

RHYTHM AS A CONDITION OF RESEARCH IN INTERLITERARY RELATIONS

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The studies of the author of this contribution, focused on the issue of the rhythmical conditioning of the translation of poetry, emphasize the necessity to go beyond the formalist-structuralist description in perceiving the verse structure, which, in the past, both in our country (M. Bakoš) and abroad (J. Cohen) was restricted to the reality of one language and literature within a wider theoretical and developmental scheme. With regard to the author's own research (*Štýl prekladu*, The Style of Translation) and the latest achievements, for example in Spanish metrics (J. Domínguez Caparrós), the author highlights the rightful participation of the subject in the perception of poetic translation, where its connection with the uniqueness of the literary and cultural life of a particular country can be mirrored. Such a necessity is a precondition for a more sensitive account of the rhythmical side of the poetic text which the author considers to be of primary importance. He also claims a rather high standard of both theoretical and practical contemplations on artistic translation thanks to the sense of the responsive discrimination between the structure of different languages as well as spiritually symbolic essence of the cultural tradition of Slovak nation.

Any person, engaged in the practice or theory of verse, can see that it is precisely the area of translational creation that gives a researcher with similar interests the tools which could hardly be used in the isolated research of verse within one language. The possibility of the comparison of different verse structures appears today to be so productive and many-sided that it brings many an innovative achievement not only in the interests of a clearer definition of the rules and the functioning of Slovak verse but also on a wider platform of interliterary and intercultural relations, which actually are the aims of similar research. Its ambitions consist in both the deepening of knowledge with respect to the description and classification of the particular norms of versification and the opening of the possibilities to use the knowledge directly in translation, where some significant facts associated with a more refined and more integral understanding or perception of the structure of the verse have been absent so far.

One of the basic consequences derived from such a definition of the issues of verse is the need to go beyond the frontiers of pure description, recording or factual research; this continues to be of prime importance in the initial phases of research, being, however, insufficient, even too partial in comparative procedures based on the wide perspective of prosodic similarities and differences between Slovak and non-Slovak verse. Interestingly, – as it actually follows from the specific aims of the given research – greater difference appearing particularly in studying the non-Slavic forms of versifying is a welcome opportunity for a more sensitive disclosure how the original structure of statement varies during translation, how the regrouping of elements takes place and how it is influenced by the factors of general character associated with the prosodic peculiarities of the languages being compared.

In my opinion, it is the ability to take the basic distinctive properties of the analysed verse systems into account that is decisive. It is no chance that already a longer time ago the longitudinal researches into the developmental questions of Slovak verse (M. Bakoš) and partially also the practical and theoretical researches on translational creation (A. Popovič, V. Turčány, V. Kochol) have seen the main problem in the accentuation of the role of the versed rhythm as an organizing agent of the verse. It was given by a natural necessity to objectify the view of the verse, deprive it of excessive subjectivity or arbitrariness in determining its typology, which is the result of the cooperation of various elements in the verse structure. The aim of the shift of Bakoš's attention towards the nature of the metric norm is to eliminate a high measure of randomness from the research following from the fact that, by studying the means of poetry on another, unrhythmical basis, it was not possible to grasp their dynamic, variable character. Although metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy or other figures are the real essence of every work of poetry, their primary position loses its justification in terms of theoretical and developmental postulates built on the harmony of several agents occurring in the verse. Until then such a unilaterality had been reflected in the exclusive understanding of the rhythm from the point of view of the arrangement of "strong" and "weak" beats. Partial outlooks on the verse rhythm have been re-appraised thanks to Bakoš: "There is a metre, an ideal metric scheme, which is the basis of the verse rhythm, in the scheme of the verse itself. But the rhythm, although sometimes realizing this metric form almost absolutely, is not completely determined by it because it is a result of the functioning of a number of different elements (word and sentence phonology organized in verse), which goes beyond the notion of rhythm of the old metrics..."¹

In contrast to the traditional dualism of "content" and "form", Bakoš's aim was to look at the contrast between the linguistic material on the one hand and construction ("form") on the other. Bakoš tried to respect the formalist view as thoroughly as possible, intentionally avoiding the view of the elements of genuine verse organi-

¹ BAKOŠ, M.: *Vývin slovenského verša od školy Štúrovej*. 3rd extended edition. Bratislava, VSAV 1996, p. 77.

