

Transforming Reality: Personal Names in Ritual Speech. The *Vinogradie* or “Song of Praise” from the Russian North*

Inna S. Veselova

In July 2007, during a folklore expedition to Zherd' Village (Mezen' District, Arkhangelsk Region), I was privileged to become acquainted with a married couple – Vasilii Alexeievich Kuznetsov and his wife Kalisfenia Ivanovna. Shortly before our meeting these famous local singers had celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Both of them were lead-singers in a village folk choir and the whole family of Kuznetsovs, including their four daughters, made a vibrant family ensemble. We were taken to visit the parents by their eldest daughter who lived in a neighbouring village. Her husband, who was the head of the village council as well as an avid hunter and fisherman, was responsible for organizing our everyday life during the expedition and, because of the bad weather, let us stay in his own house for the first few days, treating us to the fish and game delicacies he had caught himself. In the early morning of St. Peter's Day (July 12th) we were also invited to join in a lavish meal at the Kuznetsovs' house. After we had all been introduced and drunk tea together, I asked Kalisfenia Ivanovna to recollect some of the songs which had been sung in her youth on non-official, i.e. non-Soviet, holidays, such as the folk songs or carols (*koliadki*) sung during the Christmas period. Kalisfenia Ivanovna replied that even a child could sing these *chastushki* (her rather dismissive name for *koliadki*) and offered to sing us a “good and proper” *vinogradie* instead. And so she did! The words poured out of her mouth with ease and confidence and she hesitated only on the eighth or ninth line. At this point she noticed for the first time that I was recording her. She asked me to stop the recording, summoned her husband for assistance and together they started afresh. What they sang was a genuine,

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full-length *vinogradie*. It was beautifully performed and one which I had come across previously only in anthologies of calendar folklore. They sang a so-called “maiden” *vinogradie*, where in an open field, “inside a pavilion of white linen and velveteen” a young girl sits at an oaken board embroidering “all four corners” of a towel: on the first corner she embroidered “a bright crescent moon and star”, on the second “a shining / bright sun with a halo of golden beams”, on the third “a dark forest with its wild beasts”, and on the fourth “the blue sea with its ships”. In the middle of the towel room had been found for all the rest of Old Rus’ with its churches, priests and scribes [*podiatcii*]. Kalisfenia Ivanovna stumbled over the last few words. She had almost certainly never come across a real-life *podiatcii*! Everything else was quite familiar and imaginable for her. At the moment when she had to introduce the name of the towel-embroidering maiden, she turned to her daughter and said “We’ll *sing you in*”. That was how “Mistress Olga, lovely lass” found herself seated in the pavilion! According to the plot, a fine young man was passing by just then, resplendent “with the pelts of foxes and martens” hung about his shoulders and “bearing a golden spear”. Naturally, the name of the young man was that of the Kuznetsov’s son-in-law. In the song “his words were fine and fancy-fed” and with a promise “to take the maiden by her right hand and lead her into the golden church [i.e. the one she had just embroidered] to kiss the Holy Cross”. Both the daughter and we ourselves were most touched by the song and not only by its beautiful performance, but also by the beauty of the world unfolding before us. Each line of the song was followed by the refrain “Grapes, oh grapes, of red and green!” (*Vinogradie krasno-zelenoie*). The refrain transformed a northern village into a sort of Paradise. No fruit except for bird cherry and rowan berries get the chance to ripen in this severe climate and there is certainly no question of grapes. However, reality was undergoing a miraculous transformation right before our eyes. There was nothing unusual about referring to the daughter and son-in-law as capable and successful people in the song. What was particularly touching was that the parents visualized them as such and with their ‘song of praise’ (*velichanie*) imparted to their daughter’s marriage an additional value – husband and wife were worthy of each other. It was a generous and spontaneous blessing, made even more valuable by the fact that the couple was newlywed and for both of them it was the second marriage. The parents were happy for their daughter and son-in-law and managed to express their feelings in a most sensitive way. It is worth remembering that the performance was absolutely spontaneous: the *vinogradie* had not been sung before, either at the wedding or on any other occasion. Because of my interest in folklore I had simply asked to hear a calendar song being sung and Kalisfenia Ivanovna had responded, inserting through improvisation her own particular meaning into the ancient words of the song. Later, when we were drinking tea, she recollected that 50 years ago, during hay-making on a distant *kolkhoz* (collective farm) meadow the village women had sung the same *vinogradie* about her and her husband-to-be Vasilii. She and Vasilii had been

“walking out together” for quite a while, so the older women decided to sing them a *vinogradie* as a hint that it was high time for them to marry. After their return from the hay-making, Vasilii led Kalisfenia, not to the church but to the village council, and not to kiss the cross but to sign their names in the Acts of Civil Status Book. The *vinogradie*, nevertheless, had done its job.

