

Poetics and Phonology : Points of Disharmony *

MIROSLAV CERVENKA

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1. After nearly seven decades, there is no need, I believe, to expound on the revolutionary importance that introduction of the principles of phonology had for poetics and, especially, for theory or verse. While there is no doubt about the scientific nature of several branches of literary study, poetics evolves beyond its pre-scientific stage only when it comes to grips with the existence of a system which furnishes a criterion by which to separate all (and only) relevant components of the sound level of a poetic work. The issue is not merely a matter of methodology; above all, it concerns a deeper understanding of the ontological status of the basic material of poetry. It is of decisive importance for poetics that the continuum of speech is approached by its users with a system of discrete categories— their relationships and internal differentiation— set up in advance. The system not only imparts meaning to the relevant motor acts and acoustic percepts but predetermines what will actually be regarded as articulated and perceived. For the first time, the sound layer of the work appears to be a matter of a comprehensive communicative relationship between speaker and perceiver, which creates the precondition for overcoming the elements of one-sidedness in the articulatory and acoustic approaches. "The essential symptoms of speech are only those of its aspects that are present both in pronunciation and perception,"— this is Boris Tomashevsky's formulation put forth as early as 1922, and Roman Jakobson systematically spelled out the same view in a discussion with Saran and Verrier the same year.

Gradually discovered by phonological analysis of particular languages, hierarchical relationships between sound elements of speech— namely, between those capable and incapable of differentiating meaning— are becoming the basis for poetics on which operate the specific principles of poetic organization.

2. Historically, adequate application of all these theoretical stimuli was not, however, an automatic process. In Russian, and subsequently Czech poetics, this development had been protracted until the 1930's . In the meantime, structuralist poetics had to distance itself not only from half-baked solutions, but also from straightforward applications common at a time of the changing scholarly paradigm. The shared feature of such applications was that the relevance of some acoustic element in a verse line appeared to be directly dependent on the relevance of the

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same element in the phonological system. It is also apparent that the different principles of phonology have come to the fore in different areas of poetics and in different scholarly traditions.

In prosody, as far as the carriers of rhythm in particular language are concerned, prominence came to be viewed as the decisive category. In a seminal work on Czech verse (published in Russian in 1923 and in Czech in 1926), Jakobson managed to specify, in an outstanding way, the position of Czech versification among other accentual syllabic metre systems. His point of departure was the difference between the phonological nature of Russian accent and the non-phonological nature of Czech accent. For traditional prosody-- for example, Josef Kral's-- such a distinction was quite inaccessible, as it posited no difference whatever between accents. Jakobson's analysis suggested the closeness of the classical Czech accentual syllabic verse to the syllabic system, which stems from the functional and acoustic weakness of Czech accent. The latest scholar to draw attention, in a convincing manner, to the wealth of original discoveries and stimuli contained in Jakobson's work, is Stephen Rudy. Yet it has not been said clearly enough that Jakobson himself fell short of his main goal. The linguistic foundation of Czech verse, as Jakobson defined it, has never been accepted in its entirety. According to Jakobson, this foundation is provided by word boundary (distributively defined); and although stress as a nonphonological element, mechanically dependant on diaeresis, fits Jakobson's thesis, it does not "stand out" in linguistic consciousness. The trouble is that while stress in Czech is unthinkable without a previous word boundary, there are plenty of word boundaries preceding most, though not all, monosyllabic words which are not followed by any stress. In relation to strong and weak positions within a verse line, these monosyllabic words behave in much the same way as any other syllables which are not preceded by a word boundary. On the other hand, the relation of each accented and unaccented syllables to the weak position of meter (though not to ictuses) is fairly clear-cut, apart from some important exceptions. In any case, Jakobson took this phenomenon into account later on, offering different kinds of justification: it was accents, not word boundaries, that he counted, like all the Czech prosodists in the thirties, when he made the statistical analysis of the incidence of ictus in Erben's and Macha's poetry.

Thus it appeared that the phonological or nonphonological nature of an element has no immediate bearing on its capacity as the carrier of the rhythmic beat. Nonphonological elements, too, can "stand out" in our linguistic consciousness, at least in the way their deformation is clearly felt. The phonological nature of an element does, of course, have a decisive influence on the characteristics of a versification of which it is a part (see the closeness of Czech accentual verse to syllabic meter mentioned earlier).

In a 1926 review of Jakobson's book, Mukarovsky based his arguments against Jakobson's "Fundamentals" on the stability of accent position in Czech linguistic consciousness. Mukarovsky was, at this point, still apart from Jakobson methodologically and he framed his opposition to Jakobson's phonological theory of verse quite sharply. Jakobson, Mukarovsky claimed, "a priori imposed the difference between phonological and extragrammatical elements upon metrics as the basic methodological concept." Five years later, however, in the paper "Phonological and Poetics," Mukarovsky's attitude is altogether different, but his phonological approach is doubtless enriched by the author's former dissent. Experience from the dispute that preceded the turn in Mukarovsky's views in 1927 comes through quite strongly: "It may not be said that the borderline between the acoustic qualities of the work itself and those qualities independent of it could be identified with a line dividing phonological facts from extra-phonological facts." We may assume that Jakobson himself agreed with this somewhat more differentiated approach, for in a slightly modified form the same view is expressed in the collective thesis of the Prague Linguistic Circle produced in 1928.

