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Intermediality of the Waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* in the Far Eastern Text and the Problem of East-West Cultural Interaction

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Abstract. The article offers a comprehensive analysis of I.A. Shatrov's waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* (1906) in the poetic version by S.G. Petrov (Skitalets), interpreting it as a representative example of the 'Manchurian text', a unique cultural phenomenon in the Russian Far East of the early twentieth century. The study focuses on the profound and organic synthesis of musical and verbal semiotics, which reveals how the traumatic historical experience of the Russo-Japanese War is transformed into a nostalgic myth of a lost homeland. The intermedial analysis identifies structural and semantic correspondences between the triple meter of the waltz and the rhythmic organization of the poetic text, as well as between melodic figures and a system of leitmotifs (nostalgia, sacrifice, nature, memory) that shape the work's mythopoetic structure. Of particular scholarly significance is the revealed isomorphism between descending melodic lines and the motif of tears, along with the analysis of the use of the minor mode, which together demonstrate the depth of the interpenetration of musical and verbal components. The findings substantially enrich current understanding of the genesis of cultural identity under frontier conditions and open new perspectives for interdisciplinary studies of the artistic texts of the Russian Far Eastern diaspora, particularly in relation to the acoustic landscapes of border territories.

Keywords: Manchurian text, Far Eastern frontier, intermediality, cultural memory, Russian waltz, S.G. Petrov, Skitalets

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Интермедальность вальса «На сопках Маньчжурии» в дальневосточном тексте и проблема взаимосвязи культур Востока и Запада

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена комплексному анализу вальса И.А. Шатрова «На сопках Маньчжурии» (1906) в поэтической версии С.Г. Петрова (Скитальца) как репрезентативного образца «маньчжурского текста» – уникального явления в культурном пространстве русского Дальнего Востока начала XX в. В центре исследования – глубокий и органичный синтез музыкальной и вербальной семиотики, раскрывающий механизмы трансформации исторического травматического опыта (поражение в Русско-японской войне) в ностальгический миф о потерянной родине. Интермедальный анализ выявляет структурные и семантические корреляции между трехдольной метрикой вальса и ритмической организацией поэтического текста, между мелодическими фигурами и системой лейтмотивов (ностальгия, жертвенность, природа, память), формирующих мифопоэтическую структуру произведения. Особую научную ценность представляет выявление изоморфизма между нисходящими мелодическими линиями и мотивом слез, а также анализ использования минорного лада, что в совокупности подтверждает глубину взаимопроникновения музыкальной и вербальной составляющих. Полученные результаты существенно обогащают современные представления о генезисе культурной идентичности в условиях фронта и открывают новые перспективы для междисциплинарных исследований художественных текстов русской дальневосточной диаспоры, в частности – для изучения акустических ландшафтов пограничных территорий.

Ключевые слова: маньчжурский текст, дальневосточный фронт, интермедальность, культурная память, русский вальс, С.Г. Петров, Скиталец

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Introduction

A unique type of artistic super-text, defined as the “Manchurian text”, has been identified within the study of the literary heritage of the Russian Far Eastern diaspora of the first third of the twentieth century. This phenomenon possesses pronounced cultural-historical, semantic, and mythopoetic specificity that reflects both the regional characteristics and the worldview shaped under the conditions of the Far Eastern frontier. The key features of the “Manchurian text” include hybridity, mythologism, traumaticity, and liminality. Hybridity manifests itself in the synthesis of heterogeneous cultural codes – Buddhist-Daoist symbolism, shamanic practices, and the Russian narrative tradition – which together form a complex multicultural semiotic space. Mythologism is expressed in the sacralization of the natural landscape and in the construction of a mythopoetic model of the world based on the archetypes of the “lost paradise” and “eternal return”. Traumaticity is associated with the artistic reflection of collective historical experience (the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, mass emigration), transformed into a nostalgic myth of the lost homeland. Liminality defines this text as a phenomenon of the cultural frontier, situated in a zone of civilizational contact where binary oppositions such as “self/other”, “center/periphery”, and “nature/culture” become actualized, thereby contributing to the formation of specific mechanisms of cultural identity (Liu, 2025).

