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COLON BREAKS IN THE
13-SYLLABLE LAMENT


As is well known, the rhythm of the poetic line depends not only on the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, but also on the location of such phenomena as word boundaries, syntactic pauses, and the like. In this paper we shall examine phonological word boundaries in the Russian 13-syllable lament, with particular attention to their role in delimiting the three cola of which this lament consists.

The 13-syllable lament, as described in brief remarks by Jakobson¹ and Taranovsky² is in trochaic hexameter with dactylic clausula and constant stress on the third, seventh, and eleventh syllables, i.e. on all even ictuses, e.g.

Што стою, бедна горюшка, задумалась,
Чужих басенок победнушка ослушала; (16:1)³

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³. Here and throughout, the numbers in parentheses refer to pages and lines in E. V. Barsov, Prichitania severnogo kraia. Chast' I: Plachi pokhoronnye, nadgrobnye i nadmogil'nye (Moscow: 1872). Although Barsov's good transcriptions have provided the basis for most of what little work has already been done on the lament, it should be emphasized that really serious study of lament poetics must also take into account several other structural types of lament, as recorded, for example, in B. B. Efimenkova, Severnorusskaia prichet' (Moscow: Sovetski kompozitor, 1980).
Our analysis is based on the 1198-line "Plach vdovy po muzhe" in Barsov. The percentage of phonologically stressed vowels (including monosyllables) in each syllable is as follows:

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|   | 45.72 | 9.84 | 99.50 | 7.66 | 29.99 | 5.28 | 100.00 | 8.67 | 21.20 | 4.84 | 100.00 | 0.75 (3.19)

In contrast to literary trochaic verse, this lament line is characterized by the metrically constant strong ictuses on syllables 3, 7, and 11, that is, by the absence of anything approaching Taranovsky's regressive curve; the weak ictuses, however (syllables 1, 5, 9, 13) do show the left-to-right downward slope one would expect (45.72 → 29.99 → 21.20 → 3.19). Furthermore, in addition to the structures created by syllables, feet, and lines, the 13-syllable lament is divided into three cola, each of which has a strong-ictus center (syllables 3, 7, 11) and surrounding lateral portions consisting of one or two arsis and weak ictus syllables on either side of the center, for example:

4. Barsov, Prichitania severnogo kraia, 1-44.
5. The 3.19 percent of stressed vowels in syllable 13 comes from clausulae like so sinia moria with retracted main stress and a secondary and often non-etymological final stress induced by the binary cadence.
6. Whether this binary cadence is trochaic or iambic, and for that matter whether this distinction itself is of any real relevance to lament structure, has yet to be determined; see the concluding paragraphs of this article.