

## Resurrection, revenance, and exhumation

### The problematics of the dead body in songs and laments

#### 1.

Different types of folklore texts differ from each other by their function.<sup>1</sup> We can distinguish between genres meant to be believed (like legend) and genres recognized in advance as fiction (fairy-tale). At the same time, textual fiction may also have served practical purposes—such as the telling of fairy-tales during the late autumn and early winter for purposes of fertility magic—as used to be the case in the Estonian folk tradition. There are folklore genres that have functioned, among other things, as an accompaniment, comment on, or support to rituals or practices being carried out—for instance, an incantation during a cure, or a lament in death-related procedures, when a person must be separated from his familiar environment. The same textual formulae fulfil different tasks in different genres, which means that they also carry a different meaning.

Side by side with the criterion of truth versus fictionality, there exists in human life and the texts and practices accompanying it another, the axis of concreteness versus symbolism. The more culturally complicated human behaviour becomes, the more secondary modeling<sup>2</sup> it comes to involve—to the point where the actual original meanings begin to get blurred. Especially in modern times, many textual segments that once used to carry a specific meaning and yet were palpably understandable even when poetically encoded, may have become vague. A person living in a profane society ‘cannot’ believe explanations of the religious otherworld, a fact which, however, does not extinguish his existential desire to have knowledge about it. Symbolism

1 This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence CECT) and by the Estonian Science Foundation (research grant no. 7385).

2 About the concept of secondary modeling systems see Lotman 1967 and 1977, also Eco 1990: ix–x.

and abstraction here become a necessary buffer zone, trying somehow or other to fill a gap in human knowledge. For a person inhabiting a traditional culture, this mechanism of treating reality would probably have remained relatively impenetrable.

Going on from the above thoughts, I shall in the present paper consider some themes related to the bodily aspect of humanity in various genres of folklore, particularly in songs and laments, as well as in practices related to death and commemoration. As expected, the problems connected with the human body have in these genres undergone transformations of meaning, the understanding and interpretation of which may vary considerably. The material discussed in the article derives mainly from the Balto-Finnic and north Russian cultural area, partly from my own experience during my field trips. Parallels of a more eloquent nature have been added from other parts of the world. The following is a primarily comparative discussion aspiring to open up the perhaps forgotten background of certain phenomena.

## 2.

In fairy-tales, songs and laments, but also in the Estonian semi-literary national epic *Kalevipoeg*, there occurs the motif of entering into conversation with a person lying dead and buried in his or her grave. In the tales where the youngest brother, snubbed by his senior siblings, stays at his father's grave and gets advice and guidance from him, this motif is significant for the unfolding of the story, since the hero is thus provided with important information or encouragement. In *Kalevipoeg*, the eponymous nature giant, enriched with eminently human qualities by the epic's author, F. R. Kreutzwald, goes to his father's grave to find consolation, asking among other things that his father rise from the grave. This desire derives from an Estonian Kalevala-metric orphan's song, remaining rather a lyrical episode in the context of the epic. As expected, the father replies to the request in the negative, saying:

Ei vôi tõusta, poega noori,	I can't get up, young son,
Ei vôi tõusta, ei ärata.	I can't wake up and rise:
Katki olen kaeleluusta,	my neck is broken in two,
Pihupõrma põveluusta,	my kneecaps are almost turned to dust.
Muru kasvand peale mulla,	The lawn has grown above the sod,
Aruheina peale haua,	fescue flourishes atop my grave;
Sammal kasvand peale kalju,	moss has overgrown my gravestone

Sinililled silma peale,                      and hepaticas cover my eyes,  
 Angervaksad jalgadele.                      dropworts grow above my feet.  
 (*Kalevipoeg* VII:834–49, Kreutzwald 1982: 93.)

In the epic's composition, this episode, including no information of narrative importance, serves the purpose of temporarily relieving the strain of action. The father's reference to his broken bones appears plausible in an archaeological context, if we take it as a sign of the archaic custom of deforming the body of the deceased. Unfortunately the motif is not sufficiently grounded in original folk songs, whence Kreutzwald took part of his material. Thus, these lines rather strike a poetic key in the epic. Even though in the *Kalevipoeg*, the hero may have visions of unreal creatures, too, he (like Kreutzwald) does not in this episode really hope that the father might actually rise from his grave.

The motif of begging a dead parent or relative to rise from the dead likewise occurs in the folk songs of various peoples. Primarily, these are tales involving orphans or girls playing a game. The orphans may be visiting the cemetery on a day of commemoration and they address their deceased father or mother there. The Estonian Kalevala-metric songs speak about weeping orphans inviting their deceased parent to rise from the grave and come and comb their hair, or help them prepare their dowry:

Meie kaksi vaeste lasta,	We, the two orphans,
Sa isata, ma emata,	you fatherless, me motherless,
Lähme isa aua peale,	let us visit the father's grave,
Lähme ema aua peale!	let us visit the mother's grave!
Tõuse üles memmekene,	Come, rise, mummy dear,
Tõuse mu pead sugema!	come and comb my hair!
Tõuse vakka valmistama!	Come and prepare the dowry!
Ema mõistab, kostab jälle:	Mother understands and answers:
“Kes on seda enne näinud,	‘Who has seen this thing before,
Ehk on seda muiste kuulnud,	Who's heard of such in days of yore,
Et on koolijas kodussa,	a revenant staying at home,
Külma jalga küünissale?	a visitant in the barn?
Muru on kasvand mulla peale,	Grass has grown over the soil,
Aru ein aua peale.”	fescue grass over the grave.’
...	...

(H I 2, 308 (38) < Põltsamaa khk. – J. Lillak (1889).)

