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THE POETICS AND IDEOLOGY OF WAR IN THE RUSSIAN POETRY OF 1904-6

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THE POETICS AND IDEOLOGY OF WAR IN THE RUSSIAN POETRY OF 1904-6².

The Russo-Japanese war, the first war for Russia after almost three peaceful decades and the first major conflict to begin in the 20th century was in many ways a precursor to its two great wars. The article is to show the way the Russo-Japanese War is represented in the verse of 1904-6, exploring different poetic devices used to bring war back home and juxtaposing poetics and ideology. It focuses on such constitutive features of the war as geography and technology and traces their poetic projections in a wide range of the verse coming from different sources.

Key words: Russo-Japanese war, poetics, ideology, domestication, alienation

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Introduction

История людей -
История войны,
Konstantin Balmont. Voina.

The common wisdom Konstantin Balmont chose for the opening lines of his 1905 poem “Voina”, one of the many immediate poetic responses to the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5, has for decades been used by different authors as an introduction to works on the literary representation of war, quoted from a different, but still contemporary source, the British war correspondent Colonel Repington: “the history of mankind, as the British military correspondent Colonel Repington once remarked, is the history of war” [Hynes, 1998, p.XI. Cf. Ford, 2002, p. 1 etc]³. This universal and universalist perception of war, however, in the twentieth century came to be challenged by a very different attitude, alienating the concept, making it an offence beyond the boundaries of human laws. The famous Auden’s “unmentionable odour of death”, a poetic epigraph to WWII of a kind, juxtaposes the universality and routine origins of war to its apparent transgressive character [Auden, 1940], the view culminating in Adorno’s proclamation of the impossibility of lyrics as such after the machines of destruction of WWII. The key issue of the article is this juxtaposition of the universal and traditional and the transgressive in the immediate poetic response to the Russo-Japanese war with the focus on the poetic devices the poets or authors of doggerel employed to represent war’s transgressive hypostasis.

The Russo-Japanese war, the first war for Russia after almost three peaceful decades and the first major conflict to begin in the 20th century was in many ways a precursor to its two great wars, or ‘world war zero’, in the way the authors of a recent volume chose to put it [Steinberg, 2005]. The collective volume addresses political, military, technological and other aspects of the war, emphasizing the ways in which the Russo-Japanese War “presaged” the Great War of 1914-1918 “that were either unknown, undiscovered, or undeveloped in its more recent European and American antecedents”. These included new technologies and weapons causing mass deaths and new kinds of military confrontations as well as the new uses of the media [Steinberg, 2005, p.

³ Accidentally, Repington covered the Russo-Japanese war as a war correspondent and published it as his first book, *The War in the Far East* (1905). He is best remembered, though for being the first to use the term ‘First World War’ in his third book, *The First World War, 1914-1918* (1920).

XX]. The new experiences of war meant its reception back at home had to be adjusted accordingly.

Apparently, the palette of attitudes towards war as shown not only in the press, but also in the poetry is quite varied. However, it does fall within the space between the two extremes of the universal law and a lawless intrusion. Translating the opposition into cultural and linguistic concepts, we could present it through the prism of translation theory as ‘domestication’ and ‘foreignization’, in terms of Lawrence Venuti [Venuti, 1985, p. 20]. The task of the present article is to discuss the means of transgression, or, for that matter, foreignization, comparing them to the other parts of the spectre.

The immediate literary response to the war was quite varied and formative for the later writings. The most popular war genre, the war report, was read widely, especially pieces by Vassily Nemirovich-Danchenko, the most famous war correspondent of the time. War correspondencies were the main source of information about war, bringing the far war fields and alien geographical entities as well as new disastrous technologies back home to the reader and thus domesticising them. However, in the opposite ‘camp’ war was discussed as the unmentionable evil, the transgression, the view most famously and vehemently presented in Leo Tolstoy’s letter “Bethink Yourselves”, first published in English in *The London Times* in 1904 and for decades banned from publication in Russia. The letter portrays war as a crime against Christianity and human nature, comparing it with common murder or assassination: “Spontaneous feeling tells men that what they are doing should not be; but, as the murderer who has begun to assassinate his victim cannot stop, so also Russian people now imagine that the fact of the deadly work having been commenced is an unanswerable argument in favor of war” [Tolstoy, 1904]. The quintessential fiction of the Russo-Japanese war, “The Red Laugh” by Leonid Andreyev epitomized the senseless mass slaughter, characteristic of the war, with the fatal injury of the hero being caused by the friendly fire, demonstrating the obscenity of war and the failure of the human mind to embrace it. Following in the footsteps of Garshin, Andreyev, however, shows the reality of the 20th century, with its new much longer-range and more precise arms, and alienates both the essence of war and its modern development.

