

The Silent Debate Over the Igor Tale

Robert Mann

The Igor Tale, or *Slovo o polku Igoreve*, is the only epic tale of its kind to reach us from the Kievan period. It celebrates a military campaign undertaken in 1185 by a minor Russian prince, Igor Sviatoslavich, against the Polovtsy, or Kumans, the perennial steppe foe of Rus' at that time. Igor was defeated and captured, but he later managed to escape and return home. The tale survived in a single manuscript that evidently dated from the sixteenth century. It was published in 1800, about a decade after it was discovered, but the manuscript itself was destroyed during the Napoleonic occupation of Moscow in 1812.¹ A number of details in the tale suggest that it was written down in the thirteenth century (Mann 2005:98-112).

For two centuries the Igor Tale has been treated as a poem that was composed by a literate writer.² Only a few dissenters have argued that the Igor Tale was originally an oral epic song, and the question has not attracted much attention among specialists in early Russian culture. It is, however, worthwhile to reexamine some of the arguments formulated by the leading twentieth-century scholar in the study of Old Russian literature, Dmitrii S. Likhachev. His ideas went far to shape the views of scholars throughout the world, yet certain aspects of his argumentation have been ignored by his followers. When one takes a closer look at Likhachev's line of reasoning, it becomes clear that the hypothesis of a literate poet who penned the Igor Tale, accepted as axiomatic by many students and scholars, stands on extremely shaky ground.

The evidence for an oral epic tradition of court songs in the Kievan era includes the Igor Tale itself (regardless of whether it is the text of an epic song or a writer's stylization of an oral epic) and its allusions to the court singers Boyan and Khodyna. The *Hypatian Chronicle* mentions "the famous singer Mitusa" who refused to serve Prince Daniil Romanovich of Galich in the first half of the thirteenth century.³ The Pskov *Apostol* of 1307 contains what appears to be

¹The first edition of the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* was published by Aleksei Ivanovich Musin-Pushkin: *Iroicheskaia pesn' o pokhode na polovtsov udel'nogo kniazia Novgoroda-Severskogo Igoria Sviatoslavicha, pisannaia starinnyim russkim iazykom v iskhode XII stoletia s perelozheniem na upotrebliaemoe nyne narechie*. Moscow, 1800.

²Leading proponents of a written mode of composition are Roman Jakobson and Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev. See D. S. Likhachev (1967:5-39); Jakobson (1948); (1952:62-63).

³See *PSRL* 2001b: column 794 (year 1241).

a brief excerpt from an oral epic about princes' feuds in the early fourteenth century.⁴

The question of oral composition in the Igor Tale is of immense importance for the study of early Russian culture. If the Igor Tale was an oral composition, then the oral epic tradition of Kievan Rus' was much different than many have imagined. The chronicles' relation to oral sources is different than most scholars have assumed. If the Igor Tale was an oral epic song, then later works commemorating the 1380 victory over the Tatar horde would appear to draw from oral tales to a degree that few have suspected. In brief, the role of oral composition in the Igor Tale is an issue that has great significance for our understanding of the Kievan oral tradition and of many early Russian literary works from the Kievan period and later.

Although Likhachev was the leading proponent of the Igor Tale's composition by an ingenious writer, it is a little known fact that he nevertheless admitted the possibility that the tale was originally an epic song. In response to the theory of L. V. Kulakovskii, one of the rare scholars who argues that the *Slovo* was a song, Likhachev wrote (1986:28):

Мне представляется, что «Слово» написано или записано одним автором. Если даже «Слово» и произносилось на каком-то этапе своего существования устно, то окончательную

⁴The passage in the Pskov *Apostol* reads:

Сего же лѣта бысть бой на Русьской земли: Михаил с Юрьем о княжене Новгородское. При сих князѣхъ сѣяшется и ростяше усобицами, гыняше жизнь наша. В князѣхъ—которы, и вѣци скоротишася человѣкомъ.

In that year there was fighting in the Russian land: Mikhail with Yurii over ruling in Novgorod. Under these princes feuds were sown and grown, our life perished. Among princes there were feuds, and the lives of men were shortened.

It is generally treated as an excerpt from the Igor Tale, but various differences, including sound symmetries that replace those in the similar passage in the *Slovo*, demonstrate that it comes from a different tale. See Mann (1990:112-13); (2005:230-31).

отделку оно получило в письменном виде под пером одного гениального автора.⁵

It seems to me that the *Slovo* was written or recorded by a single author. Even if the *Slovo* were performed orally at some stage in its history, it was the pen of a single ingenious writer that gave the tale its final, polished form in writing.⁶

Here Likhachev does not concede that the Igor Tale was in fact an oral composition, but this statement nonetheless reflects a certain wavering in his stance. He concedes the possibility that the written *Slovo* might derive from an oral Igor Tale. In the same period, Likhachev wrote (1985:20):

Это книжное произведение, возникшее на основе устного. В «Слове» органически слиты фольклорные элементы с книжными.

Характерно при этом следующее. Больше всего книжные элементы сказываются в начале «Слова». Как будто бы автор, начав писать, не мог еще освободиться от способов и приемов

⁵In the introduction to his book, L. Kulakovskii (1977) formulates an eloquent argument that the Igor Tale was a song. Among studies published up to that time, his introduction is the best summary of evidence for the tale's orality. However, his subsequent chapters attempting to reconstruct the tale's musical features and arguing for a dialogue-based structure in the tale are unconvincing. Likhachev speaks of a possible oral origin for the *Slovo*, *Molienie Daniila Zatochnika* and *Slovo o pogibeli russkoi zemli* in other publications such as his article "'Slovo o polku Igoreve' i protsess zhanroobrazovaniia v XI-XIII vv" (1972:69-75):

Такие произведения как 'Слово о погибели русской земли' или 'Моление Даниила Заточника', —полулитературные-полуфольклорные. Возможно даже, что новые жанры зарождаются в устной форме, а потом уже закрепляются в литературе.

Works such as the "Lay of the Ruin of the Russian Land" and the "Supplication of the Imprisoned Daniil" are half-literary and half-folkloric. It is even possible that new genres arise in oral form before becoming embedded in written literature.

O. V. Tvorogov's position in regard to the genre question is close to Likhachev's (1981:42):

Не имеет «Слово» аналогий среди других памятников древнерусской литературы. Следовательно, это либо произведение исключительное в своем жанровом своеобразии, либо—представитель особого жанра, памятники которого до нас не дошли, так как жанр этот, сочетающий черты книжного «слова» и эпического произведения, не был традиционным. Быть может, произведения этого жанра, предназначенные в первую очередь для устного исполнения, вообще редко записывались.

The *Slovo* has no analogy among other monuments of Old Russian literature. And so, it is either a work that is exceptional in its generic uniqueness or it is from a certain genre that otherwise never reached us because it combined attributes of written and oral epic genres and was not a traditional genre. Possibly works of this genre, intended primarily for oral delivery, were rarely written down.

Tvorogov's statement that "possibly examples of this genre never reached us because it was not a traditional genre" is puzzling. He seems to mean that in all likelihood only a few works like the *Slovo* were ever composed; therefore, they never became a "traditional" genre and remained exceptional. This is almost stating that the *Slovo* (and perhaps a couple other epics of its kind, for which we have no evidence) was indeed exceptional—not really a literary "genre" at all—but we will wiggle and squirm this way and that in order to speak of a literary "genre" to which it belonged.

⁶All translations are the author's, unless otherwise indicated by the citation.

литературы. Он недостаточно еще оторвался от письменной традиции. Но по мере того как он писал, он все более и более увлекался устной формой. С середины он уже не пишет, а как бы записывает некое устное произведение. Последние части «Слова», особенно «плач Ярославны», почти лишены книжных элементов.

[The *Slovo*] is a written literary work that arose on the foundation of an oral composition. Folkloric elements organically coalesce with bookish ones in the *Slovo*.

Moreover, one characteristic feature of the tale is that its bookish elements are mostly at the beginning of the *Slovo*. It is as though the author, after starting to write, could not free himself from the devices and techniques of written literature. He had not yet detached himself sufficiently from the writing tradition. But as he continued writing, he was more and more carried away by the oral form. From the middle of the tale onwards he is no longer writing; instead, it is as though he is writing down an oral composition. The final parts of the *Slovo*, especially Yaroslavna's lament, are almost devoid of written literary features.

But what, exactly, are the bookish devices that characterize the beginning of the tale? What makes Yaroslavna's lament and the entire second half of the tale closer to an oral composition than the first half? If the second half of the tale is “*almost* devoid of written literary features” (emphasis added), then what are the few literary features that it (that is, the second half) contains? Moreover, if the “author” of the Igor Tale shifted from actively writing an original work to merely recording the words of the second half of an oral tale, then we must ask: *What did the first half of that oral tale look like?* If the ingenious poet created the second half of the *Slovo* by simply writing down the second half of the song, then surely he used the entire song as his primary model. In all likelihood, the first half of the *Slovo* must resemble the first part of the song very closely! The ingenious poet must have been guided by that oral tale before taking the easy way out and simply writing down the words that the singers sang, effectively renouncing his position as ingenious poet. This shift would be like that of a school boy who writes a report based on an encyclopedia entry, but halfway through his report he begins to plagiarize the encyclopedia entry word for word. Such a shift on the poet's part would be an energy saver, but it would not be very ingenious. And there is another problem with this scenario. Some of the proponents of a written mode of composition tell us there could have been a written epic genre to which the *Slovo* belonged (although all the other specimens of this literary genre have vanished). If the poet were writing in this genre, then why did he suddenly abandon his genre halfway into his tale? Genres have rules and regulations, after all—traditional patterns that writers follow. Was the new literary epic genre weak and anemic, impotent to restrain all its writers from reverting to the older tradition of oral epics that continued to lure the monks and other *literati* back into the fold? Possibly the ingenious poet struggled to continue writing with a modicum of originality, but the stranglehold of the epic song tradition proved too strong for him and he failed to free himself from its groping tentacles. More likely, of course, there was no such literary genre.

By and large, scholars have failed to heed Likhachev's own ambivalence on the issue of oral composition. Instead, many have taken his statements about an ingenious writer as an axiom of early Russian literature, closing their eyes to the ways in which Likhachev himself vacillates and mitigates this stance. At any rate, vacillation is what one might expect when no real evidence

for a written mode of composition has been produced and when the importance of formulaic composition for traditional oral tales is not really acknowledged. Likhachev's wavering reflects the failure among researchers to focus on the *process of composition* that would most likely produce the Igor Tale, settling instead for a rather mechanical comparison of the *Slovo* with recently recorded folk texts. Scholars point to differences that prove nothing because, if the Igor Tale was oral, it belonged to an epic genre that had disappeared long before folk songs and tales were collected—an epic genre that was certainly different from the *byliny* that we know from recent centuries. The focus needs to shift to the evolution of motifs, the composer's creative thought processes, and his anticipation of the audience's reception of each image and motif. Proponents of a written mode of composition have given us generalities and abstractions that are not closely anchored to the actual text of the tale. Instead, one needs to examine the text up close, tracing the thought process of the purported medieval poet-genius as he shaped his epic "poem" and the likely thoughts of his audience as they read or listened to his work.

Let us begin by examining a passage near the end of the tale, which, in Likhachev's view, might be little more than a transcription from an epic song. Take, for example, the depiction of Gzak and Konchak as they pursue Igor (vv. 634-55):⁷

А не сороки втроскоташа.	It is not magpies that chatter:
На слѣду Игоревѣ ѣздить Гзакъ съ Кончакомъ.	On Igor's trail Gzak and Konchak come riding.
Тогда врани не граахуть, галици помлъкоша, сороки не троскоташа, полозию ползоша только, дятлове тектомъ путь къ рѣцѣ кажутъ, соловѣи веселыми песьми свѣтъ повѣдають.	Now the ravens have ceased to caw, The daws have grown silent, Then the magpies did not chatter, The <i>serpents</i> only slither. The woodpeckers with their tapping Show the way to the river, And the nightingales announce the day with happy songs.
Млѣвить Гзакъ Кончакови: аже соколъ къ гнѣзду летить, соколича рострѣляевѣ своими злачеными стрѣлами.	Says Gzak to Konchak: "Since the falcon flies to his nest, Let us shoot the falcon's son With our gilded arrows."
Рече Кончакъ ко Гзѣ: аже соколъ къ гнѣзду летить, а вѣ соколца опутаевѣ красною дивѣцею.	Says Konchak to Gzak: "Since the falcon flies to his nest, Let us snare the falcon's son with a fair maiden."
И рече Гзакъ къ Кончакови: аще его опутаевѣ красною дѣвицею, ни нама будетъ соколыца,	And Gzak says to Konchak: "If we snare him with a fair maiden, Then we will have no falcon's son

⁷Throughout this essay I cite the first edition of the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* published by Aleksei Ivanovich Musin-Pushkin: *Iroicheskaia pesn' o pokhode na polovtsov udel'nogo kniazia Novgoroda-Severskogo Igoria Sviatoslavicha, pisannaia starinnyim russkim iazykom v iskhode XII stoletiiia s perelozheniem na upotrebliaemoe nune narechie*. Moscow, 1800. In my Latinized transcriptions of passages from the text, I delete final back yers, even though final reduced vowels might well have retained a phonetic value in the epic songs of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Line numbers for the text of the Igor Tale refer to Mann (2005:15-39).

ни нама красны дѣвице,
то почнутъ наю птици бити въ полѣ

Nor will we have the fair maiden,
And the birds will begin to slay us

Половецкомъ.

On the Polovtsian plain.”

Let us try to retrace the author’s reasoning as he created this passage. Here, as in many other parts of the tale, the author launches straight into a portrayal of action without providing a logical frame to establish parameters of time and space for this episode. He does not begin by explaining that the Polovtsy set out in pursuit of Igor when they learned of his escape. The reader must infer the circumstances of the pursuit. The absence of a logical framework to establish setting is not typical of early Russian chronicles and military tales. The Igor Tale poet’s avoidance of logical framing demands an explanation. What inspired him to avoid establishing a clear setting? What compositional model was he following? Instead of organizing his narration according to the usual priorities of written genres, he launches straight into concrete details of the physical world. He tells us that it was not magpies that were chattering; it was Gzak and Konchak in pursuit of Igor. This negative simile is typical of traditional oral Russian songs, and the magpie simile was inspired by that oral tradition. The instrumentation of sound in “*A ne soroky vtroskotasha*” is impressive. If the author devised the consonance and assonance on the fly, so to speak, as he was also avoiding the usual literary modes of presentation, then it must be admitted that he was a master poet. At any rate, the orchestration of sound that we find in “*A ne soroky vtroskotasha*” is unusual in early Russian literary genres, though it is what one expects in traditional oral songs and tales. Like the use of a negative simile, the masterful consonance and assonance were inspired by the oral tradition. And, of course, it is that oral tradition that the poet is following by stubbornly focusing on physical realia and refraining from the use of literary techniques that frame, organize, and explain. In the second part of the negative simile, the poet tells us that Gzak and Konchak come riding. Interestingly, he suddenly changes to present tense. This use of the historical present tense, a device that adds immediacy and vividness to the narrative, is rare in early Russian written literature. (It can be found in battle tales in a few passages that clearly cite or imitate oral epic formulae.) However, frequent transitions from past to present in a narrative about the past is one of the earmarks of the Russian oral epic as we know it from *byliny*, historical songs, and *dukhovnye stikhi*. The instrumentation of sound continues in this line, conspicuously in “*Gzak s Konchakom*” and less obviously in “*na sledu Igorevi ezdit Gzak*.”

