saints, have left. Today the generation born in 1950-60-s is trying to transfer to new generations the knowledge of the songs and the manner of their performance that can vary from saeta to fandango. All the rituals point to the fact that a new form of organizing the labor, the difference of generations, emigration and the physical extinction of those who knew those songs led practically to the loss of this ritual. Besides, the symbolic representation of social relations, which was reflected in this ritual, lost its meaning and its function as a way of transfer of the information, the taboo to which was removed in the period of the sexual revolution. The swings were one of the forms of expression and realizing the emotions that were not censured. All the informants point the places, where the swings were tied in May, as well as the days, in which the swings from the ropes were installed in the field (at the Day of all the Saints or of the Saint Isidor).

In Benamaon (region Cadis) by the beginning of 2010-s the reminiscences of the November parties were alive, when the young and mature people were frying in the field and on the fire the chestnuts and acorns, and later installed the swings for entertainment and competition in agility.

Today the verses for the swings were recognized as a part of nonmaterial cultural heritage of Andalusia. This tradition having the romantic function, today cannot be incorporated in the structure of the young people's parties. One of the reasons can be named the influence of feminism and sexual revolution. In the Spanish society the trend of late marriages is prevailing, to which the long period of mutual coexistence with different partners, so-called serial monogamy is preceding. The ritual of courtship also is experiencing transformations.

In the modern period we can mention that in Spain the tradition of installation the May swings is keeping only in the city Ubrik in the province of Andalusia, though in it the elder generation takes part, because in the modern Spanish society the ritual of courtship experienced the significant changes. The gender roles are changing and now the women have an equal role as the men during the courtship. The gender aspect during the festivals and games is shifting to the gender equality. This process was accelerated during the last ten years and the results of it can be observed nowadays. The initiation of communication is possible for both sexes equally and is accepted as a social norm. Couplets, like swinging on a swing, can be performed by both genders, women and men, which allows us to talk about the existence of this ritual as a cultural heritage of Andalusia.

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