The poetry of Russo-Japanese War did not have that much impact. For one thing, the immediate poetic response to it brought few pieces of high aesthetic value, as is the case with most poetry written on occasion. The narrative of the Russo-Japanese war was mainly formed in prose, which is only typical of the narrative. Still, the body of what could, in a wider sense, be called the poetry of the Russo-Japanese War is quite extensive, embracing both the poems by first- and second-rank poets (Briusov, Ivanov, Balmont etc.) and jingoist verse and doggerel, published in patriotic and special war periodicals (such as *Russkij Vestnik*, *Voina v Yaponii*, etc.) and even thematized collections of such verse (*Otklik Russkogo Serdtsa na Sobytiya Dalnego Vostoka*, etc.), or lavishly printed by satirical journals and satirical sections of more serious magazines in the first months of war (*Oskolki*, *Voенно-Politicheskiye Otgoloski*, a specific section of *Russkij Vestnik*, etc.). This kind of material can be accumulated in great quantity, but for the present objectives it is not discussed in its totality. To make the body of the poems under consideration representative, apart from the patriotic verse mentioned above, it includes publications from the opposite camp, i.e. magazines *Russkoye Bogatstvo* and *Mir Bozhiy*, which is a very different quantity of verse, though, as the number of verse addressing war in *Russkoye Bogatstvo* is really scarce whereas *Mir Bozhiy* has none, even if the main part of the other sections of the magazine (prose included) deals with this subject in this or that way. On the other hand, part of the body of poems and songs amassed by the revolution of 1905 is rooted in the war and thus is to be discussed within its context, especially since it takes the notion of transgression even further, both in terms of the original offence of the state and the fair response to it.

The following analysis is to show the way the Russo-Japanese War is represented in the verse of 1904-6 exploring different poetic devices used to bring war back home. The concept of transgression is partly based on problematization of the divide between the war front and home, posing reception of the war tidings as something to undermine the stability and the borders of the world around, on the one hand, and the mechanisms built up to restore them, on the other. Accordingly, the poetic devices under consideration will be discussed in terms of alienation (an analogue of Venuti's foreignization) and domestication (to borrow Venuti's term)⁴, with some of them posed as sites of both at the same time.

⁴ Inconsistent as it may seem, such a partial borrowing is better suited to the objectives of the present work.

The Original Pastoral: Domestication

The expeditionary war, fought thousands of miles away from both Russian capitals, the Russo-Japanese war underscored the inevitable distance between the war theatre and everyday life in many different ways with the focus on the two opposing forces, geography and technologies, employed to overcome it. The distance was covered by railroads and steamships, taking soldiers and war correspondents to the front and bringing back the dead and the wounded, and the “electrically-based means of communication”, thanks to which “both the home front, and, indeed, the entire world might learn about maritime and battlefield outcomes within a matter of hours” [Steinberg, 2005, p. XXI]. All these, according to the authors of the editorial introduction to *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective*, made the war closer to the First World War than the wars of the previous century, ‘world war zero’, in their terms.

The traditional poetic way to overcome the distance between the lyric persona and the war and to address the events of the front is that of empathy and poetic license: war is ‘domesticated’, i.e. placed in the traditional poetic setting, against a landscape, which makes it indistinguishable from poetic projections of love, or anguish, or other events, phenomena or notions as presented in the bulk of verse published in periodicals, mainly recycling pastoral images in cliché expressions. The traditional parallelism in the sets of images and tropes facilitates mental appropriation: the original pastoral peace of the countryside is disturbed by a storm: war undermines the pastoral - this ‘domesticating’ attitude can be traced most patriotic verse that flourished throughout 1904. Thus the battle of Chemulpo Bay is preempted by the signs of storm in the sea landscape:

Мечутся белья чайки...
Что-то встревожило их:
Чу? Загремели раскаты
Взрывов далеких, глухих...

Там, среди шумного моря,
Вьется Андреевский стяг:
Бьется с неравною силой
Гордый красавец - «Варяг» -

Anonymous. “Varyag” [Otklik, 1904, p. 33],

and an attack at Port Arthur is seen through the prism of a disturbed quiet of an oriental night:

Уснул Артур в тиши восточной ночи,
Луна плывет, скользя меж дымных туч,
Рефлекторов чудовищные очи
На гребни волн кидают яркий луч

Вдруг батарей огни затрепетали
С разбуженных тревогой берегов,
То пушки дружным грохотом встречали
В ночи, как тать, подкрававшихся врагов.

