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## **“From This Place You Cannot Hear Speech. From This Place You Cannot Receive a Letter”: The Letter-Message in Russian Funeral Lamentations**

**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the use of verbal formulas in funeral and commemoration lamentations. The article consists of two parts: in part one there are some comments about lamenting and the existence of the texts in rites, while part two contains a text analysis of one particular verbal formula (the letter-message). This formula can be found in the lamentations of different cultures, but the Russian texts are the focus of this research.

**Keywords:** commemoration, formula, funeral, lamentation, letter, poetics, Russian folklore.

*Dedicated to the memory of Giorgia Bernardele.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The publication and study of Russian lamentations**

The lamentation (*prichitanie/plach/prichet'* etc.) as a folk genre exists in many cultures, in one form or another. It occupies the same place in the ritual practices of various peoples, but the similarity is not limited to the actional code. Some verbal images, for example, are repeated from one culture to another. In Russia, laments were first mentioned in the early chronicles, such as the 10th century *Tale of Bygone Years*, and nowadays can still be heard in some remote villages. In general, lamenting is an action which produces a poetic text and which is performed in a special way.

Russian lamentations have been collected by serious scholars and amateurs since the 19th century. Some examples were published in magazines and newspapers, such as the *Ethnographic Review* and *Olonetc Gazette*. Elpidifor Barsov's collection of laments (1872)

is the most well-known, containing texts provided by the singer or performer of laments Irina Fedosova from the Russian province of Olonets as well as other laments performed by several other talented lament-singers. However, the lamentations of Olonets are not representative of all Russian traditional lamentations. Indeed, Fedosova, Bogdanova and Pashkova (Barsov's informants), whose laments were very long and rich, were not ordinary lament-singers. In order to get a more in-depth understanding of the tradition, a large corpus of other smaller texts must be analyzed. Fortunately, there are other collections of Russian lamentations. There are, for example texts from the Novgorod Region (Berdyayeva 2015), from the South Urals (Rozhkova & Moiseeva 2008) and many others. Lamentations from the Eastern part of the Vologda region were collected and published twice, in Efimenkova's *The North Russian Lamentation* (1980) and Iugai's *Cannot Moor nor Stick to Any Shore: Funeral Lamentations of the Vologda Region* (2011).

Research interest in lamentations starts to evolve in the 20th century, beginning with Mark Azadovsky's introductory article to his collection of lamentations from the Lena-river region in Siberia, first published in 1922 (Azadovsky 1960). A major role in the study of lamentations belongs to Kirill Chistov (see, for example, Chistov 1960, 1982). Different aspects of the folklore lament were researched in the late 20th—beginning of the 21st century. Lidia Nevskaya (1997) conducted a reconstruction of the semantic and rhythmic structure of the archaic Eastern Slavic lamentation. The ritual purpose of the lament was elucidated by Svetlana Tolstaya in her articles of 1999 and 2015. The vocabulary of lamentations was researched in the works of Olga Sedakova (2004). Svetlana Adonyeva (2004) focused on the pragmatics of lamentation, offering the theory that the rite of lamenting could be understood as a form of initiation of the bereaved into the state of orphanhood. Mikhail Alekseevsky viewed lamentation in the light of the ritual feast (2005). In addition, there are some works about lamentations in which they are regarded as a part of art history (Konyreva 2003, Altshuler 2007, Baluevskaya 2013). The complex analysis of laments from the Eastern part of Vologda province from the point of view of musicology was first conducted by Bronislava Efimenkova (Efimenkova 1980). The construction of a system for the images

used in lamentations was the focus of my own dissertation (Iugai 2011a).

The present article concentrates on the text analysis of one particular verbal formula: the letter-message.

### **Lamentation in the funeral ritual complex**

In pre-revolutionary Russia, vernacular lamentations were an obligatory part of the funeral ritual complex. There were different types of lamentations applicable at different stages of funerals. However, over the years, this genre has lost its role as a necessary funeral element.

