

Donum auctoris

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POETRY OF GRAMMAR AND GRAMMAR OF POETRY¹⁾

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According to Edward Sapir (1921), the juxtaposition of such sequences as *the farmer kills the duckling* and *the man takes the chick* makes us 'feel instinctively, without the slightest attempt at conscious analysis that the two sentences fit precisely the same pattern, that they are really the same fundamental sentence, differing only in their material trappings. In other words, they express identical relational concepts in an identical manner.' Conversely, we may modify the sentence or its single words 'in some purely relational, non-material regard' without altering any of the material concepts expressed. When assigning to certain terms of the sentence a different position in its syntactic pattern and replacing, for instance, the word order '*A kills B*' by the inverse sequence '*B kills A*', we do not vary the material concepts involved but uniquely their mutual relationship. Likewise a substitution of *farmers* for *farmer* or *killed* for *kills* alters only the relational concepts of the sentence, while there are no changes in the 'concrete wherewithal of speech'; its 'material trappings' remain invariable.

Despite some borderline, transitional formations, there is in language a definite, clear-cut discrimination between these two classes of expressed concepts – material and relational – or, in more technical terms, between the lexical and grammatical aspects of language. The linguist must faithfully follow this objective structural dichotomy and thoroughly translate the grammatical concepts,

¹⁾ The English recension of my paper presented at the International Conference for Poetics in Warsaw, 1960, appears for the first time, while its two other versions have been published, the Russian variant in the volume of the Polish Academy of Sciences, *Poetics Poetyka Poëtika* (Warsaw 1961), and the German in *Mathematik und Dichtung*, ed. by H. Kreuzer (Munich 1965).

actually present in a given language, into his technical metalanguage, without any imposition of arbitrary or outlandish categories upon the language observed. The categories described are intrinsic constituents of the verbal code, maneuvered by the language users, and not at all 'grammarian's conveniences', as even such attentive inquirers into poets' grammar as, e.g., Donald Davie were inclined to believe.

A difference in grammatical concepts does not necessarily represent a difference in the state of affairs referred to. If one witness asserts that 'the farmer killed the duckling', while the other affirms that 'the duckling was killed by the farmer', the two men cannot be accused of presenting discrepant testimonies, in spite of the polar difference between the grammatical concepts expressed by active and passive constructions. One and the same state of affairs is presented by the sentences: *Lie* (or *lying* or *to lie*) *is a sin* (or *is sinful*), *To lie is to sin*, *Liars sin* (or *are sinful* or *are sinners*), or with a generalizing singular *The liar sins* (or *is sinful*, *is a sinner*). Only the way of presentation differs. Fundamentally the same equational proposition may be expressed in terms of actors (*liars*, *sinners*) or actions (*to lie*, *to sin*) and we may present these actions 'as if' abstracted (*lying*) and reified (*lie*, *sin*) or ascribe them to the subject as its properties (*sinful*). The part of speech is one of the grammatical categories which reflect, according to Sapir's manual, 'not so much our intuitive analysis of reality as our ability to compose that reality into a variety of formal patterns'. Later, in his preliminary notes to the planned *Foundations of Language*, Sapir (1930) outlined the fundamental types of referents which serve as 'a natural basis for parts of speech', namely *existents* and their linguistic expression: the *noun*; *occurrences* expressed by the *verb*; and finally *modes of existence and occurrence* represented in language by the *adjective* and the *adverb* respectively.

Jeremy Bentham, who was perhaps the first to disclose the manifold 'linguistic fictions' which underlie the grammatical structure and which are used throughout the whole field of language as a 'necessary resource', arrived in his *Theory of fictions* at a challenging conclusion: 'To language, then – to language alone – it is that fictitious entities owe their existence; their impossible, yet indispensable existence.' Linguistic fictions should neither be 'mistaken for realities' nor be ascribed to the creative fancy of linguists: they 'owe

their existence' actually 'to language alone' and particularly to the 'grammatical form of the discourse', in Bentham's terms.

