

Hrabák, Josef

Remarks on the character of Czech pure-syllabic and syllabotonic verse

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REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER OF CZECH PURE-SYLLABIC AND SYLLABOTONIC VERSE

As a rule, classic Czech verse is described as syllabotonic. There are, however, several older poems which do not conform to this scheme. They have, to be sure, a definite number of syllables, but on the other hand, they have a free distribution of accents; to distinguish such verse the term pure-syllabic has been introduced. At the same time, however, we also find in the older period poems meeting the requirements of modern classical syllabotonic verse. Such verse comprises either complete works or at least whole section. For greater clarity I shall cite three pairs of examples, each pair closely linked in time, examples which unquestionably represent two clearly different forms — syllabotonic and pure-syllabic.

Kunhutina modlitba (at the end of XIII c.), v. 25—28:

Chvála tobě, bože, z toho,
ježe činíš divův mnoho
divnú mocú slova tvého
v rukú popa všelikého.

Alexandreis. Svatovítský zlomek (ca 1300), v. 149—154:

Již země v porobě stáše
a za moře dan dáváše;
neb ten bieše ještě dietě,
v jehož jie státi osvětě,
nevěda, co zdieti sobě
v téj strasti, v téj porobě.

Hádání Prahy s Kutnou Horou (1420), v. 63—68:

Potom vece přísně k Hoře:
„Zdaliž nevieš svého hoře,
tobě jistě budúcieho,
že mi činíš mnoho zlého,
protivného, bezprávného,
ohavného, ukrutného
[. . .]

Ve jméno božie počněme (at the same time as *Hádání*), v. 1—7:

Ve jméno božie počněme,
a dokudž móžme, pracujme
o najvyššie zvelebenie
stvožitele nad stvořenie
a odvážiece se papeže,
krále, biskupa i kněže,
oznammež modloslúženie!

Dačický z Heslova, “*Hic est der Papáček*” (*Prostopravda*, 1620), v. 111—116:

To vše také jini píši,
rozprávějí, mluví, slyší
v Germanii, svaté řiši.
Poslouchejte, páni mniši,
medle, čím se zavržete,
Přímem svatým nemůžete

Selský masopust (1588), act I, v. 1—4:

Ne každý, kdož vesel bývá,
svou mysl veselou mívá;
zevnitř radost ukazuje,
vnitř pak v srdci se sužuje.

The fragments from *Kunhutina modlitba*, from *Hádání* and from *Dačický* are clearly syllabotonic, since they maintain isosyllabism as well as a regular distribution of word stresses. The fragments from *Alexandreis*, from the song *Ve jméno božie počněme* and from *Selský masopust* maintain isosyllabism, but do not preserve regularity in the distribution of word stress; hence they can be considered as examples of pure-syllabic verse. In such cases Roman Jakobson wrote about the „clouding“ of phrasing, even where the metrical pattern was so weak that in more than 50 % of the cases no syllable in the line (other than the first) was set off by interword boundaries (*Ve jméno božie počněme*, cf. „Slovo a slovesnost“ 2, 1936,¹⁾ p. 18). Karel Horálek notes this type verse in *Selský masopust* and he characterizes it as pure-syllabic. It would follow from Horálek's assumption that in this poem there is no clear tendency toward regularity in the distribution of word stress. „One can consider as syllabic those works in which lines of various metric make-up (e.g. trochaic and iambic) succeed one another so irregularly that one never knows what kind of a line will follow“ (*Počátky novočeského verše* [Praha 1956], p. 32).

The pairs of examples cited above undoubtedly represent two different types of verse. This distinction is not just the theory of representatives of modern metrics; the poems were felt some time ago to be of two different types as a result of the reform of Dobrovský at the end of the eighteenth century as well as of the polemics of Dobrovský with Václav Stach soon after. Since isosyllabic verses with an irregular distribution of word stresses and those with a stable word-stress pattern were felt to be two distinct types, it is necessary to recognize

¹⁾ [Úvahy o básnictví doby husitské.]

the existence of two such categories. It is also appropriate to use the standard terms: pure-syllabic, resp. syllabic, and syllabotonic verse. However, there arises a basic problem of theory: are these variants within the framework of the same prosodic system, or are we actually concerned with two distinct prosodic systems?