As one can see, these lines are marked by numerous features that surely come from Russian oral epic tradition. Stylistically, there is virtually nothing to link them with any written genre of the Kievan period. Yet, proponents of a written mode of composition consistently base their arguments on the *differences* between the Igor Tale and the oral texts that were recorded in recent centuries. Here, too, will they argue that “*ne soroky vtroskotasha*” (“it is not magpies that chatter”) is not among the specific formulae that have been attested in folk songs and tales and, therefore, is merely an imitation of oral lore, not a true specimen?

Ravens, daws, magpies, woodpeckers, nightingales. . . . The poet refrains from any explanatory commentary in his own voice, limiting himself to the realia of the physical world. In several lines consonance and assonance are conspicuous. Again the narrator switches from past to present tense. Because there is no explanatory commentary such as one would find in written

genres, the reader must infer whether the woodpeckers are guiding Igor or the Polovtsy to the river. Of course, if this was a familiar traditional motif in Kievan times, then the author could count on his audience's ability to make the correct inference. The absence of explanatory commentary echoes the same tendency toward concreteness and physicality in the Russian oral tradition. Here, as in many Russian folk songs, animals in the wild seem to participate in the events that are retold. The extreme parataxis is another conspicuous feature.⁸ Phrases are strung together one after the other without conjunctions. This is not the norm for written compositions of that time, but it is common in oral songs and tales. The short phrases are rhythmically similar—of a length that could conceivably be embodied in song. They are united by grammatical rhyming (parallel verb forms and syntax) that is typical of *byliny* and other folk songs. In early Russian written literature an economy of style generally precludes repetition of a single phrase unless repetition is required by the logical progression of the narrative. Here, however, the author repeats the formulation that he has already used: “*Soroky ne troskotasha*” (“The magpies do not chatter”). This would be somewhat odd for a poet who is extremely prolific in the quantity and quality of the alliterations that he fashions. For some reason he returns to the formulation that he already used in previous lines. With all his vast creative talent, he resorts to a redundancy. Absence of logical explanation or abstraction, focus on physical realia, orchestration of sound, grammatical rhyming, the role of nature as participant, extreme parataxis, repetition of the same formula. . . . All of these are features of the oral epic, but they are atypical of early Russian writing.

Likhachev evidently saw the pursuit episode as possibly the transcription of an oral epic motif. (It comes in the second half of the *Slovo*, which he suggests is little more than the text of an oral tale.) Yet, will his followers, skeptics in regard to an oral Igor Tale, argue that this passage is the original composition of an ingenious writer? After all, those daws, the magpies, the woodpeckers. . . . Those lines are not found in the Russian epic tales that were recorded in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Will they argue that this passage is *different* from the oral epic that we know from transcriptions of *byliny* and, therefore, that it must be the handiwork of a highly skilled poet who—for reasons that remain a complete mystery—wrote in a style that was thoroughly that of an oral epic and resisted any temptation to lapse into the more analytic style of a literate writer? Will skeptics adhere to the argument from “difference” and insist that, although this passage is oral in style, the poet did not employ *actual lexical formulae* from oral epic tales?

Opponents of the view that the Igor Tale was composed orally assume that the oral epic tradition of the Kievan era must have produced only songs that were closely similar in their style and sophistication to the oral epic songs preserved in *byliny* and historical songs. They make little allowance for the five to six centuries that elapsed before the first transcripts of *byliny* were made. And they make no allowance for the radical changes that Russian culture underwent—documented changes such as the gradually ascendant role of writing, significant changes in the language, and the eventual loss of an entire oral genre: the court epic song, composed by professional court singers in response to current events (in sharp contrast to *byliny* that we know

⁸Throughout the tale the subordinate conjunction “*bo*” is the workhorse signifying cause, motivation, or reason. “*Ponezhe*” and “*zanezhe*,” earmarks of the written tradition, are conspicuously absent.

today, which preserve in somewhat fossilized form a group of ancient epic tales that are rooted in the Kievan period but with many changes and accretions dating from later centuries).

However, let us return to our survey of the passage portraying the pursuit of Igor. The dialogue between Gzak and Konchak portrays the enemy as simpletons, a familiar strategy of *byliny* and historical songs. The use of bird imagery to portray humans is a common device in folk songs of many genres. “*Krasnaia devitsa*” (“fair maiden”) is a widespread oral formula, with *krasnaia* serving as a fixed epithet of *devitsa*. The manipulation of Gzak’s name for harmony of sound is remarkable. The form *Gzak* is used in the line “*Molvit Gzak Konchakovi*” (“Gzak says to Konchak”), where it harmonizes with *Konchak*. The dative ending *-ovi* creates assonance and consonance with the verb *molvit*.⁹ However, Konchak’s reply is introduced with “*Reche Konchak k Gze*” (“Konchak said to Gza”), using the variant form *Gza* in the dative case to create assonance: *reche-Gze*. This is a surprising detail to find in Kievan writing because it reveals the tremendous importance that the poet ascribed to orchestration of sound—an importance that is unparalleled in other written works. (In a previous passage, the composer manipulates the name *Ovlur* in similar fashion to create assonance: “*V polunochi Ovlur*”—but “*Vlur vl’kom poteche*.”) In the passage with Gzak and Konchak, seven of the thirteen lines consist of word combinations that are repeated with little variation. Two pairs of lines are virtually identical. This sort of “naive repetition,” combined with the folkloric bird imagery, instrumentation of sound and the attested folk formula *krasnaia devitsa*, must certainly come from the oral epic tradition, where it is a commonplace.

Thus, the 22 lines portraying the pursuit of Igor bear the formal and thematic earmarks of an oral epic composition. Skeptics might break with Likhachev and maintain that the formulations in the pursuit passage find no close lexical parallels in recent Russian folklore, and, therefore, the passage is just a stylization of an oral epic motif. This skepticism is based to a great extent on the *absence* of lexical parallels in recently recorded folkloric texts—lexical parallels that could hardly survive a span of 500 years which saw major changes in the language and the extinction of a major Kievan epic tradition.

Likhachev presented a hypothesis for the development of a written literary genre to which the *Slovo* belonged (1986:28):

Думаю, что Боян и Ходына — реальные певцы. Жили они за столетие до автора «Слова». За это время фольклорная традиция дружинной поэзии (термин «дружинная поэзия» мне кажется удачным) перешла из устного бытования в письменность, сохранив довольно много от устной поэзии Руси.

I think that Boian and Khodyna were real singers. They lived a century before the author of the “Slovo.” In that interim of time the folkloric tradition of poetry among the princes’ retinues (“retinue poetry” seems to be an apt term) passed from an oral mode of existence to a written mode, preserving a rather large amount from the oral poetry of Rus’.

⁹I have spelled *ml’vit* in its pleophonic form *molvit*; the possible distinction in pronunciation between a syllabic *l* and *ol* is of no consequence for the sound parallel here.

Likhachev does not explain how the oral epic court tradition made the transition to writing. We know that the court epic tradition continued in some form through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Mann 2010; 2014). Therefore, the transition from song to writing that Likhachev envisions could not entail the complete replacement of epic songs by written tales. The song tradition continued. How, then, did the transition happen? Was the epic genre hijacked by monks and clergy, the writers and custodians of written texts in Kievan Rus'? The singers themselves could hardly be mustered for this new enterprise. A transition to writing would drastically alter the singers' professional function of entertaining with song. The musical dimension of their songs would be lost in a written text. If the song tradition continued, then what purpose did the written epics serve? Reading the written texts out loud to a prince or to a gathered crowd would seem superfluous alongside the musical performances of skilled singers of tales—tales that perform the same function of glorifying the princes' exploits. If the oral epic had been undergoing a transition to writing throughout the twelfth century as Likhachev suggests, then by 1185 one might expect to find obvious lexical and stylistic intrusions that would betray a written mode of composition in this new, written epic genre. But where are they? In one of the great understatements of Igor Tale scholarship, Likhachev states that the written epics such as the *Slovo* preserved a "rather large amount" ("dovol'no mnogo") from the oral poetry of Rus'. In his previous essay of 1985, he states that the first half of the tale appears to be the original composition of a poet who halfway through the narrative lapsed into mere duplication of an existing oral epic. Fifty percent is indeed a "rather large amount." Actually, careful examination of the text suggests that the "rather large amount" of oral material in the tale approaches one hundred percent.

Now let us turn to a passage near the beginning of the tale—from the first half of the narrative, which Likhachev claims is more clearly the poet's own, original composition (vv. 107-22):¹⁰

Игорь къ Дону вои ведеть.
Уже бо бѣды его пасеть птиць подобію;
вльци грозу въ срожать по яругамъ;
орли клеткомъ на кости звѣри зовуть,

лисици брешуть на чръленья щиты.

O руская земле!

Уже за шеломянемъ еси!

Дльго ночь мркнетъ,

заря свѣтъ запала,

мъгла поля покрыла,

щекоть славій успе,

говоръ галичь убуди.

Русичи великая поля

Igor leads his warriors toward the Don.

The birds beneath the *clouds* prey on his sad fortune,

Wolves trumpet the storm in the ravines,

Eagles with their squalling summon

beasts to the bones,

Foxes yelp at the crimson shields.

O Russian land,

You are now far beyond the hills!

The night is long in ending,

The day is kindled by the dawn,

A mist has covered the plain;

The trill of the nightingale has fallen asleep,

The chatter of daws has awakened.

The sons of Rus' have barred the broad plains

¹⁰ Likhachev does not specify where, exactly, the writer changed his mode of composition. The midpoint of the tale would be somewhere in the vicinity of the Boyars' speech to Sviatoslav.

*чрълеными щиты презородиша,
ищучи себѣ чти,
а Князю славы.*

*With their crimson shields,
Seeking honor for themselves
And glory for their prince.*

The present tense is used in the first lines before it shifts to past. All the lines are highly rhythmic, with the cadence changing at “*Di*” *go noch’ mrknet.*” Alliterations are conspicuous throughout most of the lines. Six of the lines (highlighted with italics) are composed of formulaic refrains that are repeated later in the tale. The narrative focuses entirely on the physical world. There are no generalizations or analytic commentary. There is no authorial explanation to frame the episode. Setting is established by a simple physical action: “Igor leads his warriors toward the Don.” (Where, exactly, is he? Is his army traveling through the night?) The audience must already be accustomed to this sort of narrative leap. All of these features are traits of oral epic songs. The style of this passage is essentially similar to the pursuit episode near the end of the tale. Likhachev did not point out the features of this passage that, in his eyes, make it stylistically different from the second half of the tale. Its stylistic similarity to the pursuit episode forces me to conclude that Likhachev was mistaken about the first half of the tale or he overgeneralized in identifying the entire first half as an original written composition.

So far our search for the telltale traces of literacy has been fruitless. Let us consider part of the battle portrayal, another episode in the first half of the tale (vv. 250-66):

Уже бо, братіе, не веселая година вѣстала,
уже пустыни силу прикрыла.
Вѣстала обида въ силахъ Дажь-Божа внука,

вступилъ дѣвою на землю Трояню,
всплескала лебедиными крылы на синѣмъ
море у Дону;
плещучи, убуди жирня времена.
Усобица Княземъ на поганья погыбе,
рекоста бо братъ брату: се мое, а то мое же;
и начяша Князи про малое, се великое
мльвити,
а сами на себѣ крамолу ковати.
А поганіи съ всѣхъ странъ прихождаху съ
побѣдами на землю Рускую.

Alas, brothers, an unhappy hour has arisen!
Alas, the plain has covered the troops.
Disgrace has arisen in the forces of
Dazhbog’s grandson.
As a maiden she stepped onto the land of Troyan.
She splashed her swan wings
On the deep-blue sea by the Don.
Splashing, she awakened fat times.
The princes’ struggle with the pagans perished,
For brother said to brother:
“This is mine, and that is mine also.”
And the princes said of what is small: “This is big,”
And they forged feuds against themselves.
And from all sides the pagans came,
Bringing defeat on the Russian land.

This passage is of special interest because it expresses one of the most central themes of the Igor Tale: Russian princes’ failure to unite against the enemy, resulting in defeat at the hands of the Polovtsy. Significantly, though, it never formulates this idea in any abstract, analytical way. It adheres closely to a portrayal of the physical world, citing the princes’ words with direct speech in a simple, naïve manner instead of summarizing the princes’ failings and *explaining* why disunity is bringing disaster. The elemental portrayal is not the sort of presentation that one finds in Kievan written genres. The Russians’ “disgrace” is portrayed as a swan-maiden who rises

among Igor's defeated forces and passes as a maiden bride to "the land of Troyan," the territory of the Polovtsy, bringing wealth and prosperity to the enemy.¹¹ This set of imagery has to be a traditional motif. Otherwise the audience would be as confused as we have been about its proper interpretation. One might suppose that, hearing this motif for the first time, a twelfth-century audience would understand that "Dazhbog's grandson" alludes to the people of Rus'. After all, Dazhbog had been their pagan god, and they are his descendants in a certain poetic sense. However, Troyan was also their pagan deity, so how were they to figure out that "the land of Troyan" means the land of the enemy? The composer of the tale must be manipulating familiar, traditional motifs—and there is no evidence that those motifs were denizens of the written genres that we know. The traditional model must have been an oral one. This obvious conclusion is supported by the fact that the swan-maiden, who stands at the center of the imagery in this passage, is found in oral songs and tales, not in early Russian written works.¹²

If one were to compare every passage in the first half of the tale with passages in the second half, one would not find substantial stylistic differences between the two halves. Likhachev's assertion that the author seems to lapse into mere transcription of an epic song midway through the tale does not withstand the test of comparison and it contradicts his own theory that an oral epic would not mix genres. After all, the second half of the tale contains a concatenation of generic elements: Yaroslavna's lament, invocations to princes, and digressions about previous feuds alongside ordinary epic narration. Likhachev's arguments are not carefully conceived. His contradictory stance reflects a lack of clear criteria for identifying oral composition. In his time, the hypothesis of oral composition for the Igor Tale was not really taken very seriously and the importance of the question was undervalued. In most people's thinking, the tale's beauty and excellence simply had to be owed to a skilled writer. There is nothing like it in Russian folklore; therefore, they reasoned, it can hardly come from an oral tradition, which they associated with rustic songs and primitive instruments.

In my view, the *Slovo* contains only one passage that even begins to resemble the type of analytic exposition that one finds in written literature. It follows the invocation to Yaroslav and the grandsons of Vseslav to mount a united front against the enemy: "Вы бо своими крамолами начясте наводити поганья на землю Рускую, на жизнь Всеславию. Которо[ю] бо бѣше

¹¹ This passage alludes to "the land of Troyan" in association with the mouth of the Don, the same general region where Gothic maidens aligned with the Polovtsy jingle the Russian gold.