The indispensable, mandatory role played by the grammatical concepts confronts us with the intricate problem of the relationship between referential, cognitive value and linguistic fiction. Is the significance of grammatical concepts really questionable or are perhaps some subliminal verisimilar assumptions attached to them? How far can scientific thought overcome the pressure of grammatical patterns? Whatever the solution of these still controversial questions is, certainly there is one domain of verbal activities, where 'the classificatory rules of the game' (Sapir 1921) acquire their highest significance; IN FICTION, in verbal art, LINGUISTIC FICTIONS are fully realized. It is quite evident that grammatical concepts – or in Fortunatov's pointed nomenclature, 'formal meanings' – find their widest applications in poetry as the most formalized manifestation of language. There, where the poetic function dominates over the strictly cognitive function, the latter is more or less dimmed, or as Sir Philip Sidney declared in his *Defence of Poesie*, 'Now for the Poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth'. Consequently, in Bentham's succinct formulation, 'the Fictions of the poet are pure of unsincerity'.

When in the finale of Majakovskij's poem *Xorošo* we read – '*i žizn' / xoroša, / i žit' / xorošo*' (literally 'both life is good, and it is good to live') – one will hardly look for a cognitive difference between these two coordinate clauses, but in poetic mythology the linguistic fiction of the substantivized and hence hypostatized process grows into a metonymic image of life as such, taken by itself and substituted for the living people, *abstractum pro concreto*, as Galfredus de Vino Salvo, the cunning English scholar of the early thirteenth century, says in his *Poetria nova* (see Faral). In contradistinction to the first clause with its predicative adjective of the same personifiable, feminine gender as the subject, the second clause with its imperfective infinitive and with a neuter, subjectless form of the predicate, represents a pure process without any limitation or transposition and with an open place for the dative of agent.

The recurrent 'figure of grammar' which along with the 'figure of sound' Gerard Manley Hopkins saw to be the constitutive principle of verse, is particularly palpable in those poetic forms, where contiguous metrical units are more or less consistently combined through

a grammatical parallelism into pairs or, optionally, triplets. Sapir's definition quoted above is perfectly applicable to such neighbor sequences: 'they are really the same fundamental sentence, differing only in their material trappings'.

There are several tentative outlines devoted to different specimens of such canonical or nearly canonical parallelism, labeled *carmen* style by J. Gonda in his monograph, full of interesting remarks about 'balanced binary word groups' in the Veda and also in the Nias ballads and priestly litanies. Particular attention has been paid by scholars to the biblical *parallelismus membrorum* rooted in an archaic Canaanite tradition and to the pervasive, continuous role of parallelism in Chinese verses and poetic prose. A similar pattern proves to underlie the oral poetry of Finno-Ugric, Turkic, and Mongolian peoples. The same devices play a cardinal role in Russian folk songs and recitatives.² cf., e.g., this typical preamble of Russian heroic epics (*byliny*):

Kak vo stól'nom górode vo Kíeve,
A u láskova knjázza u Vladímira,
A i býlo stolován'e počótnyj stól,
A i býlo pirován'e počéstnyj pír,
A i vsé na píru da napiválišja,
A i vsé na píru da porasxvástalis',
Úmnyj xvástaet zolotój kaznój,
Glúpyj xvástaet molodój ženój.

How in the capital city, in Kiev,
Under the gracious prince, under Vladimir,
There was banqueting, an honorable banquet,
There was feasting, an honorary feast,
Everyone in the feast was drunk,
Everyone in the feast was boasting,
The clever one boasts of his golden stock,
The stupid one boasts of his young wife.

Parallelistic systems of verbal art give us a direct insight into the speakers' own conception of the grammatical equivalences. The analysis of various kinds of poetic license in the domain of parallelism, like the examination of riming conventions, may provide us with important clues for interpreting the make-up of a given language and the rank order of its constituents (e.g. the current equation between the Finnish allative and illative or between the preterit and present against the background of unpairable cases or verbal categories, according to Steinitz's observations in his path-breaking inquiry into parallelism in Karelian folklore). The interaction between syntactic, morphologic and lexical equivalences and

² On the present state of international research in parallelistic foundations of written and oral poetry see: 'Grammatical parallelism and its Russian facet,' *Language*, 42, 1966.

discrepancies, the diverse kinds of semantic contiguities, similarities, synonymies and antonymies, finally the different types and functions of the allegedly 'isolated lines', all such phenomena call for a systematic analysis indispensable to the comprehension and interpretation of the various grammatical contrivances in poetry. Such a crucial linguistic and poetic problem as parallelism can hardly be mastered by a scrutiny automatically restricted to the external form and excluding any discussion of grammatical and lexical meanings.