The situation is tragic in these songs, yet again the description remains a lyrical fiction. Hardly anyone in nineteenth-century Estonia would have believed in so literal a rising from the dead, either. The belief in fearsome animated corpses was there naturally. The above song also includes the term *külmjalg* (lit. ‘cold foot’) designating a ‘visitant’, ‘revenant’, a demoniacal dead one which the mother speaking from her grave does not want to become. Ülo Valk (2000) has attempted to bestow a religious dimension on this poetic dialogue, speculating that hardly could such a wish have been voiced in the songs, had the people not been aware of the prospect of bodily resurrection at the day of the Last Judgement. Thus, it would seem that the teaching of the Christian church was nourishing the songs’ wording, as it were, which otherwise might have remained abstract.

Ülo Valk’s position may indeed be plausible in the context of early modern Estonian culture, where ritual lamentation as a practice and a genre of folklore was already extinct. Yet the motif of children weeping and yearning for their parents’ revival derives not from the teachings of the Church, but from a lamentation practice that had already become extinct. Kalevipoeg, as well as the orphans of the Estonian songs, carries towels—attributes obligatory precisely for lamenters, ethnographically—in his hands as he goes to the grave. Verbal communication at the grave generically rather points to lamentation, as opposed to poetic declamation or a high-culture funeral oration. Another significant detail in the folk songs is the request to come and prepare the invoker for some important event. Here, that event would be a wedding, since preparing the dowry is among the central motifs illustrating why the mother is asked to rise from the dead. From the Setu wedding customs we know that an orphaned bride may have visited her parents’ grave to ritually invite them to attend the wedding (Hagu 2000: 210). In all likelihood, songs of the aforementioned kind may have been sung there, too—but even there, already, it would rather have been a symbolic act with no physical reality even imaginable. Similar songs are also to be found among the peoples of Ingermanland, as well as the Slavs, and they represent an interesting genre in transition from lament to lyrical mode. Primarily in the Setu tradition, the border between the lament and the (necromantic) Kalevala-metric song has begun to blur—verbally similar motifs may have sounded both in the laments and in songs, while the performance of the laments has both metrically and vocally grown more song-like (Salve 2000: 57–9; Hagu 2000: 213–16). The same kind of merging or transition can also be observed in the traditions of other East European peoples (cf. Katona 1981: 80–5).

We, at present, find it difficult to guess what the Setu woman might have imagined a hundred years ago while singing this kind of necromantic song. In the cultures where communication with the deceased through ritual lamentation held (and still holds) a central place—such as that of the Setu, the Votes, the Izhorians, the Ingermanland Finns, the Karelians, the Vepsians, but also of the east and south Slavonic peoples—such figures cannot always be reduced to mere poetry. I believe that the personal religious idiolects of people may be quite different in this aspect. The following Setu song presents an interesting example:

Olli imel ütsi tütar, käsikannõl kandijal. Ärä täl koolust kaasa tulli, liivast viinaq veerüsigi. Miä täl tetäq, kohe minnäq? Minnäq täl koolulõ mehele, minnäq kaasalõ kalmulõ. Imekestä, helläkestä – oodi tä kodo koolu tütärd, oodi majja Ma(a)na lasta.	Mother had a daughter, the bearer had one to bear in her arms. A husband came for her from Death, a proposer from the sands. What could she do, where could she go? Get married to death, be taken to wife by a dead one. Mother, the gentle comforter expected home the daughter of death, waited for the child of Manala to enter the house.
Oh imme, helläkeistä, maama meelimar ´akõista – tulõ-s täl kodo koolu tütar, tulõ-s majja Ma(a)na latsi!	O, mother, the gentle comforter, mummy, the sweet berry— came not home the daughter of death, the child of Manala entered not the house!
Imekene helläkene, kalmu tii tekk´ tä kaputitsõ, liiva tii linikitsõ. Ime läts kalmu kaemahe, liivakohe leinamahe. Ärä säääl küündü küsümähe, ärä nõssi nõudõmahe: “Milles tulõ-s kodo, koolu tütar, tulõ-s majja, Ma(a)na lats?” Neiu lausi liivakust,	Mother, the gentle comforter, made a path to the grave of stockings, paved a path on the sand with kerchiefs. Mother went to visit the grave, went to mourn on the sands. There she began to ask, began to demand an answer: ‘Why did she not come home, Death’s daughter, why entered you not the house, child of Manala?’ The maiden answered from under the sands,

<p>kabo kalmulta kõnõli:          “Imekene helläkene,          maama, meelimar´akõnõ,          ärä ma lännü, ega läpe-s,          ärä astnu, anda-s aigu!          Tooni panti tulda tegemähe,          vainu vettä vaeldama –          tuimas lätsi tulda tetehnänni,          vaibu vettä vaeldõhna.”          Ime sis ikulõ isosi,          ime lainalõ lasõhtu:          “Ärä mul olli ütsi tütär,          ütsi tütär, armas latsi.          Miä_ks või võiva tetäq,          kua või kohe minnäq,          kui om Essu nii isknü,          kui om Looja nii loonu?          Ärä_ks minnäq looduvalõ,          looduvalõ, säädüväle:          või-iq loodut paedaq,          kirotõttu kelle andaq!”</p>	<p>the maid spoke from the grave:          ‘Mother, gentle comforter,          mummy, sweet berry,          I am gone—and am not allowed,          I’m departed—and given no more time!          (I’m) set to build the fire of Toonela,          to change the water of death—          I went numb as I built the fire,          as I changed the water of death.’          Then the mother broke out weeping,          the mother began to shed tears:          ‘One daughter I had,          one daughter, a sweet child.          What is to be done now,          where is one to go now,          how has Jesus ordained it,          how has the Creator created?          One must go the way it’s created,          the way it’s created, the way it’s ordained;          there is no way to escape what’s created,          no way to back down before what’s writ          down!’</p>
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(SL I 68: H I 8, 427 (42) < Miikse k – J.Sandra < Ogask (1896).)