Funeral lamentations are one of four types of lament, the other three being wedding, recruiting and occasional laments. Funeral lamentations are the most ancient and their pattern serves as the base for the other types. Among funeral lamentations there are some that correspond to specific parts of the funeral ritual, such as the washing of the deceased, the ceremony of parting from the deceased in the house, or the journey to the cemetery (see the operative classifications in the following collections of texts: Azadovsky 1960, Efimenkova 1980, Kruglov 2000, Iugai 2011a, etc.). In the vernacular we find definitions for laments performed at particular times such as: *When he is lying on the bench*, *When they carry the coffin*, *In the cemetery*, etc. The expression “*in the cemetery*” can also refer to a variety of different lamentations, such as lamentation on digging the grave, lamentation at the anniversary commemoration of the death and lamentation during visits to the cemetery on Trinity (*Troitsa*) Saturday.

Lamenting on the day of the funeral consists of several stages. In the beginning, the relatives lament in the house of the deceased, while the guests are lamenting on their way to the house. The content of the lamentation is a narrative about the search for the deceased. The performer of the lament depicts in traditional poetic expressions how he or she wakes up, washes, searches for the deceased and cannot find him/her “either in the yard or in the house”. Eventually she does find him/her lying in the ‘beautiful’ corner (*krasnyi ugol*)<sup>1</sup> and approaches his silence, asking why he feels angry and doesn't want

to talk. When the funeral helpers are closing the coffin the lament-singer again laments, asking them not to close it. The full lamentation known as *The parting ceremony in the house* can have hundreds of lines. The lamentation *On the way to the cemetery* includes a farewell formula addressed to the world of the living. Special figures of speech are used, such as the cumulative expansion of images. The deceased is supposed to say farewell first to his house, then to the street, the village, the nearby forests, and, finally, to the entire world. The lamentation known as *In the cemetery* is used to soothe the deceased and encourage him/her not to feel fear, since his dead relatives are waiting for him. Finally, there is the lamentation *On the way from the cemetery*.

On days of commemoration there is another special group of laments about the dead. Informants distinguish these from the funeral laments. As far as the poetics of the texts are concerned, commemoration laments are more symbolical, less improvisational and closer to lyrical songs. It is possible to classify commemoration lamentations in two ways, firstly according to the day it is performed. Lamentations can occur 1) within the first 39 days after the funeral (and specifically on the ninth or the twentieth days), 2) on the fortieth day after the funeral, 3) on the anniversary of the funeral, 4) on feast days, and 5) on any day. It is also possible to classify commemoration lamentations by their function. All relatives of the dead person gather at the commemoration feast. According to folk-belief, the soul of the dead person/ deceased comes too. In some Vologda villages people set a special table for the souls:

*"And then the day of ancestors [roditelskiy den] comes, so I lay the table. <...> I hang out a clean towel so they can come and wash their hands. And I always put cups, I pour tea. I put some gingerbread, some sweets, put something on the table. Chairs are placed. So I go into the street and say: 'Dear guests come to visit! We are waiting' "* (Iugai 2016: 10).

The souls are invited by the lamentation known as *Invitation to the Commemoration Feast*: *"All the relatives are gathered by that tune, including all the relatives who were killed and died in the war"* (Iugai 2016: 24). The invitation to the commemoration feast is a widespread phenomenon. In such lamentations the wailer asks the

deceased to wake up, open his eyes and stand up. Alekseevsky in his article *The Motive of Revival of the Dead in North Russian Funeral Laments* (2007) links it with the feast for the souls. The lamentations containing this motif are specific and can be heard on the ninth, twentieth, and fortieth days after the death, on the Troitsa Day and on some other memorial occasions. Additionally, people prepare a bath (*banya*) for the deceased. In the west of the Vologda region there is a lamentation known as *The invitation to the bath*. In the east Vologda villages although the rite itself exists there are no special lamentations associated with it. Finally, there is a lament called *Seeing off the soul*.

Nowadays, it is common for an informant to know just one lament, consisting of a certain set of verbal formulas, and she would use it for both commemoration and funerals. Such lamentations are stable and not very long, but they make use of the traditional formulas.

As for the letter-message image, it can be found in almost all types of laments: funeral (first after death, No. 35 in Efimenkova 1980, No. Bab.28 in Iugai 2011b) and commemoration (No.13 in Efimenkova 1980, No. Tot.11 in Iugai 2011b). It also exists in the short lamentations, which are the last fragments preserved in the informants' memory.

