

## ***Prichitaniia* and Rituals as Symbolic Representations of Russian Peasants' Collective Memory: A Comparative Study of Wedding and Funeral Ceremonies**

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This study's primary concern is to present the "total topography" of the mindsets of Russian peasants through the laments and rituals of their wedding and funeral ceremonies. The analysis will employ the French *Annales* school's paradigm, which "constitutes an inquiry into how one of the systems of a society functions or how a whole collectivity functions in terms of its multiple temporal, spatial, human, social, economic, cultural and eventmental dimensions" (Stoianovich 236).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, I will demonstrate that the laments practiced in peasants' wedding and funeral ceremonies were the most crucial vehicle in oral genres for representing the "collective memory" or "collective peasant soul," epitomized in the term of the so-called *Russkia dusha*. This paper also examines how Russian peasants led their lives with the help of rituals (as symbolic representation) and laments (as a fundamental text for ritual life). Not only to make a systemic analysis, but also to provide a framework for more specific concerns, this study employs Arnold Van Gennep's tripartite understanding of *rites of passage*: separation, marginalization, and incorporation. Theoretical rationales from Victor Turner and other *Annales* school critics will also be discussed throughout this paper.

Laments and rituals serve as "ideal models" capable of proving their "system of values" or "system of survival." Before analyzing Russian peasants' rituals and laments more closely, it is necessary to investigate some of the basic definitions and arguments regarding the collective memory. For the *Annales* critics, in fact, the definition of "mentalities" as seen in the following sentence communicates the intrinsic features of the concept: "Mentalities are not dead ideologies or hollow structures from the past but enduring recollections, treasured possessions of living identity, inviolable and deeply imbedded structures which give authentic expression to collective character" (Gismondi 435). Along with "mentalities," by the aforemen-

tioned term “collective memory” I not only mean “an exploration of a shared identity that united a social group,” but also “the active past that forms our identities,” to use French socialist Maurice Halbwachs’ definition (qtd. Confino 1390). In his book *On Collective Memory* (published posthumously in 1950), Halbwachs distinguishes between “autobiographical memory,” “historical memory,” “history,” and “collective memory,” but he considers the “collective memory” as “plural,” made up of “shared memories that can be effective markers of social differentiation” (Olick 111). Just as “all human products,” as Confino states, “and artistic work[s] in particular, were expressions of human memory transmitted through symbols from ancient times,” collective memory has come to denote the representation of the past and the making of it into a “shared cultural knowledge by successive generations in vehicles of memory” (1386, 1390). Confino’s main point was that memory is only able to endure within sustaining social contexts. Individual images of the past are provisional. They are “remembered” only when they are located within conceptual structures that are defined by communities at large. Without the life-support system of group confirmation, individual memories wither away. For that matter, Halbwachs taught, even individual memories have their social dimension because they are in fact composite images in which personal reminiscences are woven into a socially acquired understanding of the past. For this reason, collective memory is a “social construct,” and beyond that, “collective memory continue[s] to serve as a backdrop to ... historical investigations, providing the reference points that [gives one] an orientation from which to proceed” (Hutton 8).

This analysis will concentrate on traditions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century prior to the October Revolution. Regions from Northern Russia—*Arkhangel’sk*, *Vologda*, *Perm*, *Viatka*, *Olonets*, and *Novgorod*—serve as the geographical basis for this study. The first four regions listed, located near the White Sea, are called *Pomor’e*. This is the region where noted ethnographer T. A. Bernshtam conducted massive research and contributed to the extensive study of Northern Russia.<sup>2</sup> In addition, all passages cited in this paper come from a variety of ethnographic sources, including collections from different regions of Russia and Siberia.<sup>3</sup>

The regions of Northern Russia are particularly useful for this type of analysis, since in the North valuable folklore traditions were cherished and preserved longer than anywhere else—a fact substanti-

ated by the results of most ethnographic research completed by folklorists. Throughout the history of the collection of laments, Northern Russia was the first to have attracted serious attention. It is also the main location on which V. A. Dashkov's collection was based. In terms of peculiarity of regional differences between Central, Southern, and Northern Russia, the laments in the North are different from those of other areas in that they are both very dramatic and extremely mournful. The laments from Southern Russia, by contrast, are less melancholic and were not suited for weddings. In the Central region, various types of songs other than laments predominate. More importantly, however, it must be argued that the northern Russian laments had much more dramatic characteristics as well as theatrical components (Zueva 92, 105).

Rituals here serve as a theatrical "metaform of social organization" and laments as a communicative written text (Kligman 168). With this in mind, it is important to note that both wedding and funeral rituals exercise the private sphere of family matters in a public setting. As an effective symbolic action, the rituals are dramatic forms that articulate the relationship between a symbolically constructed order of meanings and a system of interpersonal and institutional relationships (169). To be more exact, the ceremonies contain so many elements that are to some degree "dramatic" in nature that it is possible to view them as pieces of a theatrical spectacle. As Elizabeth A. Warner succinctly points out, "[t]he peasants themselves recognized this in their use of expressions such as *"igrat' svad'bu"* (to play a wedding) and their categorization of people into active participants, *sviadebshchiki*, and passive spectators, *gliadel'shbchiki/smotrel'shbchiki* from the verbs *gliadet'* and *smotret'* (to watch) (*Russian Folk Theatre* 88). Throughout the wedding rite, dramatic performances are prominent: the bride must mourn her departure from the protection and care of her parents; the bride and groom are termed "royalty" and elaborate courtesies are exchanged. Magic is banished, evil is dumbfounded, bonds are strengthened between the young couple, the bride is joined with her husband's family, and both her fertility and that of her new household's cattle are promoted (Sokolov 203-23). Theoretically, to some extent, all weddings are examples of at least minimal intercultural communication in a public spatial "liminality,"<sup>4</sup> according to the terminology of Van Gennep and Turner, because all weddings combine individuals from different families into a new whole which will then need to establish its own traditions.<sup>5</sup> Within the framework of the