L. Kologrivova. Nochnaya ataka [Otklik, 1904, p.

70-1].

Another important domesticating poetic device is permanent allusion to the poetic tradition presented both in poetic clichés and bookish archaic lexis (чу, как тать, etc.). Both poems as well as many others present the Russo-Japanese war as a quintessential war read in traditional oppositions of the Russian epic heroes ('витель' is a common nomination) and the enemy, the proud beauty (гордый красавец) and a stealthy creature (как тать подкрававшийся), the Russian bravery and the Japanese boastful cowardice (the subject of many poems, such as "Kazatskaya", or "Pesnya Russko-Yaponskoj Voyny"⁵).

Thus, the domesticating approach of the bulk of verse published in periodicals seems to grow even stronger as the distance between home and the war theatre grew and as the strategies and tactics of war became new and disturbing.

Newspapers as an Ambiguous Means of Communication

The poetic familiarity of the discourse covers the distance between a soldier and a civilian, both geographical and existential. However, the distance is usually implied, even in the mention of it being overcome, of the tidings travelling far and fast:

Пусть же по свету всему
Весть о победах оружия нашего
Грозной несется волной -

⁵ Cf. Мы докажем свою храбрость

Желтолицым злым врагам! (M. Zotov. Kazatskaya) [Zotov, 104, p. 5]

от:

Нехристь хитрый и лукавый
Вздумал флот наш истребить,

Но пришлось ему с позором

От Артура отступить (M. Zotov. Pesnya Russko-Yaponskoj Voiny) [Zotov, 1904, p. 10].

Anonymous. *Mnogaya leta tsaryu pravoslavnomu* [Otklik, 1904, p. 15].

In fact, it is the focus on the means of communication, the media, that becomes the first sign of alienation (the distance between the war and the poet) and poetic transgression as communication undermines the pastoral cliché poetics with disturbing diction and notions. It can still be included in the overall domesticating discourse, embracing the newspaper and the telegraph as a modern way of glorifying the heroes:

Еще вокруг гремят хвалы «Варягу»;
Еще не смолк в печати дружный хор,
Восславивший геройскую отвагу,
С которою он дал врагу отпор,
А телеграф быстрее урагана
Уже поспел по всей Руси разнести
О подвигах команды Ретвизана
Короткую, но радостную весть.

S. Pulin. *Stikhi, Ocherki i Kartinki* [Otklik, 1904, p. 40].

or underscore the distance, playing the newspaper back at home as a means of both division and communication and showing the lyric persona's position in the home front:

Борьба не тихнет. В каждом доме
Стоит кровавая мечта,
И ждем мы в тягостной истоме
Столбцов газетного листа.

Briusov. *K sograzhdanam* [Briusov, 1906]

and:

Что дальше будет, я не знаю,
Газету каждый день читаю, -
В ней пишут мудрено:
Японец, вишь, обескуражен,
И в траур Ниппон весь наряжен,
А порт-артурский флот посажен
На самое на дно.

Sologub. *Da, Byli bitvy...*

The two latter examples, written by famous symbolist poets rather than anonymous and unknown patriots, introduce a lyric persona, who is a socially distinct type and an individual (an urban dweller, as in Briusov's poem, or a former soldier wounded at the front of this war as in that of Sologub's) as opposed to the impersonal or generalized voice of the patriotic verse en masse. And each of the poems estranges the war by means of perspective (from a peaceful city at

home), the lyric persona and the newspaper. In each case the newspaper deepens the divide as it accentuates the time of waiting (ждем мы в тягостной истоме) or the cunning (пишут мудрено) inaccurate information, dressing up defeat as victory.

The further problematization of the newspaper with highly ironic attitude towards the role of the press, this time criticized for its treacherous lack of patriotism and attention to Japan, may be found in a poem from “Voenno-Politicheskie Otgoloski”, “Chuzhoe lutshe”, by the main author of the doggerel in this section, N. Sokolov:

Я люблю читать в газетах
Дневники корреспондентов,
Ибо в них я замечаю
Много новых элементов.
[...]

Я узнал, что в каждом деле
Все еще мы кое-каки:
Нас давно опередили
Благородные макаки, -

[Russkij Vestnik, 1904, 8, p. 933-4]

K. Balmont in his heavily ironic “Voina” addresses the newspaper as a symbol of division between the front and the home front in a different way: he poses it as an epitome of the peaceful coziness of the capital, the quintessential city, on par with the opera and the jolly daily life of the capital sociolites.