### **Some notes about the textual structure of lamentation**

The main motif of lamentation correlate with the ritual acts. Nevertheless, the texts are complete and independent from the perspective of imagery, poetic organization and structure.

Russian lamentations have strophic organization, rhythm and line breaks. The rhythmic and phonetic side of the texts has been very little studied, with the exception of some articles by James Bailey (2001). The main aim of textual research has been to show the function of the lament within the ritual and the use of poetic metaphors.

The ritual goal of these lamentations is to make the time the border between life and death when it is open more secure. The researchers usually argue that use of metaphors is a means of providing this security. The theory of metaphoric substitutions is rooted in the observations of Chistov (1960) and was developed in works by Alexandra Stepanova on material from Karelia (1985).

Among the most typical metaphoric substitutions are vocatives, addressing an orphan or the deceased by substituting objects from the world of nature. The majority of them take the form of a noun phrase consisting of two words (adjective + noun, noun + noun), like “sweet dove” or “letter-message”. In addition to vocatives set phrases are used to describe the underworld, the world of living beings, the border. In general such phrases are folklore formulas, i.e. stable combinations of words with a symbolic meaning, and they perform an organizational function in the lamentation texts. Improvisation takes place in the choosing of and combining of the formulas as well as in their phonetic representation.

Using such formulas is a means for traditional culture to comprehend and adjust to existential and cultural changes. Lamentation is an improvisational poetic text which follows specific rules and contains certain formulas. *The letter-message* between the world of the living and the underworld is one such formula.

### THE LETTER-MESSAGE VERBAL FORMULA

#### The letter-message in the lamentations of other cultures

*The letter-message* is a widespread phenomenon in lamentations. The similarity of extra-textual factors affecting lamentation in different cultures is natural, but textual parallels are especially interesting. Let us take the example of two cultures—the Romanian in a country far distant from Russia and the Finno-Ugric in territory close to and with cultural contacts with the Russian North.

The motif ‘letters or messages from the underworld’ or ‘out of this world into the underworld’ can often be found in lamentations in the Romanian culture. Mourners mention the letter to emphasize the “impossibility” of correspondence after the soul of the deceased has irrevocably departed. In other cases, mourners beg the dead to send them some “news” from the underworld. In yet other cases, they refer to the deceased as a mediator or a messenger, who can deliver a message or congratulations to other deceased, whom he or she will meet in heaven. For example:

*Ka să ne mai zi' de dor.  
Frate dragă și măi dragă.*

*[My dear and darling brother,  
Why are you going so far away,*

<p><i>Kă te duș, frate, departe, Nu-s putiem trimite karte, Nu ne poți trimite karte, Kă nu-i kolo niș hîrtie, Niș černeală, să po' skrie; Nu ie trin, niče motor</i> (Brăiloiu 1981: 173).<sup>2</sup></p>	<p><i>We cannot send letters, You cannot send letters, There is no paper, No ink to write with, No train, no motor To come, if you feel bored.]</i></p>
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The letter-message lamentation formula is also present in the Baltic-Finnish (specifically Karelian) context, which is geographically and culturally close to northern Russia. There are two specific formulas discussed in the *Dictionary of Metaphorical Substitutions of Karelian Laments* by Alexandra Stepanova (2004: 116), *graamottakirjaset*—letter-message and *kirjalistabumuagazet*—paper / written sheets-letters, where one part (*gazet*) of the complex word is a borrowing from the Russian language (i.e. *gazeta* / newspaper).

Eila Stepanova (2015: 186) gives the following example in her article on ‘self-lamentation’ (i.e. in which the lamenter comments on her own death?): “... Savelyeva asks her nephew to notify relatives about her death by telegram”. The *loci communes* typical of such lamentations are ‘sent by postal sheets-letters’, ‘light little telegram with stamps’, etc., where ‘small telegrams’ or ‘sheets-letters’ are the semantic core of the formula, and the choice of additional components can depend, for example, on alliteration in the stanza or the length of the musical phrase” (Stepanova 2015: 192).