¹² As O. V. Tvorogov has noted, the use of *usobitsa* in reference to the struggle against an external enemy is a conspicuous aberration in early Russian, where it normally refers to internecine feuding or uprisings. (See Tvorogov's entry for "*usobitsa*" in *Entsiklopediia 'Slova o polku Igoreve'*, [1995:v, 150-51].) The fact that the composer relied heavily upon lexical formulae suggests a new hypothesis regarding "*usobitsa*." The anomalous usage is with the verb "*pogybe*" in a passage that also alludes to the sun deity Dazhbog. Another passage with the verb *pogybati* is "*Pogybaset zhizn' Dazh'bozha vnuka*" ("the life of Dazhbog's grandson perished"). The verb *pogybnuti* ("to perish") was commonly used in reference to the sun's disappearance during an eclipse. For this reason, the perishing of the sun god's grandson evokes associations with an eclipse. Possibly the unusual usage of *usobitsa* in a context involving foreign enemies arose as the composer followed a template that alluded to the sun and a solar eclipse, choosing the word *usobitsa* for its resemblance to *solntse* ("sun"). That is, there loomed behind the mythological allusions of the *Slovo* an entire network of allusions to the pagan gods in an oral tale about the conversion of Kiev and in oral epics that hearkened back to that conversion tale. My main point here is that the theory of an oral Igor Tale makes it possible to envision formulaic templates to explain certain aberrations, whereas the theory that the *Slovo* was written by an ingenious poet leaves us helpless to explain this particular anomaly.

насиліе отъ земли Половецкыи.” (“For with your feuding you began to bring the heathen upon the Russian land, upon the wealth of Vseslav. For it was from feuding that ravages came from the Polovtsian land.”) Though brief, these lines are unusual in that they formulate the narrator’s theme and point of view in bare, logical form—like an explanatory comment in the personal voice of the author—not embedded in plastic imagery.¹³ However, this single brief passage, which stands out from the rest of the tale, is hardly enough to demonstrate that the hand of a lettered poet created any part of the tale.¹⁴

Let us back up now and take a close look at the depiction of Boyan, whom the composer views as a genuine singer of tales and provides samples of Boyan’s art. Even if the poet’s citations from Boyan’s songs are only approximations of what Boyan might have sung, they nevertheless provide insights into the poet’s concept of epic song (vv. 55-72):

<p>О Бояне, соловію стараго времени! Абы ты сіа плькы ущекоталь, скача, славію, по мыслену древу, летая умомъ подь облакы, свивая славы оба полы сего времени, рища въ тропу Трояню чресъ поля на горы. Пѣти было пѣсь Игореви, того (Олга) внуку: «Не буря соколы занесе чрезъ поля широкая; галици стады бежать къ Дону великому!» Чили въспѣти было, вѣщей Бояне, Велесовъ внуче: «Комони ржуть за Сулою, звенить слава въ Киевѣ, трубы трубятъ въ Новгрѣадѣ, стоять стязи въ Путивлѣ!»</p>	<p>O Boyan, nightingale of yore! Would that you could trill these troops, Flitting, nightingale, through the tree of thought, Soaring in mind up under the clouds, Weaving praises around our times, Coursing along Troyan’s trail Over the plains and onto the mountains. You would sing such a song to Igor, Grandson of Oleg: “No storm has swept the falcons Across the broad plains; The daws flee in flocks to the Mighty Don . . .” Or might the song have thus begun, O seer Boyan, grandson of Veles: “Horses neigh beyond the Sula, Praises ring in Kiev, Trumpets trumpet in Novgorod, Banners fly in Putivl!”</p>
--	---

The poet admires Boyan and wishes that this “nightingale of yore” could sing about Igor’s campaign. He introduces Boyan with no explanatory commentary, showing that Boyan is a familiar legend in a narrative tradition. Instead of reminiscing in analytic fashion about Boyan, he immediately spins a web of imagery portraying Boyan as a nightingale that flies in mind up

¹³ It is not altogether certain whether these words are intended to be the voice of the narrator himself and not a continuation of Sviatoslav’s exhortations to the princes.

¹⁴ One might argue that another passage contrasts in style with that of the tale as a whole: “Отъ стараго Владимира [170 лѣтъ] до нынѣшняго Игоря.” (“From old Vladimir [it was 170 years] until the present-day Igor.”) The reconstructed number of years is based on the corresponding passage in the *Zadonshchina*, which refers to the number of years since the Kalka battle (160 or 170 in the different manuscript versions). It was 170 years from Vladimir’s death in 1015 until Igor’s 1185 campaign. It is debatable whether such chronology was maintained by oral epic singers, but there is little evidence on which to base any argument.

under the clouds and flits through the “tree of thought.” The first sample of Boyan’s singing is a negative simile (“It is not a storm that carried falcons across the broad plains; flocks of daws flee to the Mighty Don!”), an oral-folkloric device that the poet himself uses repeatedly in the Igor Tale. The simile incorporates both present and past tenses, a feature that we find throughout those parts of the narrative that are not attributed to Boyan. The metaphor associating people with birds that are carried by a storm has analogues in wedding songs, while the general technique of using birds to symbolize people is widespread in Russian folklore. Wedding songs, for example, portray the bridegroom and his retinue as falcons pursuing smaller birds such as daws or ducks. We have already seen that the composer uses bird imagery of this type in the dialog between Gzak and Konchak. Interestingly, the first purported sample of Boyan’s art, like most of the Igor Tale, does not have a recognizably regular meter. The question of rhythm and meter in the Igor Tale will always be an open one because of all the unknowns: the role of reduced vowels, possible lengthening of vowels, the possibility of a variegated meter. . . . Nevertheless, the first lines attributed to Boyan show that, as far as we can tell from the written text, the author of the Igor Tale did not seem to *perceive* rhythmic regularity as a requirement of oral epic songs.

The second sample of Boyan’s art as it was perceived by the poet of the Igor Tale is very regular in rhythm. As in the first sample, there is no generalizing or prosaic commentary. Events of the past are narrated in the present tense. The entire motif focuses on features of the physical world: the neighing of steeds, the ringing of praise songs, the blaring of trumpets, and the raising of banners. These four lines are very symmetrical, marked by grammatical rhyme and ordinary phonetic end-rhyme linking “*zvenit slava v Kieve*” and “*stoiat stiazi v Putivle*.” Folk songs do not provide very close analogues to the second and fourth lines in the series, but they do provide parallels to the first and third lines (“Steeds neigh beyond the Sula” and “Trumpets sound in Novgorod”). Boyan’s metaphor “praise rings” (or “glory rings”) is closely akin to metaphors elsewhere in the narrative that can be attributed to the voice of the narrator and not to the voice of Boyan: “*zvoniaci v pradedniuiu slavu*” (“ringing at their grandfathers’ glory”) and “*rasshibe slavu Iaroslavlu*” (“smashed the glory of his grandfather Iaroslav”). The orchestration of sound is remarkable—but no more remarkable than that of other parts of the Igor Tale that are not attributed to Boyan. In brief, Boyan’s lines do not differ stylistically from the rest of the narration. Regardless whether the motifs attributed to Boyan are accurate renditions of his art, they make it clear that the author of the Igor Tale perceived his own task as virtually identical to Boyan’s: to create an epic song.

Moreover, the narrator tells us that—in an opening passage that was missing in the manuscript found in the 1790s—he has begun his tale “in the old words of the heroic tales about the campaign of Igor” (vv. 1-7):

Не лѣпо ли ны бяшетъ, братіе,
 начяти старыми словесы
 трудныхъ повѣстий о пълку Игоревѣ,
 Игоря Святъславлича!
 Начати же ся тѣи пѣсни
 по былинамъ сего времени,
 а не по замышленію Бояню.

Was¹⁵ it not fitting, brothers,
 To begin with the olden words
 Of the heroic tales about the campaign of Igor,
 Igor, the son of Sviatoslav?
 Let this song begin
 According to the true tales of our time,
 And not according to Boyan's fancy.

The lost introduction followed the motifs of familiar tales about Igor's raid: "the olden words of the heroic tales about the campaign of Igor." Other tales about Igor's defeat already circulated before the version we know was written down. Any written tales about Igor's battle would have had a narrow audience, while the narrator is alluding to tales that seem to be widely known. Those previous heroic tales must certainly be oral epics.¹⁶

From the opening lines of the surviving text we can draw a few conclusions about its author. He tells us outright that he composed on the backdrop of familiar tales that were

¹⁵ Mistakenly assuming that the opening lines are complete, editors and translators have always given a "corrected" interpretation: *Would* it not be fitting, brothers, to begin. . . . However, the imperfect verb *biashet* ("was") never performed a conditional/subjunctive function in Old Russian. The only imperfect verb performing this function was *podobashe*, and this was a linguistic accident stemming from its use in translating scriptural passages from Greek. This conclusion is supported by the texts of the *Zadonshchina*, which derives from the epic tradition that produced the Igor Tale. In the *Zadonshchina*, the passage corresponding to the first lines of the extant *Slovo o polku Igoreve* comes not at the start of the tale, but after an introduction that would seem to correspond to the missing introduction in the *Slovo*. Significantly, this introduction in the *Zadonshchina* includes an invocation to ascend the Kiev Hills and view epic events from that vantage point. This Kievan feature, rather incongruous in a Muscovite tale, must certainly derive from Kievan epic tradition—and it most likely goes back to an introductory motif that is missing in the *Slovo*. See Mann (1990:169); (2005:96, 388n1); (2012:2).

¹⁶ The "heroic tales about the campaign of Igor" could hardly be the two early chronicle entries about Igor's campaign, which bear no stylistic resemblance to the *Slovo* whatsoever. L. V. Sokolova has argued that there were at least two written tales about Igor's raid that antedated the Igor Tale that we know. She maintains that the differences between the *Hypatian Chronicle* and *Laurentian Chronicle* accounts are a reflection of the differences between two different written tales that served the chronicles as sources. The major flaw in Sokolova's theory is that she limits her thinking primarily to a manuscript tradition when the tales about Igor were almost certainly oral. In my view, she correctly equates "*trudnykh povestii*" with "*bylinam*" and argues correctly that the second sentence in the *Slovo* is not intended as a negative response to the first extant line. We agree that "*starymi slovesy*" refers to the familiar words of tales that are already known, although my belief is that they were known for around 20 years or more by the time the Igor Tale was written down and, therefore, are perceived as somewhat old in an ordinary chronological sense. Sokolova treats the extant opening lines as the actual opening of the tale. In my view, an entire opening passage is missing, and in speaking of starting with "the olden words of the heroic tales about Igor's campaign" the narrator is alluding to the opening that he has just been spun along the lines of familiar epic tales (Sokolova 1987:210-15; Kosorukov:1986:65-74). Because the narrator is referring to the beginning that he has already made, this opens new avenues for interpreting the next lines: "This song should begin according to the *byliny* of this time and not according to Boyan's invention." "*Byliny* of this time" could refer to the "heroic tales about the campaign of Igor" that were somehow reflected in the missing introduction. The words of these tales are "old" in that the tales have already circulated for several decades and they are familiar to all (Mann 2005:98-112). According to this reading, the particle "*zhe*" in "*Nachati zhe sia t'i pesni*" is intended to emphasize and confirm what was stated in the previous sentence—that it was fitting to begin in the manner of the familiar epic tales about Igor. In the formulation "the *byliny* of this time" the intended contrast is with the legendary songs of Boyan, not with "the old words of the heroic tales" about Igor's campaign. This interpretation is in accord with historical details suggesting that the *Slovo* was not written down until sometime in the thirteenth century, not in the 1180s or 1190s as most specialists have argued.

doubtless epic songs. He incorporates motifs from these tales in his own narrative. He asserts some sort of break from the style of Boyan, yet he seems to idolize the legendary singer and actually composes in a style that is virtually identical to Boyan's, judging by the snippets that he gives to illustrate what Boyan might have sung. The only antecedents in narrative art to which the author alludes directly are oral epic tales—songs about Igor's campaign and the epic songs of Boyan. He never mentions the chronicles or any written literary works. He appears to be operating exclusively in the realm of oral epic songs. If he is a lettered poet seeking to create a new literary genre, one must admit that he is blessed with an unparalleled austerity and self-discipline in adhering to the stylistic norms of oral epic tradition and walling himself off from any clear links with written genres. Far more likely, he is an epic singer and the Igor Tale is essentially a transcription of his song.

His account of Sviatoslav's dream provides further insights into his artistic technique (vv. 315-32):

А Святъславъ мутень сонъ видѣ
въ Кіевѣ на горахъ.
«Си ночь съ вечера одѣвахъте мя, рече,
чръною паполомою, на кровати тисовѣ.
Чръпахуть ми синее вино съ трудомъ
смѣшено;
сыпахуть ми тѣщими тулы поганыхъ
тльковинъ
великій женцюгъ на лоно, и нѣгують мя.
Уже дьски безъ кнѣса в моемъ теремѣ
златовръсѣмъ.
Всю ноць съ вечера босуви врани възгряху
у Пльсньска на болони,
бѣша дебрь Кисаню,
и не сошлю къ синему морю».

And Sviatoslav dreamed a troubled dream
In Kiev, on the hills.
“Early last night they wrapped me,” he said,
“In a black shroud upon a bed of yew.
They ladled me deep-blue wine
mixed with sorrow.
From the empty quivers of the pagan interpreters
they spilled great pearls upon my breast
and treated me tenderly.
The main beam is now missing in my
gold-domed bower
All night long the ravens were cawing to Boos
In the fields around Plesensk.
They were thicket of Kisan [?]
And I cannot send to the deep-blue sea.”

The entire dream motif is comprised of actions in the physical world that are strung together in fairly symmetrical fashion with no abstractions, no explanatory commentary, and no immediate effort to clarify the omens. As one will see, no clarification was necessary because the motif was already familiar to the audience. It presents oral lexical formulae that are recognizable from recorded folklore: “yew bed” (*tisova krovat*), “gold-domed bower” (*zlatoverkhii terem*), “deep-blue sea” (*sinee more*). Instrumentation of sound, as usual in the tale, is masterful. Virtually all of the omens seen by Sviatoslav in his dream are paralleled in wedding songs in which the bride has a dream foreshadowing her wedding and separation from her maiden home. The bride dreams that the boards in her paternal home come loose, the roof flies off, or the corner posts fall away; Sviatoslav dreams that the central ceiling beam disappears in his gold-domed bower. The bride dreams that she is presented with cloth, wine and pearls—gifts brought by the matchmakers in the matchmaking ritual. Sviatoslav dreams that they bring him wine and the Polovtsian interpreters spill out pearls for him from their quivers. Interpreters accompany emissaries from

the enemy camp, much as matchmakers function as emissaries of the groom. (Hence, the interpreters are unarmed and their quivers are empty.) In the bridal dream the pearls are commonly equated with the tears shed by her. Birds in bridal dreams symbolize the family of the groom. The lines alluding to ravens in Sviatoslav's dream appear to be defective and muddled, but the ravens are almost certainly associated with the Polovtsy, who correspond here to the family of the groom in the wedding songs. Sviatoslav says that in his dream "they treated me tenderly" ("*i neguiut mia*") a detail that derives from a prominent feature of wedding songs and laments: "Momma's tender care" ("*nega mutushkina*"), which the bride will lose when she is taken away by the groom. One can see that wedding song motifs have been adapted to the context of Igor's defeat in battle. Through the wedding imagery Sviatoslav's role is associated with the sad plight of the departing bride, while the Polovtsy are linked with the groom and his matchmakers.