The question is how? How did the older women in 1957 and the Kuznetsovs in 2007 manage to “do things with words”, as John Austin put it?¹ The “thing” in this case was a blessing, approving marriage in 2007 and inducing marriage in 1957. How had words turned from “just words” into reality-transforming agents?

Natalia Kolpakova worked in the Mezen’ district in 1958–1961, that is only a few years after Kalisfenia Ivanovna was *sung* to Vasilii Alexeievich during the hay-making. In the introduction to “Folk songs of the Mezen’ region” she wrote: ‘The tradition of *vinogradie* singing, which was long-standing and strong in the old North, began to decline, noticeably and swiftly, from the 1920s. The texts of the songs, however, have remained fixed in people’s memories with surprising persistence to the present day. Far from being in any way diminished, recordings of songs from 1961 are, on the contrary, in a number of cases, fuller and longer than texts recorded earlier, although nowadays *vinogradies* are remembered only by certain elderly village “songsters” and a very few middle-aged women. They have completely disappeared from the everyday life of present-day collective farms’.² As we now understand, N. P. Kolpakova was mistaken in suggesting that the *vinogradies* disappeared from the lives of the Soviet peasantry, since hay-making on the collective farm fields had clearly become the venue for the performance of *vinogradies* by middle-aged women for the benefit of their younger village neighbours.

N. P. Kolpakova defines the genre which provides the subject of this article as follows: ‘the songs of praise, known as *vinogradina* (grape berry), were named after the refrain “Vinogradie krasno-zelenoie” (‘Grapes, oh grapes, of red and green!’), repeated after each line throughout the whole text. They are long songs of praise containing semi-epic imagery and with a slow, stately and monotonous tune, the melody of which is no longer than a single repeated line’.³ Thus we are dealing with a folklore genre defined primarily by its typical refrain, and only secondarily by the type of plot (semi-epic), function (praising), melody (stately and monotonous) and ritual time of performance (during weddings or at Christmastide). Publications and field records often define the *vinogradie* as a song “for the family” – addressed to an adult married couple, the master and mistress of the household, to a daughter of marriageable age (the so-called *dev’e* or ‘maiden’ *vinogradie*), to a young bachelor (the *parnishnoe* or

¹ Austin 1962.

² Kolpakova 1967: 27.

³ Kolpakova 1967: 27.

‘young fellow’ *vinogradie*). In the unpublished records of Kolpakova’s expedition of 1958 I came across a *vinogradie* to a childless couple. Who is being addressed determines the choice of a particular *vinogradie* ‘plot’ of which there are nine common ones.⁴ As for the communicative conventions of this genre, it should be noted that the narratives addressed to an unmarried girl, a bachelor, a newlywed or a childless couple differ one from the other.

The *vinogradie* performance by the Kuznetsovs showed us a very important genre-specific feature – the use of personal names for those who are being communicated with in the “praising” text, or more precisely for its addressees. The incorporation of personal names unites *vinogradies* with spells, lullabies, village party songs, marriage songs of praise and reproach. Spell plots bring together characters from different worlds: the healer, who gives his name and sets off – after blessing and crossing himself – on a journey around the magic world of the spell; the one who is to be cured is also referred to by name as are the magic and sacral forces called upon for assistance (the rosy dawn, the tempestuous winds, the Mother of God, etc.). In his article accompanying the publication of Great-Russian spells from the L. N. Maikov collection, A. K. Baiburin wrote that “the spell is overfilled with names”: if we analyze spell texts, even outside the circumstances of their actual performance, we will come to the conclusion that “introducing the personal name of the initiator of the spell focuses the spell on a highly individualized situation”.⁵ However, in contrast to the spell-caster, the recipient is never the acting hero of the plot, being the object of the caster’s actions and of magic forces.

