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“SOUND AND MEANING”: A BULGARIAN STUDY OF THE PHONIC STRUCTURE IN FICTION

The book by Radosvet Kolarov¹ deals with scientific problem on a large scale: untraditional for literary criticism auxiliary disciplines are used—like statistics and experimental psychology and even computer analysis of texts. That could raise some doubts in readers educated in the spirit of a more humanitarian, antipositivist approach to literature—what the use of all this scientific virtuosity, won't it kill the “living”, human aspect of literature? Kolarov's study turns down such doubts: it approaches the age-old problem of the interrelation between sound and meaning in literature armed with principles excluding the overestimation of the “thing”-aspect of the literary work. The exact (verifiable) determination and study of the sound-structure in a text is not an end in itself, it has to be related to the critical penetrating into the meaning of the work. The guiding principle is: a “stranger” sound outlook of the text does not presuppose its artistic value: every sound structure is subordinated and assimilated by “the factor ‘meaning’ that creates the artistic microcosm”.

The concrete aims, that Kolarov wants to achieve are interesting and ambitious—“to extend the object of poetic phonology, on to the sphere of fiction”. In connection with this Kolarov criticizes the idea of “impenetrability of the dividing line between verse and prose, of their polar opposition and incompatibility as regards language”. According to him there is no absolute difference between the two types of structures; just prose gives the feeling of less language organization. At that main distinctive feature of verse—the verse rhythm—annoys the reader of fiction, being a signal for “verse-quality” of the text; metaphony,² being no signal for “verse-quality” of the text, is possible

¹ Коларов, *Звук и смисъл*, София 1983.

² After considering the already existing terms denoting soundorganization of the literary text, R. Kolarov creates a new term “metaphony”, which is supposed to be free from the imperfections of the existing terminology.

in fiction as well — it can have artistic function in prose works as well.

Kolarov points out that the question of the structure of metaphony belongs to the neuralgic questions of stylistics because the traditional critical refusal to create exact descriptions cannot be accepted especially in the case when the quantitative aspect of the literary phenomena is dealt with. He gives examples of many inadequate and even careless interpretations of the sound aspect of the literary work. His own direction of analysis keeps clear from the impressionistic pseudointerpretations and the arbitrariness, connected with the "measuring-by-eye" on the metaphonic level of the literary text, as well as from the structuralist "concoction of structures". R. Kolarov considers the proof of the real existence of non-casual sound structures in a given text to be a *conditio sine qua non* for this type of studies. To meet these strict demands he elaborates two criteria for verification of the existence of metaphonic structures. The first is a statistical one and refers to the language structure of the text in its relation to the established statistical norm of language. According to this criterion we have to deal with metaphonic structures when a definite sound group reveals remarkable frequentive or distributive deviation from their "normal" appearance in language. One quite original idea assists R. Kolarov in managing the main difficulty—the absence of a stable frequency of phonic facts in the stratification of speech in terms of genres and styles. He substitutes the unclear and indefinite concept "normal frequency" of the sound facts by another unit — their medium, normal frequency for a given text (this is very similar to the contextual criterion for deviation, which M. Riffatezze introduces in to stylistics). It is exactly against the background of this specific frequency pattern that the metaphonic phenomena deviating from concrete text norm come into prominence. R. Kolarov distinguishes between three basic types of metaphonic structures and their variants:

1. Structures of a frequent type, including the frequency deviation of a single phoneme or a phonemic complex.
2. Structures of a combinatorial type including the particular non-casual distribution of phonic elements in definite sections while thus it is their sound configuration and not their repetitiveness that comes to the foreground.
3. Structures of positional type—those are structures by which the phonic elements pertaining to the metaphony are always connected with a unit of another level of language (e.g. "interverbal limit", "interphrasal pause", etc.).

The second criterion for the verification of the real existence of metaphonic structures is described by Kolarov in the last chapter of his book. It is not connected to "reality in general", but to the "perceptive

reality" of metaphonic structures — i.e. to the pragmatic aspect of the fictional text, to the problem of whether and when the actual reader will be able to perceive a given sound complex as meaningful in the given literary text. R. Kolarov considers the critical objections against the unlimited "concoction" of sound patterns in a given text (typical of Jakobson's studies) and specifies in his turn these objections by offering new ideas and experimental data. He arrives at the conclusion that there are several conditions necessary for the appearance of fictional metaphony: apart from the meaningful frequency and distributive deviations already mentioned above he also speaks of genre and style expectations as well as of the necessity of relating the sound-(metaphonic) stratum to meaning and basing of the sound-patterns on all levels of the text (p. 190).