Continuing the study of this phenomenon, the present work focuses on the analysis of I.A. Shatrov’s waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* (1906), which received its poetic embodiment in the text by S.G. Petrov (Skitalets; 1869–1941). It is noteworthy that although the text was created before the author’s personal experience of emigration, Skitalets’s poetic version of the waltz demonstrates a remarkable semantic and worldview predisposition toward the aesthetics of the “Manchurian text”. This creative intuition later found its biographical confirmation: in 1921 Skitalets emigrated to China, where he lived in Harbin from 1922 to 1934¹. This circumstance allows us to consider Skitalets’s text not as a direct reflection of the realities of emigration but as a kind of artistic prefiguration – a semantic code that, long before the author’s physical relocation, had already begun to assimilate the cultural and geographical space of the Far East and its mythopoetics.

The relevance of this study is determined by the need to overcome a significant gap in the examination of the Russian musical-poetic tradition, in which the waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* has remained at the periphery of scholarly attention, unlike such well-studied phenomena as the “Griboedov waltz” (see, Danilova, 2011; Yarko, 2018) and “rock poetics” (Domanskii, 2023), despite its considerable cultural-historical potential and its role in shaping the imperial consciousness at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The scholarly novelty of the present work lies in the fact that, for the first time, a comprehensive intermedial analysis of this work is undertaken as an integral musical-poetic phenomenon; it is examined

¹ Skitalets, S.G. (1960). *Novellas and Stories. Memoirs* (pp. 16–22). Moskovskii Rabochii Publ. (In Russ.)

in the context of the concept of the “Manchurian text” in Russian literature; the mechanisms of remythologization of historical trauma through musical-poetic synthesis are identified; and the role of the waltz in shaping cultural memory of the Far Eastern frontier is established.

The aim of this study is to examine the transition from narrative plot structure to pictorial-musical motif – image and sound constants. The main task is to demonstrate that the musical motif – image constants in the texts of the “waltz” (with the variants by A. Mashistov from the 1930s and P. Shubin from 1945 used as additional material) reflect the mythological representations of the Far Eastern frontier and the emotionally significant attitude of a person toward the sounds of nature, folk songs, and rituals within the uncultivated border space. Particular attention is given to analyzing the waltz from the standpoint of its form, which actualizes the motif of nostalgia. The diversity of variations of this motif testifies to a distinctive synthesis of cultures reflected in the Manchurian text of the early twentieth century.

Waltz as an Interdisciplinary Phenomenon and an Object of Analysis

Within the present study, the waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* is interpreted as an interdisciplinary cultural phenomenon that exists at the intersection of several discursive fields. We examine the text created by Skitalets within the context of the cultural diaspora of Primorye and Manchuria in the early twentieth century; it belongs to the literature of the Russian Far Eastern diaspora and reflects the specificity of the “Manchurian text” through the synthesis of the Russian poetic tradition with the exoticized Eastern landscape. From our point of view, the waltz underwent a process of secondary folklorization: numerous variations of its text, oral transmission, and adaptation to different ideological contexts transformed it into a part of collective memory, particularly within the emigrant milieu. An important point is that, as a musical-poetic work, it combines elements of the urban romance, the military march, and the ritual lament, which reflects its connection with the heroic deed of the Mokshan Regiment. In addition, it can be observed that during the Soviet period the waltz was resemanticized, turning from a symbol of imperial trauma into an instrument of ideological mobilization. Therefore, the uniqueness of the waltz lies in its ability to transcend genres and contexts while remaining a key object for the study of the cultural semiosphere of the Russian borderlands.

Materials and Methods

The methodological foundation of the study is constituted by intermedial analysis as developed in the works of W. Wolf. Within this approach, the toolkit of intermedial transposition is applied, understood as the performative transfer of structural and semantic elements from one medial system to another (Wolf, 1999, p. 11), which makes it possible to identify correlations between the musical and

verbal semiotics of the waltz. At the same time, V.A. Vasina-Grossman's proposition concerning the affinity of the fundamental forms in music and literature plays an important role, since it determines the universality of "certain organizing principles" that establish the "constant mutual attraction of the two arts" (1978, p. 175).

A significant contribution to the development of the methodology of interdisciplinary analysis is made by the fundamental work of O.A. Hansen-Löve, *Intermediality in Russian Culture: From Symbolism to the Avant-Garde*, in which a systematic typology of intermedial interactions is proposed. The conceptual framework developed by Hansen-Löve (2016) makes it possible to describe the mechanism of intermedial transposition of musical structures into the verbal text not as a simple borrowing but as a complex process of semantic transformation that generates new meanings.

