The Indo-European Tripartite Social Structure In Relation To Youth Initiation Rites

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The rites of passage made the subject of many studies of mythology, anthropology, social studies, and alike. The result of these researches revealed a persistent pattern consisting of three phases in the initiation rituals, identified by Arnold Van Gennep as follows: first, separation from a previous status, second, 'transition', the liminal rites of transformative actions within a symbolic boundary, and third, reentering the community into the new social status. The same tripartite structure of initiation rites is outlined by F. Graff (*Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals* 2003: 9) by using Theseus and Jason myths as examples: starting with the departure from home; followed by experience far from home; ending with introduction to sexuality and self-identity. The author concludes that the tripartite structure is a very basic narrative pattern, adding that Theseus' career served as a role model for the Greek young man, who after years of separation and military training received a shield and a spear, items symbolically signaling his entering into the new social position, leaving the status of a boy for that of an adult, the status of a warrior. A similar tripartite fundamental pattern of all initiation rituals is conveyed by Mircea Eliade when he describes the process beginning first with the torture at the hands of demons or spirits as masters of initiation, going through the ritual death in which the novice descends to hell or ascends to heaven, and ending with resurrection into a new mode of being (1958, 2005). The persistence of these patterns brings us to the Indo-European tripartite ideology posited by G. Dumezil, and latter extended by Emily Lyle and Kim McCone, reflecting the 'age-grades division' in human life: youth with power and vigor; maturity with fertility and production; and old age associated with the first class of priests, or kings (McCone 1986, Lyle 1997; 2001). To this Nick J. Allen added the fourth function, that of the other, outside or beyond (1999). Taking a step further, could the initiation process relate to the tripartite social structure, and can such approach bring new perspectives to the Indo-European comparanda?

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The tripartite social structure, generally understood as the partition of the archaic society into three main groups, the king/priest, the warrior and the producer, appears as an enduring *leit* motif in the Indo-European culture. By extrapolation, I entertain the possibility that the structural development visible in the initiation's three step process, separation from parents, inclusion in a clan or a group, and marriage (even though the archaic data is very narrow) could signal an interrelation with the social organization.

Analyzing the data from this perspective may bring to light certain initiation patterns associated with preparing the youth for specific roles in the community. For this purpose examples selected mainly from Romanian folklore will be divided into two categories: the descriptive as in myth / folktale, and the action as in ritual.

The material used for this discussion belongs to oral literature, the folk stories transmitted for centuries through a process that had to rely on known patterns necessary for memorization:

> The action pattern establishes a principle of synthesis which is *a priori* with respect to any specific tale. It explains why it is possible that the listener becomes speaker in turn – which is the principle of the traditional tale – and why good tales can be memorized so easily, by hearing them only once; there are not terribly many items to memorize, since the structure has largely been known in advance (Burkert 1979: 17).

It should be added here the sacred implications of any ideological heritage, thus the usage of the current formula 'a good tale' may not reflect the archaic religious values. In the same context of oral memorization, rituals were based on repetition of patterns in conjunction with seasonal festivals and celebrations, in the rhythms of chants, music and dance, all part of a complex process intended to help memorize the story of the heroic acts of the ancestors.

On the descriptive level, I will use the narrative in a Romanian folk story as an example of puberty initiation, possibly into the first function of a healer (Rom. *vraci*) priest-king-husband, conveyed by the motif of the transformations flight, a narrative known as 'The Apprentice at the Wizard's School'. (ATh 325) The folk story entitled *Oh* or '*Băiatul la şcoala Diavolului*' ('The Boy at The Devil's School') (Bârlea 1966: v. I, 493) begins as a poor man takes his boy to a school to learn a craft; stopping by a well, the father groans, 'Oh', and that brings out from the well a little red bearded fellow whose name is Oh, and who offers to take the child into his school. During the training, the wizard teaches the boy how to turn into various animals. At the end of the schooling time, to take his son home the father must recognize his boy from a group of seven or twelve kids absolutely identical with his own. However, the son secretly reveals to his father signs by which he can be recognized, and they leave the wizard school. Once home, the boy tells his father that they could make some money by selling him as a bull at the market, after which the lad will return home as himself. Next, the boy tells his father to sell him as a horse, but to make sure not to sell the boy-horse to the wizard with the reins; the father is tempted by the wizard with a lot of money, and he sells the horse with the reins on. Nevertheless, as soon as the reins are loosen to let the animal drink water from a river, the boy-horse turns into a fish and gets away; at this point the transformations flight begins. The wizard follows him as a bigger fish; then the boy

