

# Sound Repetition and Metaphorical Structure in the Igor' Tale

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## Introduction

Speaking of medieval Russian literature, Jakobson pointed out that works of the period "are rich in intricate puzzles, according to the trend of the time, which required speaking in riddles (*gat'kami besėdovati*)" (1952: 382). Among these puzzles are the alliterative, paronomasic and anagrammatic passages in the Igor' Tale, which, to be sure, have been noticed and treated by several authors (Ržiha 1926; Čiževskij 1948, 1949; Wollman 1958; Gasparov 1984; Nikolaeva 1984–1985, 1988, to mention but a few). With respect to the Igor' Tale in particular, Jakobson viewed the sound repetitions as a piece of unfinished business: "...zvukovye povtory v našem pamjatnike ešče ždut sistematičeskogo obsledovanija" (1952: 512–13). More than thirty years later Yokoyama and Vine could continue to assert that [i]n the library of literature concerning the poetics of the Russian epic tale *Slovo o polku Igoreve*, surprisingly little work has been done with respect to its sound texture; and with very few exceptions, most published work concerns the rhythmic or metrical structure of the poem" (1988: 415). Although the effect of sound repetitions can be appreciated for their verse-organizational and rhythmic functions as well as evocative, emotive and synesthetic character (calling forth the clashing of metal, the pounding of hooves, etc.), as has been suggested in previous works, I will propose in this paper that such structures also help clarify and unify the imagery and metaphorical associations of the Tale.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, sound structures tie together on

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a somewhat revised version of a graduate seminar paper begun at UCLA during the 1985 fall semester seminar in Russian poetics given by Professors Irina Paperno, Alan Timberlake and Dean S. Worth. I am grateful to all three of these teachers, who gave encouragement in pursuing this topic and generously imparted their advice. I am also grateful to Professor Boris Gasparov, who made additional useful comments when the paper was presented at the California Slavic Colloquium, Berkeley, in April 1986. It gives me great pleasure to dedicate this belatedly published paper to Professor Dean S. Worth as a token of my esteem for his perspicacity, patience, circumspection and sagacity as a mentor during my graduate study at UCLA. Although the paper represents a field in which I have not been

the expression plane related sets of imagery on the semantic plane that can be conceptualized in the sense of Lakoff's radial categories (1987: 91-114). These relationships to a large degree intersect with and reinforce the observations that Worth has made about positive ("vertical") and negative imagery in the Tale (Worth 1984-1985).

Sound repetition is represented in the work so widely that, according to Gasparov, a complete description would leave hardly a sentence in the text untouched (1984: 240); it has also been suggested that alliteration may have been an organizational principle of the verse in which the original epic was composed (see, for example, Wollman 1958). Among the examples of highly organized rhyme are famous passages such as the following:<sup>2</sup>

*po* Ruskoj zemli  
*prostrošasja*  
*Polovci, aky parduže gněždo.*  
*Uže snesesja xula na xvalu;*  
*Uže tresnu nužda na volju;*  
*uže vručesa div na zemlju. (25)*

In this passage the alliterative sequences *po-pro-po* and *uže- uže-uže - uže* are organized as if in a rhyming sequence; the two triadic structures are tied together by the word *parduže*, which echoes both alliterative sequences.<sup>3</sup> Most of the Tale does not display this high degree of organization. Although perhaps the numerous observations of previous scholars should suffice to affirm that sound repetition is a deliberate poetic device in the Tale, all doubt has been

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active, I offer it in the hope that it reflects the rich and lively spirit of humanistic inquiry that flourished at the UCLA Slavic Department during my graduate studies there in the 1980s.

<sup>2</sup> Citations of the Igor' Tale are from Vinogradov 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Yokoyama and Vine (1988: 427-31) have refuted ievskij's view that alliterative rhyme in the Tale was borrowed from Germanic *Stabreim* (1949), asserting instead that it is simpler to assume that the tradition goes back to alliterative rhyme in Indo-European (1988: 428). Nevertheless, it remains anyone's guess as to the origin of alliterative verse organization in the Tale, thus it seems not unreasonable to note that alliterative rhyme is the primary verse organization of Mongolian poetry (and in general of languages with initial stress) and that this feature may betray a further Altaic influence on the form of the Tale, beyond the well-known lexical elements (see Krueger 1965: 528-29, Zajaczkowski 1949). Whatever its origin, alliteration as a poetic structure in the Tale remains evidence in favor of the authenticity of the Tale (Yokoyama and Vine 1988: 429-30).

removed by Yokoyama and Vine's statistical study, which indicates that "key sounds predominate in certain passages.

This paper will not attempt a complete description, but will attempt to draw out and interpret two persistent examples of sound repetition that are realized as partial and complete anagrams on the names *Svjatoslavъ* and *polovъcbъ*, standing for the Russian and Polovetsian camps, respectively. In doing so, we recall Saussure's theory of the anagram, that includes also partial anagrams or "anaphony" which implicitly strive towards the complete anagram (Starobinski 1979: 15—17). Thus a repetition of sounds that may be connected with one of the two anagrammatical names will be seen in this paper as part of the connective material that unifies imagery, through the medium of sound, around the two camp names. In turn, these sound repetitions reflect an evaluative authorial viewpoint in which the Russian camp is seen as positive and the Polovetsian as negative.