Proponents of the view that the author of the *Slovo* was an ingenious lettered poet claim that he took folkloric motifs and raised them to new heights. In Sviatoslav's dream, for example, one can see that lyric motifs from ritual songs pertaining to a mere bride are adapted to portray events affecting the welfare of the entire Kiev State. However, there is evidence that this adapting of wedding songs was not the original handiwork of an individual author. For example, it is somewhat odd that Sviatoslav envisions himself wrapped in a shroud when it is Igor's army who die, not the Kiev Prince. Moreover, one would expect the main beam in Sviatoslav's bower to represent the Grand Prince himself, not Prince Igor. Ordinary logic would require that both these omens portend the death of the Kiev Prince. Their logical incongruity suggests that Sviatoslav's dream is a traditional epic motif that originally pertained to the death or defeat of the prince who has the dream, but with the passage of time the motif came to be applied to other contexts. This is to say that the poet of the Igor Tale was not the sole creator of the dream motif. It was originated by singers who came before him. The tale of Olga's revenge, retold briefly in the Primary Chronicle, provides further evidence that the dream motif was already very old by the late twelfth century.¹⁷ This tale, which probably goes back to the tenth century, relates how Kiev Princess Olga, grandmother of Vladimir I, outwits Mal, Prince of the Drevliane, feigning that she will marry him while actually plotting his demise. Throughout the tale, moments of an apparent wedding ritual turn out to bring death to the Drevliane. In one chronicle compilation (Obolenskii 1851:11), Mal is said to dream of a boat with black blankets and clothing embroidered with pearls. He imagines these things to represent wedding gifts, portents of his wedding with Princess Olga. In the end the boat turns out to be a funeral boat, and the black blankets, like the black shroud in Sviatoslav's dream, also portend his death. Thus, the technique of blending wedding motifs into a context of battle and death was deeply embedded in Russian epic tradition long before the poet of the Igor Tale set to work two or three centuries later. Mal's dream was doubtless a variation on the bride's dream in wedding songs. These songs about the sad lot of the bride had already been "elevated to a new level" long before Igor Sviatoslavich was even born. This in no way reduces the splendor of Sviatoslav's dream; it simply shows that the motif is the product of collective authorship by many singers, not the brainchild of a genius

¹⁷ The tale is recounted in the *Primary Chronicle* (PSRL 1997: columns 53-60), where it is attributed to the years 945-946. See Mann (2004).

who sat down and, without even a meager supply of scratch paper, created a beautiful masterpiece singlehandedly.

Another motif that underwent a long evolution before being employed by the composer of the Igor Tale is the portrayal of a brave warrior as a fierce aurochs (170-87):

Ярь туре Всеволодѣ!	Fierce aurochs Vsevolod!
Стоиши на борони,	You stand your ground,
прыщещи на вои стрѣлами,	You spray arrows on the foe,
гремлещи о шелома.	You thunder against helmets
мечи харалужными	With your Kharalug swords!
Камо Турь поскочяше,	Wherever the fierce aurochs bounds,
своимъ златымъ шеломамъ посвѣчивая,	His golden helmet flashing,
тамо лежать поганья головы Половецкыя.	There lie pagan Polovtsian heads:
Поскепаны саблями калеными	Cleft with sabres of tempered steel
шеломы Оварьскыя	Are their Avar helmets—
отъ тебе, Ярь Туре Всеволоде!	By you, fierce aurochs Vsevolod!

This motif appears to derive from ritual songs in which the aurochs, an emblem of the thunder god Perun, is portrayed as bringing fertility and abundance to the crops (Mann 1990:63). In many songs of this type that were recorded in the past two centuries, the aurochs has been replaced with a goat or other horned animal.¹⁸ Wherever the beast bounds, there lie sheaves of grain. Wherever the “fierce aurochs” Vsevolod bounds, there lie the heads of Polovtsy. Vsevolod sprays arrows like rain, he “thunders” against helmets with his swords, and his helmet flashes like lightning. The ancient connection with the rain-giver Perun in the underlying ritual song is reflected in the portrayal of Vsevolod. Elements of the motif come from a system of imagery that the composer of the Igor Tale clearly inherited. The “thunder” of swords, a “rain” of arrows, the lightning-like flashing of helmets—these were all traditional metaphors.¹⁹ Most interesting, though, is the role of “heads” as a replacement for “sheaves” in the underlying ritual song. In the subsequent digression about Vseslav we find a related image: “They spread heads on the sheaves” (“*snopy steliut golovami*”), a formulation that appears to derive from the wedding ritual of making the nuptial bed with furs and blankets spread on sheaves of rye (Mann 1990:63). The two images in the depictions of Vsevolod and Vseslav (one in Likhachev’s first half of the tale, the other in the second half) spring from different underlying rituals, but each melds into the same traditional system that brings harvested sheaves together with severed heads. The composer must be working within a highly developed tradition. His imagery has already undergone a long evolution before he begins to apply and manipulate it himself.

Skeptics will respond by insisting that the attempts of folklorists to assign a ritual origin to the “fierce aurochs” motif is just speculation and therefore proves nothing. Others will argue that a literate poet can employ traditional imagery in a poem that he writes, so there is nothing

¹⁸ Related songs with a similar motif have Iarilo, Elijah, or St. George instead of the horned animal.

¹⁹ Chronicle compilers and authors of written battle tales occasionally imitated them (alongside the usual literary formulae such as “*i byst’ secha zla*”) to add a touch of zest to their accounts of battles.

surprising in the fact that some of the metaphors of the *Slovo* had undergone a long evolution. I would respond by saying that, still, the tendency in written literature is for most of the text to flow from the writer's own creative wellspring, coming in individual words, not in ready-made blocks that have been honed by long tradition. And once again I would ask the skeptics to identify the specific words, lines, metaphors or other features that identify the portrayal of Vsevolod as the work of a literate poet. Could it be “*gremleshi o shelomy mechi kharaluzhnyimi*”? Or perhaps it is “*pryshcheshi na voi strelami*” or “*tamo lezhat poganyia golovy polovetskyia*”? I would ask the skeptics to mark for me the passages that show the tale to be the composition of a literate writer—because I fail to see those telltale signs.

Skeptics might point to the irregular meter of the Igor Tale, noting that most of the famous epics of Europe have a regular meter. Those tales include the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Song of Roland* and the epic songs of the South Slavs. Many Russian *byliny* have a flexible meter, but the rhythms of the *Slovo* show far more variation than those of *byliny*. Although the acoustic dimension of the Igor Tale will possibly never be fully understood, a number of passages provide key insights regarding the way the tale must have sounded to its audience eight or nine centuries ago. One such passage is the portrayal of Igor's army as a nest of birds slumbering in the field (vv. 135-42):

Дремлетъ въ полѣ Ольгово хороброе гнѣздо.	Oleg's brave nest slumbers in the field.
Далече залетѣло!	Far has it flown!
Не было нѣ обидѣ порождено,	It was born to be disgraced
ни соколу, ни кречету,	By neither falcon nor hawk,
ни тебѣ, чръный воронѣ,	Nor by you, black raven,
поганый Половчине!	Pagan Polovtsian!
Гзакъ бѣжитъ сѣрымъ вълкомъ,	Gzak flees as a grey wolf,
Кончакъ ему слѣдъ править къ Дону великому.	Konchak follows in his tracks to the Mighty Don.

For two centuries after the first publication of the *Slovo*, this passage has been viewed as ordinary epic imagery. The enemy is represented by a raven, while the Russian army is a nest of other birds (most likely falcons, judging by familiar patterns). There you have it—epic bird imagery and nothing more. This perception of the imagery, however, overlooks a wedding song that appears to have inspired the epic motif. In the wedding song, the bride is represented as a bird that is sleeping at night when falcons come and steal her, handing her over to a falcon symbolizing the groom. They tell him not to let the little bird be injured (or “disgraced”: “*ne davai v obidu*”) by “falcons, nor ravens, nor by any little birds.” The motif has many versions recorded throughout widely disparate regions of Russia. Here are several of them (Potanina 1981:318, 319; Zyrianov 1970:No. 215):²⁰

Как вечер перепелица,	In the evening a quail
Как вечер золотокрылая	In the evening a gold-winged one,

²⁰ I cite several songs so that the reader can see how each song reflects different features of a medieval prototype that is also reflected in the motif of the *Slovo*.

Во саду перепелила.
 Как поутру не рано
 Вдруг не слышна ее стало.
 Сокола прилетали,
 Ее силою взяли.
 И с большой-большой охотою
 Ее соколу в когти дали.
 Еще ясного учили:
 —Ты владей нашей перепелкой,
Не давай ее в обиду
Ни соколам, ни воронам,
 Никаким злым кукушкам.

Вечор перепелочка
 Во саду щекотала,
 К утру бела света
 Ее в тереме не стало.
 Знать, к нашей перепелочке
Соколы прилетали,
Ее с собою взяли,
 Кречету отдавали.

Как вечер во садочке,
 Как вечер во зеленом,
 Перепелка младая
 С перепелками пела.
 Как на утренню свету
 Перепелочки нету.
 Не орлы налетали—
 Перепелочку взяли.
 Перепелочку взяли,
 Соколу отдавали.
 «Уж ты на, ясный сокол,
 Младую перепелочку.
Не давай же в обиду
Младую перепелку
Ни орлам, ни орлицам,
Ни мелким-то ты птишкам».
 Во высоком во тереме
 Красна девица сидела
 Со кумами, со подружками,
 Со названными сестрицами.
 Как на утренню свету

Sang in the garden.
 Early in the morning
 Suddenly she could be heard no more.
 The falcons came flying
 And took her by force
 And with great glee
 Laid her in the falcon's claws
 And told the bright falcon:
 "Take our little quail.
 Let her be disgraced
 By neither falcons nor ravens
 Nor any evil cuckoos!"

In the evening a little quail
 Trilled in the garden.
 By morning's first light
 She was gone from her bower.
 To our little quail
 Falcons came flying.
 They took her with them
 And gave her to the hawk.

In the evening,
 In the green garden,
 A young quail
 Sang with the quails.
 But at morning's light
 The young quail was gone.
 It was not eagles that came flying
 And took the quail,
 Took the quail
 And gave her to the falcon:
 "Here, bright falcon,
 Take the young quail.
 Let the young quail
 Be disgraced
 By neither eagles nor eaglets,
 Nor by little birdies!"
 In her high bower
 A fair maiden sat
 With her friends and close ones,
 With those she called her sisters.
 But at morning's light

Красной девицы нету—
 Бояра наезжали,
 Молодцу отдавали:
 «Уж ты на, молодец,
 Уж ты на, удалой,
 Молодую девицу,
 Молоду красавицу.
 Не давай-ка в обиду
 Ни свекру, ни свекровке,
 Ни деверьям, ни золовкам,
 Ни чужим-то да людям».

The fair maiden was gone.
 The groom's men had come
 And handed her to the fine young lad:
 "Here, brave lad,
 Here is your young beauty.
 Let her be disgraced
 By neither father-in-law nor mother-in-law,
 By neither your brothers nor your sisters,
 Nor any other people."

As the last example illustrates, the bird imagery in many of the songs is followed by an interpretation of the imagery, making it clear that the "birds" who have come in the night represent the family of the groom, who take the bride away from her maiden home. The rhythm and syntax of the bird imagery in the Igor Tale echoes that of the wedding song. This circumstance makes it fairly certain that the Igor Tale has variegated rhythms, not a regular meter, and that in some cases the different rhythms reflect the rhythmic patterns of wedding songs and other oral genres upon which epic singers sometimes drew. Even more intriguing is the possibility that various motifs from other genres were sung with intonations and melodies that echoed their source. In other words, the information that people received from the performance of a derivative motif in, say, the thirteenth century was much richer than the meager information that we receive from the written text today. In ancient Rus', an epic singer's audience might have recognized a wedding motif not only by its words, but by its rhythm and melody as well.

Another example of an echoed rhythm is in Vsevolod's praise for his men of Kursk (vv. 74-92):

И рече ему Буй Турь Всеволодь:
 «Одинъ братъ, одинъ свѣтъ свѣтлый—
 ты Игорю!
 Оба есвѣ Святъславличя!
 Сѣдлай, брате, свои брѣзьи комони,
 а мои ти готови,
 осѣдлани у Курьска на переди.
 А мои ти Куряни свѣдоми кѣмети:
 подь трубами повити,
 подь шеломы възлелѣяны,
 конецъ копія въскрѣмлени,
 пути имъ вѣдоми,
 яругы имъ знаеми,
 луци у нихъ напряжени,
 тули отворени,

And fierce aurochs Vsevolod said:
 "One brother—one bright light:
 You, Igor!
 We are both sons of Sviatoslav.
 Saddle, brother, your swift steeds.
 Mine are ready,
 Saddled at Kursk before us.
 And my men of Kursk are well-known warriors:
 Swaddled under trumpets,
 Cradled under helmets,
 Suckled at the end of a lance,
 They've travelled the roads,
 They've sounded the ravines,
 Their bows are taut,
 Their quivers are opened,

сабли изьострени,
 сами скачють акы сѣрыи вльци въ полѣ,
 ищучи себе чти,
 а Князю славъ!»

Their sabres are sharpened.
 Like grey wolves in the field they bound,
 Seeking honor for themselves
 And glory for their prince!”

The long, rhythmic series of eight lines, each ending in a participle, finds remarkable parallels in praise songs that were sung in traditional Russian folk weddings. (I am leaving aside the question whether the immediate model for Vsevolod’s speech might be lines spoken by the *druzhko* in Russian wedding ritual. The *druzhko* recites speeches that incorporate formulae from various oral sources, including wedding songs, and Vsevolod’s role at this point resembles that of the *druzhko*, who serves as leader of the groom’s journey to the home of the bride.) These songs can be addressed to various participants or guests in the wedding celebration, but it was generally mandatory procedure to sing praise songs to the bride and groom and their parents. Here are two examples (Mann 1990:68):

Как у нас была Степанида душа,
 Как у нас была Охромеевна
 Береженое дитяtko:
 Со вечеренки спать кладена,
 Со заутренки возбужена,
 Колачем она выскормлена,
 Сытою она выспоена!

In our house Stepanida, dear soul,
 In our house Okhroveyevna
 Was a pampered child:
 Laid to bed in the evening,
 Woken in the morning,
 Fed with a twisting pastry,
 Given a honey brew to drink!

У меня свет гостейка,
 (имя и отчество)
 Во любви позвана,
 Во чести посажена,
 Хорошо снаряжена:
 Сережки яхонты,
 Лице разгорелося,
 Монисты золоты
 Шею огрузили!