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turns into a dove and flies away; the wizard follows him as a hawk; next, the boy turns into a ring and drops onto a princess's lap. The wizard goes to the king and claims the ring. Following the boy's instructions, the princess refuses to give away the ring and throws it to the floor; the ring turns into seeds of grain, the wizard turns into a rooster and starts eating the seeds, but one seed that hides under the leg of the princess's chair turns into a fox and eats the rooster-wizard. Then the fox turns back into a young man and marries the princess. In this story we can observe the tripartite pattern, separation from the father, education, and the settling in the social position as a husband/prince/king.

The motif of transformations flight from this folktale, occupies a central place, raising the question of its importance in the initiation process. The pattern of these transformations leads the investigation to myths in which the motif of transformations flight is quite frequent, best preserved in the famous Greek myth of Zeus and Nemesis: the goddess did not want to receive Zeus's love, and ran away from him; first she threw herself into waters turning into a fish; Zeus followed her as an otter; then she got out on the shore and turned into a wild beast, but he turned into an even more ferocious animal; finally she raised in the air as a wild goose, but Zeus managed to overpower her as a swan (Apollodorus *Library* 3.127). There is also the story of Metis who, like Nemesis, had the art of taking many different shapes, yet Zeus overpowered her and thus the birth of Pallas Athena (Apollodorus *Library* 1. 20).

In Hinduism, we encounter a creation story that could shed some light on the meaning of these transformations: in the beginnings the first being, Prajapati, was all alone and in need of a companion; he decides to split his body in two, giving rise to husband and wife, and from their union the human beings were born. When the wife understood that he begot her from his own body she dismissed their union as morally wrong, and decided to hide from him; first she took the shape of a cow, but he turned into a bull and from their union the cattle were born; then she took the form of a mare and he as a stallion, she turned into a female donkey and he a male donkey creating the one-hoofed animals; thus it continued with goats, sheep, creating all the female-male pairs in existence (Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 1: 4: 2–6).

The transformations flight from these myths points to a creation myth that endured in the folk stories even though it lost some of the specifics. The motif of a reluctant girl fleeing from a persistent follower through a series of metamorphoses resurfaced in many European folk stories, as in the story of *Two Magicians* from *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, # 44 of Francis James Child, or the famous *Song of Taliesin*, proving an incredible vitality, underling a meaning lost in time.

The main difference between the myths listed above and the Romanian folk story is that instead of a goddess or a female character, we have a young man, suggesting that the pattern of metamorphoses could be part of a rite of male initiation, based on the myth of creation through the transformations flight of a goddess. The sequence of the metamorphoses into animals from the realms of the sky, the earth, and the water, reveals a tripartite cosmic structure, as stated in a relevant article of John Shaw. The author follows this tripartite structure from Herodotus, the Scythians encounter with Darius, the Rig Veda funerary rites, the Mahabharata episode on Indra born of the sky, the earth, the waters, through Odysseus oath on earth, heavens and water, showing convincing evidence that the

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tripartite cosmic structure existed from common Indo-European times (Shaw 2007: 262). In line with these cultural testimonies, the initiation of the young man into 'becoming' part of his community through getting powers from sacred animals that belong to the three realms points to a metaphysical journey through the entire spectrum of life.

The young man's journey from the Romanian story is in line with the traditional hero's initiatory pattern: first separation from parent, the otherworld sojourn at the wizard's school where he acquires 'the animal powers' and a cosmic understanding of the world, followed by the confrontation with an outside force, that of the wizard, ending with his rebirth into a new position, as the prince/king/husband. The common pattern, marriage to a princess and entering the function of 'king', lord of the house, suggests the archaic relation between a king and the priests/healer class.