А далеко, в городе, где вор готовит сметы,
Люди крепковейные смеются, пьют, едят.
Слышится: "Что нового?" Слегка шуршат газеты.
"Вы сегодня в Опере?" - "В партере, пятый ряд".

[Balmont, 1911]

The irony is double: the newspaper, usually the link connecting the theatre of war to the capital becomes the symbol of the city undisturbed by the sounds of war whose heavy and loud explosions of the previous section of the poem (тяжелые раскаты, / Гимн свинца и пороха, напевы пуль звенят) are juxtaposed with the quiet whisper of the city life underscored by the quadrupled sibilant [sh] of the third line of the stanza (Слышится: "Что нового?" Слегка шуршат газеты), constituting the mere fabric of urban life. The symbol of the city's daily routine becomes a means of communication with something that is to explode it.

Distance, Toponyms And Alienation

The ambiguous role of the newspaper, connecting the everyday with the war theatre and still emphasizing the divide, is supported by that of toponyms, operating as a powerful means of estrangement and transgression. The enormous distance between the war theatre and both Russian capitals was underscored by the foreign names, alien to the very linguistic structure and phonetic system of the Russian language. The landmark toponyms of the previous wars, Borodino and Paris, representing the war of 1812, or Sebastopol, the site of the Crimean war, or even Samarkand (the Turkestan campaign) and Plevna (the Balkans) were already familiar to the Russian ear or easily acquired by the language and adapted to its rules, while Tsushima, Chemulpo, Shaho or Liaoyang were absolutely alien to the spoken language and printed page, to say nothing of the verse. Including the 'barbarous' names in the poetic diction disturbed its smooth course, thus reproducing the effect war was having on the everyday life of a city dweller. Elsewhere I have discussed the poetic functions of Port Arthur in the verse of the period [Ostrovskaya, 2013, p. 8-23], so here I will just briefly outline the main uses of 'barbaric' geographic names in general.

The strangeness and alienness of the foreign names are striking as the toponyms first come to be mentioned in the press. Thus the famous memoirist Eric Golerbach mentions 'the singing and strange Japanese names' that inundated the newspapers as the Japanese were sinking the Russian fleet, putting together Liaoyang and Fujiyama (mount Fuji), Tsushima and Port Arthur:

<...> в первые дни, когда японцы топили русский флот и газеты были полны певучими и странными японскими именами. В черную яму бесславия ухнула русская мощь, и выходило, что всему виною был не то Фузияма, не то Ляоян. Пошли в ход конфетные коробки с японскими видами, дешевенькие веера с гейшами. Вечером за чаем говорили о нехороших интендантах, о Цусиме и Порт-Артуре [Golerbakh, 1998, p. 25].

With time, as the war unfolds and, later, becomes history, the geographic names assume the function of a compressed narrative, referring to the full story but never presenting it in its fullness. In later poetry they acquire completeness of a narrative, where the first, introductory signs (the modern media and the alien toponym) stand for the whole of the trauma of the Russo-

Japanese War, or wider, the wars of the twentieth century⁶. According to Natalya Gryakalova, geographic names become the topoi of pain, trauma and national humiliation: “Liaoyang, Shaho, Mukden, Tsushima... The alien to the Russian ear geographic names marked the spots of pain for the historic memory and the wounded national consciousness of the contemporaries of the Russo-Japanese War” [Gryakalova, 2008, p. 183]⁷.

The immediate response to the events will not produce this kind of connection, but the alienation will show as the Japanese names get into the verse. The poems of the previous wars that mainly integrated the names better adapted to the rules of Russian language and the system of Russian verse still tended to put the toponyms in the ‘outer space’ of the verse, such as the title. Thus in the Crimean War corpus of poetry, “Soldatskya Pesnya v Sevastopole” by Apukhtin, “Sevastopolskoye Bratskoye Kladbische” by Fet, “Sevastopol” by Nemirovich-Danchenko will not repeat the geographic name from the title. Similarly, the loci of the Russo-Japanese war are often kept outside the main body of the text, especially in the writing of prominent Russian poets, such as Briusov or Ivanov, whose voices were heard more distinctly as it became clear that Russia was losing the war.