Thus in the last chapter of his book R. Kolarov associates himself with a common tendency of today's science of literature — the criticism of the structuralist "ideal" reader; he supports the idea for introducing of the real reader in literary interpretation. It must be noted though, that unlike the "Rezeptionsaesthetik" Kolarov sees the real reader more as a psychological, than a cultural and historical phenomenon.

The central — most important and interesting part of *Sound and Meaning* deals with the basic question of the artistic function of metaphony. Once again the author examines different approaches to the question with respectful skill and erudition: the theory of the "introvertive" semiosis dealing with the sounds as units which bear the aesthetic value by themselves, with no connection to other levels of the text; ancient and new variants of this theory — the view of euphony, the *a priori* ascribing of meaningful and emotional value to single sounds, the autonomous role of the play of sounds, etc.

The focal point of the whole study is the problem of the real possibilities of the sound structures to become meaningful in prose texts. It is a necessary condition that the metaphonic structures refer in some way to the "meaning" which "creates the fictional microcosm"; this idea is the main discovery of R. Kolarov. On one hand it is the result of the theoretically grounded criticisms of other conceptions, on the other it is generated and made concrete in a process of profound interpretative research of some of the best Bulgarian fictional works. As a matter of fact this concretization is not less important than the all-round idea; "the analysis in action" reveals a great number of types of sound-meaning correspondencies and the exceptionally subtle mechanisms through which they come into existence. Nevertheless they are classified in two basic types of functions of metaphonic structures: 1. The possibility of the metaphonic structure to function as an "iconic sign"; 2. Indirect sign functions of the metaphonic structure in its correlation with the semantic structure of the text. Two central chapters

of the book are dedicated to the elaboration on these two types, their mechanisms and subtypes.

Kolarov's style requires exact concrete proofs for every hypothesis and idea. His feeling for detail and its meaning in the context of the whole is amazing. It is the pursuit of exactness, integrity and provability in the search for the real sound structures and their real function in the text, that makes his study *Sound and Meaning* face one of the most important questions of literary science—ancient as well as modern. We have in mind the problem of the coexistence of the material and the spiritual, of the present and the absent, of the finite and the infinite in the literary work, and respectively of the limits of application of the exact methods. Kolarov persuades the reader acquainted with the contemporary tendencies in literary criticism, that auxiliary disciplines like statistics, experimental psychology, mathematic modeling and computer processing cannot be ignored in literary interpretations—especially in the field of the finite and the discrete. Moreover Kolarov's perfect interpretations of classic works in the Bulgarian prose tradition convince the reader that what we have here is neither a formalistic dissection of a literary work, nor a mechanical application of mathematic methods. It is a penetration into the spiritual nature of literary works, the exact analysis being not the goal, but the means, the starting point of the interpretation. In actual fact the study validates the effectiveness of an approach, based on a non-eclectic, but heterogenous methodological complex, containing exact disciplines, but having also its own hierarchy, which reaches its climax in the specific "inexact" operation of literary criticism—the interpretation.

In connection with what has been previously mentioned one could realize the great value of Kolarov's central idea of the optional, existing only in terms of probability connection between the basically poorer, finite phonic structures and the infinite world of meaning and value. It is a true theoretical image of the paradoxical nature of the literary work.

It is from this paradoxical nature however, that one real failing of *Sound and Meaning* emerges—the different adequacy of the theoretic languages used to describe the sound aspect and meaning aspect of the literary work. While in the description of the sound aspect linguistics and especially phonology can offer an exact scientific terminology, in the description of meaning Kolarov practically returns to the traditional language of literary interpretations, in which metaphors, concepts of more or less definite volume and content co-exist with "everyday" speech means. In principle there would be nothing wrong with this if in that traditional language of literary criticism now and then did not crop up (due to the terminological inertia of the exact phonologic description) "strict" terms, which are at first sight analogies to linguis-

tic terminology (of the type "semantic features", "semantic ingredients", "semantic units" etc.). The careful examination of similar terms convinces us that in fact it is a question of metaphors and unclarified concepts. The traditional language of literary criticism is effective enough in R. Kolarov's interpretations. Why then have such terminological "masks" been necessary? If the traditional language of literary science is to be improved, this is not the best way to do it. The sound aspect and the meaning aspect of a literary work are basically not homogeneous: such must be the theoretical languages, describing them as well. Every artificial parallelism between these languages is unnecessary and to some extent also dangerous.