The tripartite cosmic journey through sky, earth, water, appears to be part of very archaic data, as it is seen on the gold ring dating from 1450– 1400 BC, the "Ring of Minos", found at Knossos, Crete. The scene design on this ring portrays a goddess descending from heavens, then seated in a shrine on earth, and lastly floating on water in a boat that transports a shrine: "the passage of the goddess through the three elements of nature — air, land and sea — symbolically unites the visible world..." (Diomopoulou and Rethemiotakis 2004: 15–19, in Shaw 2012).

The mythological motif of the transformations flight argues for an Indo-European creation myth preserved in more detail in the Indian tradition, from which the European folklore kept the sequence of metamorphoses in animals from the three realms, according to the tripartite cosmic structure.

On the action level, the data from the Greek documents offer many local attestations for the puberty rites of initiation of young men or women into the adult world, showing no pan-Hellenic initiation rites, but a large level of variations, coming from rites tied to individual communities *(Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals*, Graf 2003: 9). Most of these rites relate to entering into the brotherhood of arms, preparing the young for becoming protectors of the community. The rites took place during known festivals such as that of Apatouria, when young men enrolled into phratries, time when they exchanged their girls' garments to men's clothing, and partaking to the rite of *koureia*, the *koureion* "the cutting ceremony", the hair cut, after which they were recognized as citizens of the polis. (Gernet 1981)

In Greek tradition, there were also girls' initiation rituals such as the *arkteia,* the "bear (artktos) ritual". During this procession girls, raced semi-nude in honor of Artemis, the goddess of purity and childbirth, perhaps relating to the myth of Callisto, the virginal companion of the goddess, who was turned into a bear after she was seduced by Zeus. It is attested that in the late 5th Century B.C. young girls were 'playing bear' before their wedding or 'serving as a bear' (*Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals*, Faraone 2003: 51).

Ritual change in the young persons' appearance was very much at the center of the initiation ceremonies in the ancient Greek world. In a recent article, Reyes Bertolin Cebrián discusses the 'shape-shifting warriors' in Greek traditions: young contingents covered in skins, found in Iliad as the 'long-haired' Acheans, Myrmidones, Lykians, the Wolf-People. The author lists the most important characteristics of these shape shifters: "use of animal skins, which allowed the

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warriors to assume the nature of the animal", (among the most commonly used were wolf-warriors, bear-skin warriors, as the famous Norse berserkers), wearing "long hair or strange hairdos, which was supposed to give them a horrifying aspect"; "they also impersonated ghosts or dead ancestors"; the physical change "made them fight in a state of fury that increased their performance" (Cebrián, 2010), not to forget the Roman Lupercalia when a band of young man wearing only goatskins were running wild "about Rome in a mitigated form of flagellant ritual, striking especially women as a magical aid to procreation" (Puhvel 1987:160). In his work dedicated to the warrior, Dumezil discusses the many shapes a mythical character can take, in particular the series of ten forms the Avestan god Vərəθragna takes. The author concludes that the shape changings motif attested in many mythologies derives from ancient beliefs due to "a gift of metamorphosis or to a monstrous heredity, the eminent warrior possesses a veritable animal nature" (Dumezil 1970: 139). The animal cover, as the Norse 'berserkers' under bear skins, determines the furor the warriors display in force and ferocity, a disguise alluding to their metamorphoses to impress upon friends and foes. What we could retain from here to apply to our story is that many people in ancient times believed in the existence of 'souls / spirits' contiguous to individuals and their appearance, to which the exterior costume was a distinct feature of the personality, leading to the previous conclusion that the boy's journey was a metaphysical one into the mysteries of life.

The educational aspect of initiations and the social organization of Spartan boys attributed to Lycurgus are discussed by Burkert (1979: 260) as the first of the three stages of the *agoge*: the *paídes*, ages 7–17, the *paidískoi,* ages 17–19, and the *hēbōntes* ages 20–29. Around the age of 18, the students became reserve members of the Spartan army; at the stage of *hēbōntes,* roughly age 20, the students became fully part of the Spartan army, and at the age of 30, men were permitted to marry and to become full citizens of Sparta who could vote and hold office. This fits well with Emily Lyle tripartite structure based on age groups mentioned above.