The battle of Tsushima was quite a landmark in this respect and generated response from different poetic strata, including symbolists. Vyacheslav Ivanov and Valery Briusov both wrote a poem entitled “Tsusima”. Surprisingly as it may seem, they have important compositional similarities. The eponymous toponym appears only in the title, whereas the body of the poem is left untouched by the hostile name and addresses the defeat as an abstraction through, among other things, other geographic names. Briusov reads the ongoing events as part of the Russian history on the ‘Roman’ scale, connecting the Far East (Dalniy Vostok) and Rome as geographic names ‘of a higher order’ in the last two lines of the poem (unlike the offending Tsushima that is left in the ‘outer’ space of the poem):

И снова все в веках, далеко,
Что было близким наконец, -
И скипетр Дальнего Востока,
И Рима Третьего венец

[Briusov, 1906].

⁶ The best known poetic references to this narrative are the famous passages from the 1940 longer poem ‘Putem Vseya Zemli’ by Anna Akhmatova and 1986 “Predstavlenie” by Joseph Brodsky.

⁷ Quoted in my translation, E.O.

and depicting the defeat as the lost chance to become the ‘Third Rome’. The juxtaposition of a symbolic and a real name works both ways: the possession (the ‘sceptre’) of the real Far East justifies the symbolic Roman crown, whereas the significance and might of Rome retroactively elevates the Far East. Ivanov uses a similar technique to suggest a combined Biblical and mythological interpretation, also including another toponym of a much ‘higher order’, Siloam, and another proper name, the mythical Phoenix in the body of the poem.

О Силоам слепот, отмстительный костер!
[...]
Кто Феникс, - возлетит! Кто Феникс, - изберет
Огня святыню роковую!

[Ivanov 1974, p. 252].

His choice of proper names shows a very different perspective at the tragedy, interpreted by Avril Pyman as “words of comfort and inspiration for Russia” [Pyman, 2006, p. 251]. Thus the mythology Ivanov chooses is not that of a lost case but that of the necessary suffering, the purifying spring and then fire that is to bring Russia the ultimate triumph. To gain hope via toponyms, the poet moves even further into the realm of abstraction, further disembodiment of the Far East and the sea.

To extend the list of compositional similarities, both poems have epigraphs. In Ivanov’s case, the epigraph is a news item relating the rescue of the cruiser *Almaz* in the dry diction of a communiqué:

«Крейсер «Алмаз» прорвался чрез цепь неприятельских судов и прибыл во Владивосток».

Из военных реляций –

The composition of transgression in Ivanov’s case is very exact: the enemy and the prose are left without, in the title and the epigraph, emphasizing the media as a way of both domestication and alienation. The more is the contrast of the harsh reality as presented in the newspapers and its pure sense, ‘realiora’.

Briusov’s composition is of a different kind. His epigraph is poetry rather than prose and from a classical source, ‘Napoleon’ by Pushkin. In this case the ‘outer spaces’ of the verse are juxtaposed: the tragedy of the defeat is put into the literary and historical context as early as in epigraph, suggesting a glorious death and grave not in the dry diction of war news and military communiqué, but in poetic quotation, highly loaded with allusions and implying both defeat and

glory. The opposition between the title and epigraph and the body of the poem works here, too, as neither the toponym nor the quotation reappear in the poem, but the transgressive toponym is counterbalanced by the pair of geographic names representing geopolitics (the Far East) and the symbolic mission of Russia (Rome). On the other hand, the juxtaposition of the real and symbolic space becomes the main compositional principle for both spaces.

Toponyms in Revolutionary Projections

The implications of geography being the same, the approach changes in the revolutionary verse, which deliberately projects the events of the Russo-Japanese war onto the Russian soil to accentuate the violence that provoked violence. In poetic transcription it turns into projection of the war geography, i.e. war toponyms, which again function as compressed narratives with Tsushima and another fatal site for the Russian arms, Mukden, being the most obvious loci.

Thus the notorious ‘poetic proclamation’ by Konstantin Balmont [Ermachenko, 2006] “Nash Tzar”, part of “Pesni mstitelya” is most famous for its first lines, uniting Mukden and Tsushima in the image of a ‘blood stain’, the three of them making a metaphorical triade representing the Russian tzar to be followed by a thread of images and metaphors:

Наш царь - Мукден, наш царь - Цусима,
Наш царь - кровавое пятно,
Зловонье пороха и дыма,
В котором разуму - темно.

The military defeats, the political failure of the tzar are interpreted as deliberate malice, projected back to where it was conceived, to the site of coronation festivities that turned a bloody tragedy. The prophetic militant poem plays with space and time, overimposing the bloody narrative of the current war on the tragic narrative of coronation festivities some 5 or 6 years ago to make the two of them fire back in the national ire getting the central character from coronation to the scaffold:

Кто начал царствовать - Ходынкoй,
Тот кончит - встав на эшафот.