In answering this question, it is significant that both of the types described appear side by side in the same period, as is demonstrated by the fragments cited above. Until we have exhaustive information about all of older Czech literature, it may seem that I am attributing to our predecessors intentions which they never had. Although I have cited several verses which support my thesis, from the point of view of verse structure, they could be isolated examples. In a large body of verse, one can always find by chance various forms which are otherwise completely atypical. From this point of view, the first pair of examples is, however, convincing. We are dealing here with some of the oldest long works written in Czech, for which the verse has been studied statistically (Jakobson, *Staročeský verš*).²⁾ It would be difficult to suppose that there coexisted in Czech literature as early as about 1300 two different prosodic principles. On the contrary, one must assume that all Old Czech verse can be derived from a single prosodic principle. I am convinced that this is the only correct solution to the problem and, further, that one can reduce to a common denominator every Czech verse with a set number of syllables; Jakobson (in both works cited above) has already expressed basically the same opinion about the verse of the fourteenth century and the Hussite period.

The opinion that Czech syllabotonic and pure-syllabic verse represent two prosodic principles was based on the clearly erroneous assumption that pure-syllabic verse is simply amorphic from the point of view of word stress distribution. I suspect that such cases of amorphism constitute only one of the possible variations, and that the essence of syllabic verse does not consist in its presenting complete anarchy from the point of view of stress distribution. It consists rather in the fact that there is a great amount of variations possible; in other words, the distribution of word stresses is a problem of a stylistic plane and not of a prosodic norm. Particular poetic schools select one of the possible variants, from complete amorphism to the complete regularization of the trochaic or iambic flow. In connection with this, it can happen that the theoreticians of particular groups, schools and trends can sanction a given variant as a canon and hold that it is the only proper principle (i.e. they take a stylistic norm for a prosodic norm). This is how I would interpret the reform of Dobrovský at the end of the eighteenth century and the stand proclaimed by Král roughly a hundred years later. We do not have the right to evaluate such a prosodic principle on the basis of the esthetic views and theoretical pronouncements formulated by the representatives of the various schools or trends. This was the real mistake of the majority of Czech versologists, who were prevented from seeing the full scope of the problem by the dogmatism of Dobrovský and the exhaustive data of Král. Both of these scholars sanctioned the esthetic precepts of their own cultural milieu (classicism and the poetics of "lumírovci" school) but in the course of history there were more periods by far in which their exact rules did not apply. It would be more appropriate to understand the problems

²⁾ [Československá vlastivěda 3 (Praha 1934), 429.]

of Czech verse from the point of view of its overall development and its numerous types and to reduce all Czech verse with a set number of syllables to a common denominator, as Jakobson has done for the Old Czech period. Using the terms "pure-syllabic" and "syllabotonic" in reference to Czech verse, we do not mean two different, mutually apposed prosodic principles, but rather two variants of the same prosodic principle.

What is this principle? I assume that we are concerned with a principle which is essentially syllabic. This follows even from the comparisons which I introduced in the beginning of this article. These pairs of excerpts can all be interpreted more easily as different forms of syllabic verse than as forms of tonic verse. Moreover, it is the peculiar trait of Czech verse that stress is linked with the word boundary. I conclude that the primary principle on which Czech verse is constructed is the varying character of the segmentation of the linguistic utterance. From this point of view it would also be possible to reduce to a common denominator verse with varying numbers of syllables. For example, we would have in Old Czech verse: (1) a verse type in which segmentation has no connection with the number of syllables; (2) a type in which the segmentation is linked to the number of syllables (pure syllabic verse); and (3) a type in which the segmentation has a tendency toward a regular distribution of stresses as well as isosyllabism (syllabotonic verse).