For analyzing the deep interpenetration of the verbal and musical layers at the level of the rhythmic-syntactic and phonetic organization of the text, it is essential to turn to the works of E.G. Etkind, particularly his conception of sound and rhythm as material carriers of meaning. The researcher emphasizes that in poetry there are no neutral elements of the text devoid of figurative-semantic significance (Etkind, 1978, p. 174). This approach makes it possible to interpret the alliterations and assonances in Skitalets's text – for example, such as *l'yutsya goryuchiya slezy (burning tears are flowing)* and *rydaet veter (the wind is sobbing)*² – not as ornamental embellishments but as a direct verbal transcription of the melodic "sighs" and dissonances of the waltz, while the rhythmic organization is understood as a deliberate imitation of the triple-meter pulsation that produces a hypnotic effect of memory.

Genre Transformation: From Salon Waltz to Requiem

To clearly highlight the unique character of synthesis in Shatrov's waltz, it is productive to conduct a brief comparison with the canonical model of the salon or festive European waltz of the nineteenth century, for example, with the works of Johann Strauss II.

The classical Viennese waltz, which took shape as a salon genre during the Biedermeier period, was characterized primarily by its entertaining and socially integrative function (Romanova, 2011, p. 52). Its musical poetics were built on a clear triple-meter structure, a fast tempo, and a predominantly major mode, which created a sense of lightheartedness and cheerfulness (Degtyareva, 2012, p. 170).

If Strauss's waltz performed primarily the function of entertainment and social integration, emphasizing lightheartedness and cheerfulness (for example, *Tales from the Vienna Woods*), then the waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* radically transforms the genre paradigm. As follows from the musical notation, the triple-meter form of Shatrov's waltz, in contrast to the major-mode organization traditional for this genre, is realized through a minor scale, which determines its infusion with

² Kalugin, V. (Comp.). (2006). *Anthology of the War Songs from the Battle of Poltava to the Chechen War* (p. 410). Moscow: Eksmo. (In Russ.)

tragic, requiem-like content and its subordination to the logic of commemoration rather than a hedonistic function. Therefore, this deliberate contrast – the use of a recognizable, “light” form to convey a deeply traumatic experience – not only underscores the uniqueness of the Shatrov–Skitalets conception but also becomes a powerful instrument of emotional impact, intensifying the perception of the historical catastrophe through its collision with the playful nature of dance.

The Poetic Score: Levels of Intermedial Synthesis

The poetic text by Skitalets for the waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* represents a verbalized score in which verbal imagery is organically synthesized with Shatrov’s musical structure. This synthesis is revealed through several key levels.

Rhythmic-Syntactic Organization. At the core of the creation of the waltz image lies a deliberate imitation of rotational, *whirling* (*kruzhashchegosya*)³ movement, achieved through the predominance of trisyllabic feet (amphibrach, anapest), which create a smooth, swaying inertia (*Spit gaolyan, / Sopki pokryty mgloi... – The gaoliang sleeps, / The hills are covered with mist...*)⁴. This effect is further reinforced through the use of syntactic repetitions and anaphoras that function as musical refrains and intensify the hypnotic, almost ritual quality of the text (*Plachet, plachet mat’ rodnaya... – The mother weeps, she weeps...*)⁵. This rhythmic pattern directly correlates with the triple meter (3/4) of the waltz, in which each poetic line corresponds to a musical phrase.

Intermedial Transposition. Etkind (1974, p. 105) analyzes how rhythm not only organizes speech structure but also forms the semantic aura of meter, determining the intonation and character of narration through repetition. Skitalets skillfully “translates” Shatrov’s musical elements into the language of poetry. Descending melodic lines are transposed into the motif of descent, fading, and tears: *l’yutsya goryuchiya slezy – bitter tears are flowing* – the phonetics (sonorants [l], [r]; sibilants [sh]) and the semantics of the word *l’yutsya – are flowing*, visualize the smooth, mournful motion of the melody. Dissonances and minor harmony are transformed into sonic and imagistic contrasts that convey terror and pain: *Strashno vokrug, / Lish’ veter na sopkakh rydaet – It is frightening all around, / Only the wind on the hills is sobbing*⁶ – the alliteration in [r] and [v] creates a sonic image of the howling wind, associated with a dissonant chord. Dynamics find their reflection in the syntactic structure. The stanzas often begin with quiet, descriptive lyricism (*spit gaolyan... – The gaoliang sleeps...*) and rise toward an emotional culmination marked by an exclamatory intonation: *No ver te, eshche my za vas otomstim / I spravim krovavuyu triznu – But believe us, we will yet avenge you / And perform a bloody funeral rite*⁷.