Ceremonies of inducing adolescents into a band of young men are very common in the European traditions. Until recently, during the Romanian winter festivals, a group named *ceata de flăcăi* 'the youth band' was organized, custom that shows possible traces of old male initiation rites. According to a collection of Christmas customs from all over the country (Herseni 1997) every December 6th, the day of Saint Nicholas, a group of 6 to 18 young unmarried men between 17 to 20 years old, were released by their parents into the custody of the group, all housed into a host house for this period. First, they will elect by vote a leader from among themselves, a young man with more experience and ability, named *vătaf*; then they will elect a little leader, *vătaful mic*, a judge, an accountant, a cook, and then they will hire a singer for the procession (Herseni 1997: 261). These functions bring to mind the initiation activities at Kato Syme in Crete where the votives show males that can be classified in the following social categories: "the warrior/hunter, the symposiast (figurine holding a cup), the musician (flute and lyre player)" (*Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals*, Marinatos, 2003: 132), similarities that indicate a basis of ceremonial rituals.

In the Romanian '*ceată*', the leader's general responsibilities was preparing for Christmas caroling, supervising the group behavior, organizing and coordinating dance lessons, and planning dance parties for the entire year during each community

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festival. Until Christmas the group was busy preparing for the day of caroling: learning carols, making different garment ribbons meant to distinguish among the hierarchic position of each participant, decorating the ceremonial flag, providing the evergreen tree to be set in front of the host house, and creating the mask for the main character in the ceremony, the Turca or Capra 'goat', representing a fantastic animal with beak of a stork and antlers of a goat. After pairing each boy with a girl the leader would teach them how to dance, and the short rhymes, *strigături* 'calling', accompanying the movements. Special emphasis was put on the proper behavior of the youngsters during the entire time: they were doing everything together, they were not allowed to leave the host house by themselves, and no bad behavior was permitted, which would result in shameful exclusion from the group. During caroling on Christmas and New Year's Eve they received money and treats, nuts, sweet breads, which they divide equally among themselves. Turca, the zoomorphic mask worn by a designated man, would follow them everywhere in total silence, scaring women, girls and children. On Christmas day the masked Turca performed in front of the entire community a long and spectacular dance, of which the mythical significance has been lost (Herseni 1997: 261).

The Romanian *cete* 'bands', of young people performing during the Christmas celebrations were also gathering together for other community events, as for example in the Eater time. The band called '*Junii brasoveni*' The Youth of Brașov from the County of Bărsa, was famous for their unique Easter performance. Ion Mușlea's ethnographic study details the activities of the group: they elected three leaders, the *vătaf* 'leader', the *armașul mare* 'the big, more important arms carrier' and the *armașul mic* 'the little arms carrier,' each with his own mace; during the circle dance *hora* each member of the group would get in the middle of the circle and throw the mace up in the air as high as possible and catch it, showing their ability in handling the weapon. These customs show reminiscence of an archaic youth warrior custom (Mușlea 1972: 78).

The data show that the Romanian traditions find their similarities in ancient Greek tradition: during the period of seclusion, adolescents received instruction in adult activities such as how to hunt for boys and how to spin yarn for girls, and equally important was the introduction into tribal traditions by learning of songs and dances (Burkert 1979: 260).

Another more recent folk tradition involving youth band is found in the Romanian wedding entourage: the groom's entourage made of his best menrecite during the main events preceding the marriage ceremonythe poem 'oratio nuptiae, in which the groomis addressed as their 'emperor' whom they have to follow in hunting the 'deer' leading to his bride's house. Similarly, in the ancient Greek tradition the coronation of the bride and the groom in their wedding day with a crown of flowers was common, and young men being part of the bride's suite, '*paides propempontes'*, led by a '*proegetes*', (Oakley and Sinos 1993) that take her to a decorated cart and goes to the groom's home, are all events that share correspondences with the Romanian ceremony: the leader *vătaf* or 'captain', guides her to the cart that takes her to the groom's house, followed by the entire suite.