The motifs of death and marriage are intertwined in this song in a manner common in archaic traditions.<sup>3</sup> Particularly in the case of young persons, death has ritually, both in customs and in the folklore texts accompanying them, been presented as a wedding, and this is explicitly narrated in the quoted song, too. Furthermore, the mother here expects the daughter’s traditional after-wedding visit, as prescribed by custom, which, however, does not take place. Communicating with her again at the grave, she learns that it is not possible to return from the otherworld. The Setu song, however, does not explain this in reference to the grass that has grown on the grave, but according to the archaic Balto-Finnic beliefs about a next life in the netherworld—in *Manala*, *Toonela*. The end of the song compositionally searches for a compromise, while the

3 On the similarities between death and weddings, and of the corresponding rituals, see Danforth 2006: 157 ff; Bajburin & Levinton 1990; Bernshtam 1979: 140–5; Buzin 2003: 156; Chistyakov 1982: 119–20; Honko 1974: 52.

contents express a yearning for Christian consolation. Where exactly do realistic notions concerning human existence and body end and symbolic, either artistic or high-religious substitutions begin? How is the human body after death conceived of in different genres and different ages?

Turning now to the laments for the dead, we can add to the poetic charge and/or religious argumentation of the given textual motifs a third important function: controlling the deceased one via communication and avoiding unexpected harassment from him. The physicality of laments and burial customs is certainly not merely symbolic, but stands in close connection to reality. In addition to the speech acts embedded in folklore genres, we can here also observe the positions and locations of human body, as well as the vocalizations and other specific activities included in the burial customs, both before and after the interment.

### 3.

Russian researchers in particular have emphasized the centrality of the voyage metaphor in the north Russian laments and burial customs. The journey of the deceased from one world to the other has been accompanied and commented on by laments depicting the topography of both this world and the other. Lamentation, weeping and other vocalizations, however, have not been allowed to sound all the time and uncontrolledly. Vernacular belief has taken the disruption of any kind of way-faring (outside as well as within the burial situation) to be unpropitious and undesirable—cutting off somebody's path or stopping someone on his way has foreboded misfortune both in rituals and in situations of daily life. Similarly, the disruption of any kind of procession has been thought to portend evil. The disruption need not have consisted in direct physical interference; producing a noise at the wrong moment has been considered equally dangerous.

The following concepts can be associated with death as a semantic sphere: keeping quiet, muteness, unclear speech, silence, secret(ive)ness (Nevskaya 1999: 123). Thus, the dichotomy of life and death is actualized in the behaviour of the vocal world, including the rules that govern lamentation and weeping at the various stages of the ritual. For instance, it has been emphasized that under no circumstances should there be lamenting during and immediately after the event of death. A different example is provided by south and east Slavonic traditions where death had to be immediately announced through a public lamentation, to be audible all over the village (Tolstaya 1999: 137). But

even there it was strictly prohibited to lament after darkness had fallen. Thus, untimely weeping has been considered to obstruct the deceased one's successful passage to the otherworld, to disrupt his voyage.

Here, a specific distinction must already be made between affective, emotional weeping as something that complicates departure, and lamenting as a regimented behaviour linked to customs both temporally and thematically, since in traditional culture laments had to be performed for all dead persons, with the exception of some anomalies, such as children or suicides. The unlamented dead person has been regarded as unclean, unabsolved of his sins (Tolstaya 1999: 136, 141–2). Usually lamentation has culminated during interment, when, among other things, messages have been communicated to previously departed kinsmen.

Silence, however, has characterized activities more closely related to death and the dead one, such as washing the body, making the coffin, or digging the grave (Honko 1974: 38–9; Tolstaya 1999: 143). The persons performing these duties have also been lamented in order to offer them magic protection during their contact with the dead or with death. Again, the role of the lamenter as a mediator and propitiator between the two worlds has been significant here.

Inappropriate excessive noise (singing, merrymaking) has also been prohibited during the first 40 days after death. The symbolic minute of silence practised at modern commemorations is related to this custom. The dead person and the sphere of death have been characterized by muteness and immobility—surprise over such behaviour by an intimate, as well as invitations for him to 'say a word', have been expressed in the first laments performed after the death.

Aside from the context of death and death-related customs, silence has also been characteristic of activities originally associated with the otherworld, or liminality—various tasks (sowing seeds, milking; Nevskaya 1999: 131) have had to be performed in silence; silence has been obligatory for the bride and groom during the wedding ritual, noise has been prohibited during the birth of a baby. Ritual silence, as well as other behaviours opposed to the ordinary, have been considered important during other crucial activities, too.<sup>4</sup>

4 Thus, for instance, in the choosing of the seasonal keeper of the Setu fertility idol Peko, a number of details pointing to ritual reversal and other anomalies (in boldface here) can be observed: 'The participants in this party number around 30 men, mostly of the same age, of a firm and serious mindset, who have sworn not to breathe a word about how they conduct their *praasnik* to any living soul. The *praasnik* itself proceeds as follows. The participants gather at some **night of the full moon**, usually

It has also been forbidden for wives to lament their dead husbands, this being regarded as a possible obstacle to getting married again (Tolstaya 1999: 141). Or, as a Vepsian woman put it in conversation with me: a wife lamenting her husband is like a cow lowing for a bull.

The physical aspect of the deceased one has been of equal importance. First of all, persons that had gone missing had to be lamented, too; among the Balto-Finnic peoples and the north Russians, a specially selected tree growing in the graveyard or the forest stood in for that purpose. Among the South Slavs, the physical representation of the deceased one at the commemoration has been required, too, with either his clothes, a wooden figure or even a live person (who had previously fasted) being used for that purpose (Tolstaya 1999: 143–4). In modern funeral customs, it is common practice to leave a vacant seat for the deceased one at the funeral feast; a custom which can also be interpreted as an (anti-)marker of his physical presence.