As Zhukova’s research has shown, in lamentations of the Finnic Vepsian people there are ‘letters about death’ which may be referred to either as *kibed kirjeine*, which means ‘a letter bringing pain and the news of the death’, or *kibed kirjaine* ‘a bitter letter that brings pain’ (Zhukova 2009: 120, 121). In most cases these are letters written from within the world of living, letter-notifications about a death.

### **Papers and letters in the Russian lamentations of the 19th—beginning of the 20th century**

The *paper sheet* or *stamped paper* (*list-bumazhen’ka* <*gerbovaya*>) motif as it appears in the collection of Barsov has two main themes. The first is distress over a missing picture of the deceased. Such

a motif is found in Fedosova's lament *The widow's lament for her husband* (Barsov 1872: 5—6). The second concerns a letter to the underworld, written by a widow's neighbor to the widow's deceased husband (so that he in turn can pass it on to the neighbor's deceased husband) (Barsov 1872: 15). Sending greetings and respects (lit. bows / *poklony*) to the underworld is one of the most common motifs of lamentations. Fedosova begins *The lamentation over her cousin* with a message about the death conveyed in the letter form (Barsov 1872: 187).

As for the other regional traditions, there are 19th century records from central Russia. However, the images found in those laments are not as expressive or as well developed. Eight lamentations from Tula and the Tula province (in the Northeast of the modern Tula region) were recorded by Uspensky at the end of the 19th century. Here, one finds the the following lines:

<i>Teper my tebya ne uvidim,</i>	<i>[Now we shall not see you,</i>
<i>Golosochka tvoego</i>	<i>We shall not hear your</i>
<i>ne uslyshim.</i>	<i>little voice.</i>
<i>Ni pisma, ni bumazhki,</i>	<i>Neither letter nor paper,</i>
<i>Nichego ot tebya ne budet!</i>	<i>Nothing will we get from you!]</i>

(Uspensky 1892: 110)

As one can see in this extract, the word *paper* (*bumazhka*) was dominant in the 19th century. It could be used to mean a portrait or a letter. Both types of letter (the notification of the death within the world of the living and the communication with the underworld) can be found in the Olonets lamentation of Fedosova. The second type may frequently be found in 19th century laments from the Tula region.

### Letters in the lamentations of the 20th century

In the first half of the 20th century lamentations were not in the forefront of folklore research. Although they were collected the main focus of attention was on other genres of folklore (with the exception of the so-called “lyric-epic novelties”), lamentations about the Soviet leaders—see Kozlova 2011). But the late 20th century was remarkable for its series of publications of the genre, starting with the publication of laments collected during World War II



(Bazanov 1962). Regarding the Russian tradition at the end of the 20th century, the letter motif was recorded at least in the Vologda, Novgorod, Ural, Perm, and Vyatka (Kirov) regions.

In the Internet project on Novgorodian folklore, the second part of which is entitled *Lamentation as a Part of Funeral Ritual* there are two fragments of different lamentations, where the lack of a letter from the underworld is noted:

*Ne poluchu ya ot tebya nikogda  
Ni pismetsa, ni vestochki,  
U nas otpushcheno-to i provozhenno  
I vo dalnyuyu-to put dorozhenku  
I net pisma-to, bey gramoty*  
(Berdyeva).

*[I will never not get from you  
A single letter or any news.  
We have bid him farewell and have released him  
To his long-long journey,  
And there's no letter, no note on white paper.]*

Kastrov's publication of Kirov (Lalskie) lamentations (1999) includes 15 recorded in 1991—1992. Kirov region is the territory which borders with the Eastern part of the Vologda region. In these texts we find the following lines:

*Da mne uzh(i) v etoy-to dorozhenki  
Da net pisma da net ne vestonki  
Da net pisma da mne, ne gramotki  
Da ne poklonu perenosnova*  
(Kastrov 1999: 383, 397).

*[And on that little road  
And there is no letter, no news  
And there is no letter, no news to me,  
And no greeting has been sent.]*

In this case the reference is to a letter from the underworld. Eltyshev and Koroleva (2011) report on the existence of the formula in some areas of the North Prikamie (Permsky Region).