On the descriptive / mythical level, an interesting example of a rite of initiation into a brotherhood of warriors is found in the Romanian poems *The Serpent Song* ("Cântecul șarpelui") and *Iovan Iorgovan*, the dragon slayer (Vrabie

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1966: 150–159). The poem tell of the mother of a little boy who curses him in a pledge to the snake living under the house threshold; the cursed boy grows simultaneously with the snake, and when he reaching adolescence, he must fulfill his destiny and fight the house snake that grew into a huge dragon. It should be noted that in the Romanian tradition, snakes are viewed as fantastic creatures embodying the souls of the ancestor; they live under the house threshold for seven years, and when reaching maturity, they rise to the sky as storm clouds.

During the fight, the dragon swallows the lad up to his waist, up to his weapons, which are *ferecate* 'locked by a spell'; Iovan hears the lad's cry for help, runs to help him, and kills the dragon. Afterwards, they become 'blood brothers', '*fraţi de cruce*,' in other words, he gets accepted into the hero's entourage. Without entering into the wealth of articles on mythical snake functions, it is worth mentioning the Thracian-Phrygian mysteries of the god Sabazios and the warriors' initiation ceremonies according to which a serpent was drawn across the bosom of the initiate, motif identifiable in the Romanian song. Demosthenes in *On the Crown* 18: 260, in a debate with his adversary, describes such ecstatic rite performed in Athens by women:

> On attaining manhood you abetted your mother in her initiations and the other rituals, and read aloud from the cultic writings ...You rubbed the fat-cheeked snakes and swung them above your head, crying *Euoi saboi* and *hues attes, attes hues* (a chant to god Sabazios).

The Romanian song preserves the mythical motif of the initiation rite into the warrior band, with the exception that while the dragon's function in traditional Indo-European dragon killer myth the monster obstructs the order and prosperity, in this song the dragon obstructs the powers of the novice's weapons, thus the hero must kill it to free the lad and his arms, to fulfill his initiation, and be accepted into the warrior's brotherhood. The ritual ends with the young man's admission into the group of warriors with his weapons unlocked, invested with the dragon's magical powers coming from the hero's ancestors, giving him hope for attaining immortality (*Encyclopedia of Religion* 1987).

This conclusion is in accord with George Dumezil's statement that warrior motifs from the Indo-European myths

> may now be interpreted literally point for point, as a memory of much older rituals and myths of initiation or military promotion (Dumezil 1970: 160).

Besides boys' initiation narratives, folk data offers information on female initiation rites. On the descriptive level, a good example of a young woman's initiation could be the *Beauty and the Beast* type, (ATh 425) known in the Romanian folklore as *The Enchanted Pig* (Ispirescu 1969: 46): the promised princess marries a prince cursed by a witch to be a pig by day and a man by night for his bride.

This wide spread folktale narrating the marriage between a girl and a man in animal shape can relate to actual ritual practices as described in the Greek ceremony performed in Athens by the king's wife during the Choes early spring festival, during which she underwent a ritual marriage to a representation of Dionysus, the

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god of growth and fertility. The success of the rite depended on the queen's mating with, perhaps, the king taking the god's place, or, in a symbolic scenario, a statue, or an animal such as a goat or a bull, representing the god, hence enforcing the king's role in the prosperity of the community (West 2007: 417).

This Greek rite parallels the Indian Ašvamedha, during which a white stallion was sacrificed, and the queen symbolically lies down under covers with the animal, while people were chanting and bantering (Puhvel 1987: 271).

In the Romanian story, after marrying a pig / cursed prince, the young woman oversteps her husband's interdiction and throws his animal skin into fire, an action that triggers his departure and the beginning of the journey of initiation. The ritual role of fire and its rejuvenating sacred functions is well known from many myths, a classic example being that of Demeter holding the child Demophon on fire to make him immortal. Also, pigs were Demeter's favorite sacrificial animal: young piglets or a pregnant swine were cast into pits at the Eleusinian's ceremonies, as a reminder of the swineherd witness Eubuleus, whose pigs were swallowed up by the earth along with Persephone. To commemorate the event, women held a three day harvest festival, Thesmophoria, dedicated to Demeter during which little pigs and phallic symbols were cast into a hole in the ground (Frazer 1971: 410).