In this case, geography is used as a mechanism of transgression in the body of the poem. Instead of using the ‘outer space’, the poet disfigures the body of the poem itself. The

placenames form the basis of the symmetrical construction of the poem: two toponyms in the very first line of the first stanza and a toponym and a functional name of the place (scaffold) in the last two lines of the last stanza. The symmetry of time represented by the same names is even more fearful: from the recent battles to the very beginning that is to preempt the inevitable end.

The parallel between the war and revolutionary events was pretty obvious and common in the revolutionary press. For example, “The Soldatskaya Zhizn”, the newspaper of social democrats, in its first issue of February 5, 1906 discussed the December events of 1905 in the same geographical coordinates as Balmont, comparing Moscow to Mukden:

Как под Мукденом, бой продолжался 10 дней и, как под Мукденом, в Москве
целые дни гремели пушки. Народ захватил огромные кварталы, укрепил их баррикадами,
разобрал оружейные магазины, вооружился [Soldatskaya Zhizn, p. 1].

The same issue published “Na Rodine” by Tatiana Schepkina-Kupernik in which the same pattern was projected on different cities, Port Arthur (also mentioned in the first line as a point of reference) and Petersburg (implied by the events and topography) [Ostrovskaya, 2013, p. 22-3].

Military boats

Even though the significance of toponyms for the poetry of the Russo-Japanese war can hardly be overestimated, other proper names also play an important part in it. Thus, names of boats are most common signs of the war, present in a whole range of poems, especially those with ‘traditional’ poetics and general ‘domesticating’ approach. The all-knowing up to December 1904 “Otklik” has a section fully devoted to the most famous boats of the war, “Varyag” and “Koreets”. The poetics of outer spaces works here, too, e.g. “Varyag” by V. Zhukov will not repeat the name in the body of the poem, the sunken cruiser being the lyric persona. The idyllic countryside at the beginning of the poem:

Вдали от пахоты и нив,
Вдали от говора людского,
Шумит таинственный залив
И беззаботно и сурово...

is contrasted with the description of the battle, where proper names are included to represent the glorious history rather than present day war, or to inscribe the symbolic glory onto the real space. The sunken cruiser will see the shadows of Kornilov and Nakhimov reminiscing the battles of Sebastopol:

А надо мной сквозь призму вод,
С беспечной легкостью, как птица,
То тень Корнилова мелькнет,
То тень Нахимова промчится...

Они пришли из дальних стран –
От севастопольских форпостов.
И, позабывши тяжесть ран,
Трепещет в радости мой остов!
[Otklik, 1904, p 34].

Personification of the boat (boats) becomes a common device which can be combined with another common approach, i.e. inserting the name into the otherwise heavily archaic stylistics and imagery of a poem:

Ты миру показал величие Руси,
Ты – богатырь, ты – витязь, богом данный.
[...]
Ты сына своего, дитя свое родное,
Не дав его врагам, рукой своей убил.
И сын твой, твой «Варяг», со славой опочил.

Vassiliy Zeveke. Posvyashaetsya Kapitanu

1-go ranga V.F. Rudnevy [Otklik, 1904, p. 32].

To achieve personification an author might play with punctuation, i.e. quotation marks. Thus even if the title of a poem by L. Kologrivova uses punctuation in the traditional way and reads “‘Varyag’ i ‘Koreets’”, in the body of the poem quotation marks are forgotten and the boats become heroes praised by the lyric subject in first person plural:

Мы в порте стояли в тот день роковой,
Как жертвы коварной засады,
Варяг и Кореец в неравный шли бой,
Одни против грозной громады.
[Otklik, 1904, p. 36].

The same distinction is relevant in an anonymous poem “Podvig ‘Retvizana”” [Otklik, 1904, p. 36].

N. Nikiforov in “Geroyam ‘Varyaga’ i ‘Koreitsa”” uses both methods: he mainly employs the quotation marks but for one line, again reminiscent of the Russian *vityazi*:

И, русской доблестью горя,
Варяг, красавец величавый,
Навстречу смерти в бой кровавый
Пошел с молитвой за Царя.

[Otklik, 1904, p. 36].

and so does K. Karelin in “V Chest Russkogo Flota” [Otklik, 1904, p. 39]. The boats are associated with the battle of Chemulpo, which is a rare name for the poems, but still can be found in some of them, in the title only (Anonymous. Geroyam Chemulpo [Otklik, 1904, p. 38]; F. Shkulev. Na Vstrechu Geroev Chemulpo [Otklik, 1904, p. 44-5]), or in the body of the poem (N. Nikiforov in “Geroyam ‘Varyaga’ i ‘Koreitsa”” [Otklik, 1904, p. 36]; K. Karelin in “V Chest Russkogo Flota” [Otklik, 1904, p. 39]:

И что же? в первом же сраженьи
Наш флот собрал дань удивленья:
Под Чемульпо, Варяг – герой
Эскадры целой вынес бой!

