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Folk Funeral Rites in Poland and Their Sonosphere

The death of a person is one of the critical moments in social life, especially in small, local communities. It both triggers fears and feelings of sadness, pain, and yearning for the deceased. The response to the death-induced state of threat to the local community is the complex of traditional and popularly accepted forms of symbolic behaviour that make up the funeral rite¹. Underlying it are two opposing aspirations: the desire to retain the deceased person, to maintain ties with him or her but in a different form, and the aspiration to free oneself from him or her². The fulfilment of the ritual activities was to facilitate the passage of the deceased to the other world, and to allow the community, especially the family of the deceased, to bid farewell to him or her and safely separate them from the community of the living.

The funeral rituals in Poland go back to ancient folk culture, containing many pre-Christian elements that coexist with Christian eschatology. The folk funeral rite on Polish soil consisted of several or even more than a dozen stages, through which the deceased and their loved ones passed.

» 1 See Joanna Tokarska, Jerzy S. Wasilewski, Magdalena Zmysłowska, "Śmierć jako organizator kultury", *Etnografia Polska* XXVI, issue 1 (1982): 79–114.

» 2 Andrzej Brenz, "Polska obrzędowość pogrzebowa jako obrzęd przejścia", *Lud*, 71 (1987): 217–218.

In recent decades, however, in many parts of the country it has lost its former character and course. The transformation of the folk funeral ritual is proceeding at a very fast pace. The changes include relegating the theme of death to the margins and a change in the value of the traditional “way of dying”. Recent research carried out by the author in the Rzeszów region shows that, especially in rural communities, many folk beliefs and rituals associated with various moments of the rite have been preserved. The custom of holding a vigil and praying next to the deceased is still alive. However, the vigil, which was always held in the home of the deceased, is increasingly being moved to cemetery chapels or funeral homes, where the body of the deceased is held before burial. Distinguished and characterised by the sonosphere, the stages of the ritual, although largely a relic of the past, are an important element of Polish folk and national culture.

Terminology and methodology

Słownik folkloru polskiego [*Dictionary of Polish Folklore*] defines rituals as “ceremonies linked with worship, sets of specific activities, gestures and words being the outward layer of celebrations connected with a belief and social and legal acts”³. Zofia Staszczak also mentioned the possibility of the presence in a rite, apart from rational rules, of elements of secular symbolism and magical or religious references⁴. The position of ethnolinguistics, including Nikita I. Tolstoy, according to whom a ritual, defined as a multi-coded macro-sign, is made up of the verbal, personal, temporal, spatial, actional, musical, and material codes. One can therefore distinguish between the verbal level and the ritual level of a celebration⁵. The ritual understood in this way is also contributed to by specific props, costumes, gestures, and behaviour. Furthermore, rituals, especially family rituals, are also social acts performed in the interest of a particular community⁶. Family rituals revolve around the triad of milestones in human life: birth, wedding and funeral. These rituals are associated with a change in the social status of individuals or entire groups and are used by the community

» 3 Entry: “obrzędy”, in: *Słownik folkloru polskiego*, ed. Julian Krzyżanowski (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1965), 275.

» 4 Entry: “obrzędy”, in: *Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne*, ed. Zofia Staszczak (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1987), 257.

» 5 Nikita I. Tolstoy, “Iz ‘grammatiki’ slavjanskich obrjadov”, in: Nikita I. Tolstoy, *Język i narodnaja kul’tura. Očerki po slavjanskoj mifologii i etnolingvistike* (Moskwa: Izdatel’stvo Indrik, 1995), 63.

» 6 Tomasz Rokosz, *Obrzęd sobótkowy. Tradycja i jej transformacje (studium etnokulturowe)* (Wrocław–Siedlce: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, Uniwersytet Przyrodniczo-Humanistyczny w Siedlcach 2016), 19.

to adequately prepare for and accept this change, which is why they are often referred to as “rites of passage”⁷.

The theory of rites of passage was developed in the early 20th century by the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep⁸. According to him, a rite of passage consists of three phases: separation, i.e. exclusion from one’s former status, a marginal (transitional) period, and rites of incorporation into a new state (integration)⁹. The above pattern, criticised and modified a number of times over the years (especially by British anthropologists), is the basis and starting point for research into family rituals¹⁰.

The funeral rite, which concludes the cycle of human life, is a perfect illustration of the above theory. The pattern of Van Gennep’s concept can be used to study funeral rites in the Polish lands. The rituals accompanying the social changes brought about by human death can be divided into three phases¹¹. They involve both the deceased and their soul, the closest family and relatives of the deceased as well as the community with which the deceased has been associated and in which they have lived.

In phase one, there is a change in the status of both the deceased and his or her immediate family and relatives and neighbours. The primary obligation of the living towards the deceased is to terminate all past relationships. The deceased is ritually separated from household members and household objects and then from the entire world of the living. The ritual exclusion of the deceased (their body and soul) takes place gradually via reconciliation of the deceased with the living before death, the ringing of church bells at the moment of death, placing a candle in the hand of the deceased, keeping silence, sprinkling them with holy water, saying prayers and singing, discontinuing household chores, arranging the room accordingly, i.e. dividing the space (for the deceased and for the living), screening the windows, carrying the deceased with their feet towards the door, hitting the coffin on the threshold¹².