*Annales* methodology, on the other hand, marriage practices are indeed an important outward mark for identifying a group that holds common social ideas, possesses a consciousness of itself as a group, and follows a similar lifestyle.

Wedding rituals not only act “as a magical dramatization of ordinary activities,” but in the context of the village community they are also one of the most important and elaborate occasions (Leach 522). The ritual was celebrated as a primary function in which all community members were involved. The family occasion was arranged by a matchmaker called *svakba'* or *svat*, and “while matchmaking was practiced both in the city and in the country, the folk wedding ritual was characteristic only of the village” (Alexander 49). Structurally, the wedding ritual is composed of three fundamental parts: 1.) bargaining about the terms of a proposed marriage with someone being cast in the matchmaking role; 2.) preparation of the bride for marriage, which usually consists of her bathing ritual in the *bania* and her farewell party, or *devichnik*; and 3.) the wedding itself. If the matchmaking was successful and the marriage deal sealed, the next important step in the ritual was for the groom’s family to be invited to see the bride. During this time she was freed from all housework. She had to prepare her *trousseau* in order to meet this important responsibility. She needed to think of herself not as the daughter of her parents, but as a new daughter of her suitor’s family. During this time of deepening anxieties, tradition required that the bride should not be seen in public; however, if she needed to go outside, she was expected to wear mournful clothing. For the most part, however, the bride was prohibited from going outside her parents’ home. In this context, the term bride (*nevesta*), which etymologically recalls the Russian term for “one who is unknown,” is symbolically relevant to the idea of protecting her from evil spirits who are believed to visit the bride’s house during the wedding period.<sup>6</sup> This kind of prophylactic magic was widely practiced and specific measures were taken; for instance, not calling the bride by name, walking three times around the wedding party with an icon,<sup>7</sup> covering the head of the bride with a large kerchief, and closing doors, windows, and other openings at various moments of the wedding ceremony.

Meanwhile, the bride, sitting at the table or under the *krasnyi ugol* (beautiful corner) would begin to lament. At this moment, the dramatization of the bride’s irreversible fate begins. The basic motifs of the bride’s laments consist of her love for her parents and her re-

luctance to leave her childhood home and meet *chuzhie ludi* (strangers). The following events present a comprehensive picture of the ritual:

1. The match-making (*svatovstvo, sgovorki, prosvatan'e, propivanië*)
2. Inspection of the bride's household by the groom's relatives and vice-versa (*smotriny, smotren'e or osmotr ugolkov*)
3. Preparation for the wedding, the sewing of the *trousseau* and dowry linen (*prigotovlen'e k svad'be, sbit'e pridannogo*)
4. The bath (*bania*)
5. The party, when the bride is merry for the last time with her girlfriends (*devishnik*)
6. The arrival of the groom and setting off for church (*sbory k ventsu*)
7. The church ceremony (*venchan'e*)
8. The wedding feast (*svadebnyi stol, kniazhnyi stol, pir*)
9. The morning night (*son molodnykh, brachnaia noch'*)
10. The morning rites (*utrennie obriady*)
11. Post-wedding feast (*khlebiny*) (Warner *Dramatic Entertainments* 45)

The marriage ritual, as “the ritualization of movement in time, space, and social position,” stands for a complex set of symbols (Anttonen 15). These symbols in turn represent more practical aspects of daily peasant life: common ideas shared by the village community, economic concerns of the bride's productivity as a work force, and all of the collective ways of life. Within Van Gennep's framework, the rites of passage are delineated into three successive but distinctive transitional phases: separation, marginalization, and incorporation. The ritual itself, together with its moral and social dimensions, also contributes in conveying collective wisdom to the young couples about how they should follow the commune's norms rather than the concerns of the individual. “The wedding rituals as a metaform of social organization,” as Kligman notes, “address the private domain of family life but in a public context” (169). “[A]s effective symbolic action,” the ritual on the whole “articulates the relationship between a symbolically constructed order of meanings and a system of interpersonal and institutional relationships” (169). The wedding ritual itself serves as a microcosm through which one can understand Russian peasants' communal livelihood, their worldview of nature, their institutionalized norms, and their cultural peculiarities.