In the endless travel songs of the Kola Lapps (see Xaruzin) two juxtaposed persons, performing identical actions, are the uniform topic, impelling an automatic concatenation of verses of such a pattern: 'A is sitting on the right side of the boat; B is sitting on the left side. A has a paddle in the right hand; B has a paddle in the left hand', etc.

In the Russian sung or narrated folk stories of Foma and Erema (Thomas and Jeremy), both unlucky brothers are used as a comic motivation for a chain of parallel clauses, parodying the *carmen* style, typical of Russian folk poetry and presenting quasi-differential characteristics of the two brothers by a juxtaposition of synonymous expressions or closely coincident images: 'They uncovered Erema and they found Foma; They beat Erema and they did not pardon Foma; Erema ran away into a birch wood, and Foma into an oak wood;' etc. (see the instructive surveys of these stories by Aristov and Adrianova-Peretc as well as their careful examination by Bogatyrev).

In the North-Russian ballad 'Vasilij and Sofija' (see particularly its variants published by Sobolevskij and Astaxova and her summarizing notes) the binary grammatical parallelism becomes the pivot of the plot and carries the whole dramatic development of this beautiful and concise *bylina*. In terms of antithetical parallelism the initial church scene contrasts the pious invocation 'Father God!' of the parishioners and Sofija's incestuous call 'My brother Vasilij!'. The subsequent malicious intervention of the mother introduces a chain of distichs tying together both heroes through a strict correspondence between any line devoted to the brother and its counterpart speaking of his sister. Some of these pairs of parallel members in their stereotyped construction resemble the mentioned clichés of the Lappic songs: 'Vasilij was buried on the right hand, And Sofija was buried on the left hand.' The interlacement of both lovers'

fates is reinforced by chiasmic constructions: 'Vasilij, drink but don't give to Sofija, And Sofija, drink, don't give to Vasilij! Yet Vasilij drank and feasted Sofija, yet Sofija drank and feasted Vasilij'. The same function is performed by the images of a *kiparis* (cypress), tree with masculine name, on Sofija's grave, and of a *verba* (willow), with feminine name, on the adjacent grave of Vasilij: 'They wove together with their heads, and they stuck together with their leaves.// The parallel destruction of both trees by the mother echoes the violent death of both siblings. I doubt that efforts of such scholars as Christine Brooke-Rose to draw a rigorous line of demarcation between tropes and poetic scenery are applicable to this ballad, and in general, the range of poems and poetic trends for which such a boundary actually exists is very limited.

According to one of Hopkins' brightest contributions to poetics, his paper of 1865 *On the Origin of Beauty*, such canonical structures as Hebrew poetry 'paired off in parallelisms' are well-known, 'but the important part played by parallelism of expression in our poetry is not so well-known: I think it will surprise anyone when first pointed out'. Notwithstanding some isolated exceptions such as Berry's recent reconnaissance, the role performed by the 'figure of grammar' in world poetry from antiquity up to the present time is still surprising for students of literature a whole century after it had been first pointed out by Hopkins. The ancient and medieval theory of poetry had an inkling of poetic grammar and was prone to discriminate between lexical tropes and grammatical figures — (*figurae verborum*), but these sound rudiments were later lost.