» 7 Arnold van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii*, transl. Beata Biały (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2006), 35–36.

» 8 Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1909), 14; see Victor Turner, *Proces rytualny. Struktura i antystruktura*, transl. Ewa Dżurak (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2010), 121–123; See Zdzisław Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne. Zwyczaje, obrzędy i wierzenia pogrzebowe oraz zaduszkowe mieszkańców regionu opoczyńskiego i radomskiego* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2007), 165–167.

» 9 Van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia...*, 36.

» 10 Michał Buchowski, “Etnologiczna interpretacja obrzędów przejścia,” *Lud*, 69 (1985): 63–72; See Brenz, *Polska obrzędowość pogrzebowa...*, 216.

» 11 Entry: “obrzędy przejścia”, in: *Obyczaje, języki, ludy świata. Encyklopedia PWN*, ed. Sławomir Żurawski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), 533.

» 12 See Brenz, *Polska obrzędowość pogrzebowa...*, 221–223.

The second phase (marginal) comprises the activities in the period between death and the burial of the body. During this time, the body and soul of the deceased had to be properly prepared for the transition from the world of the living to the “world of the dead”. In addition, the family of the deceased entering the period of mourning is excluded from everyday time (the profane). They are bound by specific prohibitions and restrictions on their social life, such as participation in dance parties, weddings and other mass events. The isolation of the family determines the period of the liminal phase, enabling an appropriate transition and assumption of new roles¹³.

The third phase involves a ritual inclusion of the deceased and their integration into the world of the dead. This group of activities includes the opening of windows, the ritual washing and dressing of the deceased, providing the deceased with the “essential” items, marching in the funeral procession, arranging the funeral feast, and praying for the deceased at specific moments after death.

As demonstrated above, in the funeral rite the phases distinguished by Van Gennep do not proceed in an orderly succession of a chain of events. They intertwine and overlap at different moments of the rite. These rituals symbolically express the fact of a change in the social status of the deceased and introduce a sacred, ritual time (the sacred). It was only through their fulfilment that the time of everyday existence (the profane) could be restored and family and social ties further strengthened, e.g. by voiding antagonisms with neighbours or relatives. This demonstrates that mediation is a feature, as well as a function, of this type of ritual¹⁴. Moreover, in funeral rituals, a very important role is played by the context of beliefs, mainly related to the Christian religion and ancient Slavic traditions of pre-Christian origin¹⁵.

The sonosphere, or the musical code of the rite, which belongs to the verbal and ritual layer of the rite, is a crucial element of the funeral rite. It consists of: the sounds of nature, supernatural signals that herald death, the sounds of musical instruments, including bells, and sounds resulting from human vocal expression, in the form of lamentations, chants, orations, and prayers. These sounds form an integral part of the ritual and perform specific functions, especially ritual ones¹⁶.

» 13 See Brencz, *Polska obrzędowość pogrzebowa...*, 223–225.

» 14 Rokosz, *Obrzęd sobótkowy...*, 37.

» 15 See Mariola Tymochowicz, “Rola tradycyjnych obrzędów przejścia w podtrzymywaniu więzi rodzinnych i społecznych (na przykładach z obszaru województwa lubelskiego),” *Rocznik Lubelskiego Towarzystwa Genealogicznego* V, 2013 (2014): 188–211; See M. Paul, *Człowiek rodzi się na śmierć i umiera na życie – commentary to the exhibition “Obrzędy przejścia i ich symbolika”*, Rzeszów: Muzeum Okręgowe, 2003, 3–4.

» 16 See Jan Adamowski, „Polskie pieśni pogrzebowe,” *Twórczość Ludowa* 26, no. 3–4 (1994): 14–17.

In a traditional rural community, people were largely dependent on the forces of nature, which spoke to them and this “speaking” (or “singing”) provided signals that could be perceived and interpreted. It was believed that the moment of a person’s death was a disruption of the concordant harmony between soul and body. It also affected the family of the deceased. Folk culture, with the contribution of folk religiosity, produced many ritualistic ways of restoring order after a person’s death, both for his or her soul and for the surviving relatives. Throughout the country, musical elements permeated these rituals, appearing in the context of a person’s death, visible at almost every stage of the funeral rite.