In the lamentations of the Ural region, the mother laments to her son:

<i>Pishu-to ya k tebe, synushko,</i>	<i>[I write to you, my dear son</i>
<i>Ya so vsemi lyudmi dobrymi</i>	<i>With all the good people</i>
<i>Tebe pismy-gramotki &lt;...&gt;</i>	<i>Letters-messages to you &lt;...&gt;</i>
<i>Ne perom, ne chernilami,</i>	<i>Neither with pen nor ink,</i>
<i>A svoimi goryuchimi slezmi</i>	<i>But with bitter tears I write.]</i>

(Rozhkova & Moiseeva 2008: 29).

As for Siberia, the motif of writing a letter (*lamentation about a brother*) is found specifically in the Irkutsk region. Several operations are performed with the letter in such lamentations, which include not only taking the paper and writing, but also sealing the letter up before sending. The description pattern represents the negation of common letter materials and its parallels between the manifestations of human sorrow.

*Sokolchik moy, rodimyy bratets,*  
*A napishu ya s toboy pismo-gramotku*  
*A ko lebedushke ko rodimoy matushke,*  
*A ne perom-to ya budu pisat, ne chernilami,*  
*A svoim-to goryuchim slezam.*  
*A zapechatayu ya etu pishmu-gramotku*  
*Svoey toskoy-kruchinushkoy,*  
*Otoshlyu ya s toboyu, gorka sirotochka,*  
*Ya k lebedushke rodimoy matushke.*  
*A pereday moe pishmo rodimoy matushke*  
*Ne vozhmet li ona v ruchki belyya,*  
*Ne prichitat li etu pismo-gramotku,*  
*A ne sozhalet li menya, gorku sirotochku?*  
 (Potanina et al. 2002: 360)

*[My little falcon, my dear brother,*  
*I will write a letter-message for you to take*  
*To my sweet swan, to my darling mother,*  
*And not with a pen, not with (an) ink,*  
*But with bitter tears I will write,*  
*And I will seal up this letter-message*  
*With my anguish, my little sorrow,*  
*I will send it with you, a wretched orphan*

*To my sweet swan, to my darling mother,  
And give the letter to my darling mother  
Will she not take it into her white hands,  
Will she not read this letter-message,  
And take pity on me, a wretched orphan?]*

In the Vologda region there are different terms (which denote the image of) used to describe the letter: *zapisochka*, *nakazanyitse*, *chelobitnoe*, *poklon* ('a little note', 'a mandate', 'a petition', 'a bow'). There are also two types of letters in the lamentation world: the letter-notification, which could be a real letter and the specific letter to the underworld, which is a special case of passing on somebody's regards.

The real letter can be represented by a telegram from the military front:

*Oy, ya dozhdalasya, rozho... (noe)  
Oy, ya vestochkyu nevese... (luyu)  
Oy, ya telegrammu pecha... (lnuyu)  
Oy, ya poluchila, rozho... (noe) <...>  
Oy, pogib, moe ty rozho... (noe)  
Oy, uzh ty v ryadakh Krasnoy A... (rmii)  
(Efimenkova 1980: 124)*

*[Oh, I have got, my dear child,  
Oh, the gloomy news,  
Oh, the sad telegram,  
Oh, I have got it, my dear child, <...>  
Oh, you perished, my dear child,  
In the ranks of the Red Army]*

<i>Rasskazhu-ka ya, mamenka,</i>	<i>[I will tell you, my dear mother,</i>
<i>Poluchila, goryushitsa,</i>	<i>I, a poor little soul, received</i>
<i>Da, ne veseluyu vestochku,</i>	<i>Some gloomy news,</i>
<i>Ot rodimogo ladushki,</i>	<i>From my sweet beloved,</i>
<i>Da stenovuyu kartinochku</i>	<i>And his picture</i>
<i>(Iugai 2011b: 89).</i>	<i>to go on the wall]</i>

The first one describes the receiving of a real telegram from the war, written by people, but it turns to contain information on death

(the bad news). The addressee and addresser of the second lamentation are both living people (the mother and the wife of the deceased), and they are talking about the letter, from which they discovered that their relative had been killed.

In this case the letter-news means not only a textual letter, but also an actual picture.

Some texts refer to a letter written in tears and sent to the other world. Thus, the letter is a material image and a symbol of communication with the deceased.