³ Kalugin, V. (Comp.). (2006). *Anthology of the War Songs from the Battle of Poltava to the Chechen War* (p. 410). Moscow: Eksmo. (In Russ.)

⁴ Ibid. P. 409.

⁵ Ibid. P. 410.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Mythopoetic Structure and the System of Leitmotifs. The text is not merely a description but a ritual of memory that constructs a myth of the fallen heroes through a system of interconnected leitmotifs:

1) the motif of sleep and death (*spit gaolyan – the gaoliang sleeps, voiny spyat – the warriors sleep, spite zh syny – sleep, then, sons*⁸) unite nature, the soldiers, and the entire country in a single mournful, motionless state;

2) the motif of memory and oblivion: the central conflict of the text (*zabyt'... my ne mozhem – to forget... we cannot, versus vechnuyu pamyat' ne speli – we did not sing the eternal memorial hymn*⁹) emphasizes the trauma of an unfulfilled duty;

3) the motif of nature as a participant in mourning: The Manchurian landscape (*sopki – the hills; gaolyan – gaoliang; veter – the wind; luna – the moon*) becomes an active chorus lamenting the fallen (the wind *sobs – rydaet*);

4) the motif of sacrificial atonement and vengeance: the conclusion of the text with an oath of revenge (*krovavuyu triznu – a bloody funeral rite*) transforms individual grief into a collective, almost pagan, vow.

Cultural Synthesis of the Russian and the Eastern. The semiotic space of the text possesses a hybrid cultural organization. Traditional Russian symbols of mourning and memory (*kresty – crosses; bereza – birch – implicitly; trizna – funeral rite*) are placed within an exotic Eastern context (*sopki Man'chzhurii – the hills of Manchuria; gaolyan – gaoliang*), which creates the effect of an alien, “foreign” land that intensifies the sense of tragedy and longing for a distant homeland that is “one’s own”. Therefore, the waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* becomes not merely a song about a place but a sounding embodiment of the very “genius loci” (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) of the Far Eastern frontier, which in the artistic consciousness of the Russian diaspora acquires the features of a bearer of collective sorrow and a guardian of memory.

The poetic text by Skitalets represents an ideal verbal projection of Shatrov’s music, deepening its semantics and revealing, through the word, its mythological, ritual, and traumatic subtext. Through intermedial synthesis, a unique instance of the “Manchurian text” is formed.

Remythologization and Nostalgia in the Context of Cultural Memory

The history of the reception of the waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* represents a unique example of the continual remythologization of a musical work through the succession of verbal texts, each of which actualized it within a new historical and ideological context. The canonical text by Skitalets, which constitutes the central object of this study, focuses on the existential trauma of the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, expressing national mourning through powerful images of collective grief and an oath of vengeance (*spravim krovavuyu triznu – we shall perform a bloody funeral rite*¹⁰). Its mythopoetic depth, the synthesis of Russian and Eastern

⁸ Kalugin, V. (Comp.). (2006). *Anthology of the War Songs from the Battle of Poltava to the Chechen War* (p. 410). Moscow: Eksmo. (In Russ.)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

motifs (*gaolyan – gaoliang; sopki – the hills; kresty – crosses*), and the ritual nature of memory make it the quintessence of the “Manchurian text”. In the Soviet era, the version by Mashistov (1930s) undergoes ideological resemanticization: tragedy and vengeance are transformed into a mobilizing call for revolutionary struggle (*My poidem navstrechu novoi zhizni, / Sbrosim bremya rabskikh okov – We shall go to meet the new life, / We shall cast off the burden of slavish chains*¹¹). The motif of existential longing disappears, and memory is instrumentalized for the purposes of political agitation. By contrast, the text by Shubin (1945), created during a new war with Japan, is characterized by the lyrization and individualization of memory. The emphasis shifts to the nostalgic recollections of an individual soldier about home and love (*devichii milyi vzglyad – the sweet glance of a maiden*), while the tragedy of 1905 becomes a background for reflections on personal loss. Therefore, taking these transformations into account is essential for demonstrating the deliberate choice of Skitalets’s version as the most representative for analyzing the “Manchurian text”. The comparative perspective clearly illustrates the mechanisms of remythologization of cultural memory, in which a single musical plot was successively adapted to the ideological demands of different eras – from imperial sorrow, through Soviet mobilization, to lyrical nostalgia. Within this sequence, Skitalets’s text preserves the status of an authentic voice of historical trauma, free from subsequent ideological accretions, which determines its value for intermedial and mythopoetic analysis.