Silence, too, is an element of the sonosphere of the funeral rite. Silence was maintained during specific moments of the rite (e.g. during the agony, at the inhumation of the body and during the period of mourning). When addressing the role of silence and pause in music, Zofia Lissa observed that silence “is not only an absence of music or other acoustic effects, is not only a stagnation of dramatic development, but also a deliberate and intended means of expression. It is the manifestation of such tense emotions where musical means are no longer sufficient, unable to bear the tension of the experiences presented. Under such circumstances silence speaks volumes, [...] is full of meaning, a concentrated manifestation of an emotional climax [...]”¹⁷. Silence is recommended likewise by the post-conciliar documents of the Church, e.g. in funeral rites adapted to the customs of the Polish dioceses¹⁸. Silence was also observed during home prayers by the body of the deceased. The preservation of silence in a folk funeral rite had above all an eschatological and integrating dimension. In the context of a rite of passage such as the funeral rite, one can also speak of the exclusionary role of silence¹⁹.

Stages of the rite

The funeral rite defined in this way, together with the musical code, helps to differentiate and characterise its individual stages and to extract in them the most significant musical elements with ritual functions. Based on studies of funeral rites in Poland, with particular reference to the Rzeszow region studied in detail, it is possible to distinguish more than a dozen distinct stages of the rite.

» 17 See Zofia Lissa, “O roli ciszy i pauzy w muzyce”, *Muzyka* 4 (1960): 12; See Kinga Kiwała, “Muzyka a cisza. O wymiarach ciszy w muzyce”. *Ethos. Kwartalnik Instytutu Jana Pawła II KUL* 29 no. 1(113) (2016): 65-86.

» 18 See *Obrzędy pogrzebu dostosowane do zwyczajów diecezji polskich*, Katowice 1978, no. 10.

» 19 See Tomasz Rokosz, *Między mową a śpiewem. Słowo, muzyka i obrzęd w kontekście przemian* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL 2019), 200.

Predictions of death

Predictions and premonitions of death are a prelude to the rite. The belief in the existence of signs and indications foretelling death has been very much alive in many localities, particularly in rural environments. In these strongly Catholic environments, pre-Christian beliefs were strongly rooted, leading to elaborate spiritual practices and a simultaneous “mystification of the true character of nature”²⁰. Throughout the country, death was predicted on the basis of various natural signs and phenomena, human and animal behaviour, dreams, and noises²¹.

Abnormal behaviour of animals and their noises were very common harbingers of death²². To this day, there is a belief in rural communities that the dog is an animal that feels and sees death (Korczeniowska, Stępień; Niwiska, Cudecka)²³. This demonstrates an ancient reference as the dog is a classical psychopompos, a guide of souls to the afterlife, as well as a guardian of the afterlife, associated with the chthonic deities of death²⁴. In Niwiska, death was predicted on the basis of the dog’s heart-rending howling and digging holes in the ground near the house or within reach of the farm. In other Lasowiak villages, death was heralded by a dog howling with its muzzle pointed downwards, towards the ground. In the folk culture of the Slavs, it was widely believed that the earth nourished humans, provided them with livelihood and, after death, offered respite, welcoming people back into its womb²⁵. In Kamień, it was believed that a dog howling upwards foretold a fire and when it was howling downwards, it foretold death²⁶. Informants unanimously agree that the sound of the dog howling is very distinctive and long on such occasions.

- » 20 Michał Buchowski, “Model religijności ludowej – próba konstrukcji”, *Lud* 63 (1979): 104-106.
- » 21 Barbara Ogródowska, *Polskie tradycje i obyczaje rodzinne* (Warszawa: Sport i Turystyka – Muza, 2007), 235.
- » 22 See Krystyna Kwaśniewicz, “Zwyczaj i obrzędy rodzinne”, in: *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. 2, ed. Maria Biernacka, Maria Frankowska, Wanda Paprocka (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1981), 109.
- » 23 See Adam Fischer, *Zwyczaj pogrzebowe ludu polskiego* (Lwów: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1921), 9-16; See *Komentarze do polskiego atlasu etnograficznego*, ed. Janusz Bohdanowicz, 14; see H. Biegeleisen, *U kolebki. Przed ołtarzem. Nad mogiłą* (Lwów: Instytut Stauropigijański, 1929), p. 258; see Krystyna Turek, *Ludowe zwyczaje, obrzędy i pieśni pogrzebowe na Górnym Śląsku* (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1993), 24; see Jan Adamowski, Jadwiga Doda, Halina Mickiewicz, “Śmierć i pogrzeb w relacjach Polaków mieszkających na Białorusi”, *Etnolingwistyka* 9/10 (1998): 259-260; See Aldona Plucińska, *Polskie zwyczaje rodzinne* (Łódź: Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy, 2014), 184.
- » 24 Entry: “pies”, in: *Słownik symboli*, ed. Władysław Kopaliński (Warszawa: 2006), 316-319.
- » 25 Entry: “ziemia”, in: *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*, ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, 18-20; see also the lyrics of the song *Zmarły człowiecze*: “[...] powracasz w ziemię, co matką twą była, teraz cię strawi, niedawno żywiła” [you return to the earth that was your mother; it will consume you now, who not long ago nourished you].
- » 26 Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 121.

Equally disturbing was the unusual behaviour of the horse in the stable and the anxious sounds it made. It is worth noting that the horse, a symbol of time and death in folk beliefs, was recognised as an animal associated with the chthonic underworld, capable of sensing the presence of souls²⁷.