<i>Dak nakazhu nakazanyitse,</i>	[ <i>So, I will have a note sent,</i>
<i>Poshlyu poklon-chelobitnitso,</i>	<i>I'll send a greeting-salutation</i>
<i>Ya svoim-to roditelyam,</i>	<i>To my sweet father and my</i>
<i>Batyushku da i matushke,</i>	<i>sweet mother,</i>
<i>Dak napishu ya zapisochku,</i>	<i>So I'll write a little note,</i>
<i>Dak ne perom, ne chernilami,</i>	<i>Neither with a pen nor with ink,</i>
<i>Dak ya slezami-to gorkimi,</i>	<i>But with bitter tears I will write,</i>
<i>Gde-nibud da uvidisse,</i>	<i>Somewhere you will surely</i>
<i>Ne na pischey bumazhenke,</i>	<i>meet them.</i>
<i>A na tonkom polotenyshke,</i>	<i>not on a little sheet of writing-paper,</i>
<i>Gde-nibud da uvidisse.</i>	<i>But on a thin little towel,</i>
(Iugai 2011b: 49)	<i>Somewhere you will surely</i>
	<i>meet them].</i>

Communication in such laments is always one-sided, as a mourner “sends a letter” but does not receive a response from the underworld. In fact in some texts it is clearly stated that no letter will ever be sent from there.

*Oy toshneshenko, da ne poshlet da im batyushko,*  
*Oy toshneshenko, im ni pisma da ni gramotki—*  
*Oy toshneshenko, da so togo svetu belongo,*  
*Oy toshneshenko, nikto ne prinosit zho vestochki,*  
*Oy toshneshenko, moim serdechnym-to detonkam!*  
 (Efimenkova 1980: 134)

*[Oh, how sick I feel, father will not send to them,*  
*Oh, how sick I feel, neither a letter nor a message,*  
*Oh, how sick I feel, from the fair underworld,*

*Oh, how sick I feel, no one brings any news  
Oh, how sick I feel, to my dearly-loved children!]*

The lack of letters from the underworld turns to be one of the defining characteristics of the genre?:

*Ottol ved rechi ne slyshattse,  
Ottol uzh pisma ne pishuttse  
(Iugai 2011b: 83).*

*[From that place no voice can be heard.  
From that place no-one will write you a letter.]*

So, the content of the motif is the giving of a message-letter to the deceased or, in some cases, a message to an old deceased with the new one. No letter is sent in response, however. As it was shown in the above examples, the images of letter, paper and ink are usually duplicated by images of the towel (used as a handkerchief) and tears, as markers of human sorrow.

### **Messages, packages and the towel in funeral ritual**

Although lamentation texts are usually self-sufficient, some of the objects verbally present in lamentations, are also physically present as necessary elements of funeral ritual.

It is common to send something to the underworld with a newly-deceased person. For example, someone who has already passed away may come in a dream and ask for something to be sent to him. So the relatives put the requested object into the coffin of someone awaiting burial: “*A packet of cigarettes is placed <in a coffin>, a box of matches too. If you have a close relative — send candies! For instance, my <husband> is dead, and you pass candy...*” (Archive Cherepovets: record 97, No. 24). Passing on one’s regards to dead relatives is one of the most common motifs of lamentations. It may be found even in short fragments of lamentations, where the narrators remember only a couple of lines from the whole lament.

The need to inform the dead about news of their living relatives also goes beyond the lamentation. The same content is natural for common talks on cemeteries and also for commemorative narratives

(about conversations with the dead in the Vytegra area of the Volgda region — see Ilyina 2008).

The paper for the writing of letters mentioned in lamentations is paralleled by the towel (used as a handkerchief by the grieving person), the message on which could be written in tears. The towel is a material object used in funeral ritual in many different ways. A white towel could be hung up near the icon corner during the first forty days after the death for the soul to dry itself after washing. In earlier times in some regions a lament-singer would cover her face with a towel or a handkerchief. Like virtually everything in vernacular culture, a towel has a symbolic meaning; it may allude to a road, a path, which is also a key metaphor of the funeral as a rite of passage. So, the material objects, which find their place in the texts, are often correspond with the very ritual. In the texts such objects obtain poetic, metric and metaphoric structure.