The waltz *On the Hills of Manchuria* constitutes a significant object of mythological reconstruction of the Far Eastern frontier, which is reflected in the continual remythologization of the historical episode of the Mokshan Regiment’s battle in the Russo-Japanese War. Drawing on Structural Anthropology by Claude Levi-Strauss, V.V. Polonsky examines the interrelation between myth and music and notes that “myth is inherently ‘musical’, and music is ‘mythological’” (2008, p. 34). This interrelation manifests itself in the leitmotif of nostalgia, which permeates various versions of the waltz text and is realized through a system of semantic motifs (*krest – cross; mogila – grave; sud’ba – fate; krov’ – blood; trizna – funeral rite; Otchizna – Fatherland; Rodina-mat’ – Motherland; slezy – tears; bereza – birch; etc.*). According to the concept of Svetlana Boym, nostalgia encompasses both temporal and spatial categories, representing a longing for a place that no longer exists or never existed, while in reality expressing a longing for an irreversible past (2001, p. 18). At the same time, nostalgia generates a longing for a sense of continuity and coherence in space and time, linking the past, present, and future. This desire is embodied in two forms: nostalgia that awakens “national past and future,” and nostalgia concentrated on “reflection on history and time”¹².

The process of continual remythologization of the waltz and its adaptation to new ideological contexts is explained within the framework of Astrid Erll’s theory of cultural memory, which interprets such phenomena as mechanisms of the

¹¹ Kalugin, V. (Comp.). (2006). *Anthology of the War Songs from the Battle of Poltava to the Chechen War* (p. 413). Moscow: Eksmo. (In Russ.)

¹² Ibid. P. 117.

functioning of media memory that ensure the relevance of historical experience for subsequent generations (2011). In the intermedial structure of the waltz, the nostalgic leitmotif is realized through the interaction of images belonging to different semiospheres. Musical images (*Vechnaya Pamyat – Eternal Memory; Razbrosala kosy rusye bereza – The birch has scattered its fair tresses; staryi val’s – the old waltz; bayan – the accordion; lad – the harmony*) are combined with pictorial ones (white crosses, the bloody funeral rite, the gloomy land) and with images from Manchurian texts (Manchurian fields; the plains of the East; deserted hills; gaoliang; the foreign land; silence). The poets actively employ elements of the Eastern linguistic sphere, as well as Manchurian and Russian folk traditions, creating complex images, motifs, and plots that contribute to the acquisition of a sense of home within an alien space, which is appropriated and reinterpreted by the collective consciousness. Therefore, the waltz becomes not only a musical composition but also a multilayered cultural text that synthesizes mythological, historical, and nostalgic discourses of the Far Eastern frontier.

Conclusion

Thus, standing out among conventional European waltzes, *On the Hills of Manchuria* represents a unique cultural phenomenon organically integrated into the paradigm of the “Manchurian text” of Russian literature. Its nostalgic and pathetic character reflects the key parameters of this textual complex: the dialectic of one’s own and foreign space, the mythologization of the Far Eastern frontier, and the metaphysics of loss characteristic of works about Manchuria. Through the intermedial synthesis of music and poetry, the work reconstructs the mode of perception characteristic of the “Manchurian text” – a view of the region as a space of mythologized memory and cultural nostalgia. Particular significance is acquired by the waltz’s capacity for semantic transformation across different historical and cultural contexts, which corresponds to the very nature of the “Manchurian text” as a dynamic semiotic formation. This capacity for resemanticization – from the imperial narrative to Soviet ideological adaptation – confirms the status of the work not merely as a musical phenomenon but as an important element of Russian cultural mythology of the Far East, remaining relevant for the study of mechanisms of identity formation under conditions of intercultural frontier.

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