The spell has, or so it seems, the same aim as the *vinogradie*: improvement of the recipient’s private life. But, firstly, this improvement is rather one-sided, being

⁴ In the study *Vinogradie – pesnia i obriad* [Vinogradie – song and ritual] T. A. Bernshtam and V. A. Lapin categorize plots by their connection with a particular ritual and by the type of narration. Classical studies of Russian folklore define the most well-known *vinogradie* scenario as that of a carol or a well-wishing song. V. Y. Propp in his book *Russian Agrarian Festivals* analyzed the carol-type *vinogradie* plot, as one consisting of an introduction which described the singers’ journey from afar and their search for a particular house, a main section with praising of the master and mistress, and a conclusion where the singers demand to be treated nicely with food and drink for their extolling, while threatening negative consequences to a stingy host and hostess (Propp 1995: 50–53). *Vinogradies* of the carol type formed the biggest block of texts recorded by Bernshtam and Lapin – 87 out of 246. Topics related to weddings and marriage form a group of different plots: “The Dashing Young Man” (a plot in the form of questions and answers with praise given to a fine fellow with “three spirals of curls”), “Embroidery” a young girl sits in a pavilion embroidering a kerchief, while a young man passing by starts to boast openly about his merits with the aim of taking her for his wife, “The Ring” (husband and wife lie on a bed under a tree with a ring rolling between them, they send messengers to Heaven, asking for wealth or children), the “Marriage” group with four scenarios: a bird promises a young man he will provide merry-making at his wedding (1); a father must brew beer as it is time to get his son/daughter married (2); a young man is leading a maiden along a narrow plank across a brook (3); a maiden is carried away by the beautiful song of a nightingale enticing her to follow her bridegroom to a foreign land (4). “Vinogradie-the River Danube” is another plot belonging to the wedding-marriage group. In this song the refrain may change to “da iz-za Dunai” (“along the River Danube”) – a young man on board the first of a line of ships makes an arrow and throws a ring into the sea. Those *vinogradies* which are unrelated to rituals, are in fact historical songs like “Skopin” or “The Ransoming of Filaret” with the traditional refrain integrated into them (Bernshtam – Lapin 2009: 260–261).

⁵ Baiburin 1994: 171.

performed according to the best interests of the requester. The “servant of God” who initiates the spell is a young girl or a woman who would like to tie up her beloved with overwhelming and soul-sapping dependency. The description of the “symptoms” of this feeling is very graphic. The man against whom the spell is cast is shown as suffering “longing and anguish” (but not love) of such a scale and intensity that he is not able to drink, eat, walk about outside or sit with his mother unless he can hear or see the specific, named “servant of God” who has cast the spell. The precise description of the degree of dependency, in my opinion, relates more to the requester’s state of body and mind as well as to her longing for love returned. Secondly, unlike the *vinogradie* a spell is not performed in public but in secret from the person to whom it is addressed. Thirdly, in a spell all those involved in the communication (active and passive, sacral and magical, real and supernatural) are named: the spell-caster, who addresses the forces (morning dawn and sunset, the Mother of God and the winds), the requester, in whose interests the caster is acting, and the object of her feelings. It should be noted that the activity of speech and deed with respect to spells is shown only by the sorcerer while the other individuals are passive objects, either those whose assistance is requested or those who suffer the application of forces:

I’ll stand up with a blessing,
 Cross myself and go
 Through the doors out of my house,
 Through the gates out of my yard
 To the open field beyond the gates,
 And stand with my face to the East.
I, servant of God (name),
 Will obey and bow down before
Maria, the Morning Star,
Before Solomonia, the Evening Sunset,
Before the Holy Mother, the kindly Mother of God.
 Oh, Holy Mother,
 You have twelve brothers,
 Twelve tempestuous winds.
 Blow, *winds,*
 To every village,
 To every town
 And find *God’s servant (name).*
 Put longing and anguish
 Into his sweet lips,
 Into his body so white,
 Into his hot blood,

And proud heart,
 Into his black liver,
 Into his red lungs,
 Into 77 joints,
 And 77 heel tendons,
 So he burns and craves for *servant of God (name)*.
 Until he sees her, until he hears her voice,
 Let him have no drink,
 Let him have no meal,
 And neither walk into the garden,
 Nor spend time with his mother.
 Whenever he sees her, whenever he hears her voice,
 He can eat and drink,
 And with his parents speak.
 Let my words be firm and binding,
 A lock with a key. (*Italics mine – I. V.*)⁶

