

Comparative Folkloristic Analysis of Karelian and Hungarian Death Laments

Doctoral Thesis by Anna Viktória Rezessy

/English Summary/

In my doctoral thesis I have compared about 85-85 Karelian and Hungarian death lament texts collected from published and archival sources.

In the pre-studies of my thesis I have already stated that the Karelian and Hungarian death lament texts transmit differing religious, theological, psychological messages and also differing coping strategies for grieving.

This time my dissertation aims to answer in what measure this difference really exists, in what degree the similarity can be demonstrated, and how all these manifest at the levels of texts' structure and linguistic form: what means the structure and the lingual expression use to get the message through?

Regarding the variation and the reproduction it is also supportable that the meaning, the message and the function of the lament chiefly determine define chiefly the degree and the limits, as well as the object and the form of the variability.

Furthermore, in my paper I also seek the answer for the following questions: where do the differences and similarities stem from; what are the main differences and essential correspondences derived from the cultural, historical, religious, ritual and social background? What status does the lament have in the Karelian and Hungarian folklore; what prestige does it gain in the hierarchy of folklore genres and in the Folkloristics?

The target of my thesis is text analysis exclusively; I do not touch upon the assay of the melody.

I have systematized the text material of the comparative analysis in a two-volume anthology, containing a separate Karelian and Hungarian corpus attached to the dissertation. The selection of the Karelian texts is bilingual: I have supplemented the original text versions with my own translations. The text corpus covers all the Karelian and Hungarian lament areas, and its temporal dimensions expand to 150 years: the earliest Karelian text used in this research material is from 1845 and the latest Hungarian text is from 1993.

The method of this comparative assay is essentially based on the folkloristic text analysis (thematic-structural analysis, the assay of the language of the lament, the study of the text variation) and completed with the anthropological rite theories, the viewpoints of the ritual poetry research, as well as the theories of the thanatology – namely the approach of the sociology of death, together with the psychological, theological and medical grief theories. In addition, I partially apply the achievements of the *gender studies*.

In the chapter discussing the ritual background of the lament it has been pointed out that among the orthodox Karelians lamenting is a more integral part of the death ceremony; it can be heard more often throughout the different steps of the rite, so the Karelian folklore contains more lament types – lament

performance related to a given rite momentum – than the Hungarian folklore. The reason for the difference is the fact that while the Hungarian lament takes part in the death ritual in cooperation with other folklore products and dramatic customs, the Karelian lament is the exclusive accompanying genre with a full monopoly of the death ceremony.

In the case of both researched groups the lamenting goes side by side with the death ritual and goes through the same – or at least similar – phases.

The different levels of the text analysis prove in many ways that in both the Karelian and Hungarian laments the parallel journey of the death ceremony and the grief work can be traced. The survey of the content, structure and language of the texts confirms that the laments' chief function and religious message is to formulate a coping strategy for grieving.

The thematic-structural analysis has demonstrated that the Hungarian and Karelian lament texts give dissimilar solutions for dissolving the conflict caused by death and for dealing with grief. The table below recapitulates the main conclusions of the structural-thematic comparative analysis.

	Hungarian lament texts	Karelian lament texts
Passing	Passing from the viewpoint of the living: Happy past ↔ unhappy present	Metamorphosis from the viewpoint of the dead: transubstantiation of the dead, its journey to the other world
Temporal dimension	Temporal dimension of the living: <i>chronos</i> time	Temporal dimension of the dead: <i>kairos</i> time
Contact with the dead	Exclusively in the past, with its former state of existence	Report from beyond + contact with the transubstantiated estate of the dead in the present
Relation to the present	Escape from living the present by looking into the past (future)	Living the present moment
Coping strategy for grieving	<i>Less effective strategy:</i> Refusal of the death Keeping distance from the dead Pushing the emotions to the past	<i>More effective strategy:</i> Living and accepting the metamorphoses of the present Acceptance of the death and the new form of existence of the dead ⇒ Real distancing of the emotions
The message dissolving the death: faith in the existence after death	<i>Resurrection, eternal life</i> Christian death concept Death is a final and utter rupture Other world without any passage	<i>Reincarnation</i> Finno-Ugrian death concept Death is a gradual leaving process, getting into a new form of existence Beginning of a new relationship between living and dead
Tone of the laments	Unrest, pits	Calm, peace, relief
Structure of the laments	More hectic unsettled, shorter thematic units	More clear, apparent, stable; the thematic episodes are longer, and consist of multiple parallelisms