Following the departure of her husband, the heroine must start her own journey, as she is with child and unable to give birth until she finds him. The 'quest for the vanished husband' is a mythical motif well known from myths like that of Cupid and Psyche, or the Egyptian story of Isis and Osiris. In the first part of her trip, she spends time as a maid, suggesting perhaps a sojourn in the third function; then she seeks help from the otherworld, reaching the heavens to the Moon House, the Sun House and the Wind House, a cosmic travel reflecting a similar tripartite cosmic structure. At the divine instructions, she has to keep the chicken bones left from her dinner. Guided by her divine helpers, she finds her husband's house, a place without a door or windows, a house resembling a tomb or a womb. As Eliade states, the archaic image of males initiation was that of entering into a womb, into the invisible world from where they would come out anew, whereas girls' initiation revealed to them the secret meaning of the natural phenomena, the visible, (M. Eliade 2005: 47) represented here by the houses of the Sun, the Moon, and the Wind.

Facing his tomb/womb, the girl finds that the only way to enter it is from atop by using a ladder made of chicken bones received in the miraculous helpers' houses from the three celestial realms, suggesting perhaps an archaic sacrificial funerary rite. Like a goddess, she is the one taking him out the womb, bringing him to life, reborn into his new role, that of a husband and a father, as she could not give birth without his release, thus marking the end of their initiation journey.

This famous animal-groom folktale motif may actually record a double initiation ritual, that of husband and wife, perhaps a story recited during a marriage ceremony. Although the core of the story is the girl's journey, it is evident that his initiation could not be fulfilled without hers, as she starts the process by burning the animal skin. Their ritual actions are interdependent: by burning his animal skin the girl determines her husband departure into the otherworld, the invisible, the tomb, as a seed, while she starts her own journey as a pregnant woman, symbolically the carrier of a seed. Akin to the Demeter/Persephone myth, when the young woman

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burns her husband's animal skin, she performs an act of purification, ending a stage of his life, and simultaneously, beginning of her own journey looking for him, a journey through her pregnancy. Like the goddess Demeter, she represents fertility, she treats her husband as harvested grain, and death by fire is the fate of grain baked into bread. During the Eleusian mysteries people were reminded of the mystery of the immortal grain and the fire as the divine gift. Such understandings were common in antiquity and the folktale may reflect the same set of principles, reminding people of the powers of fire as opening the way to an underworld journey of purification and transformation. The same is the case in the *Enchanted Pig* story: the young man needs the girl's initiation fulfilled so he could reach the end of his own. It is the girl's function to take him out of that condition, the 'ingurgitation' into the shape of an animal by burning the skin, retrieving him from his tomb, and helping him enter his social position of a husband, a procreator, a third function, indicating a marriage rite of an agrarian social structure.

Conclusions

The data analyzed here belongs both to the archaic times and to more recent folk heritage. As Shaw argued, "the formula in which the belief system was encoded survived by being grafted onto the ostensibly neutral genre of a children's tale" (Shaw 2007: 261). Despite the controversies such arguments may stir, we can detect certain patterns that can be considered as relics of the ancient cultures. The more complex patterns may reflect more recent times, as observed in the Greek description of youth role and education. In discussing initiation rites, Van Gennep argues that we should consider classes and professions, and the ritual use of tools of a certain occupation, resulting in a ritual incorporation in a restrictive group. Consequently, separation and taboos are important; special separation of youth in distinct groups is an aspect of social organization, as in the ancient traditions, warriors do not keep company with blacksmiths (Van Gennep 1960: 101; 192).

Likewise, David Leitao states that rites should be discussed in the context of "the social practices out of which such rites originate;" the traditional small scale societies in ancient Greece were mostly organized according to kinship and gender, but in polis the society was more complex, differentiated by social classes (liturgical, free citizens, slaves, and so on) or by membership in voluntary associations, religious cults, political clubs, etc.; the young man had to claim first his identity as a man and a citizen, but equally important, he had to claim his position as a "member of the elite (*kaloi kai agathoi*)" or "member of the *Alcmenoid genos*" or "initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries" or "practitioner of the metallurgy trade" (*Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals*, Leitao, 2003: 111). Such complexities lead to the conclusion that initiation rituals must have been selective in accord with the social position of the novice and thus enabling us to observe traces of the tripartite social structures. It could be quite difficult to detect from all the data traces of specific details from specific rituals. Nevertheless, the effort is worthwhile.