Wedding laments, an oral tradition, belong to the category of ritual songs<sup>8</sup> (*obriadovaia pesnia* in folk culture). Ritual songs in turn fall into two groups: one contains songs that are “calendar or seasonal” (*kalendarnaia pesnia*) and the other includes “family ritual songs” (*semeiniaia pesnia*).<sup>9</sup> Unlike other folk songs, ritual songs represent the archaic past, the deepest layer of memory. The tradition of wedding songs is, by and large, a universal experience. Vadim Prokhorov aptly summarizes that ritual songs, particularly wedding songs, “are organically linked to either the cycle of the agricultural year and the ritual activities and entertainments connected with it or to the cycle of family life” (17). Russian laments belong to the sub-category of ritual songs. As part of the oral tradition, laments, which are sometimes called “the poetry of final parting,” are a sequence of symbols—speech, writing, and gestures—that need various interpretations.<sup>10</sup> The bridal laments, for instance, are like dramatic monologues that detail the events of the wedding as well as the girl’s psychological reactions to them, couched in the poetic language of symbols and metaphor. They evoke reactions and responses both among the passive spectators and the other participants in the ritual, moving the action forward to its inevitable conclusion. As Anna Caraveli-Chaves succinctly writes: “[L]aments mediate between vital realms of existence: life and death, the physical and metaphysical, present and past, temporal and mythic time” (142). Just as the betrothed maiden expresses her fears about her new life in lamentations, the elders in her community voice their collective wisdom. In other words, they advise her to accept her subordination to her husband and in-laws. Through their engagement, the participants transmit and preserve values and norms of Russian peasant society. The bride’s human life ceases when she crosses over the threshold of her *iz’ba*, despite the fact that she has been taught to anticipate the predicament of her future life in advance by learning and rehearsing these laments. In this context, the following folk saying figuratively conveys the tragic picture of a peasant maiden who is doomed to an unhappy life: “[К]оли не заплачется за столом (на девишнике), то заплачется за столбом (в хлеву—в доме мужа)” (Sokolov 217).<sup>11</sup> In this typical lament, the lyrical passage below illustrates the bride’s impending doom:

На море утушка купалася,  
 На море серая полоскалася.  
 Вышедши на берег, встрепенулася,  
 Встрепенувшись, утушка воскликнула:

-- Как-то мне с морем расстаться,  
 Как-то мне с крутых берегов подняться?  
 Придет зима холодная,  
 Придут морозы жестокие,  
 Выпадут снега глубокие,  
 Нехотя с морем расстанешься,  
 Нехотя со крутых берегов подымешься. (Potanin 138-9)<sup>12</sup>

The above lament provides an explicitly metaphorical statement: the bride in the sea requests she not be sent off, bitterly exposing her own sadness. Yet, she has already been in the territorial passage of the sea that represents a mediator between life and death. As “a state of transition,” to use Turner’s terminology, sea imagery accounts for the connection between this world and the next (Turner *Feast* 94). Each of these scenes features the transitional stage through which the bride has to pass: the sea and river, mountains and forests. Just as the sea functions as the final and decisive obstacle that most Russian fairy tale heroes have to overcome on their way from the kingdom of the deceased to the living, it also connects two different realms of life and death (Propp 286). As Natalie Moyle notes, “water is not so much the other world itself, as a substance through which the human realm and the supernatural can contact each other” (233). Seen from this point of view, the motif of a bridge or a coach (sometimes represented as a boat or ship) acquires an important function, similar to that of water.

Many of the laments sung before the marriage not only demonstrate the bride’s grief and fear, but also the loss of her human dignity. The groom’s family is represented as animals (*zver*) in her laments and the bride is permitted to use defiling portrayals in her wailing. The same may be said of life and hard work in the household. A poor peasant woman sings a song about “the bitterness of a woman’s fate” (*prichet o gor'koi zhenskoi dole*): she is isolated and unhappy. To her, life is misfortune (*gore*); she cries over her fate, but her everyday life does not end:

С малых лет ли да уж я с детства  
 Добрых ден я да не видала,  
 Счастья—доли не испытала,  
 Во добре—житье не живала--  
 Жила в горюшке во великом!  
 Я шаталась, бедна—злосчастлива,  
 По чужим людям сиротинкой,  
 По бабам я да по холопам!

Я не жизнь жила—горе мыкала  
 Во чужих людях да во работушке,  
 Утром рано—то была разбужена,  
 Вечер поздно была уложена,  
 Среди ночи потревожена,  
 День и ночь я была на работушке. (Chistov 340-1)<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, in the laments recorded in the several collections mentioned earlier, whether they were sung by the bride or by a married woman, no lament regarding the happiness of women or a happy marriage life is present. A patrilineal family is indifferent to the predicament of its daughter-in-law. Once her husband is recruited to be a soldier or, consequently, if he dies, the widow lives as if she herself were dead. Although the bride is married to the “beautiful sun” (*krasno na zoloto* or *krasno solnyshko*), the poetic metaphor for the husband of the bride, in the celebration of her wedding she views his family as “evil alien people” (*zlye, chuzhie ljudi*) and pictures herself as the widow of her animal-like husband. It is clear from the above consideration that the bride’s laments are nothing but a preparation for her unhappy future through a death-like ritual that is similar to a funeral. As many of the wedding laments demonstrate, once the bride is brought to the alien mother and father of her husband, the husband shows no sympathy for his wife. On the contrary, the wife seems to be a vital laborer in the household economy of the husband’s family; therefore, there is no reason for the husband to feel sorry for her in order to appease his wife’s grief. The groom’s family view their daughter-in-law only as a domestic servant without any claim to spousal affection in her life.