One may state that in poetry similarity is superimposed on contiguity, and hence 'equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence'. Here any noticeable reiteration of the same grammatical concept becomes an effective poetic device.³) Any un-

³) See 'Linguistics and poetics', *Style in Language*, ed. by T. Sebeok (New York 1960). The grammatical structure of diverse poems from the ninth to the twentieth century has been analyzed by the present author in the following studies: 'Poxvala Konstantina Filosafo Grigoriju Bogoslovu', *George Florovsky Festschrift* (New York, in press); [with P. Valesio] 'Vocabulorum constructio in Dante's sonnet "se Vedi li occhi miei"', *Studi Danteschi*, 43 (Florence 1966); 'Struktura dveju srbohrvatskih pesama', *Zbornik za filologiju i lingvistiku*, 4-5 (Novi Sad 1961-62); 'The grammatical texture of a sonnet from Sir Philip Sidney's "Arcadia"', *Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of*

biased, attentive, exhaustive, total description of the selection, distribution and interrelation of diverse morphological classes and syntactic constructions in a given poem surprises the examiner himself by unexpected, striking symmetries and antisymmetries, balanced structures, efficient accumulation of equivalent forms and salient contrasts, finally by rigid restrictions in the repertory of morphological and syntactic constituents used in the poem, eliminations which on the other hand, permit us to follow the masterly interplay of the actualized constituents. Let us insist on the strikingness of these devices; any sensitive reader, as Sapir would say, feels instinctively the poetic effect and the semantic load of these grammatical appliances, 'without the slightest attempt at conscious analysis,' and in many cases the poet himself in this respect is similar to such a reader. In the same way both the traditional listener and the performer of folk poetry based on a nearly constant parallelism, catches the deviations without, however, being capable of analyzing them, as the Serbian guslars and their audience notice and often condemn any deviation from the syllabic pattern of the epic songs and from the regular location of the break but do not know how to define such a slip.

Often contrasts in the grammatical make-up support the metrical division of a poem into strophes and smaller sections, as for instance, in the double trichotomy of the Hussite battle song of the early

M. Schlauch (Warsaw 1966); 'Razbor tobol'skix stixov Radiščeva', 18 vek, 7 (Leningrad 1966); 'The Grammatical Structure of Janko Král's Verses', *Sbornik filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského*, 16 (Bratislava 1964); [with C. Lévi-Strauss] 'Les Chats de Charles Baudelaire', *L'Homme*, 2 (1962); 'Une microscopie du dernier Spleen dans les Fleurs du Mal', *Tel Quel*, 29 (Paris 1967); 'Struktura na poslednoto Botevo stihotvorenje', *Ezik i literatura*, 16 (Sofia 1961); [with B. Casacu] 'Analyse du poème *Revedere* de Mihai Eminescu', *Cahiers de linguistique théorique et appliquée*, I (Bucharest 1962); 'Devuška pela' [A. Blok's poem], *Orbis scriptus D. Tschizewskij zum 70. Geburtstag* (Munich 1966); [with P. Colaclides] 'Grammatical imagery in Cavafy's poem "Remember, Body"', *Linguistics*, 20 (The Hague 1966); 'Der grammatische Bau des Gedichts von B. Brecht "Wir sind sie"', *Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Volkskunde und Literaturforschung*, W. Steinitz dargebracht (Berlin 1965); and the papers referred to in the footnotes 4 and 6. The entire third volume of R. Jakobson's *Selected Writings*, now in preparation, is devoted to 'Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry.'

fifteenth century,⁴⁾ or, even, they underlie and build such a stratified composition, as we observe it in Marvell's poem *To his Coy Mistress* with its three tripartite paragraphs, grammatically delimited and subdivided.

The juxtaposition of contrasting grammatical concepts may be compared with the so-called 'dynamic cutting' in film montage, a type of cutting, which, e.g., in Spottiswoode's definition, uses the juxtaposition of contrasting shots or sequences to generate ideas in the mind of the spectator, which these constituent shots or sequences by themselves do not carry.

Among grammatical categories utilized for parallelisms and contrasts we actually find all the parts of speech both mutable and immutable, numbers, genders, cases, grades, tenses, aspects, moods, voices, classes of abstract and concrete words, animates and inanimates, appellatives and proper names, affirmatives and negatives, finite and infinite verbal forms, definite and indefinite pronouns or articles, and diverse syntactic elements and constructions.