The one by one comparison of the singular lament types determined in the anthology has again proven that the texts – either Karelian or Hungarian – not only follow and interpret the several phases of death

rituals, but also the different stages of grief work. The structure, the content and the motifs of the individual lament types are much more bounded and stable in the Karelian material, then again in the Hungarian corpus the arrangement of the thematic and structural units is more loose and unbound. This may arise from the fact that the Karelian laments de facto follow more tightly the whole flow of the death ceremony.

The analysis of the lament language (vocabulary, images, stylistic devices of the melody, grammar, phrase types and figures) has shown that the linguistic form cohere with the content and the religious-psychological message of the lament.

Beside the text motifs and together with the idea of the reincarnation, the language of the Karelian laments is also more mysterious (hardly understandable metaphors, invocations hiding taboo names, metaphorical substitutes, expletives easing alliterations, alliterations fading meanings, lingual archaisms, grammar differing from the standard language) and fits more into the death ritual than the Hungarian lament language which is more closely related to the everyday spoken language. Consequently, regarding content, structure and language the Karelian lament is more tightly connected to the death ceremony than the Hungarian equivalent.

The Karelian lament language has developed a unique poetical expression that is alien to any other lyrical production or any other product of folk poetry, as well as to the ordinary spoken language. Its characteristics are rarely adapted in other folklore genres, and vice versa: the lament rarely borrows from other genres. On the other hand, the Hungarian laments take their images, expressions and formulas from many other folklore genres and other (ecclesiastic-literary, popular, quotidian) sources.

At the levels of content and form, both in Karelian and Hungarian laments the magical function seems secondary compared to the expressive and emotional functions (the expression of the indissoluble contradiction of being, the phrasing of the power and love, giving a coping strategy for grieving and distancing emotions).

The texts analysed in the chapter studying the lament texts' variation and reproduction reflected a really diversified picture. However, I have succeeded in finding the capital rules of reproduction concerning both the Karelian and the Hungarian material. The lament representing the same ritual function and same performer stays relatively unchanged despite the fact that the object of the lament, namely the lamented person varies. Thus the function is one of the most determining structural and thematic factor. The content of the lament does not really depend on the object of the lament (the sex, age, marital status of the deceased, the relation between the deceased and the lament-performer) and the nature of the death, but primarily on the performance situation, namely the rite momentum and the related grief work stage. The former factors act mostly upon the vocabulary, possibly upon the linguistic form, their influence on content and structure is negligible.

The reason for the differences regarding the Hungarian and Karelian lamenting custom and lament genre shall be sought in the wider social and historical context, or it shall be seen in the position taken by the lament in the folklore genre hierarchy. Contrary to the Hungarian the Karelian lament has a central place in the system of folklore genres, and this is justified by the following facts:

1. The role of the lament overgrows the frames of the ceremonies connected to the life turning-points and it is attached to various points of everyday life. This way the traditional definition of lament has been prised open.
2. The lament is one of the form of expression that reinforce the identity of the Karelians who often survived the experiences of detachments and statelessness. Today's *revival* movements are also an evidence for this: during officially organized lament courses more and more participants gather and try to (re)acquire the techniques of the lament production. The Karelian lament has remarkable prestige and symbolic value in the folklore genre hierarchy and Karelian culture.

The Karelians need a positive vision of future in order to endure. According to my hypothesis – beside the modern therapeutic function – the lament could also be the mediator of this message. To support this hypothesis, a more precise research on the historical and social background of the Karelian and Hungarian lament would be needed.