

MOTHERS-IN-LAW AND ANECDOTES

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Abstract

The image of the mother-in-law is a very popular one in the international repertoire of anecdotes. It is usually presented as one of the unavoidable evils of marriage and is often targeted with extreme aggression by the son-in-law. The paper addresses the questions why this new couple of personages appeared while it was missing from the pre-modern comic narrative tradition and what it signifies. The author suggests that the personages of the mother-in-law and the son-in-law explicate the transformations in the family-kinship relations in the context of modern culture. The changes are related to the gradual separation of the family from the large kinship structures and with the new type of relationships between the spouses, with the intimacy of domestic space, where the cultural experience of the wife became a priority.