The Russian writer Veresaev confessed in his intimate notes that sometimes he felt as if imagery were 'a mere counterfeit of genuine poetry'. As a rule, in imageless poems it is the 'figure of grammar' which dominates and which supplants the tropes. Both the Hussite battle song and Puškin's lyrics as '*Ja vas ljubil*' are eloquent examples of such a monopoly of grammatical devices. Much more usual, however, is an intensive interplay of both elements, as for instance, in Puškin's stanzas '*Čto v imeni tebe moem*', manifestly contrasting with his cited composition 'without images,' both being written in the same year and probably dedicated to the same addressee, Karolina Sobańska.⁵⁾ The imaginative, metaphoric vehicles of a poem may be opposed to its matter-of-fact level by a sharp concomitant contrast of their grammatical constituents, as we observe it, for example, in the Polish concise meditations of Cyprian Norwid, one of the greatest world poets of the later nineteenth century.⁶⁾

⁴⁾ See 'Ktoż jsú boží bojovníci,' *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, 7, 1963.

⁵⁾ Cf. the comparative scrutiny of these two Puškin's poems in the Russian paper referred to in the footnote 1.

⁶⁾ See 'Przeszłość' Cypriana Norwida, *Pamiętnik literacki*, 54, (Warsaw 1963).

The obligatory character of the grammatical processes and concepts constrains the poet to reckon with them; either he is striving for symmetry and sticks to these simple, repeatable, diaphanous patterns, based on a binary principle, or he may cope with them, when longing for an 'organic chaos'. I stated repeatedly that the rhyme technique is 'either grammatical or antigrammatical' but never agrammatical, and the same may be applied as well to poets' grammar in general. There is in this respect a remarkable analogy between the role of grammar in poetry and the painter's composition based on a latent or patent geometrical order or on a revulsion against geometrical arrangements. For the figurative arts geometrical principles represent a 'beautiful necessity,' according to the designation taken over by Bragdon from Emerson. It is the same necessity which in language marks out the grammatical meanings.⁷⁾ The correspondence between the two fields which already in the thirteenth century was pointed out by Robert Kilwardby (see Wallerand, p. 46) and which prompted Spinoza to treat grammar *more geometrico*, has emerged in a linguistic study by Benjamin Lee Whorf, 'Language, Mind and Reality' published shortly after his death: Madras, 1942. The author discusses the abstract 'designs of sentence structure' as opposed to 'individual sentences' and to the vocabulary, which is a 'somewhat rudimentary and not self-sufficient part' of the linguistic order, and envisages 'a geometry' of form principles characteristic of each language'. A further comparison between grammar and geometry was outlined in Stalin's polemics of 1950 against Marr's linguistic bias: the distinctive property of grammar lies in its abstractive power; 'abstracting itself from anything that is particular and concrete in words and sentences, grammar treats only the general pattern, underlying the word-changes and the combination of words into sentences, and builds in such a way grammatical rules and laws ... In this respect grammar bears a resemblance to geometry, which, when giving its laws, abstracts itself from concrete objects, treats objects as bodies deprived of concreteness and defines their mutual relations not as concrete relations of certain concrete objects but as relations of bodies in

⁷⁾ Cf. R. Jakobson, 'Boas' view of grammatical meaning, *American Anthropologist*, 61, 5, part 2, *Memoir* 89, 1959.

general, namely, relations deprived of any concreteness.⁸⁾ The abstractive power of human thought, underlying – in the views of the two quoted authors – both geometrical relations and grammar, superimposes simple geometrical and grammatical figures upon the pictorial word of particular objects and upon the concrete lexical 'wherewithal' of the verbal art, as it was shrewdly realized in the thirteenth century by Villard de Honnecourt for graphic arts and by Galfredus for poetry.

The pivotal role, performed in the grammatical texture of poetry by diverse kinds of pronouns, is due to the fact that pronouns, in contradistinction to all other autonomous words, are purely grammatical, relational units, and besides substantival and adjectival pronouns we must include in this class also adverbial pronouns and the so-called substantive (rather pronominal) verbs such as *to be* and *to have*. The relation of pronouns to non-pronominal words has been repeatedly compared with the relation between geometrical and physical bodies (see, e.g., Zareckij).