zation, which other theorists or poets (T. Milkin, Š. Krčméry) used for explaining the unique nature of Štúr's syllabic versification that is difficult to explain. The reason for my mentioning precisely this aspect of Bakoš's conception is that I see a certain rehabilitation of the subject in verse perception for the needs of a more detailed analysis of the translational creation which is ultimately associated with the character of poetry. In spite of the undeniable respect for Bakoš's immensely valuable knowledge, which has been, in my opinion, undeservedly neglected so far, poetic translation should reckon with the role of subject as a legitimate means of interpretation. Anyway, I think that the concept of the poetic rhythm with its prime position with respect to the verse, as has been proved by Bakoš's research on Slovak verse, should still be understood as fundamental in the particular analysis of the original and the translation. In this sense, the contrastive function of the original, its different prosodic basis, can serve as a corrective to purely or predominantly scientific knowledge of the questions of Slovak verse acquired chiefly thanks to Bakoš. Such a procedure becomes a prerequisite for a reliable interliterary or intercultural overlap since its ambition is not the prosodic or figurative reality of a single language but of two languages emerging in organic conditioning of literary and cultural specificities. No wonder that the application of formalist or structuralist perspectives was, in spite of the great demands to make knowledge scientific and objective, reduced to the reality of one language and literature. This should be considered as a necessary stage of development, which already cannot be worked on with equal consistency. A space has undoubtedly been opened up to the investigation of the interliterary process from the point of view of respect for the cultural and linguistic specificities of particular nations, which, in view of the present integration efforts, is not a negligible fact.

When studying verse, one of the chief goals set by the well-known French theorist of verse Jean Cohen is worth noting. In the introduction to the book *Structure du langage poétique*,² J. Cohen formulated principles which are similar to those of Bakoš's in many aspects. He concentrates there on the concept of 'poetics' scientifically understood in relation to the object of investigation, which is poetry. It presupposes elimination of the "poetic impression", "feeling", even "natural human beings" or "life circumstances" from the exploration of poetry. From the point of view of phenomena, Cohen decided to pay attention to literary facts as they appear in the poetic forms of speech, exclusively speech. With regard to the aesthetic function of literature, the verse is, in his understanding, merely "a conventional, strictly codified form of language"; but simultaneously, it is assigned other, more diverse forms, achieved on the basis of the semantic and sound analysis of the poetic speech. The central point is, as with Russian formalists, the relation of poetry to prose or to other common linguistic expressions. The developmental attitude is at the same time applied to a carefully chosen corpus of the most representative liter-

² COHEN, J.: *Structure du langage poétique*. Paris, Flammarion 1970.

ary phenomena in France, trying to be as considerate towards their homogeneity as possible. Since prose is generally close to ordinary speech, he was primarily interested in the deviation represented by the poetic expression he studied. Emphasis is thereby placed on the aesthetic character of the deviation as it appears in a common norm. His scientific angle requires a search for tighter links between style and statistics. Although he realizes that the actual problem of the style is of a qualitative and not of quantitative character, he wants to avoid the intuitive approach to the material studied as much as possible and to reach the verification of hypotheses by necessary proofs. His most remarkable statement emerges when highlighting the need for conclusions, which would only be valid for French poetry. He preliminarily confines himself to the particular area, although indicating other possible ambitions – to extend the knowledge acquired in the next phase “to poems from other languages or other cultures”.³

However, what does it mean in practice, to extend the knowledge “to poems from other languages”? While making every effort to express, with the help of such a conception, the universal signs of a verse whole or common structure of individual figures, according to which, for example, a metre occurs in connection with a particular use of speech or the use of rhyme is equally given by a certain metric organization, while achieving such an aim, it is necessary, in my view, to examine not only the written, logically provable “form” of the verse, but also its internally diverse features conditioned by a creative subject. These are connected not only with the structure of the particular language but also with its whole literary and cultural background, which leads to a more lucid view of its grammatical, rhythmical-syntactic or semantic peculiarities.⁴ I shall probably not deviate from the heart of the matter, if I say that this is actually the basic function of the poetic translation since its mediation task has to be based on all these givens, escaping from the external structural description and aiming to express not only the “spirit” of poetics of a particular translated subject but also of the developmental status of the particular literature, its specific cultural code, where the poetic translation has its fixed place. This leads to the above mentioned necessity of crossing the frontiers of one language and literature, ability to discriminate between the internal and external determinants of their existence conditioned by the specific cultural life of the nation.

The reliability of such a procedure is actually proved by the work with the original itself, perceiving under any circumstances a transparent tissue of external and internal relations of the literary work. It should be emphasized that the most personal task of the author is a fine decoding of the text of the original, which naturally presupposes – with respect to the special status of artistic literature – the need to penetrate into its hidden, secret or unknown parts which remain beyond the at-

³ COHEN, J.: op. cit., p.12.

⁴ I follow these relations in the research of Slovak translations of Paul Claudel in my work *Štýl prekladu* (The Style of Translation). Bratislava, Veda 1997.

tention of a creator or explorer, while taking exclusive account of the individual elements of the verse structure.

From the point of view of the demands generally made on every artistic translation, the role of rhythm as an essential agent of the specific organization of the artistic text becomes clearer. A perceptive, more sensitive approach to the questions of its interpretation provides a more or less reliably decodable key to a deeper understanding of the translational procedures, also touching, within a wider context, the equally significant problem of semantic or stylistic organization of the translated text. It could be documented by several examples of the leading position of rhythm as an indicator of individual and wider generation code. At the same time, the specific nature of poetry enables more comprehensive expression of its functioning in poetic speech, which is given by certain internal rules of versifying from the point of view of the organic connection of individual elements.