From the above examples, it seems plausible to conclude that at the action – ritual level the ceremonies were associated with entering into a group, be that of warriors, protectors of the polis, in conjunction with performing services in temples, as did the Spartan *agoge* or the Athenian *ephebei* who carried out religious duties

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and military service during their initiatory process, or as stated above, in small communities simply entering into the premarital stage of their life, as in the Romanian *ceată*.

In the descriptive myth / folktale data the information is more imaginative as in the story of *The Apprentice at Wizard's School*, in which case we can assume that the flight of transformations recorded a rite of initiation into a warrior, showing the animal heredity he possesses, according to Dumezil's conclusions, or into a healer/priest/king. Or, it could simply be a story of metamorphoses offering the audience a metaphysical approach to life creation. The ritual passage through the essential elements of nature, the land, the water, the air, disclose the tripartite cosmic structure, serving to convey the *sacra* of life to an adolescent ready to enter into the new social position in the community, that of a man among the men's group, being that a lord, a warrior, or a groom, or perhaps all three.

The *Beauty and the Beast* story, or at least the Romanian version of it, may give us some glimpse into the spiritual complexities of a double ritual, a female and male initiation. From a social classification point of discussion, given the many fertility connotations, this story seems to preserve a very archaic attribution of the royal class as protectors of growth and fertility, shown in the Ašvamedha rite, combining the need of fertility rite addressing a young couple with the fertility rites addressing the production for the entire community. The royal aspect in which the story immerses each character (the prince marries the princess) reflects the archaic tradition kept in the folklore of all Europe, by which a marrying couple was addressed as emperor and empress on their wedding day, that could not argue for an actual royal social position. As the Greek girls being in the service of a goddess, the heroine of this story shows her relation to a goddess of fertility, acting on her behalf or on her instructions. The goddess's position seems more complex from the social organization perspective: she is a fertility goddess, thus related to the third class, but her power and socio-economic importance transgress the social limits, overwhelming kings, warriors, and producers. She has the power of life and death over the entire community, over human procreation and crops production, positioning her into a fourth function, as Nick Allen suggested, representative of the otherworld, the Mother Goddess of nature, a divine force transcending the social order.

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Abstract

The Indo-European tripartite social structure, understood as the partition of the archaic society into three main groups, the king/priest, the warrior and the producer, may be projected into the structural development visible in the initiation's three step process: separating from parents, instruction and trials, ending with settling into a certain social status. The initiation rites of passage introduced adolescents into the complexities of the social and religious world of the community, preparing the novices for their new status within the adult group, be that of a warrior, a bride, a groom, or a king. This paper will attempt to identify among a few examples of youth initiation rituals patterns, separation from the previous social status, inclusion in a clan or a group, and marriage, in line with the tripartite social classification. On the descriptive level I will analyze the Romanian folk stories 'The Apprentice at the Wizard's School', ('*Vrăjitorul și ucenicul său'*), in which the transformations flight through embodying animals from all realms of nature suggests a youth initiation ritual into the entire spectrum of existence, reminiscence of a creation myth. The mythical motif of the flight of transformations is discussed in Greek and Hindu heritage. The 'Beauty and the Beast' ('*Povestea porcului'*) story presents the initiation of a wife through the trials of finding her departed husband, and of a husband parting after the burning of the animal skin. From the social structure perspective these folk stories describe the youth initiation into husband and wife position. The songs 'Iovan Iorgovan,' and 'The Snake Song' ('*Cântecul șarpelui*,') represent the youth initiation into the warrior fraternity. On the action level I discuss the youth bands Romanian 'ceată' and their ritual training for holiday ceremonies, Christmas, Easter and such, including the Brașov Youth, Romanian '*Junii braşoveni'*; other youth bands that form the Romanian wedding entourage, the reciters of the poem 'oratio nuptiae,' are compared with the escort formed during the ancient Greek wedding ceremony.

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