Beside common or widespread devices the grammatical texture of poetry offers many salient differential features, typical of a given national literature or of a limited period, a specific trend, an individual poet or even one single work. The thirteenth century students of arts whose names we have quoted remind us of the extraordinary compositional sense and skill of the Gothic epoch and help us to interpret the impressive structure of the Hussite battle song 'Ktož jsú boží bojovníci'. We deliberately dwell on this incentive revolutionary poem almost free of tropes, far from decorativeness and mannerism. The grammatical structure of this work reveals a particularly elaborate articulation.

As shown by the analysis of the song (see footnote 4), its three strophes in turn display a trinitarian form: they are divided into three smaller strophic units – *membra*. Each of the three strophes exhibits its specific grammatical features which we labeled 'vertical similarities'. Each of the three *membra* throughout the three strophes

⁸⁾ As V. A. Zvegincev brought to my attention, Stalin's confrontation of grammar with geometry was prompted by the views of V. Bogorodickij, an outstanding disciple of the young Baudouin de Courtenay and M. Kruszewski.

has its particular properties, termed 'horizontal similarities' and distinguishing any given *membrum* in the strophe from its two other *membra*. The initial and the final *membra* of the song are linked together with its central *membrum* (the second *membrum* of the second strophe) and differ from the rest of the *membra* by special features, enabling us to connect these three *membra* through a 'falling diagonal', in contradistinction to the 'rising diagonal' linking the central *membrum* of the song with the final *membrum* of the initial strophe and with the initial *membrum* of the final strophe. Furthermore, noticeable similarities bring together (and separate from the rest of the song) the initial *membra* of the first and third strophes with the second *membrum* of the second strophe, and, on the other hand, the second *membra* of the first and third strophes with the third *membrum* of the second strophe. The former disposition may be labeled 'initial upright arc', because it involves initial *membra*, while the latter, involving a final *membrum*, will be called 'final upright arc'. There appear, moreover, the 'inverted arcs', likewise grammatically delimited, an 'initial' one, uniting the initial *membra* of the first and last strophes with the central *membrum* of the second strophe, and a 'final inverted arc', tying the central *membra* of the first and last strophes with the final *membrum* of the second strophe.

This steadfast 'membrification' and congruous geometricity must be viewed against the background of Gothic art and scholasticism, convincingly compared by Erwin Panofsky. In its shape the Czech song of the early fifteenth century approximates the authoritative precepts of the 'classic *Summa* with its three requirements of (1) totality (sufficient enumeration), (2) arrangement according to a system of homologous parts and parts of parts (sufficient articulation), and (3) distinctness and deductive cogency (sufficient interrelation). However immense the difference is between Thomism and the ideology of the anonymous author of *Ziszkiana cantio*, the shape of this song totally satisfies the artistic request of Thomas Aquinas: 'the senses delight in things duly proportioned as in something akin to them; for, the sense, too, is a kind of reason as is every cognitive power.' The grammatical texture of the Hussite chorale corresponds to the compositional principles of Czech contemporaneous painting. In his monograph about the pictorial art of the Hussite epoch, Kropáček analyzes the style of the early fifteenth century and points out a congruous and systematic articulation of the surface, a strict

subordination of the individual parts to the total compositional tasks and a deliberate use of contrasts.

The Czech example helps us to glance into the intricacy of correspondences between the functions of grammar in poetry and of relational geometry in painting. We are faced with the phenomenological problem of an intrinsic kinship between both factors and with a concrete historical search for convergent development and for interaction between verbal and representational art. Furthermore, in the quest for a delineation of artistic trends and traditions, the analysis of grammatical texture provides us with important clues, and, finally, we approach the vital question, how a poetic work exploits the extant inventory of masterly devices for a new end and re-evaluates them in the light of their novel tasks. Thus, for instance, the masterpiece of Hussite revolutionary poetry has inherited from the opulent Gothic stock both kinds of grammatical parallelism, in Hopkins' parlance 'comparison for likeness' and 'comparison for unlikeness', and we have to investigate how the combination of these two, mainly grammatical ways of proceeding enabled the poet to achieve a coherent, convincing, effective transition from the initial spiritual through the belligerent argumentation of the second strophe to the military orders and battle cries of the finale, or – in other words – how the poetic delight in verbal structures duly proportioned grows into a preceptive power leading to a direct action.

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