### Camp names

The name *Svjatoslavъ* (and its derivatives) stands as the emblematic name for the Russian camp. Its choice is less obvious, at first blush, than the choice of *polovъcbъ* for the Polovetsians, but it may be seen as rich in associations and thus provides a large number of ready metonymic connections to be implemented in the composition of the Tale. Concretely, the name as a patronymic unifies the genealogy of the princes Igor', Oleg and Vsevelod", a connection strengthened by several repetitions of the word *synъ/synove* 'son/sons'. (In fact, at least two more Svjatoslavs can be traced in the brothers' lineage, going back to their great-grandfather and great-grandfather four times removed, who died in 972; see Rybakov 1971: 280a). The folk-etymological association of the second part of the compound in *-slavъ* with the ethnonym *slověne* 'Slavs', through the intermediary of the term *slava* 'glory, praise (with respect to nobles)' provides an ethnogenetic unifier as well as a positive evaluative marker (see further on the semantic distinction between *čestъ* and *slava* Lotman 1967, 1971; Zimin 1971). Moreover, the repetition of *s*-sequences in the name itself suggests yet another association, connecting *svjatъ* 'holy', or more likely, with its pre-Christian meaning 'power, abundance'; thus *Svjatoslavъ* may be understood with the meaning "ne tot, čъja slava «sakralъna», no tot, u kogo ona vozrastaet, širitsja i t.p.) (Toporov 1985: 454). The total effect of the name *Svjatoslavъ* is that of a term rich in positive moral associations, reflecting the favorable regard in

which the author holds the Slavic camp. In addition, it serves as an emblem of geneological and ethnogenetic identity.

The use of the word *polovьcь* (and its derivatives) as the name for the Polovetsians requires no special explanation. Nevertheless, its choice and repetition throughout the Tale is no less rich in meaning than *Svjatoslavъ*. Numerous repetitions of the initial sequence *po-* relate a coherent set of images to the Polovetsians. In particular, we find frequent juxtaposition of the name *polovьcь* with the modifier *poganyi* 'heathen': ...*potoptaša poganyja plьky Poloveckyja i rassušjasъ strělami po polju* (10); *tamo ležatъ poganyja golovy Poloveckyja* (13). This contrasts the moral view of the Slavic camp as *svjatъ* 'holy, powerful'. In addition, the downward-oriented, horizontal imagery is associated with negative moral evaluation (contrasting with positive upward-oriented vertical imagery, in Worth's sense), as we find in the connection of *pole* 'field' with the Polovetsians: ...*polja Poloveckago* (5), ...*na polě neznaemě* (29); ...*to počnutъ naju ptici biti vъ polě Poloveckomъ* (44).

In the continuation of the paper I shall accordingly refer to the camps as "Slavic" and "Polovetsian."

### Alliteration and anagrams

In accord with Yokoyama and Vine's findings, alliterative (i.e., paronomasic, anagrammatic) passages are not evenly distributed throughout the Tale, but, rather, grouped in a clustered fashion in proximity to the names representing the two camps. In the following passage, which displays frequent repetitions of the segment *s* and the sequence *sv*, we find, if the extraneous material is removed, the name *Svjatoslavъ* echoed anagrammatically: *sv-sv-Svjatъslav-s-sv-s-sv-ja-ja-t-s-s-s-s-slav*.

*"Komoni ržutъ za Suloju — zvenitъ vъ Putivlě". Igorъ ždetъ mila brata Vsevoloda. I reče emu Bui Turъ Vsevolodъ: "Odinъ bratъ, odinъ svěť světlyi — ty, Igorju! oba esvě Svjatъslavličja; sědlai, brate, svoi brъzyi komoni, a moi ti gotovi, osědlani u Kurъska na pere//di; a moi ti Kurjani svědomi kmeti: podъ trubami poviti, podъ šelomy vъzlelějani, konecъ kopija vъskrъmleni, puti imъ vědomi, jarugy imъ znaemi, luci u nixъ naprjaženi, tuli otvoreni, sabli iztoštreni, sami skačjuti, aky sęryi vlъci vъ polě, iščuči sebe čti, a knjazju slavě."* (7–8)

In this Slavic passage the positive moral outlook towards that Slavic camp is emphasized through the repetition of the words *svěť světlyi*, which play on their similarity to *svjat*. That *svěť* refers metaphorically to the Slavic camp is unmistakable, a metaphor strengthened by

the connection of Igor' and Vsevolod with *solnce* 'sun': "...*dva solnca poměrnosta, oba bagrjanaja stǎlpa pogasosta*" (25). In contrast, the Polovetsians are connected with darkness: "*Dlǎgo noč' mǔknet', zarja svěť zapala, mǔgla polja pokryla...*" (10)