[Otklik, 1904, p. 39].

The same section of “Otklik” contains two poems commemorating the arrival of the boat crews in Moscow. The story rhymes with the war projections of Port Arthur or Tsushima, and represents the traditional narrative of homecoming from the front, which in the case of the Russo-Japanese war was not so common in the verse. The picture of the historic capital welcoming the war heroes is again mainly dependent on the traditional images of the Moscow famous bread and salt and the glorious skies with the addition of Koreets’s and Varyag’s crews (no quotation marks) (D. Pavlov. Na Vstrechu Geroyev Moryakov [Otklik, 1904, p. 39]). Chemulpo is not mentioned at all, with the central toponym, Moscow appearing twice in the body of the poem, as a noun and an adjective. F. Shkulev in his “Na Vstrechu Geroev Chemulpo” [Otklik, 1904, p. 44-5], on the contrary, chooses to mention the name of the battle in

the title and not to include any names in the poem per se at all but for the paraphrase ‘zlatoglavaya’.

The most exotic and most traditional way of addressing boats is the new bylina by Vladimir Korotky “O Slavnom Vityaze Vsevolode i o Ego Struge Brannom ‘Varyage’, na Guslyarsky Lad Nalozhennaya” [Otklik, 1904, p. 46-51], the quintessential combination of the new wine with the old bags. The poem is an imitation of the classical bylina, imitating its accentual dimeter by regular catalectic trochaic trimeter with mainly pyrrhic first feet, using a six-line stanza and unrhymed:

Разскажу про бой
Страшный на море,
Как он бился там
На струге резном
Со врагом лихим
Вором-недругом!

[Otklik, 1904, p. 46].

In the traditions of bylina the lack of rhyme is compensated by alliteration and assonance with the name of the boat being the center of such play: [Varyag] – vragom – vorom-nedrugom. The vocabulary is deliberately archaic with the markedly Slavic obsolete poetic “strug” and its diminutive “struzhok” used for the boat. The two words, sharing the main consonants with “Varyag”, also become the basis for alliteration:

- «Ты зачем стружок,
Струг «Варяг» лихой,
Ты зачем идешь
Во неравный бой?!

[Otklik, 1904, p. 46].

Paradoxical as it may seem, even though the names of boats are associated with the real objects and events of the war theatre, in terms of poetics, projected into the poetry, they become a literary device with a high domesticating potential, a device used to animate inanimate machines of destruction and bring them home to the reader as war heroes.

Military terms and technologies

However, apart from the proper names, the most obvious lexical markers of war are military terms. They have never been totally alien to the Russian war poetry, e.g. the best known

Russian war poem, Lermontov's "Borodino", has stanzas parading the army both in description and terminology:

Ну ж был денек! Сквозь дым летучий
Французы двинулись как тучи,
И всё на наш редут.
Уланы с пестрыми значками,
Драгуны с конскими хвостами,
Все промелькнули перед нами,
Все побывали тут.

The warfare of the early 20th century is quite different from that of the Napoleon war of the early 19th and the press of the period is full of names for the war technologies: 'branders' (fire ships), mines, explosions, shell bursters, shrapnel, etc. Apparently, poetry is less revealing in this respect. However, even abstract, heavily metaphoric texts, mainly consisting of patriotic clichés will often include military terms referring to the present war with different degrees of specificity and often an apparent focus on the navy:

Пусть туча двинулась с востока.
По ветру к берегу спешит.
Туда – на рейд, где на далеком
Родной наш флот давно стоит.

N. Murzich. Orel i Tucha. [Otklik, 1904, p. 12].

Poetic first-person narrations (another traditional genre in poetic representation of war), with a soldier for the lyric persona, will be quite similar in terms of lexis: mainly general lexis, typical of the verse of the time, with a few inclusions of the military terms:

Ловко! Ведь это *снаряд*
С нашей, кажись, *батареи!* –
[...]
Дрогнула желтая рать,
Сбита атака *шрапнелью!*
Ну, я могу умирать!
Братцы, накройте *шинелью!*

N.B. Khvostov. Na Rodnoy Bataree [Russkij Vestnik 1905, № 1,
p. 71].