Our guest here,
 [Name and patronymic] our light
 Was invited in love,
 Seated in honor,
 Decked out finely:
 Sapphire earrings,
 Her face shines;
 Coins of gold
 Hang about her neck.

The metaphors in Vsevolod’s speech were created by blending battle terms with the more prosaic wedding song formulae. The men of Kursk are swaddled under trumpets and lullabied under helmets—not under a bed canopy. They are fed at the end of a lance—not at the end of a table. The distinctive rhythm of Vsevolod’s speech appears to reflect that of praise songs that also speak of “lullabying,” “feeding,” and “swaddling.” Like the passage in which the Russians’ “brave nest” slumbers in the field, Vsevolod’s lines in oral performance might have also echoed melodic features of their source in the wedding ritual. Wedding song associations might have been evoked not only by the words and rhythm of the passage, but also by its melodic intonations. And, significantly, the disparate motifs deriving from different songs display *disparate rhythms*, showing that it probably makes little sense to predicate a single, uniform

rhythm for the Igor Tale or to approach the question of rhythm without taking the apparent folkloric prototypes into account.

After Prince Igor sets out against the Polovtsy, the Div calls out from the treetops, warning a Tmutorokan idol that the Russian army is approaching. Comparative study of a number of Russian and Belorussian tales shows that a mythic bird that guards the approach to a pagan idol was a feature of a medieval oral tale about the conversion of Rus'. The bird-idol sequence survived intact in a number of Russian and Belorussian prose tales (*skazki*), while in *bylina* tradition it separated into two distinct tales: one about the monstrous Solovei ("Nightingale") who sits atop nine oaks and guards the approach to Kiev, and another about Idolishche ("Huge Idol") (Mann 1990:7-37; 2005:113-19). However, even though the early Russian audience of the Igor Tale was very familiar with the bird-idol sequence of the conversion tale, they would still wonder why the narrator wove the bird and the idol into his narrative. Why has the Div resurfaced in this tale? Why is Igor seemingly attacking an idol in Tmutorokan? What connection does Igor's campaign have with the baptism of Rus', the topic of the conversion tale? Clearly, the composer of the Igor Tale counted on his audience's prior familiarity with epic adaptations of this motif. He did not need to explain the Div and the idol because his audience had already heard epic songs that had alluded to the conversion tale in this manner.²¹ His allusion to the conversion tale in the bird-idol motif was already a traditional feature of the oral epic before he composed his Igor Tale; if it were his own original creation, then it would have required explanatory commentary even for readers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

One finds evidence of the same kind in the digression about Vseslav of Polotsk. The entire digression is obviously a succinct retelling of Vseslav's topsy-turvy history, a history that was celebrated and bemoaned in epic songs that were already familiar to the audience. The tales about Vseslav had to be part of popular lore for the audience to understand the compressed allusions (vv. 505-09):

На седьмомъ вѣцѣ Трояни	In Troyan's seventh millennium
врѣже Всеславъ жребій о дѣвицю себѣ любу.	Vseslav cast lots for the maiden he loved.
Тѣй клюками подпрѣся о кони,	Leaning on the end of his staff,
и скочи къ граду Киеву,	He vaulted to Kiev town,
и дотчеся стружіемъ	And touched with his banner pole
злата стола Киевскаго.	The Kiev golden throne.

First, Vseslav is said to "cast lots for the maiden he loved." If this were not already a well-known oral motif, the audience might wonder who the girl was! He casts lots "in Troyan's seventh millennium." It is clear that the audience would know what this formula meant—the demise of

²¹ I have argued that one of these tales was an epic song about Igor's victory over the Polovtsy on Elijah's Day in 1174. The conversion cycle portrayed Elijah as the Christianizer of Rus', the spiritual hero who overcomes the pagan Div, enters Kiev, and destroys the heathen idol of his predecessor Perun. I believe a song was composed in celebration of Igor's 1174 victory and with motifs associating Igor with Elijah in his role as victor over idolatry and pagan cults. In that hypothetical tale, Igor must have set out against the Tmutorokan idol and returned victorious, while in the later tale about his 1185 defeat the idol motif is introduced in an ironic manner. Igor sets out like the conquering hero Elijah (as he did in the 1174 tale), but this time his audacious plan ends in ignominious defeat (Mann 2005:140-56).

the pagan cults—because the narrator employs it without any explanation. Then Vseslav vaults to Kiev on a walking stick. Only an audience that was already familiar with this motif would understand that Vseslav’s vaulting was being depicted in terms of the miraculous feat of Elijah, who on a mission of conversion vaulted to Kiev on the staff of the Church. (This motif survived to some extent in the *bylina* about Il’ia Muromets—Elijah the Prophet reinterpreted as a mortal superhero—who vaults to Kiev on a staff that he receives from a pilgrim named Ivanishche, a reinterpretation of St. John the Apostle. In the portrayal of Vseslav, the conversion motifs are used ironically, to contrast the feuding Vseslav with the saintly heroes of yore [Mann 1990:7-39; Mann 2005:113-39].) After a series of misadventures, Vseslav flees from Kiev, “crossing the path of the great Khors.” If this is the poet’s own creation, then what did he expect his audience to make of it? They surely understood that Khors was a sun deity, but does the passage only mean that Vseslav fled southward, intersecting the path of the sun? Does it mean that he fled at night, before the sun rose? The “seventh millennium of Troyan,” the crossing of Khors’s path, the casting of lots for a maiden, and the vaulting to Kiev cannot be the original creations of an ingenious poet who was concocting all this imagery as he wrote. To be understood by the audience these motifs had to come from traditional lore. They allude to events in previously existing tales that the audience already knew. The skeptics have an intuitive understanding of this, as shown by the fact that they debate what these formulae meant to a Kievan audience. However, they forget that, to be understood by the audience, the formulae themselves had to be embedded in traditional texts. The notion that those texts were written compositions is not supported by any evidence whatsoever. Allusions that seem cryptic to us now were readily comprehended by people who grew up amidst the oral tradition of the time.

Scholars of the Igor Tale have frequently assumed that the author of the *Slovo* was guided by chronicles that he had read. They attempt to retrace the author’s sources in the various chronicle compilations from which a twelfth-century writer might have drawn. However, the version of history that one finds in the Igor Tale differs from all known chronicle accounts at a number of points. The sequence of events in the portrayal of Vseslav does not agree with the order of events as they are presented in the *Hypatian* and *Laurentian Chronicles* (Mann 2005:196-207). The digression about Iziaslav Vasil’kovich describes a skirmish with Lithuanian forces that seems to have no identifiable analogue in any of the surviving chronicles. We cannot even link the mysterious Iziaslav Vasil’kovich with any figure in the chronicles (Mann 2005:98-112). These discrepancies suggest that the Igor Tale drew upon oral, not written, history and in fact was a link in a long chain of oral tales that were an important part of that oral history.

The chronicle accounts of Igor’s 1185 campaign also exhibit departures from the account of the *Slovo*. The account found in the *Hypatian Chronicle* is clearly related to the Igor Tale in some way, but discrepancies show that it most likely drew upon a different oral version of the Igor Tale—one of the “heroic tales about the campaign of Igor” that are mentioned near the beginning of the *Slovo* (Mann 2005:189-95). In the *Slovo*, Gzak and Konchak debate whether to shoot Igor’s eldest son or marry him to a Polovtsian maiden. At the same point in its narrative, the *Hypatian Chronicle* account presents a similar debate motif, but it has the two Polovtsy debating which direction their next raid should go. Again, the author of the chronicle account appears to be following an oral source that differed to a certain extent from the recorded *Slovo*. In the chronicle entry, Sviatoslav weeps when he hears of Igor’s defeat. This is in agreement with

the *Slovo*, in which Sviatoslav sheds tears as he rebukes Igor and Vsevolod for “making the Polovtsian land cry too soon.” Then, in the *Slovo*, he proceeds to exhort various princes to “block the gates to the field.” In the chronicle, on the other hand, Sviatoslav rebukes Igor and Vsevolod for “opening the gates to the Russian land.” This metaphor fits the system of imagery that is used in the Igor Tale, but the chronicle account has altered Sviatoslav’s words and changed an exhortation to a rebuke. If the author of the chronicle entry were using a written *Slovo* as his source, then one might expect him to provide a more “accurate” rendition of Sviatoslav’s speech.

Russian folk incantations, known as *zagovory* or *zaklinaniia*, tend to be organized according to a number of traditional structural templates. One common pattern is essentially tripartite (Mann 2005:140-56). First, a saint or other holy figure is addressed. Michael the Archangel, Elijah the Prophet, St. George, and the Virgin Mary are among the most common figures to whom the incantations are addressed. Some of the texts portray the holy figure seated on a golden throne or ensconced among seraphim roundabout a heavenly throne. Second, the holy figure is praised—sometimes for shooting evils or illnesses with fiery celestial arrows. Finally, he is implored to intercede on behalf of the person reciting the incantation. Sviatoslav’s exhortations to the princes bear the stamp of these traditional appeals to the saints, most notably the exhortation to Yaroslav of Galich (vv. 420-37):

Галичкы Осмомыслѣ Ярославе!	Galician Eight-thoughted Yaroslav!
высоко сѣдиши на своемъ златокованнѣмъ	You sit high
столѣ,	On your gold-wrought throne,
подперъ горы Угорскыи своими желѣзными	Bracing the high hills of Hungary
пльки,	With your iron regiments,
заступивъ Королеви путь,	Barring the way of the Hungarian king,
затворивъ Дунаю ворота,	Closing the gates of the Danube,
меча времени чрезъ облаки,	Hurling times across the clouds,
суды ряда до Дуная.	Wielding your judgments as far as the Danube!
Грозы твоя по землямъ текутъ;	Your thunders flow throughout the lands,
отворяеши Кіеву врата;	You open the gates to Kiev,
стрѣляеши съ отня злата стола	From your father’s golden throne
салтани за землями.	You shoot down sultans in far-off lands.
Стрѣляй, Господине, Кончака,	Shoot then, lord, Konchak,
поганого Кошея,	The pagan slave,
за землю Рускую,	For the Russian land,
за раны Игоревы,	For the wounds of Igor,
бугега Святславлича!	The bold son of Sviatoslav!

The tripartite structure of Sviatoslav’s appeal to Yaroslav echoes that of the folk incantations. First, Yaroslav is addressed. He is portrayed sitting high on a golden throne. His epithet, “eight-thoughted,” is related to “six-winged” (used in another exhortation to the princes) and evokes the

six-winged seraphim who guard the heavenly throne in folk incantations.²² Second, Yaroslav is praised for feats that properly belong in a superhuman realm. His thunderstorms flow throughout many lands. He “braces” the Hungarian mountains with his iron regiments. He “closes the gates” of the Danube. He “flings times across the clouds,” much as Elijah the Prophet might fling lightning bolts. He shoots his arrows across the skies, killing sultans in faraway lands. Finally, Yaroslav is exhorted to aid the Russian cause by shooting the heathen Konchak. The underlying template is that of folk incantations addressed to Elijah the Prophet, who controls water, rain and lightning. The passage cannot be the spontaneous, original creation of an ingenious author who was suddenly inspired by folk incantations. This sort of adaptation can only come from an evolutionary process that probably began when a prince was likened directly to Elijah or other saintly personage. Then, as time passed, the hyperbolic praise came to be applied to other heroes without any direct reference to the divine figure who originally lay behind it. Without this prehistory in the epic tradition, even an ingenious poet would hardly dare to portray a mortal prince in the manner of Elijah or the Archangel Michael. This would be a tremendous artistic leap. The sudden elevation of Yaroslav to the saintly realm of celestial feats might even raise some gray eyebrows among an early Russian audience. The oral epic was the only likely tradition in which the motif might have evolved. Skeptics might respond that a literate author could have simply incorporated an oral epic motif at this point in his poem. This hypothesis is at least grounded in evidence for the oral motif, but evidence for the literate author is not forthcoming.

Three passages in the tale speak of foreign nations who sing praise as epic events unfold. First, the Germans, Venetians, Greeks, and Moravians (all are Christian nations) sing praise to Sviatoslav for his victory over Kobiak (vv. 302-14):

Ту Нѣмци и Венедици,	Now the Germans and the Venetians,
ту Греци и Морава	Now the Greeks and the Moravians
поють славу Святъславлю,	Sing praise to Sviatoslav,
кають Князя Игоря,	And sing reproach to Igor,
иже погрузи жиръ	Who sank his wealth
во днѣ Каялы.	To the bottom of the Kaiala.
Рѣкы Половецкія Рускаго злата насыпаша.	The Polovtsian rivers
Ту Игорьъ Князь высѣдѣ изъ сѣдла злата,	They filled with Russian gold.
а въ сѣдло Кошчѣво.	Now Igor the Prince
Уныша бо градомъ забралы,	Gets down from his golden saddle
а веселіе пониче.	And into the saddle of a slave.
	The city walls grow weary
	And merriment wanes.

This is after the defeated Kobiak has landed in Sviatoslav’s banquet hall. If we approach this passage as the spontaneous creation of a brilliant writer, then a number of questions arise in

²² “Thought” (*mysl’*) and “mind” (*um’*) are repeatedly used in place of “wings” to create metaphors in the Igor Tale: “Не мыслию ти прелетѣти издалеча огня злата стола поблности?”; “Храбрая мысль носить васъ умъ на дѣло”; “летая умомъ подь облакы.”

regard to its reception by a medieval audience. First, where are these foreigners? Are they in the banquet hall? And why are they singing praise and reproach? Is this a wedding celebration where the unmarried girls sing praise to wedding participants, who are expected to reward them for the praise song by dropping some coins into a glass of wine? Is these nations' reproach somehow like the reproach that is sung by maidens to wedding participants who reward the girls by dropping coins into a cup of wine? Does the Kaiala River correspond to the wedding wine? Did Igor really sink gold in a river? Did he really fill the Polovtsian rivers with Russian gold? Did the foreign singers expect to receive some of that Russian gold? This is not to imply that the medieval audience was stupid. As modern readers, equipped with a much more extensive and variegated reading background, we also ask these questions because we are poorly familiar with the norms of Kievan epic composition and with Kievan culture in general. If this motif were the original creation of a poetic genius, then his medieval audience would be confused.