While comparing and contrasting rituals and laments, it becomes clear that the two mirror one another. That is why the wedding rite embodies death motifs and death-related symbolic connotations, while the funeral rite foreshadows a new afterlife as remarriage or rebirth. In short, as Van Gennep, Turner, and other anthropologists have shown, all rites of passages have elements of death and rebirth. Our perceptions of life and death are not separable from each other and all rites of passage have three stages: being alive, dying, and being dead. Not surprisingly, the funeral ritual displays similar features to those in the wedding rites. Once the death has been announced a priest is summoned and the ceremony proceeds. Before the ceremony, the dead body of the deceased is washed and dressed in a special attire, like a bridegroom, if the deceased is a male. Then the

body is placed on the table or on the bench below the *krasnyi ugol*<sup>4</sup> with his head pointed in the direction of the icons and his feet toward the outer door of the *izba*.<sup>15</sup> Having washed the corpse, it is dressed in new clothing that has never been touched by the deceased. A mirroring of the wedding ritual starts from the moment of the abluion of the corpse, *omovenie*, which echoes the bride's bathing ritual in the Russian *bania*. In some regions of Russia, female corpses were dressed and buried in the same clothing that they had worn at their weddings, a custom that occurred with males as well.<sup>16</sup> Curiously, depending on different regions, there were various rites of dressing the deceased; for example, "the female corpses were used to be dressed from the left to the right while male from the right to the left."<sup>17</sup>

Equal attention must be paid to the custom of tying the corpse. Semantically, this custom is no doubt the opposite of untying knots, unlocking locks, and opening all kinds of windows, doors, closets, etc. The corpse's clothing is buttoned up and all knots are tied; in addition, his arms and legs are also tied to one another (Baiburin 109).<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the fact that this constriction is to prevent the soul of the deceased from returning to the body and doing harm to the living, these customs are undoubtedly evocative of the unbraiding of the bride's hair after the bath ceremony, which is juxtaposed to the abluion of the corpse. One typical lamentation shows how the ritual proceeds:

Уж как смотрю, беда победная головушка, --  
 Не по-старому ты спишь, да не по-прежнему!  
 Нету душеньки в твоих да во белых грудях,  
 Нет во резвых во ноженьках стояньица,  
 Нет во белых во рученьках маханьица,  
 Нет во ясных очах да мигваньица,  
 Уж застоися-то речист язык в устах да во сахарных.  
 (Chistov 239)<sup>19</sup>

After a priest has administered the confession and sacrament, a deacon (*d'iakon*), reads the Psalter over the dead body. During this final farewell, the deceased is absolved of all of his or her sins. The wailer, turning to the deceased, begins to lament for a long time even after the coffin is brought to its final abode (grave). The preparation for the departure of the coffin to the cemetery is completed through this procedure.

It is important to point out that the deceased is not dead, but still living. To be more precise, people expected the deceased to con-

tinue to live in the other world or imagine that the voyager on his/her way to the other world could marry again in this new realm. No matter whether the deceased was a man or woman, a belief in the possibility for posthumous remarriage, the equivalent of rebirth, was preserved among the peasantry. Of great importance is the fact that the living's longing for the deceased's posthumous marriage occurred mainly when the deceased died too early, or died unmarried, particularly with young girls. Since the conception of the deceased included the idea that the dead could both guard and harm the living, these attempts to appease the soul of the dead are quite understandable. This belief was frequently expressed in the theme of a soldier's death on the battlefield. The ensuing passage embodies the relationship between death and marriage in the form of symbolism: bullet—soldier (husband) and mother—the damp earth (marriage).

Ты скажи—тко си, мой конь,  
 Что я женился на другой.  
 Как женился—то миня  
 Цюжа дальня строга,  
 Повенцала—то миня  
 Да пуля быстрая.  
 А жена—то у миня  
 Да сабля вострая,  
 А постель—то у миня  
 Да мать—сыра земля,  
 А изголовье—то у миня  
 Мурава трава. (Sokolov 481)<sup>20</sup>

The appearance of military motifs in laments is also present in Nikolai Gogol's *Strashnaia mest'* in which Katerina sings her doleful song—an example of the association between death in battle and marriage. Katerina, the wife of the Cossack Pan Danilo who is killed by his father-in-law (a demonic sorcerer), is driven mad by her husband's fateful death; she begins to sing, recalling the burial of Pan Danilo:

Бижыть возок кровавенькій:  
 У тим возку козак лежить,  
 Постріеляный, порубаный,  
 В правій ручци дротык держить,  
 С того дроту кривця бижыть;  
 Бижыть рика кровавая.  
 Над ричкою явор стоить,  
 Над явором ворон кряче.

За козаком маты плаче.  
 Не плачь, маты, не журься!  
 Бо вже твій сын оженився.  
 Та взяв жинку паняночку,  
 В чистом поли земляночку,  
 И без дверець, без оконець.  
 Та вже писни вышов конець.  
 Танцювала рыба з раком...  
 А хто мене не полюбить трясця  
 Его матерь! (Gogol' 274)<sup>21</sup>