Of course this is not so much a failing of Kolarov's study, but rather a consequence of the general lagging behind of the semantics of the literary work. It comes to show that the book *Sound and Meaning* is not only valuable because of its serious scientific achievements, but also that its small failings become symptomatic of the actual problems in the field of contemporary literary science. Kolarov's study belongs to the general post-structuralist tendency where on one hand there exists the effort to do away with the antagonism between exactness and understanding (e.g. in the works of P. Ricoeur and Hirsch), and on the other hand the structuralist idea of exactness itself is criticized (Riffaterre, Mounin, Culler, Werth).

But the main merit of the book „Sound and Meaning” is that it is created not only with scientific discipline but also with scientific imagination—and scientific imagination is something, that always challenges human minds and gives birth to new ideas.

DŹWIĘK I ZNACZENIE

BULGARSKA ROZPRAWA O FONICZNEJ STRUKTURZE POWIEŚCI

STRESZCZENIE

Książka R. Kołarowa bada starodawny problem wzajemnego stosunku między dźwiękiem a sensem; przy czym jej „novum” zawiera się w tym, że bada ona wskazany problem na materiale prozy literackiej. Jej podstawowa teza sprowadza się do twierdzenia, że dane dwa aspekty utworu literackiego znajdują się między sobą w stosunku możliwościowym: warunkiem funkcjonowania artystycznego organizacji dźwiękowej jest, z jednej strony, jej statystycznie relewantna dewiacja w stosunku do kontekstu dźwiękowego, i „percepcyjna realność” struktury dźwiękowej w związku ze specyfiką gatunkowych i stylistycznych „oczekiwań” czytelnika, z drugiej. Lecz najistotniejszym warunkiem funkcjonowania artystycznej warstwy dźwiękowej jest jej podporządkowanie czynnikowi sensowemu, „tworzącemu mikrokosmos artystyczny”. Wychodząc z tych założeń R. Kołarow postuluje dwa podstawowe typy metafonii:

- 1) struktury dźwiękowe funkcjonujące jako znaki ikoniczne;
- 2) struktury dźwiękowe pośrednio skorelowane z sensem.

Praca R. Kolarowa charakteryzuje się ogólnym nastawieniem poststrukturalnym: usiłuje ona bowiem przewyciężyć rozdzźwięk między analizą dokładną a interpretacją rozumiejącą, jak również krytykuje niewystarczalność strukturalistycznych wymagań dokładności. W ten sposób stawia ona zawiły problem granic stosowalności dokładnych metod w literaturoznawstwie, udowadniając, że zajmują one istotne miejsce w roli dyscyplin pomocniczych, podporządkowanych podstawowemu celowi nauki o literaturze — interpretacji.

ЗВУК И СМЫСЛ
БОЛГАРСКАЯ КНИГА О ЗВУКОВОЙ СТРУКТУРЕ РОМАНА

РЕЗЮМЕ

Книга Р. Коларова направлена на исследование вековой проблемы взаимоотношения звука и смысла; при чем ее новаторское содержание в том, что она исследует данную проблему на материале литературной прозы. Ее основной тезис сводится к утверждению, что эти два основных аспекта литературного произведения находятся в вероятностной связи между собой: условием художественного функционирования звуковой организации является, с одной стороны, ее статистически значимое отклонение по отношению к звуковому контексту; и „перцептивная реальность” звуковой структуры в ее связи с особенностями жанрового и стилистического „ожидания” читателя, с другой. Но самым существенным условием художественного функционирования звукового пласта является его подчиненность и ассимилированность смысловым фактором, „творящим художественный микрокосмос”. Исходя из этого Р. Коларов выделяет два основных типа метафории: 1) звуковые структуры, функционирующие как иконические знаки; 2) звуковые структуры, косвенно коррелирующие со смыслом.

Исследование Р. Коларова вливается в общую пост-структуралистическую волну, чьи различные направления характеризуются как усилием преодолеть пропасть между точным анализом и понимающим толкованием, так и критикой неудовлетворительности структуралистических требований точности. Таким образом оно снова ставит сложный вопрос о границах приложимости точных методов в литературоведении, доказывая, что они занимают законное место в роли помощных дисциплин, подчиненных основной цели этой науки — толкованию.