### Verbal form

The verbal formula of a letter-message has several formal features. It consists of two words, traditionally perceived as synonyms. In Fedosova's laments (Barsov 1872) the words are usually *sheet-paper*, while in other laments, we find different combinations of three elements: *news*, *message*, and *letter*. Also the word *telegram* (the second part of which in Russian sounds similar to *message*/i.e. *gramota*) is used.

The verbal formalization of the formula does not depend on the type of communication, whether the letter is addressed to the deceased or this is a letter from a an alive person to another living person). In Fedosova's lamentation "*The lamentation over her cousine*" there is a letter-notification, "*written in tears*". By contrast, the word *telegram* can be used to describefrom the underworld. It is following the rules of the impossibility formula, i.e. the metaphoric verbal formula, which describes the impossibility of an event or a situation. The word is given in the diminutive form:

*I-oy, dak-y ne napishot on pi,*  
*Oy, da pisima g(y)ramotki.*  
*I-oy, dak-y ne posh(y)let i nam da te,*

*Oy, da telegramushki*  
(Archive Cherepovets: record 098, No. 09).

[*And-oh, he would never write a le...*  
*Oh, a letter-message.*  
*And-oh, he will never send a te...*  
*Oh, a little telegram.*]

In the lamentation of Fedosova the fragment depicting a letter takes up approximately fifty lines and contains a narrative with the lament-singer as the actor. In the modern lamentation the average fragment length is four lines (in addition to a lexical complex describing the letter it includes the verbs *send* or *get*, an actor, an object, and the circumstances of place). In detailed fragments there is the description of the writing process. Overall, action is more typical of folklore than inertia, making description of writing and sending more important than the notion of a physical object.

### Conclusions

The lament had great significance for funeral ritual in the past. It is not only an expression of grief, but also an illustration of religious belief in the post-mortem existence. As was pointed out by Tolstaya (1999), vernacular bans on lamentations in wrong time and place indicate the importance and indispensability of lamentations as a part of the funeral ritual. "Sometimes the folk tradition directly links the need for weeping with the expectation of the patronage of the dead relative. ... The need for weeping is also connected with the fact that unlamented dead, according to folk beliefs, will not receive the remission of sins, because 'tears wash away the sins' " (Tolstaya 1999: 136). Untimely or excessive lamentation can upset the deceased. So, weeping is a form of lamentation that has an independent value. The weeper's voice shows the way to the soul of the deceased person. Being halfway between tangible and intangible, it serves as a bridge between the two worlds: "The voice sounds here on earth, but its destination is far beyond this world" (Ibid.: 145).

The lamentation is a way of communicating with the dead. According to the metaphor of the lamentation text it can be said that the letter as it occurs in lamentations is one written with tears on a thin

towel (used as a handkerchief). The association of the towel and the face (Levkievskaya 2004) allows us to consider this letter as an act of mourning. In reality, it is the orphan's face that is used as a 'paper' for the letter. The letter is a way to establish contact with a distant, invisible world, with which direct communication is impossible. The analogy of the funeral and the notion of departure to a foreign country is one way to euphemize the death. According to the world of folklore and mythology, lamentations themselves are viewed as a way of communicating with the inaccessible world where the mourners' voice and the tears of orphans form a channel of contact.

Almost all verbal formulas concern the different ways of making contact, opening and closing the border (see e.g. the many metaphors involving birds, roads, locks and so on). A letter, which sometimes serves as a link within the world of living beings, also serves as a metaphor connecting the living with the underworld. The letter-message is the symbol of a form of communication, which is neither direct nor easy. The lament-singers sent their laments to the deceased having hope but no guarantee that they would reach the addressee. The letter in laments has a stable verbal form and is one feature which helps to define the genre.

When someone is going to visit a rural cemetery, their neighbors may say: "Best regards to everyone!" This is an action, reflecting what would be normal in everyday speech in everyday life. The distinguishing feature of lamentation is in the use of metaphoric images and a precise rhythmic structure to communicate with the underworld.

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### Notes

1. The eastern inner corner of the house, where the icons are kept.
2. Giorgia Bernardele found and translated the Romanian texts for this article in 2015.



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