A similar lament recalls the weeping of a widow for her dead husband who died during the Russo-Japanese war: “Удалы ты головушки / Не весельем занимался— / Своей кровью—рудой венчался! / Как на поле на сраженном / Головами мосты мощены, / От кровей реки пропущены! / На этом ли на полюшке (Chistov 303).<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between death and marriage is distinctively inscribed in the ritual of lamentation, particularly when the deceased is a young unmarried woman. Her body is attired like a bride and followed by her female friends as they did in her lifetime, traveling from the bride's *izba* to the church for the wedding ceremony. A mother's *plach po docheri* (wailing for her daughter) illustrates how deeply she grieves for her daughter's untimely death, as well as her sorrow over not being able to afford the best dress for her daughter: “Положила бы во платица во цветные, / Да в нарядные тебя бы в подвечные” (Chistov 236).<sup>23</sup> On a symbolic level, this passage attests to the fact that the deceased's attire and her funeral ceremony are closely linked to her posthumous marriage in the other world. The corpse of an unmarried woman (particularly if she committed suicide) was considered extremely dangerous because her soul was believed to return to its earthly home to inflict harm on the living. Such an untimely death, as D. K. Zelenin defines it, belongs to the category of “*zhalozhnye pokoiniki*” (*Izbrannye trudy* 231). The hope for a posthumous union is a clear result of the livings' efforts to avoid harm from the spirit of the unmarried woman. Not only did the family wish to protect themselves from the spirit of their deceased child, but there was a sense of communal responsibility to perform a symbolic ritual (a funeral ceremony that acts as a posthumous marriage) for their deceased daughter. This act is another representation of the rebirth of the deceased: namely, the living beseeches its poor victim to live happily in

her new life through marriage. While marriage rituals in peasant life were inseparable from death imagery, marriage in the case of the deceased (in the form of funeral rites) took a more poeticized and dramatized form.

For these reasons, it is hardly surprising that the married daughter visits her former home, her parents' *izba* where she was born and from which she was carried out during the funeral ritual. In this case, the visitor is always described as a "guest" from the other world: "Когда ждать в гости любимое гостибище?" (Chistov 103), or "Бог дает да дорогу гостыню, / Догору гостыню сердечную" (286). The motif of a soul's return to the world of the living is not only present in funeral laments, but also in wedding songs and in the oral rituals of orphans:

Маринина матушка,  
 Маринина родная  
 Да по том свету ходить,  
 Господа бога просить:  
 —Спусти мне, боже,  
 И с неба на землю,  
 На сиротскую свадьбу,  
 Хуть бы я посмотрела,  
 Как сироты плачуть,  
 У бога доли просють. (qtd. Chistiakov, 125-6)<sup>24</sup>

Understandably, the theme of visiting is paired with the theme of the road, the path by which the deceased is initially carried to the other world. It is no coincidence that many laments share these two motifs, as they both connect the realm of the deceased with the realm of the living. Both the ritual space of the road and the act of returning are based on territorial passage, just as funeral and wedding rituals are a rite of passage. The latter, however, does not indicate the possibility of the bride's return. This is why wedding laments are tragic while, by contrast, funeral laments consider the dead as a creature that lives forever: the deceased is able to, and must, return annually on the day of his or her death.

Да ты слушай свет-желанной милой дядюшка,  
 Побывашь когда к победным нам головушкам  
 Ты в свой дом во крестьянску нашу жирушку,  
 Сожидать буду душа я красна девушка,  
 Я сидеть буду победна под окошечком,  
 Ясны очюшки держать да во чистом поле,

...  
 Когда ждать тебя в любимое гостибище ...

...  
 Хоть чистым полоушком лети да черным вороном,  
 Ко селу лети ведь ты да ясным соколом...  
 Не убоюся того белая лебедушка,  
 Выду, стричу на крылечке переном,  
 С тобою сдию тут я доброе здоровьице...  
 Объявился вдруг любимый у нас гостюшко,  
 Засмотреть пришел желанный ведь наш дялюшка.  
 (Barsov 217-18)<sup>25</sup>

The return of the deceased to his former home is linked to the crossing of a water boundary, as in the lament above. For the most part, these scenes unfold with the deceased making a voyage by boat: “Все я думала победным своим разумом, / Как не едет ли любимая семейшка / *Корабельничкам* на синем на Онегушке/ Он со этим товаром заграничим” (Barsov 34).<sup>26</sup> The deceased also sometimes returns in a zoomorphic form: it takes the shape of flying animals, such as birds, ravens, falcons, doves, and cuckoos, as shown in previously quoted laments (Barsov 217-18). There are a number of clichés found in laments that demonstrate the prevalence of bird imagery, for instance: “*obernushis’ pereletnym iasnym sokolom*,” “*belym golubochkim*,” “*sizoi kukushechkoi*,” and “*ptashechkoli*.” The souls of birds are often said to visit the relatives of the deceased in order to give them protection or carry messages from one place to another. Birds are one of the frequently recurring animals in lamentations, evidence of the importance of the soul’s escaping from the dead body in order to visit its former home.<sup>27</sup>

In peasant tradition, the bereaved family remembers the departed on the days of the Church calendar set aside for the remembrance of the dead. In venerating the dead, the departed individual is never referred to as a corpse, the dead, or the deceased. Unlike the funeral-like wedding ritual, the marriage-like funeral glorifies human life with the possibility for the deceased to visit its former home and be welcomed back to its *izba*. The belief that the departed will visit the living is held up until a certain date—the fortieth day after the funeral. On this day a special farewell ritual is performed. One example demonstrates how the deceased’s homecoming was celebrated: “At 12 o’clock people went out on the street in order to lead the soul beyond the river of oblivion (*Zabyt’—reku*), and they carried an icon, *kul’ia* (a

main food eaten at funeral repast) and *prizheniki*’ (Eremina *Istoriko-etnograficheskie* 198). The widow of the dead then performs the final farewell lament:

Ты сойдешь да, млада-милая  
 Ты на тот да свет на будущий.  
 Тибя станут звать да, млада-милая,  
 Станут звать да Забыть-реку.  
 Ты послушай, млада-милая,  
 Ты в остатние во последние:  
 Ты не ездй на Забыть-реку,  
 Ты не пей-ко Забытной воды,  
 Ты забудешь, млада-милая,  
 Ты свою родну стронку,  
 Ты забудешь, млада-милая,  
 Ты меня да горюшиночку  
 Со своим да малым детушкам. (Eremina *Istoriko-etnograficheskie* 198)<sup>28</sup>

From the laments cited so far it is apparent that both wedding and funeral laments invariably include a rite of passage across a territorial barrier: a river, a sea, a bridge, etc. The image of a boat plays an especially important role as M. Pliukhanova notes, for “the boat is a vehicle for transference to the other world, first of all, to the kingdom of the deceased” (182). Pliukhanova goes on to say that “in Rus’ the deceased was cremated on the boat in accordance with the pagan funeral ritual” (182). Thus, the bride’s journey is reminiscent to that of the deceased’s, but the latter entails hope (in the welcoming of the spirit home again) while the former is a permanent loss for the family. As most wedding laments demonstrate, there is no indication of welcoming the married daughter. On the contrary, the bride’s parents often do not recognize their daughter. While funeral laments offer the deceased the opportunity to return to the living in many forms and by many vehicles of territorial passage, wedding laments do not make any reference to this.

Symbolically, funeral rites provide the belief that the deceased will return to mother earth to live a new life in a new abode (the coffin and grave). According to Russian folk belief, the deceased no longer lives in its former home but continues a liminal existence in a new “dwelling-place,” that is the coffin, which in some parts of Russia even had windows (*Vostochnoslavianskaia* 348). Wedding laments have no such allusions, even though the bride undergoes the rebirth ritual

in the *bania*. Once the bride marries the groom she is considered as being nearly dead and no longer human. In this context, the motif of life in the funeral lament is similar to the archetypal figure of the Moist Mother Earth (*Mati syra zemlia*) in its representation of rebirth. In these laments, the deceased is portrayed as being returned to the Moist Mother Earth, but before settling in her “permanent nest” it is carried into its new room—the coffin.

С попом—отцом духовным  
 Да с петьем божьим церковным!  
 Как схороним тебя, белая лебедушка,  
 Во матушку сыру землю  
 И во буюву холодную моголушку,  
 В вековечну, бесконечну тебя жирушку,  
 Закроем тебя матушкой сырой землей,  
 Замуравим тебя травонькой шелковою! (Chistov 237)<sup>29</sup>

Often the name of Moist Mother Earth is replaced with *Bogoroditsa*, “the most common name of Mary among Russian people” (Fedotov 360). As in the case of Mother Earth, *Bogoroditsa* is the embodiment of divine Motherhood.

Most funeral laments, in order to assure entrance into the maternal womb, require several rites; the ablution and dressing the corpse, including adornment with a wreath and accessories, seem to be a final rehearsal for rebirth. Unlike the nature of the wedding ritual and its laments, as Van Gennep points out, the funeral is characterized by “incorporation” in the other world—the realm of the ancestors and of the deceased. It is the place for a permanent new life (*vechnoe, beskonechnoe*) and a “comfortable life” (*zhibizn' v dostatke*). In a cosmological sense, the mother’s womb is a sacred and safe place where even the unclean dead may rest. Hence, it is not unreasonable to postulate that to be born is to emerge from the mother’s womb whereas to die is to return to Earth. Although descriptions of the Moist Mother Earth accompany expression like “cold grave” (*khladnaia mogilushka*),<sup>30</sup> the new resting place functions as a site where the dead may preparation for rebirth.

Although wedding and funeral rituals have certain similarities, they stand in sharp contrast to one another upon an analysis of their content. In these laments, the cycle of life is divided into three main elements: birth, marriage, and death. The components, however, are represented differently in both types of lament: the wedding ritual includes a prologue that prepares one for a symbolic death, while the

funeral has a vision of new life (remarriage and rebirth). Under the Rus'ian patriarchal social system, most peasant women were not allowed to express either conjugal affection or spousal love, even in the very beginning of their marriage period. In this context, the majority of Russian wedding laments figuratively express the tragic fate of peasant women. Despite the fact that the bride was warned of her tragic future through these morose laments, her human life ceased when she crossed over the threshold of her *izba*. The bride could rest permanently only if she died and finally lay down in the Moist Mother Earth. Since the laments reflect the way of life that was ingrained in the peasant life, they display the collective wisdom of a community. The laments served as lessons to the bride in how to live, how to cope with the groom's family, and other problems commonly faced by the bride.