The style of the poem is multi-layered: it is based on the metaphoric clichés, vaguely or directly associated with the patriotic diction (желтая рать), interspersed with colloquialisms, or, to be more exact, the cliché bookish projection of colloquial speech (кажись, братцы), and the military terms (снаряд, батарея, шрапнель, шинель). The interplay of the levels poses the overarching ‘generally poetic’, universalizing discourse over the other two that add a touch of specificity to it. However, the colloquial domesticating style joins forces with the previous one to overcome the alienation of the military, making it part of the universal war narrative of giving one’s life for the native land.

Military Terms and Poetics of Fragmentation

The symbolist depiction of war plays the same elements in a more complicated way. Thus, Balmont’s “Voina” accentuates the atrocities of the war theatre by the quintessential modernist literary device, i.e. fragmenting, and then expands the picture to explode the whole of the universe. In the first part of his triptych, the poet also takes a universal approach, addressing the war in global perspective rather than appropriating it as part of traditional culture as was the case in “Na Rodnoj Bataree”:

История людей -
История войны,
Разнузданность страстей
В театре Сатаны,

In the last quatrain, the narration shifts from the objective 3rd-person description to the collective inclusive ‘we’, uniting all people to present them as the Satan’s actors:

И снова льется кровь
Из темной глубины.
И вот мы вновь, мы вновь -
Актеры Сатаны.

[Balmont, 1911]

The second poem marks a complete change in the focus of the lyric narrative to ‘I’ of the lyric persona. It is the same lyric persona of Balmont’s “Goryaschie zdania”, capricious and full of himself, his desires and volition, with his famous want to be daring (Хочу быть дерзким, хочу быть смелым). His relations with the world around are still the same, as he is still full of himself, his own tenderness and meekness (Нежен я, и кроток я, а страшный мир жесток), but

the focus of his conflict with the world is now the atrocity of the war, illustrated by the pictures of mutilated bodies (Тысяч рук оторванных, разбитых рук и ног), grenades and bullets and their harvest – the blood, once again depicted metaphorically (И готовят Дьяволу не желтый, красный мед). The main technique of part 2 is juxtaposition, bringing together the complete opposites, such as the ‘meek’ lyric persona and the atrocities of war as represented by the war technologies and their effect on people (“Бывший человеческим и ставший зверским взгляд” and mutilated bodyparts), or war and life at home, the capital’s newspapers and theatres,

The stylistic elements are not so different from the previously discussed poems: the general (this time highly metaphoric) and the military, but in the place of domesticating colloquialisms Balmont in part 2 uses alienating urban imagery and vocabulary (see the part I quoted elsewhere):

А далеко, в городе, где вор готовит сметы,
Люди крепковейные смеются, пьют, едят.
Слышится: "Что нового?" Слегка шуршат газеты.
"Вы сегодня в Опере?" - "В партере, пятый ряд".

Part 3, however, introduces colloquialisms (Баба, — прочь её) and brings the matter back ‘to the high level of abstraction’, making war a plaything of the Providence rather than the senseless means of destruction as in Part 2. The triptych embraces the universe, presenting it at different levels: the metaphoric one (part 1), the ‘real’, presented both realistically and ironically (part 2) and then the symbolic, providential order, growing from plain realism (part 3). The three parts employ different approaches, both domesticating (this time, universalizing, part 1 and partly part 3) and alienating (part 2 and partly part 3). The military terms depicting contemporary arms are mainly used in part 2 to combine with other means of alienation (fragmentation, irony) in order to create the atrocious picture of war.

Conclusion

The main poetic trends in depiction of the Russo-Japanese war in poetry can be presented as counteraction of the two opposing forces, ‘domestication’ and ‘alienation’, used as both different poetical systems and ideologies. The mass approach, characteristic of mass poetry, would try to appropriate the war by making it as much of a home truth as possible, modeling it after the fashion of the previous wars and presenting it as the pastoral paradise lost and then

regained. The constant appeal to tradition involved all levels of poetics, the worldview based on the pastoral, ‘countryside’ thinking, the elevated tone with the stylistic divisions of themes and lexis, creating the opportunities for the parallel between war and poetry-writing itself, and the clichéd language of the poems. This approach unites poetics and ideology, presenting the generally conservative patriotic front that seeks to preserve the ‘traditional’, ‘legitimate’ poetics of war. War as transgression comes from two different sides, either from poetics, or ideology. Ideologically, it is represented by the poetry of revolution, undermining the traditional poetics to finally explode the political regime. Poetically, it is used by the modernists, such as Balmont, who fragment to the current reality in order to achieve the final universe beyond the horizon.

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