Again, the reversals concerning the deceased, clothing, and objects in funeral customs are noteworthy. Nikita Tolstoj has discussed the repositioning of the dying person in order to alleviate their agony. It has been customary to place the dead body on a lower earthen floor and to turn the body around, exchanging the places of its head and feet. On the one hand, what we see here is bringing the deceased closer to the earth; on the other hand, by changing his position he is assisted in transforming his essential self. The ways of alleviating the death of a special person—a witch—have been even more specific, since such persons have already been ‘other’ in this life (Tolstoj 1990: 119–20). As a prophylactic measure, the body or objects that had been in contact with it have been turned around after death. Chairs and stools on which the deceased was lain out have been turned upside down after the body was car-

when the moon beautifies the night with its silvery light. Each participant has taken along a sack of provisions, out of which, **behind closed doors and windows, sitting on the floor** with their **backs turned towards each other**, they **sullenly** eat, merely grunting and wheezing, **making no conversation**. After having eaten sullenly and without talking for about half an hour, each man ties up his bag tightly and throws it to a fixed place occupied by no other bags. Now they briskly run out of the room like naughty boys held up in the class too long by their teacher. Outside they gently, in a cat-like manner, begin to **romp, pushing and jostling among themselves**, chasing each other and leaping over the fence. This play goes on, if need be, till the day dawns again, or until someone gets hurt in the romping and **blood is drawn**, which is precisely what they expect of their game when it has gone on for some time, already. The one that is bleeding, either as a result of leaping over the fence, or because he has been scratched or hit by someone, will become the host of the *koräädsi-praasnik* for the next year, at whose place they will again gather in the accustomed manner.’ (Paulson 1997: 94.)

ried out. The same has been done to the cart or the sleigh on which the body was driven to the cemetery, but also to the dishes, for instance (Tolstoj 1990: 120–1). In the latter case, it has been considered important that no water remain in them, for fear that it may have got poisoned if the deceased's soul bathed in it. A parallel is provided by the Balto-Finnic *sauna* customs, where the water used in *sauna* always had to be thrown out—the dishes turned upside down—before leaving, what with the *sauna* also being regarded as a somewhat otherworldly place.

Where fear of the dead was common, the passages used for carrying out the dead body were peculiar, too. As a rule, a reversed orientation (*i.e.*, feet first) has been used when carrying out the deceased; where fear of the dead was prevalent, the body was carried out not through the door, but through some other opening, possibly made specially for that occasion. Fear of the dead has also had an impact on the choice of the site for the burial ground (across some body of water, on an island, on terrain different from that of the home place). The ways of burying and other (including post-burial) techniques designed for preventing the dangerous deceased from rising are widely known; although the most characteristic examples of them are recorded from the Balkans, instances can be found in the northern parts of Europe, too. In Vepsian customs the cross or stave marking the site of the grave can be placed in the middle of it (Vinokurova forthcoming). In addition to the association with the departed's soul/heart/midriff, a desire to physically nail down the dead one to prevent his unwanted return can be surmised here.

Right from the situation immediately following death, one of the main themes of lamentation (as an act of communication) has been the successful transfer of the deceased into the otherworld so as to avoid later complications and the deceased's becoming a revenant. One of the main problems of the Balto-Finnic peasant culture has been the establishing and (re-)marking of the borders between human culture and the various forms of otherworldliness (Anttonen 1996, 2003; Stark 2002, 2006). Thus, lamentation has constituted a diplomatic act representing communal (and to a lesser extent individual) interests. The diplomacy has necessarily continued after the burial, in the form of commemorative and occasional laments. The lamenter is the one that must bring herself closer to the world of the dead, or rather to its border. The position of the body, upright versus horizontal, expresses the human versus the non-human code of communication. Therefore, falling over or otherwise assuming a horizontal position is always anomalous and indicates danger (Stark 2002: 102–5). In case of the lamenter, a horizontal body position referring to a change of code is thus to be expected.

On several occasions, I have recorded Vepsian lamenters in cemeteries performing occasional laments, outside the fixed commemoration calendar, at the graves of their dead relatives. On all occasions, the lamenters have assumed a more or less leaning position. The most impressive of them, in that aspect, was a lamentation session I witnessed in the village of Yashozero, Onega Vepsia, the main part of which lasted for about half an hour and was extraordinarily charged with emotion (Arukask & Lashmanova 2009). Most of the time, the lamenter lay horizontally on the grave, later sitting next to the grave. The lament itself was directed straight into the grave, leaving no space for speculations about symbolism. It has been said that in such a position, the lamenter may hear the movements of the deceased one in the grave. On other occasions, the lamenters have rather leaned on the grave marker or cross, nevertheless displaying a visible change in the body attitude.

#### 4.

I would point out two main causes as points of departure for lamentation in connection with death:

1. the need to restore interrupted social cohesion;
2. an archaic (albeit also very human) fear of the dead.

The first cause—the need to restore social cohesion—has been analysed with functional complexity by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. In his famous study on the Andaman islanders, he notes that each lament and the embrace that precedes it (either upon a reunion after long separation, in celebration of making peace in tribal wars, at the end of a mourning period, upon the exhumation of the deceased, getting married, or in initiation rites; Radcliffe-Brown 2006: 151 ff.) is essentially a way of restoring relations that have been temporarily broken off. In the various situations of real life listed above, the former continuity has, in principle, been interrupted—friends have drifted apart, tribes have gone on the war-path, a person has died, the bereaved one has gone into mourning, the remains of the dead have been brought out of the grave, unmarried status has ended, a previous social status has come to an end. Understandably, in such situations the deeper task of the lament goes far beyond the expression of personal feelings, amounting to the bringing back into shared life of one who has been away—no matter what the new social form might be. The social ties that had temporarily been slackened, either because of circumstances or

affect, are again closely tied through the lamentation, and thus the lament would be an expression rather of unity than of rupture or end.

The change of social status is accompanied by a change of the ritual's main participants' identity or worldview. Having been interrupted, the social cohesion needs to be restored or, in other words, the person redefined by the ritual must learn a new social role that would harmonize with what is preordained for him or her. Following the preordained path has also conceptualized the terms of *one's own* (i.e. right kind of) *life* and *one's own* (i.e. right) *death*. Since in the animistic system of beliefs everything was shared and divisible, there has also existed a notion concerning the limit (that is, age) up to which a person has the right to stay in this world, which in its turn has legalized ritual killings and suicides. Not always would a person live the appropriate length of his days; it might also come to pass that he exceed the right measure (cf. Sedakova 1990). Rudiments of that conception can still be found in the comments of elderly informants who, although aware that from a Christian viewpoint their yearning for death is sinful, nevertheless sense that in the archaic, 'meted out' world it is in a way an even graver misdeed to live on as a feeble old person.