When we turn to the next variation on this motif, answers to our questions begin to coalesce. After Igor's defeat, the boyars allude to Gothic maidens in their interpretation of Sviatoslav's dream (vv. 354-64):

<p>Уже снесеса хула на хвалу; уже тресну нужда на волю; уже връжеса дивъ на землю. Се бо Готскія красныя дѣвы въспѣша на брезѣ синему морю, звоня Рускымъ златомъ. Поють время Бусово, лелѣють мечь Шароканю. А мы уже, дружина, жадни веселія.</p>	<p>Reproof has now come down on praise Thralldom now has thundered down on freedom Now the Div has plummeted to the ground. For lo, fair Gothic maidens Sing on the shore of the deep-blue sea As they jingle Russian gold. They sing the days of Boos, And lullaby revenge for Sharokan. But we, your loyal retinue, Thirst for merriment."</p>
---	--

The previous motif, with singing Germans, Venetians, and the rest, alludes simply to the nations as a whole. Here maidens are singled out, confirming our suspicions that the wedding ritual of singing praise and reproach is a referent for the first variant. (In traditional ritual, only maidens were allowed to sing the wedding songs.) In the first motif, the nations sing praise to the senior prince, Sviatoslav, and then they sing reproach to Igor. Here, too, the Goths (allied with the Polovtsy) sing praise for the ancient time when the Ants and Slavs were defeated and their leader Booz was crucified. Then they "lullaby revenge" for the more recent Polovtsian leader Sharokan, who was defeated in 1107. First they sing praise, then revenge. This corresponds to the wedding ritual in which maidens sing a praise song and if the reward for their praise is too meager, they launch into a song reproaching the addressee for being too stingy. The song of reproach is figurative revenge. Significantly, the Gothic maidens jingle the Russian gold as they sing their songs, much as girls at a traditional wedding jingle the coins that they receive for their praise songs. This answers one question that was raised by the first variant: whether the foreign nations expected to receive some of that gold. On the level of the metaphor's imaginary referent (a wedding celebration), the answer is yes. On the level of historical reality, of course, these motifs with singing nations mean that Christian nations would be chagrined by Igor's defeat, while

peoples allied with the Polovtsy would be pleased. At any rate, the second variant adds information about the imaginary referent—maidens who actually take possession of the gold—and completes the picture so that we can say with confidence that the underlying referent is a wedding ritual. While Igor’s army spills the gold, like coins for the wedding singers, into the fictional *Kaiala* (the name is derived from *kaiati*, the term for singing songs of reproach) (Mann 1990:44-49), the Gothic maidens stand on the seashore as they jingle the gold. In each case, a body of water seems to correspond to the wedding wine. (The same river-wine associations are present in Igor’s desire to drink from the Don with his helmet as he first sets out with “passion burning his mind.”) If we expand the metaphor slightly, we can say that the gold that Igor’s army spilled into Polovtsian rivers has been washed down to the sea where it is garnered by the singing Gothic maidens.

A third variation on the singing-nations motif comes at the end of the tale (vv. 664-79):

Дѣвици поють на Дунаи.	Maidens sing on the Danube,
Вьются голоси чрезъ море до Кіева.	Their voices weave across the sea to Kiev.
Игорь ѣдетъ по Боричеву	Igor rides up the Borichev Way
къ Святѣй Богородици Пирогощей.	To the Blessed Virgin of the Tower.
Страны ради, гради весели,	The lands are happy,
пѣвшѣ пѣснь старымъ Княземъ,	The towns are gay,
а по томъ молодымъ.	Having sung a song to the old princes
Пѣти слава Игорю Святѣславлича.	And then to the young.
Буй туру Всеволодѣ,	Let us sing: Glory to Igor, son of Sviatoslav,
Владиміру Игоревичу.	To fierce aurochs Vsevolod,
Здрави Князи и дружина,	To Vladimir, son of Igor!
побарая за христьяны на поганья плѣки.	Health to the princes and to their men
Княземъ слава,	Fighting for Christians
а дружинѣ Аминь.	Against the armies of the pagans!
	Glory to the princes
	And to their men—amen!

Here, as in the second variant, maidens are singled out, although the passage also refers to entire nations and cities. They have sung first to the elder princes and then to the younger ones, much as in the previous two variants. All three variants follow the etiquette of wedding ritual, in which elder guests and participants are honored first. As Christians, the maidens along the Danube sing in celebration of Igor’s escape from captivity.

The first two variants share a common template in wedding ritual: first, the singing of praise; second, the singing of reproach; and third, dropping coins into the wedding wine. Although this phase of the wedding ritual varies in different regions, the person who is praised with a song (*velichal’naia pesnia*) most commonly drinks the wine into which he has just placed his coins. It is in this context of drinking wine at a wedding celebration that the boyars say, “And now we, your retinue, thirst for merriment” (vv. 360-63, 304-07):

Поють время Бусово,	They sing the time of Boos,
---------------------	-----------------------------

лелѣють мѣсть Шароканю.
А мы уже, дружина,
жадни веселія.

they lullaby revenge for Sharokan,
 while we, the retinue,
 thirst for merriment.

поють славу Святъславлю,
 кають Князя Игоря,
иже погрузи жиръ
во днѣ Каялы.

they sing praise to Sviatoslav,
 they sing reproach to Prince Igor,
 who sank the wealth
 on the bottom of the Kaiala.

Together with the thematic and rhythmic parallels uniting these two variants of a single motif, the amazing coalescence of sound in the final two lines of each variant suggests that these lines evolved from a common model that they both continue to echo.

It is clear that the wedding motif with singing nations was a traditional metaphor. Otherwise it would have been somewhat confusing to the audience. The wedding referent is partially revealed in the first variant, while the second and third variants reveal features that were not fully exposed in the first version. This is hardly the work of a poet who is creating the imagery as he writes. His audience would have already been familiar with wedding motifs of this sort. Therefore, he was familiar with such motifs as well. The composer of the tale is adapting familiar, traditional motifs to the circumstances of Igor's defeat. If a writer were employing multiple variants of a motif that was his own creation, one would expect the first variant to be more explicit. The referents in wedding ritual would be delineated more clearly the first time, paving the way for other versions, possibly less complete, to follow later in the text. However, that is not what we find in the Igor Tale. The composer counts on his audience's familiarity with his poetic conventions. They come from an established tradition that has eluded any close documentation in early Russian written tradition—other than the *Slovo* itself, the addendum to the Pskov *Apostol* of 1307 and the later *Zadonshchina*. It was clearly a popular tradition, familiar to all. If so, then why was that tradition so silent? The answer is obvious: it was an *oral* tradition. It was not generally recorded in writing. And it was a song tradition that was eventually lost.

Many other formulae and motifs in the *Slovo*, if subjected to the same scrutiny, lead to the same conclusion. Boyan is said to “course in Troyan's trail.” In my view, this means that Boyan sang songs about the conversion of Rus', about the demise of the dragon Troyan in “Troyan's seventh millennium.” However, that is only my view (Mann 1990:7-37; 2005:113-39). What were the audience to make of this allusion if they were not already familiar with the legendary behavior of Boyan and Troyan? And what were they to make of the ingenious poet's calling Boyan the grandson of Veles? If they had no prior familiarity with these formulations, they might mistakenly conclude that Boyan was an incorrigible pagan long after the conversion of most of the populace to the Christian faith. When the narrator refers to the people of Rus' as “Dazhbog's grandson,” the audience already knows epic motifs pertaining to Dazhbog, or else they would wonder what the narrator was trying to insinuate with this allusion. When Oleg Sviatoslavich mounts his steed in Tmutorokan, Vladimir hears ringing each morning far away in Chernigov. It seems to be the ringing of Oleg's stirrup that he hears. Later in the tale, Vseslav is in Kiev when he hears the Polotsk church bells. In my efforts to understand these seemingly related motifs, I have concluded that both ringing motifs go back to a tale about the conversion of Rus'. In that

tale, the dragon Troyan plugs his ears when he hears church bells in faraway Constantinople signaling the approach of the hero who will Christianize Kiev. Again, however, that is only my reconstruction based on incomplete sources. A medieval Russian audience must have already been familiar with this motif in order to comprehend the narrator's allusion. The flight of Troyan, "Veles's grandson," the faraway bells, and much more. . . . These are the traditional motifs of popular oral tales, not the creations of an individual.

The placement of metaphors further suggests formulaic, oral composition in the Igor Tale. The death of Iziaslav Vasil'kovich is portrayed metaphorically to evoke a wedding celebration. As he dies, he is "caressed" by enemy swords on the bloody grass, and the same passage contains an enigmatic allusion to a "lover on a bed" (*s khotiiu na krovat'*). Iziaslav "spills his pearly soul through his golden necklace" when he is killed—a metaphor that appears to be a variation on wedding song lines in which the bride spills tears over the matchmakers' gifts: gold and a pearl necklace (Mann 1990:50-62; 2005:176-82, 274-77). After Iziaslav dies, "voices grow weary and merriment wanes, while the trumpets sound in Goroden" (vv. 476-94):

Единъ же Изяславъ, сынъ Васильковъ, позвони своими острыми мечи о шеломы Литовскія, притрепа славу дѣду своему Всеславу, а самъ подъ чръленими щиты на кровавѣ травѣ притрепанъ Литовскими мечи. И схоти ю на кровать, и рекъ: «Дружину твою, Княже, птиць крилы приодѣ, а звѣри кровь полизаша.» Не бысь ту брата Брячяслава, ни другаго Всеволода. Единъ же изрони жемчюжну душу изъ храбра тѣла, чресъ злато ожереліе.	Alone Iziaslav, son of Vasilko, Rang his sharp swords Against the Lithuanian helmets, Caressed the glory of his grandfather Vseslav, And under crimson shields On the bloody grass Was himself caressed by Lithuanian swords. And with his beloved on a bed [. . .] [. . .] and said: "Your retinue, Prince, Birds have covered with their wings, And beasts have licked their blood." His brother Briachislav was not there, Nor the other, Vsevolod. Alone he spilled his pearly soul From his valiant body Through his golden necklace. Voices grow weary, Merriment wanes. Trumpets trumpet in Goroden.
Унылы голоси, понице веселіе. Трубы трубятъ Городеньскіи.	

The voices are those of the maiden singers at a wedding celebration. A variation on the same imagery concludes the earlier motif in which foreign nations sing praise to Sviatoslav and sing reproach to Igor (vv. 308-14):

Рѣкы Половецкія Рускаго злата насыпаша. \	The Polovtsian rivers
Ту Игорьъ Князь высѣдѣ изъ сѣдла злата, \	They filled with Russian gold.
а въ сѣдло Кошцево.	Now Igor the Prince Gets down from his golden saddle

Уныша бо градомъ забрали, \
а веселіе пониче.

And into the saddle of a slave.
The city walls grow weary
And merriment wanes.

Here the words “city ramparts” have simply been substituted for “voices” to create this metaphor. In the two variants (“city ramparts grow weary” and, later, “voices grow weary”), the referent that appears to have inspired them—*voices of singing maidens*—is explicitly mentioned only in the variant that comes *later* in the tale. The first variant (“city ramparts grow weary”) is more highly metaphoric. That is, it departs from the logical norms of everyday language. It is a further *adaptation of the second, less metaphorical variant* (“voices grow weary”). This means that the composer of the tale already knew the second variant when he included the first variant in his narrative. In other words, certainly the second variant and probably both variants are part of a repertoire of ready-made poetic *formulae* that the composer already knew. An ingenious author was not concocting this imagery as he wrote. This formulaic method of spinning a tale is typical of oral traditions. The placement of variant formulae adds to the evidence that the Igor Tale was first composed as an oral narrative before it was later committed to writing.

As Igor enters Kiev at the end of the tale, maidens sing and nations rejoice once again (vv. 664-71):

Дѣвици поють на Дунаи.
Вьются *голоси* чрезъ море до Кіева.
Игорь ѣдетъ по Боричеву къ Святѣй
Богородици Пирогощей.
Страны ради, гради весели,
пѣвшє пѣснь старымъ Княземъ,
а по томъ молодымъ.

Maidens sing on the Danube.
Their *voices* weave across the sea to Kiev.
Igor rides up the Borichev Way
To the Blessed Virgin of the Tower.
The lands are happy,
The towns are gay,
Having sung a song to the old princes
And then to the young.

The “weaving” of the maidens’ voices across the water appears to have been inspired by ancient folk rituals such as that of Trinity Sunday, when each maiden would weave a wreath and toss it onto the water. According to popular belief, the boy or man who found her wreath was destined to be her husband. The first two lines in this passage (“*Devitsi poiut na Dunai. V’iutsia golosi . . .*”) correspond to the beginning of Yaroslavna’s lament (vv. 547-48):

Коніа поють на Дунаи.
Ярославнинъ *гласъ* слышитъ . . .

Lances sing on the Danube.
Yaroslavna’s *voice* is heard . . .

“Maidens sing on the Danube” follows the ordinary contextual patterns of prosaic language. However, lances do not ordinarily “sing,” and “Lances sing on the Danube” is a metaphor. It was formed by taking the contextually neutral statement “Maidens sing on the Danube” and substituting the subject “lances” for the contextually normal subject “maidens.” The resulting imagery—“lances sing”—violates the ordinary contextual patterns of the language and, therefore, immediately attracts the hearer’s attention. “Lances sing on the Danube” is a

metaphoric adaptation of the formula “Maidens sing on the Danube.”²³ The composer of the tale *already knew the second formula* (with “maidens”) when he included the first variant (with “lances”) earlier in his narrative. This is further evidence that the Igor Tale was first composed with the traditional *formulae* of an oral narrative tradition. It was not composed by a writer who spontaneously invented imagery as he wrote.

Skeptics are divided in their grounds for objecting. The unreasonable anarchists will deny that anything at all is demonstrated by the order in which metaphoric variants appear. Others will object that writers use formulae, too—especially in the medieval period—and it is conceivable that an ingenious author employed some formulae that he had invented before writing the *Slovo*. That is, he compensated for the fact that he worked outside any tradition by formulating a sort of mini-tradition in his head. But why not use the variants with “voices” and “maidens” first in order to make the wedding referent more comprehensible to readers? Was the genius trying to camouflage his own allusions? That is highly unlikely. Certainly his formulaic style is owed to an oral mode of composition that is made possible by an extensive repertoire of ready-made formulae.

The *Primary Chronicle* relates that in the year 1022 Mstislav Vladimirovich, Prince of Tmutorokan, killed the Kasogian leader Rededia when the two engaged in singlehanded combat with their entire princedoms at stake (*PSRL* 1997: column 147). After finally throwing Rededia to the ground, according to the chronicle, Mstislav took out his knife “and he slew Rededia” (“*i zarezha Redediu*”). The *Slovo* employs the same formulation: “*izhe zarezha Redediu pred p’lky kasozh’skymi*” (“who slew Rededia before the Kasogian regiments”). If one views the Igor Tale as the product of a written tradition, one might conclude that the author of the *Slovo* borrowed the formulation from the much older chronicle account. However, the version found in the *Slovo* displays consonance and assonance that go beyond that of the variant in the chronicle. Especially striking is “*zarezha Redediu pred,*” but the additional instrumentation of sound extends to “*izhe*” and “*kasozh’skymi*” as well. In all likelihood, the *Slovo* gives a more complete version of oral formulae that epic singers used in reference to Mstislav’s duel with Rededia.