Another belief concerns the crowing of a hen in the direction of a house²⁸. This behaviour was also interpreted as a harbinger of death, however, in some cases it could be thwarted by killing the animal and burying it outside the farm²⁹.

Certain species of wild birds played an important role in death prophecies³⁰. Birds in many cultures of the world were identified with “the materialised, visible form of man’s spirituality, the manifestation of his spirit or soul, in particular, the soul separating from the body after death”³¹. Beliefs are known in which the dead communicate with the living through bird voices³². Ornithomorphic representations of the soul and death take a variety of forms³³.

The owl, or the tawny owl, was a very popular bird predicting death³⁴. The owl’s hooting was considered ominous, as it was believed to summon the souls of the dead³⁵. The sound of the owl is phonetically similar to the vowel “u”. It is located in the double octave and is characterised by a downward glissando and a slight vibrato at the end, similar to a cry. Owl sounds are generally not very frequent and irregular³⁶. Therefore, the increased sonic activity of the owl was widely feared. There was also a belief that sometimes sounds associated with certain words could be heard in the owl’s hooting: e.g.: *póǳ, póǳ, wywieź, pochowaj* [go, take, bury]³⁷, which naturally indicates a person’s death. Research shows that such be-

» 27 Entry: “koń”, in: *Słownik symboli*, 156–160; See Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 121.

» 28 See Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 34–38; Biegeleisen, *Śmierć w obrzędach...*, 16; Adamowski, Doda, Mickiewicz, *Śmierć i pogrzeb...*, 260.

» 29 Oskar Kolberg, *Tarnowskie-Rzeszowskie. Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 48, ed. Józef Burszta (Wrocław–Poznań: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1967), 100.

» 30 Jan Adamowski, Jerzy Bartmiński, Stanisława Niebrzegowska, “Ptaki, zwierzęta i rośliny w relacjach gwarowych z okolic Biłgoraja”, *Etnolingwistyka* 7 (1995): 135–178.

» 31 Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek, *Muzykalne dzieci Wenus i inne studia z antropologii muzyki* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2014), 32.

» 32 This was the case, for example, in the culture of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea – see Żerańska-Kominek, *Muzykalne dzieci Wenus...*, 26.

» 33 Maria Majerczyk, “Kobieta – ptak – dusza w archaicznym obrazie świata,” *Etnolingwistyka* 16 (2004): 287–289.

» 34 See Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 22–27; See Turek, *Ludowe zwyczaje...*, 24; Biegeleisen, *U kolebki...*, 130; Adamowski, Bartmiński, Niebrzegowska, *Ptaki, zwierzęta i rośliny...*, 147; Adamowski, Doda, Mickiewicz, *Śmierć i pogrzeb...*, 261.

» 35 Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 115–116.

» 36 Based on recordings of the owl’s hooting published at www.glosy-ptakow.pl.

» 37 Wilhelm Gaj-Piotrowski, *Kultura społeczna ludu z okolic Rozwadowa* (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1967), 248.

liefs are very much alive in the folk tradition in Rzeszów region as well as in other regions of Poland³⁸.

The cuckoo was another bird regarded as a harbinger of death. It was believed that if one heard the cuckoo's call while fasting, death would be imminent³⁹. The cuckoo's voice is in the middle register, around the high female c (unlike most wild birds, which sound very high). Its song, phonetically similar to the syllables "ku, ku", follows cycles of two sounds separated by a minor third⁴⁰, usually rhythmic in binary metre (sixteenths + eighths) or occurring in succession at small (1-2 second) intervals⁴¹. The cuckoo's call is loud and has a pleasant, mellow timbre, making it easily recognisable.

An ominous significance was also attributed to crows and ravens, whose very appearance was awe-inspiring⁴². This is because these birds are quite large and have completely black feathers. The poignant call of crows and ravens perched on or near a cottage was interpreted as a harbinger of death. The sound made by crows and ravens is very harsh, low (single octave), of a very unpleasant colour, and irregular. Sometimes specific words associated with death, produced by phonetic similarity, for example Polish "*trup, trup, trup*" (corpse, corpse, corpse), were found in the sounds of these birds.

In addition to the characteristic behaviour of animals, it was believed that death was foretold by numerous other signs and accompanying sounds⁴³. These included a rhythmic, loud knocking or banging at the window. A similar omen was the spontaneous opening of doors in an inexplicable manner. The falling of a painting from the wall or the cracking or breaking of a mirror was also interpreted as a harbinger of death. Attention was also drawn to various other mysterious sounds and acoustic phenomena, such as noises coming from behind the window, rattling in the chimney, groans, etc.⁴⁴ These sounds, due to their unexplained origin,

» 38 Irena Wójcik, *Pogwizdów Nowy w powiecie rzeszowskim*, Archiwum Materiałów Terenowych Muzeum Etnograficznego w Rzeszowie, no. 796, vol. 270, 124; see *Komentarze do polskiego atlasu etnograficznego...*, 33–39.