Women's ritual suicides after the death of their husbands—the breadwinner and protector—have constituted normative behaviour not only in Hinduism. The widowed woman's duty to follow her husband has been motivated economically, religiously and socially—she has become a burden to her community and it has been her duty to follow her master, together with the other appropriate possessions; on the social plane, however, ritual suicide may also have been associated with a preordained role behaviour. Such widows' suicides were also known in pre-Christian Russia (cf. Bernshtam 1979: 140–1), and as such, this concept<sup>5</sup> may have made its way into northern Eurasian lamentational poetry.

The main addressee of the lamentation rites is the dead one—in the situation where he is, on commemoration days but also on the mornings he still spends in his home, woken up with specific lament formulae and certain observances, in order to go on communicating with him. One widely known way of waking the deceased consists in making sweeping movements—for example with a towel—over the grave and/or dead body. Sweeping or raking

5 On the ethnical level, this kind of preordained (by omens) submissiveness may have brought about voluntary self-destruction of whole ethnic groups feeling that their time is running out. A characteristic example of this in the folklore of the peoples of north Russia is the theme of the Chuds' self-burials (cf. Pimenov 1965: 117 ff., Oinas 1969, and many others).

can be interpreted as an imitative-magic rite aimed at provoking the elements of the four cardinal directions and of thunder—the powers necessary to re-voke the original act of creation in the world order. As Mircea Eliade has pointed out, each ritual re-enacts the original act of creation (1959: 68–9), as we can observe also in the given case. The activity imitating sweeping has, on the verbal level, been accompanied by corresponding lament formulae. The north Russian, Vepsian and Karelian laments begin by invoking the winds to come and wake up the deceased to make the communication with him possible:

Уж ты дай-ко богородица,	Oh, Mother of God, give
Только ветры неустойные.	Restless winds only.
Уж вы повеите, ветерочки,	Oh, flow winds,
Разнесите-ко песочки!	Scatter the sand!
Ты раскройся, гробова доска,	You, stave of coffin, open up,
Покачнись-ко тело мертвое,	Incline yourself, dead body,
Ты, личушко же блеклое!	You, white face!
Уж ты дай-ко богородица,	Oh, Mother of God, give
В ясны очушки-то зреньице,	Sight to the bright eyes,
В уста же – говореньице,	Speech to the mouth,
В белы ручушки – маханьице.	Waving to the white hands,
В резвы ноженьки – хоженьице!	Walk to the fast legs!
...	...

(Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 109.)

The Vepsian lamenter says:

Puhoudaske pohjas poludespei, sotei tulleihudem,  
hougeidaške nece korged koumeine kahthe čomha poludehe.  
Polni polnikeizem, vesuu sina venceizem,  
aveidaške sinä ičiiž zorkijad sil'meižed,  
stanovideske sina minunke paksuile pagineizile,  
enččikš i edeližikš kut mii sinunke pagizimej.  
Polni sina polnikeizem, sina miispei eraganzid.  
Kuz' pitkäd nedališt, nel'küme pimedad öhüt minä sindei karavulin da  
varjoičin.  
Emboi mina sindei kudes pitkas nedalis, nel'kumes pimedas ohuzis  
homeita i primet't'a, polni sina polnikeizem.  
Kuz' pitkad nedalist, nel'küme pimedad ohut

kavelid sina tundmatomid dorogoidme, tedmatomid tesaroidme.  
Void-ik sinä vastatas ičemoi rodimijoide roditel'oidেকে,  
ičiiž setjan da čižoihudenke.  
Om minei kaks' veslad da viikuskod, oma hii edaheizuu viluu da randei-  
zuu.  
Uhtel veslou viikuskou om korged da koumeine,  
a toizuu viikuskou emei tekoi om-ik korged koumeine.  
Om han ottud pahale torale, om-ik hän bibučijaha soho pekstud  
vei om-ik veslaha vedudehe uppotet, om-ik ledho maha segoitet,  
Polni sina polnikeizem, ozutadeske minii uradas unudes  
void-ik sina hiid vastata.

Blow from the North, sweet wind,  
hew this sweet high mound into two nice halves.  
My lovely other half, you, my merry wreath,  
open your clear eyes,  
strike up conversation with me,  
as we used to talk of old.  
My lovely other half, you went away from us.  
Six long weeks, forty dark nights I watched and guarded you.  
Six long weeks, forty dark nights I couldn't  
see you or notice you, my lovely other half.  
Six long weeks, forty dark nights  
you travelled along strange paths, over unknown crossroads.  
Could you meet your dear parents,  
your beloved sister?  
I have two brothers, but they're over on the distant cold shore.  
One merry brother has a high sweet mound,  
but of the other we even do not know does he have a high sweet mound.  
He was drawn into a bad quarrel, but is he trampled into the swaying  
swamps,  
or drowned in a merry stream, or mingled with the earth?  
My lovely other half, appear to me in wild dreams;  
can you meet them?  
(Zhukova 2009: 166–7.)

As noted, the primordial elements (roaring winds, rumble and clatter) have not only been described in laments, but also imitated in practice. The above-mentioned Onega Vepsian lamenter also made wind-raising sweeping move-

ments over the grave; upon arriving at the grave, she also pronounced the formula, ‘Здравствуй дедушка, Христос воскрес! Все покойнички пришли’ (Welcome, Daddy, Jesus has risen, all the deceased have come), as though thereby carrying out yet again the cosmogonic waking act, the specific function of which was to begin communication with the deceased in a customary manner (Bajburin & Levinton 1990: 82–3; Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 109; also Honko 1974: 29–30; Chistov 1994).