Things are somewhat different with respect to lullabies. The child to whom the sleep-inducing song is addressed may become its main character, for which purpose the singer will give its name in the song. So then, in the world of the lullaby, Liosha/Katia/Vania may be attacked by a big bad wolf or get a smacking.⁷ Threats and promises, addressed to a particular baby who is supposed to go to sleep, but pronounced within the symbolic universe of the cradle song, are not intended as an order, like “Go to sleep!” A demand of this kind does not really sound very effective in the context. Threats and promises *inside the reality of the lullaby* are make-believe only, while rhythm, melody and cradle rocking in the *actual world* are what change the baby’s state.

Vinogradies use the same trick of integrating an addressee into symbolic reality. The name of the addressee is attached to a character in the *vinogradie*. An interesting example of the use of personal names can be found in published *vinogradies* from the collection of Aleksei Vladimirovich Markov.⁸ Notably, the majority of *vinogradies* in this book are intended for a bachelor and “Aleksei dear Vladimirovich” is praised

⁶ The Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University (FASPSU) Vin20–30. Recorded on July 11, 1990 in the Village of Brasunitsoie of Topez County in the Vinogradovskii District of Arkhangelsk Region from Taisiia Vasilievna Sergeieva, born 1917 in the Village of Borka, recorded by I. Razova and S. Zhavoronok.

⁷ Baiu, baiushki-baiu,
 Do not lie on the very edge,
 A little gray wolf will come,
 And take a hold of Lyosha’s side.
 FASPSU Onezh 10–29. Recorded on July 23, 1981 in the Village of Filevo of Ksachel’ County in the Onezhskii District of Arkhangelsk Region from Aleksandra Mitrofanovna Malygina, born 1908 in the village of Cheshiuga, recorded by A. Kalimina and E. Demidenko.

⁸ Markov 2002: 821–836.

in many of them. Undoubtedly the narrators meant the collector himself. It is known that A.V. Markov conducted his field research in the Russian North from 1898 until 1909, i.e. when he was 20–30 years of age and not married at that time. In a *vinogradie* of the “young fellow” type sung in July 1899 in the Village of Nizhniaia Zimniaia Zolotiza the singer, Agrafena Matveievna Kriukova, addressed not only the researcher, but all his relatives by first name and patronymic: “birth mother Mariia Polikarpovna”, “birth father Vladimir Semionovich” and “blood sister Zinaida Vladimirovna”.⁹ While singing *vinogradies* to A.V. Markov at his own request the narrators tried to arrange his private affairs as well. Some singers left him a certain freedom of choice, delicately leaving out the girl’s name. It is unlikely we will ever know, for example, who exactly was the girl chosen by the singer A. M. from the village of Gridino in July 1909. Others praised him together with particular individuals, such as “Matrionushka Mikitishna”. Nevertheless, we can see not only the results of intensive and successful field work by an enthusiastic folklore collector, but also the no less intensive attempts of his counterparts, the informants, to change his life by getting a suitable wife for him.

What is the mechanism for changing reality by means of words?

Once again I would like to draw your attention to the communicative distinctions of the *vinogradie*’s performance, and in the first place to the participants in this specific communication: the one who assumes the right to praise and the one to whom such praise is addressed. Depending on relations between the addresser(s) and the addressee *vinogradies* can become a blessing, an approval, an impetus and even a coercion (we do not know, to what extent, if any, A. V. Markov was inclined to “tie the knot” with Matrionushka Mikitishna). We should always keep in mind that *vinogradies*, like spells, lullabies and songs of praise – i.e. magic and ritual genres, – are not performed without the intention of changing the addressee’s real-life situation: finding a husband or wife for her/him, bringing wealth and prosperity to a household, even helping to conceive babies. The sphere which the *vinogradie* embraces is the wished-for world of the family ideal. In general this ideal has remained practically unchanged since the time of the first recorded *vinogradie*’s (beginning of the 19th century) until the present day: a materially comfortable life with a decent husband or wife and with children. Only the details of the conventions regarding intrusion into someone’s personal life have changed. For example, public and collective acknowledgement of infertility problems and the expressed desire for a solution are not possible in the modern setting.

