

Сообщение о смерти как способ сказать о жизни: образ «идеального человека» в некрологе

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Notice About Death as a Way to Tell About Life: Image of a «Perfect Person» in an Obituary

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена рассмотрению набора характеристик, которые предписываются персонажам современных российских некрологов. Исследование выполнено на материале некрологов, посвящённых жителям города Пушкина Ленинградской области.

Abstract

The article is devoted to examination of the set of characteristics, which the personages of modern Russian obituaries are prescribed to have. The research is based on the obituaries, devoted to the residents of the town of Pushkin at the Leningrad region.

Ключевые слова: исследование смерти, некрологи, современный город.

Keywords: death studies, obituaries, modern town.

Obituary in modern Russia: tradition and practice

In Russia an obituary is considered as a news article, devoted to a person, who died recently, and notifying a wide audience about his/her death. Usually there are following elements in Russian obituary: the main stages of the deceased person's life, his/her basic professional merits, his/her relationships with other people and their acknowledgements, mention of his/her family life, a positive estimate of his/her personality, and moral virtues. The peculiarity of Russian obituaries is that they contain a detailed life description, including the relation to important positions of the community.

As noted by Russian modern researcher G. Orlova, during the Soviet



era obituaries were primarily focused on working career of the decedent. The description of his or her moral virtues was non-mandatory, but sometimes it could finish the life overview. Political and psychological qualities were summarized and generalized into a short list without any examples or comments. By doing so, image of a «perfect person» was created. This image represented a set of attributes and characteristics, that depersonalized the defunct and referred him/her to the certain social type (Orlova 2009).

In modern Russia, the obituarists partly carry on the Soviet tradition of obituary creation. As in the Soviet times, they focus primarily on social relevance of the decedent, his/her working career. But all the same, they pay attention to his or her moral virtues and family life: sometimes obituaries turn into intimate memoirs.

The sociologist of culture A. Reytblat emphasizes, that in an obituary most of the focus is on socially useful activity of the decedent, his/her positive characteristics from the society perspective, while negative qualities and actions are not mentioned (Reytblat 2014).

Data for study

This article is based on obituaries, collected at the town of Pushkin at the Leningrad region from the local newspaper «Tsarskoselskaya gazeta».

Pushkin is a municipal town in Pushkinsky District of St. Petersburg, located about 20 kilometers south from St. Petersburg with population near 93 thousand people. Mainly, Pushkin is famous for its State Museum-Reserve «Tsarskoye Selo», a palace and park ensemble of 18th–19th centuries, built as a royal residence.

I arbitrarily chose 100 obituaries from various years (2000–2015), devoted to

different people: from a nurse to a Vice Admiral.

Out of 100 obituaries, 59 ones were written of men and 41 — of women. Age of the decedents varied from 46 to 101 years old (at that, age was not indicated at all in 26 obituaries).

Working career of the decedent

In Russia an obituary is an institutional phenomenon. According to my observations, family members never write obituaries of their relatives. Usually obituaries are written by colleagues and friends.

For perception convenience, I combined the occupation of the obituary «heroes» into several professional fields and calculated how many men and women were involved in each one: research (10 men; 7 women), art (14;4), armed force (17;1), management and administration (11;6), public health (3;1), education (1;7), police (3;8), sport (3;0).

In this context, it would be interesting to look at those professional qualities, which men and women were prescribed to have. I took three leading professional fields and distinguished such qualities out of obituaries. It is necessary to point out, that these characteristics were the same for men and women.

Research: *A person, who represents the period of town formation; well educated; talented institutor; educated researcher; an expert with encyclopedic knowledge; a scientist of the first water; thoughtful specialist; a man of great depth.*

Art: *talented craftsperson; selfless labour; a devotee; gifted person; a sense of duty; instinct with love of the beautiful; hard-working; responsible; marked by god poet; aganippe.*

Armed force: *faithful patriot of his Motherland; valour and bravery;*



honorable service; firmness; allegiance to Motherland.

Moral virtues of the decedent

Despite of the fact, that professional achievements (and therefore, professional qualities) often turn out to be the central characteristics, as though swallowing up the individual (in 34 obituaries personal qualities are not at all represented, but at the same time occupation and professional qualities are indicated), the analysis of moral virtues is of strong interest. I found out a rather long list of personal qualities, which described men (55) and women (44). I chose the most frequent personal qualities, which men and women are prescribed to have, and obtained the following results (the frequency of occurrence is indicated in parentheses).

Personal qualities for women:
kindness (6), advertency (5), love of life (5), generosity of soul (3), carefulness (3), decency (2), proactive attitude and personal opinion (2), great conversationalist (2), reliable friend (2), ability to give advice (2), industry (2), ability to hear out (2), sympathy (2), honesty (2), big-heart (2), polymathy (2).

Personal qualities for men:
outgoingness (7), kindness (5), carefulness (4), sense of humor (4), carefulness (2), reliable friend (2), conscientiousness (2), joy of life (2), sociability (2), decency (2), creativeness (2), industry (2), civic consciousness (2), love of life (2), polymathy (2), responsibility (2), patriotism (2), modesty (2), exactingness (2), honesty (2).

Family life of the decedent

Another interesting fact is that references to happy family life (marriage, parental status) were presented in 16 obituaries of men and only in 7 obituaries of women.

In some obituaries of men it is said, that the decedent had a '*big friendly family*', was a '*fond and careful father*', a '*family man*', who '*loved his family*'. To my mind, the attachment to family life is emphasized, because men usually are not expected to behave this way and in obituaries it is marked specially.

As shown previously, in Russia obituaries focus primarily on social relevance of the decedent. According to our analysis, education and care of the younger generation is one of the most important socially approvable actions. In 37 obituaries out of 100 it is said, that the decedent educated children/students/young specialists etc. In my opinion, this ability is marked especially, because in this case, people really managed to leave something valuable behind.

Conclusion

Thus, the present-day Russian obituaries concentrate on social relevance and activity of the defunct. Much attention is given to characteristics, which could help a person to communicate and work effectively with other people. Besides, in Russia an obituary is an institutional phenomenon, so it focuses primarily on working career of the decedent. The men are approved to be good family-guys, and this quality is marked especially. For both genders it is very important to educate and care of the younger generation. The number of peculiarities, which describe men and women, is large, but an obituary still continues to be conventional, although there are some exceptions.

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