The microcosmic counterpart of the world’s (re-)generation is the waking of the dead person in order to communicate with him—in order to send messages to the other world, to ask for blessings on this world, to solve personal problems. In a Karelian epic song, Lemminkäinen’s mother wakes her son from the dead on Toonela river, by raking his body parts; in present-day Estonia visits to the graves involve as the first and obligatory act, cleaning and ordering it—sweeping and raking—before it is considered appropriate to address the deceased in our thoughts. Thus, the modern behaviour in cemeteries also exhibits archaic features which follow the blueprint of waking up the deceased one and communicating through lament. Even where lamentation itself has dropped out of the culture, or is ideologically suppressed,<sup>6</sup> the communication code of laments and the corresponding register in relevant situations need not be lost.

This waking up of the deceased serves a preventative purpose. The lost one is thereby temporarily afforded the status of a guest to this world. Thus, his relationship with this side of the grave is temporarily legitimated, or at least an attempt is made to avoid his possible appearance as a non-guest—the revenant, the undead. The ‘vocabulary’ of lamentational motifs of various peoples is rife with prayers, threats, promises, and flatterings, all aiming (or having been aimed, in cases where the more modern lamenter no longer ‘remembers’ it) at gaining control over the comings and goings of the dead.

Accordingly, the lamentation session as such constitutes an example of legitimate communication with the dead, opened and closed by calling up the dead one, discussing various subjects with him and then sending him back. This guarantees control over possible unexpected projections from the otherworld, a problem that has always been acute in traditional (Orthodox)

6 Particularly the folk cultures with a Lutheran superstratum (as, for example, the Estonian and Finnish ones), have not, for religious reasons, favoured the Catholic ‘magical’ subordination of the dead to clerical jurisdiction (cf., e.g. Martin Luther’s ‘Disputatio pro Declaratione Virtutis Indulgentiarum’, theses 8–29), the impact of which is visible also in the gradual suppression and disappearance of lamentation as a practice in the Finnish and Estonian cultures, for instance.

folk culture (cf. Stark 2002: 75–6, 138–46). Even if a great part of the textual body of some given lament does consist of the lamenter's personal and deeply tragic complaints over her present situation and misery, it is nevertheless not quite identifiable with, say, a modern person-centred posing of the problem—as it is represented, for example, in the popular ballad genre (cf. also Arukask 2009). Laments combine the description of one's own personal distress and misery with chastising the dead—part of the sorting out of power relations between the two worlds, or the diplomacy relevant to it. Thus, a very practical magical combat between here and the afterworld goes on in lamentations, a combat in which the lamenter is a kind of gate-keeper and medium. Setu laments involve attempts at bringing death to justice, and the attitude towards a recently departed person may be quite aggressive. The note of accusation is also very characteristic of Russian laments performed immediately after death (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 106–7).

It seems that it is in the central issues of the burial lamentations listed above—those of controlling the deceased's returns to this world, and of restoring social cohesion—that the greatest ruptures took place as a result of the arrival of Christianity and, still later, the process of modernization. One indicator of this is the problem of mourning or, more precisely, the difficulties faced by the bereaved one—in finding a new identity as an orphan or widow(er). It is not always that (folk) Christianity can provide a coherent solution to all such problems, or at least the quest for control over the deceased persons' behaviour may in some fields and some cultural areas turn out to be longer and more painful than in others. In those north Eurasian folk belief systems which have an Orthodox superstratum, from Setu to Siberia, the commemoration times and lengths of mourning period have, nevertheless, been settled. One temporal boundary may have been the Russian *сорочины* or Karelian *kuusnäädal*—a 40 day period at the end of which the deceased one's soul was supposed to have departed from this world (Honko 1974: 40–1; Buzin 2003: 168–9; Joalaid 2000: 266–75). The first anniversary of death—the second significant boundary—has marked the end of customary lamenting and mourning. The observance of later anniversaries (3, 9) has already become more rare. It seems, however, that the ritual ending of the mourning period has not been managed with equal success, particularly from the twentieth century on—from which time, however, we only begin to get more complete folkloric reports.

## 5.

The relationship with the deceased is different in such cultures where the customs related to death involve the phenomenon of exhumation—the digging out of the deceased one's remains, after a certain period, and providing them with a new identity as it were, re-initiating them into the society of the living in a new role, either as relics or amulets. As described by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown in his study of the Andaman islanders mentioned above, the part of the deceased that does not belong into the otherworld can be brought back to his relatives here through yet other rites, including lamentations. That act puts a decisive end to any problems related to unwanted appearances of the deceased, but also to the need of grieving his absence. As Radcliffe-Brown writes:

The dead person is now entirely cut off from the world of the living, save that his bones are to be treasured as relics and amulets. Weeping over the bones must be taken, I think, as the rite of aggregation whereby the bones as representative of the dead person (all that is left of him) are received back into the society henceforth to fill a special place in the social life. It really constitutes a renewal of social relations with the dead person, after a period during which all active social relations have been interrupted owing to the danger in all contact between the living and the dead. (Radcliffe-Brown 2006: 154.)

Exhumation is not just an archaic cultural phenomenon characteristic of the 'third world' peoples, but familiar also to the peoples of southern Europe. The 'lament belt' stretching from the Balkans to the White Sea (cf. Honko 1974: 14; Nenola-Kallio 1982: 16) indeed marks the last area in Europe where lamentation has survived, but the more southerly area is different from the northern parts precisely in that exhumation is practised there. Loring M. Danforth has described exhumation and the lamentation practices accompanying it in modern Greek death culture, emphasizing its essential similarity to weddings. The deceased one's skull is given a kiss of greeting and money is placed on it as though for a wedding gift. The returning of the remains into the society is comparable to the bride's leaving her home and entering public life:

An exhumation is similar to a wedding in several respects. This is particularly true when the person whose remains are exhumed never married. The greeting of the skull at the exhumation by kissing it and placing

money on it corresponds notably to the greeting the bride and groom receive at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, when those present greet the newly married couple with a kiss and pin money to their chest. . . . The analogy between exhumation and wedding is also suggested by the fact that the movement in both rites of passage is one of emergence. When the remains of a widow's husband are exhumed, she comes out into society. Similarly, when a woman marries, it is said that she will go out into society, or that her husband will take her out into society. (Danforth 2006: 162.)