» 39 Wanda Daszykowska-Ruszel, "Zwyczajne pogrzebowe we wsiach rzeszowskich", in: *Ludowe zwyczajne pogrzebowe*, ed. Krzysztof Ruszel (Rzeszów: Muzeum Okręgowe, 1993), 36.

» 40 In studies of the origins of music, reference has often been made to birdsong, in particular the cuckoo performing the characteristic interval of a minor third – see Żerańska-Kominek, *Muzykalne dzieci Wenus...*, 12–15.

» 41 Based on recordings of the cuckoo's voice published at www.glosy-ptakow.pl.

» 42 See Biegeleisen, *Śmierć w obrzędach...*, 14; Fischer, *Zwyczajne pogrzebowe...*, 27–29.

» 43 See Fischer, *Zwyczajne pogrzebowe...*, 42–45; Plucińska, *Polskie zwyczajne rodzinne*, 184.

» 44 See Agnieszka Kościuk, "Pogrzeb," in: *Polska pieśń i muzyka ludowa*, vol. IV, *Lubelskie*, part 2, *Pieśni i obrzędy rodzinne*, ed. Jerzy Bartmiński (Lublin: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie, Wydawnictwo Muzyczne Polihymnia, 2011), 658; See Daszykowska-Ruszel, *Zwyczajne pogrzebowe...*, 36–37.

were personified through identification with death, which was most often imagined as an old woman in white clothing and holding a scythe⁴⁵.

It is worth noting that a common feature of almost all death predictions are unusual, characteristic sounds made by animals or sounds of unknown origin. Many informants present them as piercing, terrible, mysterious “otherworldly” sounds. This goes some way to explaining the attendant beliefs. Musical perception and interpretation of acoustic phenomena among the rural population were once widely developed and held great importance.

The agony

At the moment of a person’s death, there was a ritual exclusion of his or her soul and body, which manifested itself in many folk practices that arose from eschatological imagery but were transformed by the Catholic Church. It was common practice to bring the priest to the dying person to administer the last rites, sometimes at the dying person’s request⁴⁶. In some places, e.g. near Rozwadów, Eucharistic songs were sung in front of the dying person’s house at the arrival and departure of the priest, as the priest brought the Blessed Sacrament with him⁴⁷.

Also linked to musical and acoustic phenomena are beliefs concerning the moment of separation of the soul from the body (the moment of the last breath, the striking of the coffin, the sound of bells, etc.)⁴⁸. The duration of the soul’s stay near the body was, however, very important because, according to folk accounts, as long as the soul is “not far away”, the dead person sees and hears everything⁴⁹. Therefore, during ritual activities and conduct around the deceased, they were addressed as if they were alive⁵⁰. This behaviour can be explained by the belief in the demonic power of the dead. Speaking to the deceased as if they were a living person, or ritual lamentation, resulted from a widespread belief and was also one of the practices of incantation and warding off evil forces lying in wait for the human soul. The sound of the voice in this situation was treated as a kind of acoustic shelter that provided safety for both the deceased and

» 45 See Plucińska, *Polskie zwyczaje rodzinne*, 180–181; Majerczyk, *Kobieta – ptak – dusza...*, 287–303

» 46 Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 143–147.

» 47 Gaj-Piotrowski, *Kultura społeczna...*, 247.

» 48 Krzysztof Ruszel, *Lasowiacy. Materiały do monografii etnograficznej* (Rzeszów: Muzeum Okręgowe, 1994), 115; see Biegeleisen, *Śmierć w obrzędach...*, 50; see Piotr Kowalski, *Leksykon. Znaki świata. Omen, przesąd, znaczenie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1998), 122; see Biegeleisen, *U kolebki. Przed ołtarzem. Nad mogiłą...*, 69–73.

» 49 Piotr Dahlig, “Lament – między przeżywaniem a teatralizacją”, *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny* 4 (2005): 134–135.

» 50 Biegeleisen, *Śmierć w obrzędach...*, 48.

the mourners⁵¹. In this context, the human voice should be seen as one of the tools used to “tame” death, to exclude the deceased from the world of the living and to guide the soul safely into the “other” world.

The first moments after a person’s death were filled with a series of practices and activities performed by the family or community, aimed at excluding the person from the community of the living and symbolically severing all previous links with the world of the living. Among these activities, lamenting the deceased occupied a special place, being an important message to the local community and “the other world”, and at the same time a natural act of despair caused by the loss of a loved one. “The basis of the belief interpretation of lament is the assumption that there is communication between the worlds of the living and the dead”⁵². Until the moment of a person’s death, no loud crying was allowed in front of the person and silence was to be observed. It was only when the deceased was pronounced dead that the next of kin could weep and lament. Wailing could also occur at other times during the funeral rites, e.g. when the coffin was closed, and the deceased carried out of the house or during internment in the cemetery⁵³.