Funeral rites too are full of death-imagery, however their laments imply that the living wishes for the permanent life of the deceased. These wishes are expressed through symbolic and reoccurring motifs such as the deceased's visiting its former home as a guest, it's settling in to a new abode, remarriage, rebirth, and so forth. In funeral laments, the deceased was believed to make a journey to the other world (the place of the late person's ancestors) and so the departed was dressed elaborately with great caution on the part of the community. Through these rituals the community could overcome their fear of the dead, as well as of death itself. Further, through rituals and laments, the peasant community continued to have not only a positive vision of life but also an ever-present conception of eternity: the idea that life is a continuum and does not cease with death. Funeral rituals, thus, reinforced the link between the living and the departed while allowing the deceased to rest permanently in its new domicile—the cosmic womb that is the Moist Mother Earth. Moreover, the bereaved family honored the departed on particular days of the Church calendar, praying for the soul of the deceased with a commemorative service that was no doubt an important rite of respect for the departed. As funeral rituals and laments show, death for the Russian peasantry was not the end of life. Rather, it was the synthesis of life and death, the main axes of the human life cycle.

Not only does an analysis of wedding and funeral laments elucidate peasant beliefs surrounding life and death, but an interdisciplinary approach to wedding and funeral rituals sheds new light on the problem of gender. Sexual asymmetry in Russian peasant culture took

the form of the cultural subordination of women to men, to the communal institution of patriarchy, and to the peasant *Weltanschauung* as a whole, all of which were vital ingredients in the total topology of peasant life. These features are expressed in the aphoristic phrase: “in cultural systems we find a recurrent opposition: between man, who stands for culture, and woman, who stands for nature and often for disorder” (Rosaldo 31).

The most important times in the lives of village peasants were invariably communal events: births, marriages, and deaths, plagues, or famines, droughts or unusually prosperous years, celebrations or bereavement—these events all brought them together “in some collective manifestation” (Marrus 115). Folklore, the cultural equipment of village life, was one of the means by which communities or individuals could attempt to ease of the cruel burdens imposed on them. In short, folklore helped to bind villages together through its network of regulations that applied to all, making individual actions of common concern. Rural communities were frequently involved as “corporate bodies in folkloric practice because these communities engaged in this struggle for survival. This is why all members had to participate and why the community had a deep interest in seeing that everything was done properly, according to the rules” (Marrus 119). Due to the importance of collectivity, Russian wedding and funeral laments cannot be properly understood without paying close attention to their social contexts, as Halbwachs writes. Collective memory, of which laments are a part, originates from shared communication about the meaning of the past—a meaning that is anchored in the experience and words of individuals who partake in the life of the respective collective. Collective memory, thus, is based on a society’s inventory of signs and symbols and serves as a unique language for expressing the shared experience of a community. It is in this way that wedding and funeral laments and rituals were forms of oral communication, propagating the ideals of the peasant commune, as well as the collective normative values of Russian peasant culture that were passed down from generation to generation.

### Notes

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invaluable comments that eventually made this paper available in its finalized form.

1. The expression “total topography” I partly owe to the school’s usage in its primary critics’ arguments. In the *Annales* school’s conception, “total history” is the actual aspiration for a reconstruction of the society of the past in its entirety and multifariousness” (Gurevich 202).
2. For more information on the geographical topography of the land near the White Sea, see *Russkaia svad’ba*, tom I (26) and T. V. Bernshtam.
3. The main collections I use are as follows: *Zapisali i Iurii Sokolovy* (hereafter abbreviated as Sokolov); *Prichitaniia*, vstu. stat’ia i primechaniia (hereafter abbreviated as Chistov); *Prichitaniia Severnogo kraia, sobrannyye* (hereafter abbreviated as Barsov); *Russkie svadebnye pesni Sibiri* (hereafter abbreviated as Potanin). Almost from the appearance of its first volume, Barsov’s collection has been regarded as a fundamental source of information about Russian laments. It evoked responses from scholars, writers, and cultural figures not only in Russia, but also from abroad, including the English scholar W. P. Ralston. In all subsequent references to lamentations, all italics are mine. All English translations are mine, except for the Ukrainian translation in endnote 21.
4. For Turner, the term is a marginal phase between old and new statues, a period lasting a limited amount of time and in most cases leading to a normal condition and a new social membership and status.
5. See Turner, *The Ritual Process* and Van Gennep.
6. In the province of Iaroslav, the bride goes around in black clothing until her wedding. During the period of pre-marriage she is considered a saint and she must wear the same “doleful clothing” (*pechal’naia odezhda*) that she would wear in mourning (Eremina *K voprosu* 22).
7. Similar to this measure, a special practice was used to chase off a devil (sorcerer) and appeared in the wedding ceremony; We can find such a scene in the first chapter of Gogol’s *A Terrible Revenge* (*Strashnaia mest’: 1832*).
8. See Prokhorov, p. 3.
9. Songs were sung at all stages of the marriage ritual and were of two main types: lyrical (*liricheskaia*) and laudatory (*velichal’naia*) with a sub-group of reproaching (*koril’naia*).
10. The term lament is one of several common English words that have been used for wail, death chant, funeral mourning, song of sorrow, dirge, elegy, and keen. These terms overlap and have been inconsistently used by various writers. Lament on the whole implies a certain poetic expression and an artistic formality not always understood by the word “wailing” and has a less formal connotation than the word “elegy.” As an oral tradition, “the term lament has been used to identify a poetic expression without music,” in Janice Jarrett’s definition, and “the lament

tends to be more expressive of personal grief, more spontaneous as a form, and is in essence a religious expression” (3-4).