Different forms of exhumation have been known in northern European burial customs, too. We know that skeletal remains found in Estonian stone-cist and *tarand* graves have exhibited signs of having been used for other purposes, or treated after burial (cf. Lang 2007: 154, 179–80, 216–17, 221–3). As for the manipulations performed with the deceased one's physical remains, only pre-burial washing has been preserved in the northern cultural area, as well as procedures of apotropaic or medical magic (as, for instance, combating the fear of the dead, or treatment of a 'Bible bump'/ganglion cyst, called in Estonian *kooljaluu*—'dead person's bone'). The pre-burial touching or stroking of the dead (in contemporary times even more frequently of only the coffin) constitutes one of the last surviving relics of a one-time propitiation practice in which again lamentation played an important role. The repertoire of laments used on the occasion of death and the procedures accompanying it (from washing the body to interment and commemoration), has been relatively well elaborated among various peoples. Different stages of the observances have been accompanied by different lament themes and speech acts incorporated in them (cf. Ajuwon 1981: 277–80). In the laments used immediately after death, in the Karelian Russian tradition it has been common to express astonishment or ask for the reasons for leaving behind one's living relatives, as well as rebuke him for it (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 106). Weeping has continued during the various stages of preparations for the burial, made over three days. Upon carrying the dead body out, lamenters have described the journey ahead of him and invited him to make peace with the living in all the issues that might have arisen during his lifetime (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 106–7; on the motif of a journey in Russian laments, see also Bajburin 1979: 116–17; Chistyakov 1982; Nevskaya 1990: 137 ff.). The laments used on the way to the cemetery have contained messages to dead relatives, and while lowering the coffin into the grave, once again forgiveness has been asked for everything.

In the Karelian tradition, lamentation could begin during the washing ceremony and again would involve expressions of astonishment—addressed to the washers—over the causes for their activity (Honko 1974: 38). The lamenter, being usually the person closest to the deceased one, has figured as an onlooker of the events, posing questions and making comments. Again, personal internal tensions have been solved in this form, while keeping the theme socially visible and at the same time holding a diplomatic ritual dialogue with the deceased person and through him, the afterworld. The same functions have continued, in different phrasing, through the following stages of the ritual and the corresponding laments addressed to the coffin-makers, grave-diggers, and bell-ringers, side by side with whom the deceased one himself and the community of the dead person have identified as addressees (Honko 1974: 38–40).

It can be said that particularly up to the burial and the funeral feast, as well as throughout the forty days during which the deceased person's soul has been thought to be moving between the two worlds, lamentation has thematically and functionally reduced social rather than personal tensions, or rather—the personal has been allowed to take place only through social functionality. Later, outside of the framework of commemoration days and customs, so-called occasional laments have been wept either at the grave or in the ordinary everyday environment, in which the bewailing of personal problems may tend to rise more and more to the foreground. Almost a half of the 185-verse occasional lament I recorded in Onega Vepsia, in the summer of 2005 (see Arukask & Lashmanova 2009), consisted of personal complaints about the lamenter's problems and fate and of recalling good times spent together with the deceased. Although in the given case more than a year had passed from the death of the lamented husband, the time had not reduced the lamenting widow's regret and grief; besides, she had problems connected with the appearance of the husband in her dreams and his nightly visits to their house. Thematic passages linked to the customs turned up rather accidentally in the lament, instead of structuring it. The occasional lament was concerned primarily with the lamenter herself and her husband, neither of whom had quite successfully made the passage from the liminal phase of the ritual—one in the role of the *orphan*,<sup>7</sup> the other in that of the *deceased*.

Thus what I propose is that particularly in such cultures as do not involve exhumation in the funeral rites (which would cover the Balto-Finnic

7 About the concept of *orphan* in Russian death-related customs see Adonèva 2004: 216 ff.

and north Russian traditions), the two central problems of the lament genre mentioned before, i.e. 1) the restoration of social cohesion and overcoming grief, and 2) overcoming the fear of the dead that obsesses the community of the living from the moment of death—remain unsolved. The Christianization of Europe has here been accompanied by a suppression of the archaic death culture, taking place in at least two stages. The belief in bodily resurrection has required that the body be buried intact and kept in peace—which may well have seemed shocking, particularly during the earlier centuries of transition, since the deceased one in his bodily form has evoked the greatest fear among the living, a fear that obviously explains the early cremation rituals, but also other manipulations of the skeleton—the cleaning of its bones, taking its scalp, perhaps other similar procedures. The second stage would be constituted by the institutional separation of the worlds of the living and the dead, a separation suffered primarily by the Protestant cultural space and explaining pretty well the suppression and decline over recent centuries of the lamentation custom as a most immediate communication channel and speech act.

Regardless of what was said above, interesting motifs do occur in the Setu burial laments, which in my view could be explained by the phenomena of death culture discussed earlier in this article, and by forgotten parts of the ritual, such as exhumation. I shall point out some of the more conspicuous of them.

In the Setu laments (as well as songs) there are textual motifs obviously referring to parts of the human skeleton. The importance of the parts of the human skeleton in the vocabulary of Setu burial laments has also been stressed by Vaike Sarv (2000: 136). By way of example, I shall bring in a quote from a lament where a daughter is weeping over her mother:

Kui näet iks mu, neio, ikvat, sääl silmi pühk'vät, mullõ anna_ks jäl käsi kääpäst,  annaq sõrm sõmõrast! Käega_ks ma aja armujuttu, sõrmõga_ks ma sõna kynõlõ, sys meelüs iks mino meelekene, sütüs mino süämekene. (SL III 1848: H, Setu 1903, 20 (12) < Helbi k. – Jak. Hurt < Miku Ode (1903).)	When you see me, maiden, weep, wiping my eyes, stretch to me a hand from out of your grave, give me a finger out of the sand! To that hand then I'll talk sweetly, to that finger I'll say some words, then my mind will be calmed, my heart will be healed.
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In this motif, pretty widespread in Setu as well in Votian burial laments, the longed-for post-burial physical contact with a part of the deceased one's skeleton guarantees a kind of satisfaction, or relaxation of tension, corresponding to the function of ritual exhumation as exemplified above.