There is a very important factor that should be underscored when speaking about the inalienable role of the subject. There is often a freer or less binding relationship to the metric norm, that is a fact observed by Bakoš's fruitful, stimulating and well supported research, but without sufficient regard for the possibilities of subjective perception of poetic expression. I am of the opinion that for a certain rehabilitation of the subject, particularly when working with the poetic translation, there is an evident legitimate existence of specific metric procedures applied since the older times of Slovak poetry. It is known that Štefan Krčméry, Tichomír Milkin but also other poets and theorists⁵ centred their contemplations on this pressing problem of Slovak poetry. Their intent was to refute the idea of an insufficient metric maturity or the level of education of the Štúr poets, who derived the essence of their versification from a specific rhythmical character of Slovak folk poetry.

My analyses of Slovak translational poetry from the inter-war period proved that their knowledge relates to syllabo-tonic forms of the so-called "higher style" (iambus of Hviezdoslav's generation) but also to the later forms of the symbolist verse, this time in connection with the preservation of a precise metric scheme which could have been uncovered merely thanks to a more subjective approach based in principle on Krčméry's thesis on the possible "shifting of the stress in the flow of poetic speech".⁶

It might be worth mentioning that similar possibilities of the rhythmical research on poetry have already been raised in some works by foreign theorists of poetry. They are assigned an equal status functioning next to other "more norm-forming" or constantly codifiable procedures in revealing various forms of the poetic speech. For instance, in agreement with the demands on intonation, musicality or the unpredictable placing of rhythmic intervals, the Spanish writer J. Domínguez Caparrós

⁵ Cf. *Vývin náhľadov na rytmus štúrovských básnikov* in M. BAKOŠ, op. cit., pp. 31–73.

⁶ See Chapter on *Štruktúrálny rozbor Claudelovej poézie v slovenských prekladoch* in my book *Štyl prekladu*.

identifies out the incidence of the specific metric schemes, without any relation to the conventional principles of the metric norms of poetry in Spanish and Hispanic-American poetry. This leads to the accentuation of the unstressed syllables, double accentuation of polysyllabic words, loss of the accent on tonic syllables which is connected with the shifting of the word stresses.⁷ The interconnection of metric schemes with the folk song tradition is also remarkable in this case, just as in the Slovak poetry of the poets of the Štúr's group. Some researchers engaged exclusively in the rhythmic nature of Spanish poetry go so far in their conclusions that they deny all settled ideas about the norms of verse rhythm in the Castilian language. They mainly look at it from "inside" from the point of view of the specifically emerging cadences not obeying any external norm. This is, for instance, the case with A. Carvajal Milena in his work *On Expressive Metrics in Contrast to Mechanical Metrics*.⁸ Similar views should also be seen in connection with the specific nature of Spanish metrics based on, in contrast to Slovak, looser application of metric norms.⁹

Obviously, the demand for the most thorough knowledge of the metric or – generally – rhythmic peculiarities of languages including the rightful participation of the subject in the analysis and thus also the need for a sort of sympathy with the author and creator of the poetic translation provides the possibility to better perceive other stylistic and semantic elements of the verse in further phases and thanks to this to define the measure of the shift being born in relation to our tradition more reliably.

In conclusion, the rather high standard of Slovak theoretical and practical thinking should be appreciated. It was reflected not only in many valuable analytical works devoted to the problems of artistic translation in Slovakia especially in the sixties and at the beginning of the seventies¹⁰ but directly in the wide activities of Slovak translators. As far as its poetic component is concerned, the ability to perceive the original with regard to all its formal signs (syllabism, strophic arrangement, rhyme structure, etc.) stands out. This rarely finds its particular expression in the translations of Slovak poetry into "great" languages (e.g. into French). This also supports the fact that the concept of interliterary and intercultural relations has had its remarkable place in Slovakia since earlier times, incomparable in a sense with the position of other countries – sovereign and autonomous for a long time.

⁷ DOMÍNGUEZ CAPARRÓS, J.: *Métrica española*. Madrid, Ed Síntesis 1993, p. 97.

⁸ Cf. CARVAJAL MILENA, A.: *De métrica expresiva frente a métrica mecánica (Ensayo de aplicación de las teorías de Miguel Agustín Príncipe)*. Universidad de Granada 1995.

⁹ Cf. FRANEK, L.: *Metrický prízvuk v španielskom verši*. Slovak Review, 6, 1997, pp. 27-35.

¹⁰ In addition to the well known book titles, valuable studies included in volumes *Z historickej poetiky*. Litteraria I., II. Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo SAV 1964, 1965 should also be mentioned.

I think it is also thanks to a precious gift to combine the feeling for the structural differences of languages with the symbolic-spiritual essence of the Slovak national existence, from which a desire for the comprehensive knowledge springs within a wider plan of thought and aesthetics. In my opinion, it is not by coincidence that besides Ďurišin's demand to take a primary account of "the determining role of recipient literature", Slovakia also had and probably still has – Felix's or Turčány's – deep internal commitment to approach the peaks of the European and world cultural heritage. We should only hope that similar aspirations will also remain in the area of poetic translation since, as we see, there is something worth continuing from every point of view.