... *treščat' kopja xaralužnyja v' polě neznaemě sredi zemli Poloveckyi. Črǔna zemlja pod' kopyty kost'mi // byla posějjana, a kroviju pol'jana: tugoju vzydoša po Ruskoj zemli* (17–18)

### Moral marking

Worth has pointed out the function of vertical ("good") and horizontal ("bad") evaluative marking in the imagery in the Tale (Worth 1984–1985). Without reiterating his arguments here, it is worth noting that there is a congruence between positive moral evaluation and "Slavic" alliteration; similarly, negative evaluation occurs with "Polovetsian" passages. Note, for example, the following brief passages, about which Worth suggests that: "the collocation of two 'good' factors remains cumulatively 'good' (*stojat' stjazi v Putivlě* (18)), while that of two 'bad' factors changes the cumulative image to 'good' (*tamo ležat' poganyja golovy Poloveckija* (54))" (idem: 32). Bird imagery is also strongly associated both with vertical ("good") imagery and "Slavic" alliteration:

*Bojan' že, bratie, ne i [10] sokolov' na stado lebedi puščaše, n' svoja vščia prsty na živaja struny v'skladaše; oni že sami knjazem' slavu rokotaxu* (4)

*O Bojane, soloviju starago vremeni! a by ty sia pl'ky uščekotal', skača, slaviju, po myslenu drevu, letaja utom' pod oblaky, svivaja slavy...* (6)

In these passages, the positive vertical imagery of the birds (*sokol*, *lebed'*, *solovij/slavij*), through alliteration a paradigmatic substitution for the "Slavic" actants, is connected further with glory (*slava*). The vertical imagery is strengthened with vertically-oriented verbal semantics (*vz-* 'upward', *skača* 'leaping') which further employ s-alliteration.

In contrast, downward-oriented/horizontal passages are associated with the Polovetsians:

... *i Polovci sulici svoja povr'goša, a glavy svoja podkloniša pod' tyi meči xaralužnyi* (32)

*Togda vrani ne graaxut', galicy poml'koša, soroky ne troskotaša, polozie pol'zoša tol'ko.* (43)

The table summarizes the semantic fields and oppositions suggested by sound repetition.

**Table: Semantic Oppositions Supported by Sound Repetition**

semantic fields containing the opposition positive (= Slavic = S) vs. negative (= Polovetsian = P)	Slavic	Polovetsian
S = vertical (high orientation) P = horizontal (low orientation)	<i>stojatъ stjazi</i> 'banners stand' <i>stъlpъ</i> 'pillar'	<i>pasti</i> 'to fall' <i>pole</i> 'steppe, field' <i>pogruziti</i> 'sink' <i>podъ</i> 'under, below' <i>podkloniti</i> 'bow' <i>poleči</i> 'lie down' <i>polzti</i> 'to crawl' <i>polъnočъ</i> 'midnight'
S = light P = dark	<i>světъ</i> 'light' <i>svētītisja</i> 'shine' <i>svētъlyi</i> 'bright' <i>sъlnъce</i> 'sun'	<i>pogasnuti</i> 'be extinguished' <i>podoblačie</i> 'clouds' <i>pokryti</i> 'to cover' <i>povolōčisja</i> 'to slowly cover' <i>polozie</i> 'type of large snake' (coll.)
S = birds P = snake	<i>sokolъ</i> 'falcon' <i>sokolъcbъ</i> 'little falcon' <i>solovii</i> 'nightingale' <i>soroka</i> 'jackdaw'	<i>pavoloka</i> 'brocade' <i>papoloma</i> 'shroud, pall' <i>poroxъ</i> 'dust'
S = hard material, metals P = soft materials	<i>srebro</i> 'silver' <i>srebrъnyi</i> 'silvery' <i>strēla, strēlъka</i> 'arrow' <i>stružie</i> 'hilt, spear, shaft' <i>sulicja</i> 'metal lance'	<i>poganyi</i> 'infidel, heathen, pagan' <i>pobēči</i> 'to run away' <i>pogybati/pogynuti</i> 'perish'
S = good, strong, holy P = bad, weak, unholy S = advance P = retreat	<i>sila</i> 'strength' <i>svjatyi</i> 'blessed, holy'	

The poetic view that emerges from the distillation of all of the anagrammatically related words is two relatively coherent sets of images. Exactly how these are to be structured is a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, in cognitive terms an association of semantic primes presents itself in the basic positive vs. negative opposition embodied in lightness (*světъ*) vs. darkness (*polъnočъ*). These might be viewed as the "central" oppositions from which further associations are related or derived. The upward, vertical imagery, which links together the daytime sky (*sъlnyce*) and the birds that inhabit it (*sokolъ, solovii, soroka*) are opposed the earth (*pole*), the horizontally slithering snake (*polozie*) that inhabits it, as well as the things that cover (i.e., the view of the daylight) (*podoblačie, poroxъ, papoloma*), leaving aside the non-alliteratively related *tъma* (*sъlnyce emu tъmoju putъ zastupaše*). Radially associated with light and dark would also be the vertical and horizontal images, respectively, correlating in turn with Worth's positive and negative evaluative structure.

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