3. The recurrent thoughts on what is and what is not part of a work are characteristic of a scholarly tradition that Mukarovsky inherited before his encounter with Russian formalism. Although this tradition also played a part in the shaping of modern Russian theory of verse, it held, generally speaking, considerably less urgency for the formalists. A number of Central European scholars, headed by Eduard Sievers, showed the way towards overcoming the schematism of nonformative metrics in the study of the individual acoustic form of verse. Their working hypothesis revolved around those features that are transmitted and obligatorily inscribed into every line of the text under investigation. This meant, of course, that the description of the acoustic perception of the poem now took into account a number of components which had been previously of no interest to metrics. Apart from "melody" (intonation), the Sievers school concerned itself with timbre (the way in which syllables are conjoined), with tempo, and the like, each scholar putting a different element in the foreground. Yet almost no attention was paid to demonstrating the assumed sound configurations by means of the linguistic analysis of the text. Sievers and his school remained contented with highlighting the acoustic impression. Without much difficulty, and quite rightly, its opponents (for instance, Heusler) were able to declare the school's results to be subjective constructs, describing these acoustic elements as recitative qualities, but not necessarily predetermined by the work. Mukarovsky's teacher, Otakar Zich, included even intonation among the components that the work acquires only during the verse reciter's rendition. For Zich, though, a poem was consummated as a work of art only when recited aloud.

As his unpublished series of lectures show, Mukarovsky was perfectly informed about these studies. The question of acoustic shape, uniquely tied up with an inimitable poetic personality, became central to his own scholarly work of the first decade. Aware of the inconclusiveness of Siever's results, Mukarovsky addressed himself to the task of locating, in the text of a poetic work, the basis of those properties of acoustic impression that Sievers merely stated with dogmatic assurance. After his first study, *Prispevek k estetice ceskeho verse* [A contribution to the Aesthetics of Czech Verse, 1923], Mukarovsky's efforts along these lines culminated in the work *O motorickem deni v poezii* (On the Motor Processes in Poetry, 1927). Although flawed when taken as a whole, these efforts are a grand attempt to turn practically all component of a poetic work-- starting from rhythm and euphony, through the semantics of words and tropes, all the way to the theme and the poet's overall approach to reality-- into carriers of individual acoustic shape. (And as Milan Jankovic has shown, precisely this integrative approach to a problem made possible, ten years later, one of Mukarovsky's great theoretical contributions, deriving as it did from such well-prepared foundations: when the summary intention of an acoustic configuration was replaced by the semantic summary intention, motor gesture became semantic gesture, one of the most stimulating and discussed categories to date of the aesthetics of Prague structuralism) As far as the verse theory is concerned, Mukarovsky switched from Siever's acoustic approach to an articulatory- motor analysis, but even this development turned out to be lagging behind, and hence was incompatible with, the principles of modern linguistics. Mukarovsky motivated the relationships between the resultant acoustic configuration and the other components of work by methods borrowed mainly from contemporary psychology. It is easy to imagine the critique that his method must have come under at the meeting of the Prague Linguistic Circle when the author presented his work in 1927. Apparently, this occasion meant a dramatic turning-point in Mukarovsky's development. The study, whose publication had already been announced, never appeared; instead two years later, the first volume of the *Travaux* featured another paper, "Souvislost fonicke linie se slovosledem v ceskych versich" [The Connection between the Phonic Contour and Word Order in Czech Verse], which addressed the same problem from the structuralist position. I have dealt with this paper elsewhere in great detail and have voiced many reservations about its claims; suffice it to say here that Mukarovsky defines the phonic line on the basis of structural relationships between linguistic components of the work: easily demonstrable components, such as word order, make the intonation contour of a verse visible insofar as it is predetermined by these components. Consequently, Mukarovsky's hypothesis about the poet's psychology and motor behavior can be entirely eliminated. (It is interesting to note that the germ of these analyses can be found in Jakobson's *Fundamentals of Czech Verse*: here

the passage on Mayakovsky implies the dependence of accent intensity on the semantic relations between words within a syntagma.

Apparently, Mukarovsky did not give up on his pre-structuralist inquiry but attempted to reach its object by different avenues. He was helped in his pursuit by the emerging phonology of the sentence. Once again, phonology was seen as an instrument for dealing with those acoustic components of the work which are not of phonological nature by themselves.

Here, too, we are at the opposite pole from the applications of phonology which, using the contrast of phonological versus non-phonological acoustic elements, made a clear-cut distinction between those features which as phonological may function as a part of the work and those which represent mere recitative qualities. Such applications leave no scope for the question of the individual acoustic form of the work. This attitude was exemplified in the studies by Sergey Bernstein, whose unjustified radicalism manifested itself in the following three directions: first, Bernstein excluded all nonphonological acoustic element from the work, although one cannot deny their intersubjectivity and, consequently, communicativeness. Secondly, he conceived phonological elements as mere sets of abstract oppositions, independent of the substance in which they are realized: for Bernstein, a poetic work thus became a purely "extramaterial" phenomenon which can be enriched by sensory qualities (as components of aesthetic impression) only and exclusively by recitation. Finally, hampered by the still inchoate stage of the discipline he drew upon, Bernstein excluded some phenomena-- intonation, in particular-- from phonology and the language system, which, however, belong there, whether partially or completely.

If phonology embarked on a new stage of prosodic study by applying the aspect of prominence, the issue of individual acoustic form, as we have seen, centred on the aspect of *intersubjectivity*. Among the Russian formalists, it was Tomashevsky who understood this aspect best (along with Boris Eichenbaum, who based his research on verse melody exclusively on the demonstrable connection between intonation and syntax). Tomashevsky rejected Bernstein's skepticism concerning the analysis of the work's acoustic layer, both in its individuality and as an intersubjective function. In one of his formulations of theory of rhythmic impulse, Tomashevsky placed intonation among the components of the rhythmic impulse. He went so far as to outline a bold project of research on verse intonation as part of rhythm. Unfortunately, Tomashevsky's project, like Mukarovsky's proposals presented in his controversial study on the interconnections of the phonic lines, has not been put into effect to this date.