The lament took the form of a dramatised conversation with the deceased, in which words and feelings clearly predominate over the musical side⁵⁴. Nevertheless, it was a particular, archaic manifestation of musical folklore. In a lament, “music is likened to speech, creating an intermediate link between itself and speech”⁵⁵. The text, usually improvised, determined the course of the melodic phrase with a free recitative rhythm similar to that of speech⁵⁶. The volume of the performance of the lament was important, as it was a measure of the intensity of grief for the deceased⁵⁷. Alicja Trojanowicz distinguishes five different ways of performing laments: recited, expressively recited, chanted, chanted during singing and sung. In doing so, she notes that the performance types create a number of transitional forms between speech and singing⁵⁸.

Polish laments contained certain fixed formulas and motifs in the verbal texts. Their multifaceted nature shows that they were related to the strong experience of the loss of a loved one and reflected the emotional

» 51 Dahlig, *Lament...*, 134–135.

» 52 Dahlig, *Lament...*, 134.

» 53 Kirilł Czystow, “Poezja ludzkiej potrzeby, czyli o zawodzeniach ludowych,” *Regiony* 4 (1976): 13.

» 54 Kazimierz Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, part II: *Kultura duchowa*, issue 2, (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1939), 1107–1108.

» 55 *Ibidem*, p. 1108.

» 56 Alicja Trojanowicz, *Lamenty, rymowanki, zawołania w polskim folklorze muzycznym* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1989), 23–24.

» 57 Trojanowicz, *Lamenty...*, 14.

» 58 See Trojanowicz, *Lamenty...*, 25; Rokosz, *Między mową a śpiewem...*, 182–185.

state of the lamenter at that difficult moment⁵⁹. Funeral laments used to belong to conventional behaviour towards the deceased person and, in addition to expressing feelings, they also had a normative-social and ritual-magical function⁶⁰.

Preparation of the deceased for the funeral and a prayer vigil

After all the necessary activities around the deceased, a room had to be prepared in which the coffin with his body would be placed. A series of ritual activities performed by the deceased's next of kin allowed the entire village community to begin a vigil at the deceased and bid them farewell.

All relatives and neighbours were invited to the home vigil by the deceased. It was a special time in the whole funeral rite, filled with prayer and singing. The chants performed at the side of the deceased included primarily hymns, but also recitations of prayers, psalmody chants, litanies, and song cycles (rosaries, the hours, chaplets, or Angelus)⁶¹. The hymn repertoire included several major thematic groups: funeral songs dealing with death or the dying situation, Marian songs, songs to the angels and patron saints of the dying, songs about the Last Judgement, songs of passion and penance, and casual songs. Community singing at the side of the deceased helped to come to terms with the death of a loved one, and also united the local community by strengthening the sense of unity. It also expressed the religious attitude of the singers and the desire to relieve the suffering of the family members of the deceased.

Removal of the body from the house

Usually, a funeral was held on the third day after the death of the deceased. On this day, people would come to the house where the deceased lay to say goodbye to him. In the Rzeszow area people say they were on their way to escorting the body being led out of the house. This stage of the ritual was always attended by more people than on the two previous days, as it involved a final farewell to the deceased. People usually gathered about an hour before the priest was due to arrive so that they could say the last rosary and pray for the deceased during this time. Many songs were also sung on this day.

An important moment of the funeral rite was the carrying of the coffin with the deceased out of his house. The deceased had to be carried out

» 59 See Dahlig, *Lament...*, 135; Rokosz, *Między mową a śpiewem...*, 174–175.

» 60 See Trojanowicz, *Lamenty...*, 25; Dahlig, *Lament...*, 139.

» 61 See Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 214–217; Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 192.

his or her feet first⁶². This was because it was believed that in this way a possible return of the soul to the house would be avoided. Very characteristic and obligatory element of the farewell of the deceased to the house in the area under scrutiny was hitting the bottom of the coffin three times (in the place of the head, the torso and the legs of the deceased) against every threshold that was crossed in the house⁶³ or only against the last threshold at the entrance door⁶⁴. During this activity, the pall bearers would say: *ostańcie z Bogiem* (God be with you; Dzikowiec, Wólka Sokołowska), *uostajcie z Bogiem zdrowi* (God be with you, stay healthy!; Kamień) or *Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus* (Praised be Jesus Christ; Niwiska, Wola Wadowska), to which the people gathered responded: *Na wieki wieków, amen* [Forever and ever! Amen].

At the time of the death of one of the household members and when the deceased was being carried out of the house, the interior space was disrupted⁶⁵. It is therefore a special time when dangerous forces were believed to invade the household. Another widespread belief was in the residence of spirits and souls of the dead under the threshold of the house⁶⁶. Therefore, fearing the return home of the spirit of the deceased, which would do all sorts of harm to the family, the deceased was bid farewell by means of banging the coffin against the threshold. The sound of this pounding was identified with the departure of the deceased forever⁶⁷. This is important from the perspective of the sonsphere of the rite (the sound layer, the rhythm, the symbolism of the number three). There was also a belief that the soul of the deceased, which might still be in the house or just under the threshold of the house, would at that moment leave there together with the deceased⁶⁸. Thus, this is another practice of excluding the deceased from the community of the living, present in the folk funeral rite, which is intentionally characterised by the aforementioned bipolarity: on the one hand, the desire to bid farewell to the deceased and, on the other, to escape his or her pernicious impact on the household.