The *Primary Chronicle* account of the battle on Nezhata’s Field in 1078 (*PSRL* 1997:199-204) is remarkably similar in focus and general organization to the account in the Igor Tale. First, it relates how Oleg Sviatoslavich set out from Tmutorokan and later waged battle with Vsevolod Yaroslavich near Chernigov. Next, it tells of the death of Boris Viacheslavich, Oleg’s ally, and then of how Iziaslav’s body was transported by his son to Kiev. Finally, the chronicler laments at length the unhappy effects of fratricidal feuds. This sequence of narration runs closely parallel to that of the Igor Tale.²⁴ The close similarities suggest that the two accounts are interrelated, but it is unlikely that either of them drew on the other as a direct source because they differ radically in factual detail. For example, according to the chronicle, Iziaslav’s body was taken to the Church of the Holy Mother and not to the Church of St. Sophia, as stated in the

²³ Note that, as part of the traditional pattern, each of the two variant formulae is followed by a reference to voices.

²⁴ Two subtle parallels in focus and phrasing also point to a connection between the Igor Tale and the chronicle account: *slysha* and *pokhvalivshagosia vel’mi*. Compare in the Igor Tale: “*t’i zhe zvon’ slysha*” and “*slava na sud’ privede*.”

Igor Tale. In the chronicle, the son who takes Iziaslav's body to Kiev is named Yaropolk. In the Igor Tale he is named Sviatopolk. Moreover, Yaropolk conveys his father's body *in a boat* in the chronicle, while the Igor Tale states that the body was "rocked" (or "cradled") to Kiev between two Hungarian amblers. This discrepancy is most interesting because the verb *leleiat* ("to lullaby," "to rock," "to cradle"), used in the Igor Tale, is commonly associated with rivers and other bodies of water in Russian folklore. For example, a river "rocks away" the bride in this passage from a wedding song (Kireevskii No. 660 [Miller and Speranskii 1911]):

Разлилась вода полая,	The floodwaters have spilled over
Разлилася, разлелеяла,	Spilled over and rocked away
Унесла, улелеяла	Carried away and rocked off
Дочь от матери любимую.	The dear daughter from her mother.

In the Igor Tale itself, *leleiat* is repeatedly used with bodies of water. Yaroslavna invokes the Dnepr to "rock back" her true love, and she tells how the Dnepr once "rocked the boats of Sviatoslav to the regiments of Kobiak." She also tells how the wind "rocks ships on the deep-blue sea." Later, Igor praises the Donets for "rocking" him on its waves. These motifs testify to a close connection between water and "rocking" in the folklore of the twelfth century. In light of the general similarity and minor differences between the two accounts, the use of the verb *leleiat* ("to rock," "to lullaby") at precisely that point in the Igor Tale which corresponds to the allusion to a boat in the chronicle suggests that both accounts have as a prototype an oral tale which originally spoke of "rocking" Iziaslav's body to Kiev in a boat. The boat in at least one version of the tale was replaced with amblers.

The confusion between the names *Iaropolk* and *Sviatopolk* finds parallel in a similar confusion between the names *Viacheslavich* and *Sviatoslavich* in the various accounts of the same battle on Nezhata's Field. According to the Igor Tale, the *Hypatian Chronicle* and the *Laurentian Chronicle*, the boastful Prince Boris, who was killed in the battle, was the son of Viacheslav (*PSRL* 2002:192):

Бориса же Вячеславлича слава на судъ приведе. . . (*Slovo o polku Igoreve.*)

And Boris Viacheslavlich Glory led to judgment. . .

... И похвалився велми, не виды яко Б(о)гъ гордымъ противитя, смѣреннымъ же бл(а)г(о)д(а)ть дасть, и да не похвалитя силны силою своею. И поидоста противу, и бывшимъ имъ на мѣстѣ на Нѣжатины Нивѣ и совокупившимъся обоимъ бысть сѣча зла, и пѣрвое убиша Бориса с(ы)на Вячеславля, похвалившого(ся) велми.

... And he boasted much, not seeing that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the meek so that the strong will not boast of their strength. And the two sides set out against each other, and when they were at Nezhata's Field they clashed and there was terrible slaughter. And first they killed Boris Viacheslavlich, who had boasted much.

However, other chronicles such as the *Radziwill Chronicle*, the *Vologda-Perm' Chronicle* and Tatishchev's history identify Boris as a *Sviatoslavich*, a brother of Oleg and a son of Sviatoslav.²⁵

Which is historically correct: Sviatoslavich or Viacheslavich? Iaropolk or Sviatopolk? These questions are very complex because both the Igor Tale and the chronicles drew upon oral tales. The oral tales about the 1078 battle were over a hundred years old by the time they became sources for the composers of tales about Igor. Historical inaccuracy could slip in at any time during the transmission of the tales about the 1078 battle or tales about the battle of 1185 that included a digression about 1078—not to mention the possibility of scribal errors in copying the chronicles. However, we can see the process that led to these confusions if we look closely at the poetic “packaging” of both these names in the Igor Tale. In both instances, the names are part of a metaphor that links them tightly by consonance and assonance to the word that follows them:

... *Iaropolk poleleia ottsa* ... (“Yaropolk rocked his father . . .”)

... *Viacheslavlicha slava na sud*” *privede* ... (“Viacheslavich glory led to Judgment . . .”)

In each case, the *second half* of the name is “anchored” to a metaphoric formula by consonance and assonance—and in each case it is the second half of the name that has proven to be stable during the transmission of the tales. The first half of each name displays a lack of stability among the various texts. The assonance and consonance in each formula (*Iaropolk poleleia* and *Viacheslavlicha slava*) had served as a mnemonic device in the oral transmission of the tale, but it was only half-successful. That is, *-polk* was preserved, but *Iaro-* and *Sviato-* were confused; *-slavlicha* was preserved, but *Viache-* and *Sviato-* were confused. *Iaropolk poleleia* became *Sviatopolk poleleia*—or the opposite happened in tales upon which the chroniclers drew. *Viacheslavlicha slava* became *Sviatoslavlicha slava* in oral tales that some of the chroniclers knew—or the opposite happened in tales that fed into the Igor Tale.²⁶

²⁵ *PSRL* (1959:44 [year 1079]): Того же лѣта убиен бысть Изяслав Ярославич з Борисом Святославичемъ у града Чернигова. И полощиша и Изяслава въ святѣи Софѣи в Киевѣ. The singular forms *byst'* suggests that one name has been interpolated. See also Tatishchev (1963:87 [year 1073]).

²⁶ The *Sofiiskaia First Chronicle* names both Boris Sviatoslavich and Boris Viacheslavich in its brief account of the eleventh-century battle (*PSRL* 2000: column 204 [year 6587]):

Того же лѣта убиень быс(ть) Изяславъ Ярославичъ с Борисомъ С(вя)тославичемъ, бьяся по Всеволодѣ со Олгомъ С(вя)тославичемъ и с Борисомъ Вечеславичем у града Чернигова < . . > и положиша и Изяслава въ Святѣи Софии в Киевѣ.

This passage was first noted by I. M. Kudriavtsev: “*Zametka k tekstu: ‘S toia zhe Kaialy Sviatopl’k’ . . . v ‘Slove o polku Igoreve’*,” (1949:407-09). Note that this account, unlike that in the *Primary Chronicle*, states that Iziaslav's body was taken to the Church of St. Sophia, as in the Igor Tale. Likhachev argues that the “author” of the Igor Tale used a chronicle that somehow combined the information found in the *Sofiiskaia First Chronicle* with the *Primary Chronicle* account. It is more likely, however, that the two chronicle accounts were influenced by variant oral tales about the death of Iziaslav that diverged in detail. One oral tale, like the *Primary Chronicle*, spoke of the Church of the Holy Mother; another referred to the Church of St. Sophia, like the Igor Tale. The allusion to two Borises in the *Sofiiskaia First Chronicle* probably stems from a chronicler's efforts to mesh his written sources with the oral tales. Gil'ferding points to two versions of the *bylina* about Sviatogor in which the formant *Sviato-* is preserved in a line where it is supported by *Sviatykh* later in the same line. One version of the tale has “*Sviatogor*” while another has “*Sviatopolk*.” The final syllable of the name was not preserved: “*Святополк богатырь на Святых на горах*.” “*Святогор богатырь на Святых на горах*” (Gil'ferding 1873:XLVII).

Orchestration of sound played a key role in composing the Igor Tale and in fixing word combinations in the performer's memory. This is illustrated by the use of alternate name forms for Gzak (Gza) and Ovlur (Vlur) and by the preservation of that part of a name that alliterates with the word following it (*Sviatopolk poleleia* and *Viacheslavlicha slava*). Consonance and assonance permeate the entire *Slovo*. This fact, together with the tale's remarkable rhythms, has led many skeptics to entertain the notion that the Igor Tale, like sermons of that period, might have been *written* for *oral* delivery. Curiously, however, sermons from the Kievan period by Metropolitan Ilarion and Kirill of Turov—written compositions that were intended for oral delivery—have almost no consonance or assonance. These sermons draw some skillful analogies with Biblical lore, creating a number of metaphors in the process, but in comparison with the *Slovo*, they can be called rather dry prose. Nothing in Old Russian written literature comes close to the poetic splendor of the Igor Tale. The model for the composer of the Igor Tale was not any written oratorical work but the epic song tradition instead. The tale was intended to be *sung*. Its rhythmic patterns, its myriad alliterations, and its many connections with folk songs all show that its dimension in sound was as important as its verbal content. The hypothesis that the *Slovo* was composed in writing for oral delivery leads to a somewhat absurd scenario. First, the author draws primarily upon the oral epic in writing the *Slovo*. Then, even though his poem is now in writing, he delivers his work orally—presumably by reading the poem aloud, without melodic features and without the musical accompaniment, to a gathered audience.²⁷ In other words, the inspiration and the delivery were oral, but the composing was done in writing. The first and third moments in the scenario—oral epic model and oral delivery—are supported by abundant evidence, but the second phase, composition in written form, has no evidence to support it and is hardly compatible with the other two. If the only identifiable model for the tale is the oral epic tradition and if we agree that the tale certainly seems designed for oral delivery, then why continue to insist that it was composed in writing?

Proponents of a written mode of composition for the *Slovo* have failed to produce any real evidence to support their view. Their strategy has always been to identify differences between the *Slovo* and folkloric texts recorded in recent centuries. There are at least two reasons why they do not move beyond this stance. One is that the *Slovo* betrays no clear signs of written composition. Another is that the skeptics, generally speaking, have been seemingly unaware of the research conducted by Albert Lord, Milman Parry, and other students of oral theory. The basic principle of formulaic composition as a central technique of oral epic traditions is hardly acknowledged in studies of the *Slovo*. Soviet studies seem to reflect a blissful ignorance of Albert Lord's teaching, and more recent scholarship devoted to the Igor Tale both in Russia and in the West has followed suit. In order to maintain a good pace in performance, the medieval singer of tales relied heavily on preconceived lexical formulae and traditional formulaic motifs. These allowed him to decide upon his next lines while still completing ready-made formulae that only required a certain amount of adaptation to a new context. The formulae provided the singer with an intermittent "autopilot" that simplified his task.

It is formulaic structure that explains why flight from the enemy is consistently portrayed

²⁷ A key question is whether the Igor Tale was committed to writing for use in performance or primarily for the sake of preservation.

as a nighttime occurrence. Gzak and Konchak flee at night. The carts of the Polovtsy squeal as they flee at midnight. Igor and Ovlur flee at midnight. Vseslav flees out of Belgorod at midnight. The timing of these events might sometimes coincide with historic truth, but as the oral tales about a military campaign circulated among numerous singers, historic fact tended to twist and bend into the formulaic patterns established by the song tradition (Mann 1990:103-09).

One of the key differences between the Igor Tale and folklore, according to Likhachev, is that in folklore genres are not mixed or combined, while the *Slovo* combines folkloric genres: lament (*plach*) and praise song (*slava*).²⁸ This “mixing of genres,” in Likhachev’s view, is evidence that the *Slovo* was not an oral, folkloric composition. That is, the author stood outside the system of folkloric genres and borrowed from various genres as he pleased. However, Likhachev’s supposition that court songs of the Kievan period did not mix genres is pure guesswork. It is based on his *impression* of folklore recorded in recent times. However, when we take a closer look at this folklore, we find that folk texts of one genre sometimes import motifs from other genres. For example, one *bylina* incorporates a bridal lament that is fourteen lines long. In another *bylina* we find a formula that is recited by the matchmakers in traditional wedding ritual (Mann 1990:137):

У тебя то есть да лебедь белая,
Лебедь белая да одинакая дочь.

You have a white swan,
A white swan, an only daughter.

These passages demonstrate that Likhachev’s axiom, reiterated by him in multiple publications, is not exactly true. It is not really research-based; instead, it is based on a general impression of folklore. It is an attempt to generalize and synthesize before much data has been examined. More important, it applies a perceived principle of folkloric composition to an extinct oral genre that we know was quite different in function from the tales collected by folklorists in recent centuries.

In the Igor Tale, the most conspicuous motifs from non-epic genres include those that come from wedding ritual. (Examples: “Oleg’s brave nest”; Vsevolod’s praise for his men of Kursk; Sviatoslav’s reproaching Igor and Vsevolod for being hard-hearted.) Yet, the oral tale

²⁸ See Likhachev (1985:20):

Связь «Слова» с произведениями устной народной поэзии яснее всего ощущается, как я уже сказал, в пределах двух жанров, чаще всего упоминаемых в «Слове»: плачей и песенных прославлений—«слав», хотя далеко не ограничивается ими. «Плачи» и «славы» автор «Слова» буквально приводит в своем произведении, им же он больше всего следует в своем изложении. Их эмоциональная противоположность дает ему тот обширный диапазон чувств и смен настроений, который так характерен для «Слова» и который сам по себе отделяет его от произведений устной народной словесности, где каждое произведение подчинено в основном одному жанру и одному настроению.

The *Slovo*’s connection with oral folkloric works is most tangible in two genres that are mentioned most often in the *Slovo*: laments and praise songs (*slavy*), but the connection is not limited to those two genres alone. The author of the *Slovo* cites laments and praise songs literally in his work, and he is guided most of all by them in his narrative. Their emotional contrast provides him with a broad gamut of feelings and changes in mood that are so characteristic of the *Slovo* and distinguish it from works of folklore, in which each work is limited to one genre and one mood.

Likhachev, however, admits that laments themselves commonly incorporate features of praise.

about Ol'ga's revenge also appears to have been an epic narrative that adapted motifs from wedding ritual. Mal's dream appears to be based on a bride's dream in wedding songs (Mann 1990:52-53). The tasks that Ol'ga assigns Mal's emissaries appear to be related to riddles posed by a bride (Likhachev 1950a:297-98; Kholmogorov 1994). In other words, genres were being mixed in Kievan epic narratives long before the Igor Tale was composed. The mixing of genres in the Igor Tale was nothing new in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It followed a truly ancient tradition. Likhachev's conjecture that twelfth-century epic songs would not have combined motifs from various oral genres is not carefully conceived. It is contradicted by the folkloric texts of recent times and by the evidence one finds in the chronicle retellings of the oral tale about Ol'ga's feigned wedding.