11. “... if she does not cry her heart out while sitting with her girlfriends at the table (at a girl’s party, *devichnik*), then she will have her cry out behind the post (*i.e.*, in the cattle shed—in her husband’s house.”
12. The little duck was swimming in the sea / The grey one was splashing in the sea / Clambering on the shore it shook its wings / After shaking its wings, the duckling declared / How can ever part from the sea / How can I ascend from its steep banks? / The cold weather will come / The cruel frosts will come / The deep snows will fall / You will part from the sea unwillingly / You will ascend from its steep banks unwillingly.
13. From my earliest years, yes even from childhood / I have not seen good days / I have not experienced a happy fate / I have not lived in a good existence / I have lived in great woe / I wandered, poor and unfortunate / Among alien folks, an orphan Among slaves and serfs / I did not live a life, I tasted grief / Both alien folks and work / In early morning I would be awakened / And was put to bed late in the evening / I was disturbed in the middle of the night / And I had to work both day and night.
14. For information on traditional funeral ritual throughout Russian history, see Gatsak, p. 179-91.
15. The direction of the deceased’s legs was believed to be a very important aspect of the funeral ritual. As is well known, it is closely related to the theme of “deceiving a ghost,” which was considered as a means to protect the living from the soul of the deceased, especially from the evil spirits. See Frazer, p. 100.
16. G. S. Maslova says that “the bride and groom did not wear their wedding dress [after their wedding]; instead, they tried to keep it until their death. According to the custom, they did not sell [their] wedding shirt (*rubashka*). There was a custom of burying the deceased in its wedding clothing—skirt and padded jacket, skirt and jacket” (160).
17. For details related to the treatment of the funeral ritual, especially to the corpse before it is carried out from the *izba*, see Baiburin, p. 107-11.
18. The motif of untying and opening is used particularly during childbirth if it is difficult. This belief results from the magical perception that the mother-to-be can deliver easily by untying all kinds of knots and locks. A example is in Anton Chekhov’s *The Name Day Party (Imeniny, 1888)* in which a midwife helping Olga giving birth resorts to this superstition. See the final two chapters.
19. I see that my poor unfortunate loved one / Is not sleeping as of old, as he used to sleep / There is no soul in your white breasts / There is no firmness in your lively feet / There is no grip in your white hands / There is no winking in your clear eyes / And your glib tongue has come to a halt in your sweet mouth.

20. Tell me, my steed / That I have married another / As I married, then / An alter distant land / Crowned me / And a speedy bullet / And my wife—I have / A sharp sword / And my bed / And my Damp Earth / Is the young green grass.
21. Slowly winds the bloodstained wagon / Bearing home a brave young Cossack / Rent by bullets, hacked by sabers / In his hand he holds an arrow / From its shaft the blood runs downward / Down it runs, the blood-red river / By the river sways a maple / On the maple caws a raven / The mother mourns her Cossack son / Weep not, mother, thou’rt not forsaken / For thy son a bride hath taken / Yea, he wed a gentle maiden / Took a lodging in the valley / Neither door nor window has it / Here we end our doleful ballad / Crabs and carps they went a-dancing / And he who loves me not in hell will rot!
22. My brave ones / You did not have a joyful time / You were married with your own blood / Like on a battlefield / The bridges are paved with heads / The rivers are filled with blood / Was it on this little field.
23. I would dress you in colored clothes / In special clothes.
24. Marina’s mama / Marina’s kindred one / [If she can] travel back to me / Ask the Lord God / Let me descend, oh God / From heaven to earth / To my orphan’s wedding / Let me have a look / At the orphan’s crying / At them begging God for luck.
25. Listen to me, my sweet heart uncle / You will come to see us / Come back to your peasant heavenly home / I will wait for you, my beautiful girl / I will sit under the small windowsill / I will keep a close watch in the open friend / While waiting for you to arrive as my beloved guest / Over the clean little field like a black raven / Fly like a bright falcon to our village / I will not fear you, little white swan / I will come out, I will meet you on the front porch / With you I will be healthy / Suddenly our beloved guest arrived / Our long-awaited uncle arrived to have a look.
26. I kept thinking with my poor reason / How my beloved family is not coming / By ship on the blue Onega / With its foreign goods.
27. The bird, as a personified symbol of the soul of the deceased, is symbolic around the world, particularly in Indo-European countries (Veletskiaia 31).
28. Will you depart, my young dear one / For the next world, the future world / Will they began to summon you, my young dear one / Summon you to the River of forgetfulness / Listen up, my young dear one / During your last remaining days / Do not leave for the River of forgetfulness / Do not drink from the waters of forgetfulness / You will forget, my young dear one / You will forget your native land / You will forget, my young dear one / You will forget me, your grieving wife / And your young kids, too.
29. With a priest, with a spiritual father / And with the swimming of God’s Church / How will we bury you, little white swan / In the Damp

Mother Earth / In the cold little grave / In the eternal, heavenly home /  
We will cover you with the Damp Mother Earth / We will cover you  
with silk grass.

30. As Vladimir Dal' notes, there are several other clichés used in laments to describe coffin and grave, such as “new chamber” (*nova gornitsa*), “beneficial house” (*blagodatnyi dom*), and “permanent mansion” (*vechnoe domovishchebko*). The words “*dom*” and “*domovishchebko*,” together with “*domovina*,” were also used and are etymologically linked to “*dom*” (house).

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