» 62 Adam Fischer, *Lud polski. Podręcznik etnografii Polski* (Lwów–Warszawa–Kraków, Wydaw. Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1926), 125.

» 63 The threshold in folk beliefs represents the boundary between a domesticated, familiar space (inside the house) and an unfamiliar and alien space (outside). The threshold is therefore characterised by mediality, which has particular significance in the perspective of rites of passage. Crossing the threshold in folk culture signifies a change of status – see Kowalski, *Leksykon. Znaki świata...*, 482.

» 64 Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 259–268.

» 65 *Komentarze do polskiego atlasu etnograficznego...*, 185–186.

» 66 See Biegeleisen, *U kolebki...*, 129–142; Daszykowska-Ruszel, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 46; Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 205.

» 67 Biegeleisen, *U kolebki...*, 138–140.

» 68 Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 269–270.

The custom, now forgotten but still practised before the Second World War of helping the deceased to leave the house was to overturn the stools and furniture on which the coffin was placed, or to turn them upside down⁶⁹. This was done as soon as the coffin was carried out of the house, so that the deceased would not sit down, and was only cleaned up after returning from the cemetery. In seeking an interpretation of this custom, special attention should be paid to the noise made when furniture is turned over, which has an apotropaic significance for the people. Clatter, uproar and noisy sounds are ancient ways of warding off evil spirits, common among Slavic peoples⁷⁰.

The lingering custom of smashing dishes after the removal of the body can be justified in a similar way⁷¹. In Niwiska, the blessed water with which the priest sprinkled the deceased was poured under the wheels of the coffin cart, and the plate containing the holy water was thrown under the wheels so that it would be crushed⁷². Dishes were also broken at home by being hit on the ground⁷³. Kazimierz Moszyński classifies breaking vessels as a magical practice proper, a sympathetic one. They consist of a fictitious effect on a given object through actual interference with any object. In this case, the very act, the action of smashing (destroying) an ordinary pot by a person who has an unclean spirit in mind, causes belief in the destruction of and the unravelling of an evil force⁷⁴.

Funeral procession

The carrying out of the coffin from the house was usually accompanied by singing, although sometimes it proceeded in silence. Once the coffin with the deceased was carried out of the house and placed on a cart, a funeral procession was formed. Enroute, the mourners prayed the rosary and sang hymns. The singing and prayers were usually led by the funeral singer or the church organ player. As the funeral procession approached the church or chapel where the funeral service was to be celebrated, bells would toll. The coffin was pulled from the cart by the same people who had carried it

» 69 See Turek, *Ludowe zwyczaje, obrzędy...*, 37; See Jan Perszon, *Na brzegu życia i śmierci: zwyczaje, obrzędy oraz wierzenia pogrzebowe i zaduszkowe na Kaszubach* (Lublin–Pelplin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego – Wydawnictwo Diecezji Pelplińskiej Bernardinum, 1999), 215; Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 141–145; Biegeleisen, *Śmierć w obrzędach...*, 208–209; Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 205.

» 70 See Kazimierz Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, part II: *Kultura duchowa*, issue 1, (Kraków, Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1934), 290; Biegeleisen, *U kolebki...*, 62.

» 71 Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 257–258.

» 72 Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 206.

» 73 Biegeleisen, *U kolebki...*, 62; see *Komentarze do polskiego atlasu etnograficznego...*, 115.

» 74 Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, 290.

out of the house. Following the priest, they led the body of the deceased into the church.

The funeral mass and the procession to the cemetery are non-folk elements and will therefore not be discussed in detail here. They do, however, supplement the folk funeral rite⁷⁵.

Inhumation of the body

In the cemetery, after the priest had recited all the prescribed prayers, the mourners bid goodbye to the deceased before the coffin was interred. This took the form of kissing or embracing the coffin or the cross on it. This was the final moment of public mourning for the deceased. At the time of entombment in many localities, the song *Zmarły człowiecze z Tobą się żegnamy* [The deceased we said goodbye to you], was intoned by the organist or funeral singer.

In modern times, the time when the coffin is interred has become one of the few moments in a folk funeral rite (apart from the liturgy and the meal after the funeral) where musical instruments are used. The most common instrument used at this time is the trumpet, whose sound is associated with solemnity and dignity. There are also instances of the accordion or guitar being played during burials in the cemetery. At funerals of significant people, it is common to find a brass band accompanying both the procession to the cemetery and the very interment. The repertory of songs performed at this stage of the funeral includes e.g. different versions of the *Ave Maria* (mainly by G. Caccini and J.S. Bach) and songs such as: *Łzy matki*, *Cisza*, *Barka* and the march *W mogile ciemnej*. Increasingly, the above songs are played by the funeral parlour attendants from the hearse bearing the coffin.