The sociologists P. Berger and T. Luckmann in their book “The Social Construction of Reality” maintain that the “reality” of the everyday world, which is *the reality par excellence* is affected by finite provinces of meaning (dreams, literature, religion). Being symbolic enclaves in everyday reality they transpose their meanings into it, with language acting as a mediator. ‘Language is capable of transcending the reality

⁹ Markov 2002: 836.

of everyday life altogether. It can refer to experiences pertaining to finite provinces of meaning, it can span discrete spheres of reality. Language links up commonsense knowledge with finite provinces of meaning, thus enabling people, for example, to interpret dreams through understandings relevant in the daytime. For instance, I can interpret the “meaning” of a dream by integrating it linguistically within the order of everyday life by making it an enclave within the latter. The dream is now meaningful in terms of the reality of everyday life rather than of its own discrete reality. Enclaves produced by such transposition belong in a sense to both spheres of reality. They are “located” in one reality but “refer” to other. Any significant theme that thus spans spheres of reality may be defined as a symbol and the linguistic mode by which such transcendence is achieved may be called *symbolic language* (italics mine – I.V.).¹⁰

The principle by which the symbolic enclave works is not simple. By means of symbolic language it creates an abstracted reality, the meaning of which may be transposed into everyday reality by certain mediators. In terms of ritual speech, spells, lullabies and *vinogradies* have their own particular signs which act as mediators – the personal names of participants in the communication and their titles (maiden, beloved, lovely lass, mistress of the house, fine fellow, master of the household, etc.).

In order to define the relationship between everyday reality and symbolic reality, I would like to use the communication multi-level model, developed for works of literature by Wolf Schmid. Schmid extended the communication model of “addresser–message–addressee” proposed by R. Jakobson. In Schmid’s model the “message” became multi-layered and placed the work of literature, taken as a whole with all included narrative instances, within the wider context of author–reader relations. So, a concrete author creates a work of literature and a concrete reader reads it. But the concrete author envisages an abstract reader (the one with whom he communicates on the pages of his book), while the concrete reader imagines, based on signs contained in the text, an abstract author. The abstract author and the abstract reader belong to the work of literature. The world depicted in literature may also have a fictitious narrator, such as Mr. Belkin in *The Tales of Belkin* by A. S. Pushkin, as well as a fictitious reader (such as the one addressed by the author in *Eugene Onegin*). In the world narrated by the narrator lies the deepest communicative level: the level of communication(s) between the characters.¹¹

Applying the communication multi-level model to folklore performance we see that in the real world communication takes place between the performer and his or her audience or between addresser and addressee. The performer and the audience are engaged in a specific communication act, which is different from the language of everyday speech. They communicate through the performance of a particular folklore

¹⁰ Berger – Luckmann 1991: 54–55.

¹¹ Schmid 2003: 39–49.

genre, which creates a symbolic reality. The folklore genre, as defined by Boris Putilov, is “a system – historically formed and realized both in individual works and in their totality – of content, poetical, functional and presentational principles, norms and stereotypes behind which stand those ideas, relationships, links with various spheres of reality, social institutions and everyday life which derive from the collective experience”.¹² The speaker, singer or tale-teller creates the work of folklore in compliance with these principles and norms, while the addressee understands it, guided by the same. The communicative parameters of each genre define, in particular, the status of the participants, the specific time and place, etc. The communicative parameters of the *vinogradies*, for example, contain ideas about who may “praise” or “be praised” – older people or people of a particular age group may “praise” those who are younger or the same age as themselves, most frequently within the framework of calendar ritual (Christmas carols) or rites of passage (the wedding). No folklore performance is possible without both parties – addresser and addressee – being fully aware of the conventions of the communicative genre. As Natalia Gerasimova has pointed out with respect to the fairytale, ‘in order to enter the fairy-tale world one has to accept the “rules of the game”, set by the initial and final formulas, which form the framework of the fairy-tale plot: these are the rules of place, time and person. The strong framing position of such formulas is by no means accidental, since it marks the boundaries of what is being related. The initial formula is where the audience is drawn into the fairy-tale action, where the specific figure of the “mediator” makes his appearance, that is the tale-teller who acts as intermediary between the tradition and the audience’.¹³ When a work of folklore is presented orally, the performer and the audience coexist in several different realities: the physical reality of the performance and the symbolic reality of the work of folklore. The symbolic reality of the work of folklore is a special world with its own laws and specific features (time, place, plot, formulas, themes characters). Some folklore genres with ritual or magic meaning assume the performer’s ability to unite actual and symbolic realities in order to change the former. One of the methods of achieving unity and interaction is the use of the personal names of the participants in the communication and other ways of naming them. However, in each genre personal names function in different ways. Let us have a look at some of the parameters of communication. At the level of everyday reality we should take into account the following – the number of addressers or performers (depending on the collective or individual nature of the performance), whether the interaction involved is public or intimate in character, the number of addressees and the forms of address given to the participants in the communication. At the level of symbolic reality it is important to note whether a named character is active or passive. This approach provides us with