The possibility of bringing the deceased one back into this world is expressed by washing the body:

Neio, tii_ks ma lipõ linnasist,	I, the maid, shall make lye of malt,
tii_ks ma vii verditsõ,	I shall make fermenting water,
leotõllõ ma_ks mant maa lõhna,	I shall soak the smell off you,
kaputist iks mõsõ kalmu lõhna.	I shall wash the smell of grave off your stockings.
Peläku-i_ks tarrõ tullõh,	Don't then fear when you come home,
kahiku-i_ks tarrõ kalduh!	don't cast an evil eye when you come home!

(SL III 1832: H, Setu 1903, 173 (83) < Helbi k. – Jak. Hurt < Miku Ode (1903).)

With this example I allude to washing as a manipulation, just as ritual washing (and/or whisking oneself in *sauna*) constitutes part of a liminal rite, not hygiene. The point of this motif in the given lament is the desire to recover the deceased breadwinner and supporter as a participant in the community of the living—not as the unforeseeable and unwanted visitor we spoke about earlier, the figure upon which the archaic fear of the dead is grounded. Thus, the person is called back home here rather in the role of ancestor and protector that we saw in the process of exhumation, although in more recent times, that textual motif may have been understood rather as a lyrical utopia, or a Christian allegory of resurrection (cf. Valk 2000: 258 ff.).

Naturally the death we encounter in the Setu laments, recorded at the end of the nineteenth century, is not a new state in the archaic chain of continuity, but a fatal end one cannot endure and must rather try and bargain with, something that only Mary and sweet Jesus can help against:

Kuul iks tegi kur'astõ,	Death was cruel,
katsko väega kalõstõ,	the pest very heartless,
kuul iks koolõt' kogonist,	death killed relentlessly,
maalõ vei viimätsest,	buried in the ground,
jäti_ks ime ikma!	left the mother weeping!

(SL III 1860: H, Setu 1903, 515 (57) < Kolovinna k. – Jak. Hurt < Martini Irõ (1903).)

A motif repeatedly voiced in the Setu laments is yearning for death. No doubt the Setu lament belonged to the genres where the woman could (just as in lyrical songs) express her forbidden feelings and fantasies, among them the yearning for death. In the funeral situation, however, it need not have been just playing on the boundary of the forbidden, but probably (depending, of course, on the details) the yearning was at times realistic. But could we also trace here the archaic feeling of superfluity after the loss of the supporter as the other half of the whole, in all senses? Why should a genre not establish its deep-rooted imperatives for the performer, or putting it differently—what else could the stable preservation of genres rely on, if not on the surprising recognitions and expressions opening up through the text in the relevant situation?

## 6.

In conclusion the following can be said. The motifs related to the body and the bodily resurrection of the dead bear different meanings in different folklore genres. The dialogues held at the grave, as represented in songs or tales, are based on a one-time practice of communicating with the dead in commemorative situations, the aim of which, however, was not merely lyrical expression, or seeking for psychological support, but also an attempt to control the activities and behaviour of the dead. The invitation expressed in the songs for the deceased to rise from the grave, is based on the waking and invitation formulae used in the laments to mark the beginning of communication. Thereby, the rising of the dead is legitimated, as it were—under such circumstances, the buried one is not a revenant behaving in unwanted and unexpected ways, but a respected kinsman with whom it is possible to share one's concerns and send messages to other deceased ones. The same principle has governed saying farewell to the dead at the end of the lamentation session, negotiating a diplomatic agreement, as it were, according to which he is not to disturb the living unexpectedly.

In the lament, the waking of the dead is accomplished through physical metaphors. Likewise, other lament themes treating the voyage of the dead, or his location, are charged with physicality. The fact that it is not merely a symbolic notion is referred to by the bodily attitudes of the lamenter, physically oriented towards the deceased, as well as by the orientations used in funeral customs and the avoidance of physical contacts with the otherworld, but also by the details of keeping quiet, or clamouring out in uncommon ways (as

lamentation, too, could be described). Although there are no reports of actually seeing the buried one rise from the grave, it has been believed that he could leave the grave in an undesirable manner, possibly disturbing the peace of the living.

The communicative function of lamentations has not consisted in mere channelling of personal affect, but even more in the protection of the communal interests of the living. Throughout the period from death to funeral, laments have controlled and secured the relations with the deceased one and the afterworld—a task they have also fulfilled during communication with the deceased one over the commemoration period. Thus, each lamentation session has also been yet another redrawing of the boundaries between the communities of the living and the dead, another reaffirmation of the location and identity of each side. The lament texts are full of direct and hidden diplomacy and hints; the personal feelings in them have been cast into traditional formulaic language, the message of which, however, is rather of the communal kind.

Among the Balto-Finnic and Slavic peoples, after death communication is characterized by the absence of exhumation. Based on some archaeological data, the existence of this practice at some time in the past cannot be excluded; however, there are no traces of it in later folk practices. Yet among other peoples, exhumation has fulfilled an important social function in the customs observed after death, figuring as a means of reuniting the deceased with the world of the living. Among other things, this has helped avoid the danger of the dead one returning as a revenant, and has brought relief from the grief. The motifs of seeking physical contact with the dead in the lamentation texts of northern Europe may possibly have originated as references to exhumation. If that is the case, it provides an example of how the textual memory of a folklore genre surpasses continuity of customs and preservation of distinct practices.

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