Another feature of the Igor Tale that raises scholars' doubts about its oral origin is the boldness of its metaphors. The narrator continually combines vastly disparate realms to create his imagery: a battle and a wedding feast, playing the *gusli* and setting falcons loose to kill swans, rejoicing at Sviatoslav's victory over Kobiak and singing praise at a wedding, wielding great power and closing the "gates" of the Danube . . . However, the tale about Ol'ga's revenge shows that the artistic principle of portraying epic events along the lines of traditional wedding ritual was embodied in oral epic tales long before Igor's luckless campaign. And, although it is true that no folk texts from recent times display anything like the metaphoric daring of the *Slovo*, one can nevertheless find what might be called vestiges of the medieval penchant for bold metaphor. Most notable are metaphors in which the ground is "sown" with the bones of fallen warriors and "watered" with their blood (Mann 1990:74):

Тут распахана была пашня	The field was plowed
Не плугами и не сохами,	Not with plows,
Добрых коней копытами;	With the hooves of good steeds;
Посеяна была пашня	The field was sown
Еще теми же драгунскими телами;	With those soldiers' bodies;
Взборонована была пашня	The field was harrowed
Еще теми же мурзавецкими копьями;	With those enemy spears;
Поливана была пашня	The field was watered
Тою ли христианской кровью . . .	With that Christian blood.

Compare a corresponding motif in the *Slovo* (vv. 229-33):

Чръна земля подь копыты	The black earth beneath horses' hooves
костьми была посъяна,	Was sown with bones
а кровью поляна.	And watered with blood,
Тугою въздоша по Руской земли!	And sorrow sprouted
	Throughout the Russian land.

In another folk song, sadness corresponds to the crops that are sown, as in the last line of the passage just cited (Mann 1990:74):

И ой, чем поля те насеяны?
Тоскою насеяны, грустью огорожены.

And with what are those fields sown?
They're sown with sadness, they're fenced
with sorrow.

In these folk motifs we find the same imagery as in the *Slovo*—the same blending of the death and sadness of battle together with the tasks involved in growing crops. These “agrarian” metaphors are poetically very similar to the wedding-related imagery of the Igor Tale in that both bring the violence and destruction of battle together with a seemingly opposite realm: a) the life-giving activity of raising crops and b) a wedding, associated with pleasure, procreation and a happy family life. It is this uniting of vastly disparate realms that makes the metaphors of the Igor Tale so striking.

Many other folkloric parallels to the metaphors of the Igor Tale could be added here, although most are less extensively developed: battle/feast; caressing/killing; treating to wine/killing; drinking from one’s helmet/being victorious; *gusli* strings/singing birds; a marriageable young man (Igor’s son)/a falcon; a bed canopy, mattress and blanket/tree, grass and air; a grieving wife/a sad little bird; animation of wind, sun and river in a lament; the sun in the sky/the hero in his homeland; a muddied river/sadness; leaves falling/sadness; approaching storm clouds/the enemy . . . (Mann 1990:72-102). As a whole, they demonstrate that there is nothing in the bold metaphors of the *Slovo* that is intrinsic to written literature alone. Indeed, the written literary genres of early Russia never come close to the *Slovo* in the density and boldness of their metaphors. And when they come closest, it is most frequently in the literary laments of saints’ lives—laments that are inspired partly by folk laments.

In one of his first monographs on the *Slovo*, Likhachev points to five passages as examples of bookish features in the tale. All five passages are metaphors (1950b:143):

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) растѣкашется мыслию по древу | 1) raced in thought through the tree |
| 2) скача, славлю, по мыслену древу | 2) flitting, nightingale, through the tree of thought |
| 3) истягну умь крѣпостию своею | 3) drew out his mind with his fortitude |
| 4) свивая славы оба полы сего времени,
рища въ тропу Трояню | 4) weaving praises around this time,
loping in Troyan’s trail |
| 5) спал(а) князю умь похоти | 5) passion burned the prince’s mind |

Note that all five passages are constructed around an “abstract,” or intangible, referent: *mind*, *thought* or *time*. Likhachev’s conclusion stems from the fact that Russian folk narratives depict primarily the physical world of tangible things. His statement reveals one tenet of the skeptics’ thinking: in their view, the boldest metaphors of the *Slovo*, especially those with “abstract” referents, can hardly come from an oral tradition. However, this belief is not backed up by any reasonable argument—when other bold metaphors in the Igor Tale, some of them no less “abstract” than Likhachev’s examples, have parallels in oral-folkloric sources: “sorrow sprouted,” “caressed by Lithuanian swords,” “swaddled under helmets,” “they treated the matchmakers to drink.” . . . The entire tale, from start to finish, is marked by a striving for metaphor, making it unreasonable to identify those metaphors with *time*, *mind* or *thought* as “bookish.” Moreover, many of the metaphors have been shown to come from a traditional-

formulaic repertoire used by the composer. Likhachev is judging the question of orality on the basis of the differences between the *Slovo* and *byliny*. Their styles are indeed very different, but they are different genres that served different functions. *Byliny* preserve the national myths of long ago—usually in a fantastical form. The sequence of action and many details have long been set in stone, so to speak. The Igor Tale, on the other hand, belongs to a genre that had to be far more malleable and inventive because its function was to depict current events as well as to preserve the memory of bygone days. Composers had to be “quick on their feet,” skilled at adapting their motifs to new circumstances. It is safe to assume that the tradition of court epic songs was more lively, dynamic and innovative than the *bylina* tradition that was recorded between 1750 and 1950. A key innovative feature of the court tradition was the juggling of images to form metaphors.

One reason for many scholars’ skepticism regarding the Igor Tale as an oral composition is a desire, conscious or unconscious, to promote medieval Russian culture, to show that the written literature of the Kievan period was not inferior to that of Western Europe.²⁹ However, if one proceeds from the type of analysis that I am proposing, one sees that the *Slovo* does not really “elevate” oral lore to new heights as scholars have so often insisted. Judging by the available evidence, the court epic song tradition of Kievan times was already on a high level before the *Slovo* was written down. One can see that the amazing metaphoric fabric of the tale—one of the primary features that make the tale so artful and “sophisticated”—is not the handiwork of an individual poet. Instead, it is the creation of a collective tradition that melded military campaigns with wedding songs and ritual. It blended invocations to saints with pleas to princes. It combined storming warriors with the storming aurochs of ritual songs. . . . The material of everyday folklore was crafted by court singers into epic songs that were intricate and refined. The daring quality of its orally composed imagery was never equalled in Russian literature until the early decades of the twentieth century when writers such as Nikolai Kliuev introduced a new sort of poetry replete with highly innovative metaphor. The *Slovo*’s uncanny orchestration of sound, which is the product of an oral tradition, has never been paralleled. In all likelihood, an individual singer’s performance was somehow written down, eventually to become known as the *Slovo o polku Igoreve*. However, the personal role of that singer in creating the tale’s exquisite tapestry of imagery and sound was probably modest. Most of the honing and polishing had been done by generations of singers who came before him.

Passages in the *Slovo* that can definitely be traced to a written tradition are limited to the

²⁹ Consider Likhachev’s introductory statement to one of his monumental works on the *Slovo* (1985:3):

Многим читателям вся древнерусская литература известна только по одному памятнику —«Слову о полку Игореве». И «Слово» поэтому представляется одиноким, ни с чем не связанным произведением, сиротливо возвышающимся среди унылого однообразия княжеских свар, диких нравов и жесточайшей нищеты жизни. Эти представления поддерживаются традиционными мнениями о низком уровне культуры Древней Руси, при этом косной и малоподвижной. Все это глубоко ошибочно.

The *Slovo* presents itself as a lonely, isolated work that towers orphan-like amidst the sad monotony of princely feuds, primitive mores and the cruelest poverty. This picture is reinforced by traditional views about the low level of culture in ancient Rus', a culture that is seen as backward and stagnant. All of this, however, is seriously mistaken.

allusions to the formula “seventh millennium.” However, even though this millennial formula ultimately derives from church writings about the Last Judgment, it was certainly known in popular oral legend much as in recent centuries. Its use in the Igor Tale goes back to earlier oral tales about the conversion of Kiev and the demise of the pagan cults in the final “seventh millennium” of the local gods (Mann 1990:124-25).

Those features of the Igor Tale that point to an oral mode of composition permeate the entire fabric of the tale. Throughout the narrative the focus is on events in the physical world. There is little framing of episodes such as one finds in written literary works. The narrator makes no attempt to elaborate or explain in the manner of a writer. The use of the historical present tense must certainly reflect oral epic formulae. The text is extremely paratactic, like that of oral epics. Although the tale’s rhythms are varied, some can be related to folkloric texts, and the relatively short units that we often call “lines” seem to be quite amenable to musical performance. The alliterative qualities of the tale are totally unique in early Russian literature. They make it altogether certain that the tale was originally intended for oral delivery. The large number of folkloric parallels to lines in the *Slovo* include some of the metaphors that make the *Slovo* so distinctive among early Russian literary works. All of these features are sustained with a high degree of consistency throughout the Igor Tale. There are virtually no passages or techniques that can be traced directly to a written tradition. The tale about Princess Ol’ga’s revenge shows that the wedding/death imagery that plays such a central role in the Igor Tale was already an old feature of the epic tradition long before the twelfth century. The way in which certain metaphors come earlier in the tale than their more prosaic variants shows that both variants were formulae that the composer knew before he began his tale. The narrator calls his tale a song, and he sees the singer Boyan as his predecessor in the art of composing epic songs. His samples of Boyan’s art can hardly be distinguished from the rest of the tale in their style and formulaic content. The narrator states that (in an opening passage that is now lost) he began his narrative “in the olden words of the heroic tales about the campaign of Igor”—other oral epics that circulated in the decades following Igor’s defeat.

In brief, there is no real evidence that the Igor Tale was first composed in writing. When Likhachev speculated that the second half of the *Slovo* is little more than a song transcript while the first half appears to be the writer’s original composition, he was half right. The tale is homogeneous in style, and all its many oral, formulaic features show that the entire tale must surely be the text of an epic song.

Independent Scholar

References

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Gil’ferding 1873 | A. F. Gil’ferding. <i>Onezhskie byliny</i> . St. Petersburg. |
| Jakobson 1948 | Roman Jakobson (with Henri Grégoire, Marc Szeftel, and J. A. Joffe). “La geste du Prince Igor”: Épopée russe du douzième siècle.” <i>Annuaire de l’Institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales et slaves</i> , 8. |

- Jakobson 1952 Roman Jakobson. "The Puzzles of the Igor Tale." *Speculum*, 27:43-66.
- Kholmogorov 1994 E. S. Kholmogorov. "Sviataia ravnoapostol'naia kniaginia Ol'ga." *Al'fa i Omega*, 3:142-43.
- Kosorukov 1986 A. A. Kosorukov. *Genii bez imeni*. Moscow: Sovremennik.
- Kudriavtsev 1949 I. M. Kudriavtsev. "Zametka k tekstu: "'S toia zhe Kaialy Sviatopl'k" . . . v 'Slove o polku Igoreve'." *Trudy Otdela Drevnei Russkoi Literatury*, 7:407-09.
- Kulakovskii 1977 L. Kulakovskii. *Pesn' o polku Igoreve: opyt vossozdaniia modeli drevnego melosa*. Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor.
- Likhachev 1950a D. S. Likhachev. "Kommentarii." In *Povest' vremennykh let*. Ed. by V. P. Adrianova-Peretts. 2 Vols. Moscow, Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk. 2:297-98.
- Likhachev 1950b _____. *Slovo o polku Igoreve. Istoriko-literaturnyi ocherk*. Moscow, Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk SSSR.
- Likhachev 1967 _____. "Slovo o pokhode Igoria Sviatoslavicha." In *Slovo o polku Igoreve*. Ed. by L. A. Dmitriev and D. S. Likhachev. Moscow, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura. pp. 5-39.
- Likhachev 1972 _____. "'Slovo o polku Igoreve' i protsess zhanroobrazovaniia v XI-XIII vv." *Trudy Otdela drevnei russkoi literatury*, 27:69-75.
- Likhachev 1985 _____. *'Slovo o polku Igoreve' i kul'tura ego vremeni*. 2nd ed. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura.
- Likhachev 1986 _____. "Predpolozhenie o dialogicheskom stroenii 'Slova o polku Igoreve'." In *Issledovaniia "Slova o polku Igoreve."* Leningrad: Leningradskoe otdelenie izdatel'stva Nauka. pp. 9-26.
- Mann 1990 Robert Mann. *Lances Sing: a Study of the Igor Tale*. Columbus: Slavica.
- Mann 2004 _____. *The Germanic Legend of Attila the Hun in Kievan Rus'*. Karacharovo: The Birchbark Press of Karacharovo.
- Mann 2005 _____. *The Igor Tales and Their Folkloric Background*. Karacharovo: The Birchbark Press of Karacharovo.
- Mann 2010 _____. *Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche. Zabytyi spisok Nikolaia Golovina*. Monuments of Early Russian Literature, 8. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Slavic Specialties.
- Mann 2012 _____. *Pesn' o polku Igoreve*. Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury.
- Mann 2014 _____. "'Golovinskaia' redaktsiia 'Skazaniia o Mamaevom poboishche' i ee znachenie dlia pamiatnikov Kulikovskogo tsikla." *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, 63. pp. 278-304.
- Miller and Speranskii 1911 V. F. and M. N. Speranskii, eds. 1911. *Pesni, sobrannye P. V. Kireevskim. Novaia seriia* [Collected Songs of P. V. Kireevskii. New series]. 2 Vols. Moscow: Obshchestvo liubitelei rossiiskoi slovesnosti pri Imp. Moskovskom universitete.

- Obolenskii 1851 M. Obolenskii. *Letopisets Pereiaslavlia Suzdal'skogo, sostavlennyi v nachale XIII veka (mezhdū 1214 i 1219 godov)*. Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia.
- PSRL 1959 *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei (PSRL). Vologodsko-permskaia letopis'* (Vol. 26). Moscow, Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk SSSR.
- PSRL 1997 _____. *Lavrent'evskaia letopis'* (Vol. 1). Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury.
- PSRL 2000 _____. *Sofiiskaia pervaiia letopis'* (Vol. 6.1). Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury.
- PSRL 2001 _____. *Ipat'evskaia letopis'* (Vol. 2). Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury.
- Potanina 1981 R. P. Potanina. *Obriadovye pesni russkoi svad'by Sibiri*. Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Sokolova 1987 L. V. Sokolova. "Dve pervye frazy 'Slova o polku Igoreve'." In *Issledovaniia po drevnei i novoi literature*. Ed. by M. B. Khrapchenko, L. A. Dmitriev, and D. S. Likhachev. Institut russkoi literatury Akademii Nauk SSSR. pp. 210-15.
- Tatishchev 1963 V. N. Tatishchev. *Istoriia rossiiskaia*, 2. Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR.
- Tvorogov 1981 O. V. Tvorogov. *Literatura drevnei Rusi. Posobie dlia uchitel'ia*. Moscow: Prosveshchenie.
- Tvorogov 1995 _____. "Usobitsa." In *Entsiklopediia 'Slova o polku Igoreve'*, 5. Ed. by L. A. Dmitriev and D. S. Likhachev. St. Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin. pp. 150-51.
- Zyrianov 1970 I. Zyrianov. *Cherdynskaia svad'ba*. Perm': Permskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo.

This page is intentionally left blank.