Meal after a funeral

For centuries, a traditional feast crowning an important event in a person's life has been a permanent feature of rites of passage in Slavic countries. It used to have a ritual character and, in the case of a funeral rite, was a solemn banquet to honour the deceased⁷⁶.

In the area under discussion, the funeral banquet could not be complete without a joint prayer for the deceased, interspersed with the singing

» 75 *Tradycje pogrzebowe na Kurpiach, Gmina Kadzidło*, part 1, ed. Jacek Jackowski (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2021), 52.

» 76 See Biegeleisen, *Śmierć w obrzędach...*, 283–284; Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe...*, 376–377; Perszon, *Na brzegu życia i śmierci*, 226–227; Turek, *Ludowe zwyczaje...*, 38–40; Kupisiński, *Śmierć jako wydarzenie eschatyczne...*, 233.

of songs. There are references in the literature to the fact that this prayer could last for at least an hour and that many funeral songs were sung in the process⁷⁷. Information can also be found about dancing to music during the funeral feast. Perhaps these were remnants of old funeral feasts, in which death and evil spirits were driven away through singing and dancing⁷⁸. O. Kolberg observes that during a funeral banquet in Sandomierz region, musicians played a “slow obertas of very ancient” tonality, treated as a funeral dance⁷⁹. Well-known songs for funeral banquets were: *Wszystkie gospodynie wyganiają świnie* [All housewives drive out the pigs] and *Umarł Maciek, umarł* [Died, Maciek, died]⁸⁰. These are songs with a distinctly folk origin, unlike most other mourning songs. However, they went out of use in the area in question many years ago. Fr. Gaj-Piotrowski gives another example of dancing at a wake in Turbia. It is a record of the memories of an informant from this village, who recalls a situation at a funeral banquet, when the participants, after the plentiful refreshments, began to dance, even involving the widow of the deceased husband⁸¹. This was also an element of consolation for the woman after the loss of her husband.

Conclusion

The explanation and presentation of the meaning of the various types of sounds (nature, animals, bells, objects) that coexist in the funeral rite and contribute to its sonosphere allows us to perceive the extraordinary character and sacred dimension of the time of the rite. This dimension is clearly emphasised also through the prayers and funeral songs recited and sung.

The analysis demonstrates a symbolic overlapping of the meanings of the linguistic and religious aspects of the rite with those of sound and music. In a funeral rite, the sounds that make up the musical code influence numerous sequences of other codes of this macro-sign. This demonstrates that the sonosphere elements described above are an integral part of the rite and also perform specific functions in it. Musicality is therefore one of the fundamental layers of the funerary rite, and its study can help to establish the rite's ontology, function and role for particular communities. ●

» 77 Fischer, *Zwyczajne pogrzebowe...*, 383.

» 78 Fischer, *Zwyczajne pogrzebowe...*, 392.

» 79 Oskar Kolberg, *DWOK*, vol. 2, *Sandomierskie*, Wrocław–Poznań 1962, 159

» 80 Biegeleisen, *U kolebki...*, 279; Fischer, *Zwyczajne pogrzebowe...*, 383; Jan Stanisław Bystróż, *Pieśni ludu polskiego* (Kraków: Orbis, 1924), 12–14; Włodzimierz Bugiel, “Lamentowa grupa pieśni pogrzebowych”, *Rocznik Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu*, 6 (1925): 100.

» 81 Gaj-Piotrowski, *Kultura społeczna...*, 265.

Abstract

The article is an attempt to present the funeral rite in Poland in the context of its sonosphere. The basis for the analysis is field research conducted by the author in the Rzeszów region, and materials obtained from several research centres dealing with folk culture in Poland. The funeral rite is a kind of response to a state of danger for the local community that arises as a result of death. Arnold van Gennep's concept assigned specific rituals and beliefs to each phase of the rite and divided it into three phases: separation, i.e., exclusion from the current social status; marginal (transitional) period; and rituals of incorporation into a new state (integration). Research shows that the ritual level of the funeral rite in Poland is extremely developed and contains many archaic elements, testifying to its long tradition. In this article, the author distinguishes the musical elements which accompany and co-create the funeral rite. The analysis of elements made it possible to explain the meaning of the various types of sounds that make up the sonosphere of the funeral rite. The extraordinary nature and the sacral dimension of time of the funeral rite is also emphasised by the human voice, i.e. lamentations, sung prayers and funeral songs.

Keywords:

folk, folk culture, ritual, funeral, funeral rite, sonosphere, ritual songs

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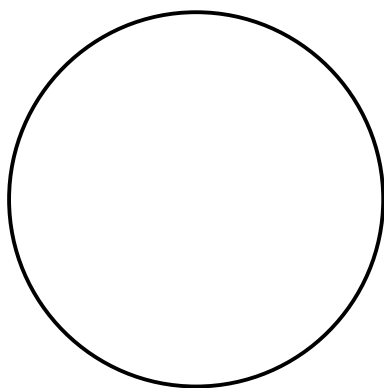
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