¹² Putilov 2003: 167.

¹³ Gerasimova 2012: 79.

a fully formalized description of the communicative parameters of the *vinogradie* as a genre. In the *vinogradie*, according to these parameters, one or two addressees are named but the performers, of whom there must be several, are never named. In symbolic reality the *named characters are active*: the maiden “sews and embroiders the towel”; the young fellow “awakes from sleep and clears his tipsy head” or is “draped in fox and marten furs, and girdled with black sable”, the master of the house “makes decisions and keeps order” etc.¹⁴

The *vinogradie* performers, whose groups are formed according to gender- or age-related principles (older women at hay-making, adult guests at a wedding, young girls and youths, groups of women and men,¹⁵ going house-to-house to sing Christmas carols) address their songs of praise to bachelor village neighbours, newly-wed couples, masters of the household and childless married couples. The public and collective nature of their performance is an expression of the generalized nature of their commentary, the significance, objectives and values of which are shared by the group as a whole. The performers’ aim is to praise the addressee(s) while at the same time wishing upon them improvements in their present status. This aim is achieved through the use of certain conventions. The active nature of the characters, the addressees who are given personal names, is, in symbolic reality, a testimony to their personal merits. In other words, the addressees are praised according to their actual achievements. The well-wishing that follows, therefore, is transformed into a well-deserved reward, behind which lurks unseen the cultural imperative the singers wish to impose. The bachelors are “strongly recommended” to get married, the newlyweds – to set their household, the childless – to have children. The number of improvement scenarios corresponds to the number of *vinogradie* plots (let me remind you that there no more than nine), while the number of specific personal situations can be much greater. Personal names individualize a universal solution, correlating it with a specific time and place and with personal circumstances. As a result everyday reality is turned into an idealized form of symbolic reality for the time of the performance and keeps its suggestive effect as long as memory and imagination allow. The Kuznetsovs, who sang the *vinogradie* to

¹⁴ By way of comparison here is a description of the process of mediation between everyday and symbolic realities in lullabies and spells. In the lullaby, a single child is named (the one being rocked to sleep), while the performer, also in the singular, is not named. In the symbolic reality of the lullaby the named character is most often passive – sleep and drowsiness are summoned for him, he or she is the recipient of the order to “go to sleep”. In the symbolic reality of spells, on the other hand, the named characters are the wise-man (or-woman), who is also the performer, the “patient” or object of the spell and the wise-man’s otherworldly helpers. While the wise-man and the supernatural forces are active, the object of the spell remains passive.

¹⁵ “Unfortunately not much data on the manner of *vinogradie* performance and types of treats for performers has been preserved. Nevertheless, summing up the collected information we may suggest the following: groups of young girls or women sang *vinogradies* inside the house: in the living space (Russian North), in the ante-room and in the living space (Murom Region, the Volga Region), in the yard and in the living space (the Kolyma Region); groups of young girls and lads – in front of the house (Pskov Region, Sumy Region); groups of men in the North of Russia and Siberia would begin to sing *vinogradies* in front of the house, but if invited in by the host and hostess, they would continue their singing in the living area” (Bernshtam – Lapin 2009: 255).

their daughter and the folklore researchers, impromptu, genuinely believed the force of its charm would last for the whole life-span of its addressees. However, we will never know how the *vyinogradye* sung especially for A.V. Markov influenced the rest of his life.

ARCHIVE MATERIAL

The Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University (FASPSU).

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