It may appear that we are dealing with a very simple problem, a problem purely terminological in character. In fact, however, a basic question is involved. If we take the stand that this is a matter of variants within a single prosodic principle, we not only reduce to a common denominator all variants of Old Czech (and probably even of modern Czech) verse, but we also expose the close internal relationship between Czech and Polish verse. I believe that Czech verse is much closer to Polish than has been generally recognized. This could not be realized as long as we insisted on characterising classic Czech verse as syllabotonic and Polish as pure syllabic, and hence as verses of two different types. I consider that in both cases we are dealing with verse which is basically syllabic, i.e. with verse in which segments are measured to the numbers of syllables and not the number of stresses or their distribution. In other words, in Czech syllabotonic verse the primary consideration is the number of syllables, and never the number of stresses (i.e. the number of syllables is not a result of and is not subordinate to the number of metric stresses). This is corroborated by the fact that new tonic variations in Czech verse do not occur as a result of keeping the number of stresses while the number of unstressed syllables between accented ones (and thus the number of syllables in the verse) is free to change. They occur rather as a result of the displacement of metric stresses (hence a change in word distribution) within the same syllabic period (of for example, the poetry of the "májovci" school, efforts connected with Czech iamb, etc.).

1964

Poznámky o charakteru českého čistě sylabického a sylabotónického verše

Za „klasický“ český verš se zpravidla pokládá verš sylabotónický, v němž je normován počet slabik i distribuce metrických přízvuků. Vyskytují se však — zvláště v starší litera-

tuře — také verše, kde jsou při pevném počtu slabik počet i distribuce těžkých dob velmi uvolněné, a v tom případě se mluví o verši čistě sylabickém. Je otázka, zda verš sylabotónický a verš čistě sylabický představují v české literatuře dva prozodické systémy, nebo zda jde o varianty v rámci téhož prozodického systému.

Na počátku obrození, když formuloval základy novočeské prozodie Josef Dobrovský a narazil na prudký odpor Václava Stacha, byly verše skládané „podle starého způsobu“ (tj. podle dnešní terminologie čistě sylabické) a verše skládané „podle pravidel p. Dobrovského“ (tj. podle dnešní terminologie sylabotónické) skutečně pocítovány jako dvě různé kvality. Ve skutečnosti však lze uvést český verš čistě sylabický a sylabotónický na společného jmenovatele. Kdybychom chtěli pokládat český čistě sylabický a sylabotónický verš za dva různé prozodické systémy, musel by být čistě sylabický český verš z hlediska distribuce slovních přízvuků naprosto amorfní; taková amorfnost je však v českém verši zachovávatelná pevný počet slabik naprosto výjimečná. Rozdíl mezi sylabotónickým a čistě sylabickým veršem je v češtině pouze stupňovitý (tedy kvantitativní) a nikoli podstatný (kvalitativní). V tzv. čistě sylabickém verši jsou varianty v počtu a rozložení slovních přízvuků jevem stylistickým, kdežto ve verši sylabotónickém jsou vázány normou imperativnější povahy. Pokud jde o podstatu českého sylabotónického verše, je možno jej pokládat za zvláštní typ sylabismu. To má význam i pro historickou metriku, protože se ukazuje společný základ verše staročeského i novočeského; dalo by se říci, že se český verš s normovaným počtem slabik řídí od nejstarších dob až do dneška stejnými metrickými požadavky. Z toho hlediska se také ukazuje, že je tzv. „klasický“ český verš (tj. verš typický pro českou literaturu) daleko bližší klasickému verši polskému, než jak se dříve soudilo.

Заметки о характере чешского чисто силлабического и силлабо-тонического стиха

„Классическим“ чешским стихом считается обычно силлабо-тонический стих, число слогов и дистрибуция метрических ударений которого подчиняются определенной норме. Встречаются, однако, стихи (особенно в литературе предшествующих столетий), в которых число слогов сохраняется, но число и дистрибуция ударений являютсявольными. В таком случае можно говорить о чисто силлабическом стихе. Возникает вопрос, образуют ли силлабо-тонический стих и чисто силлабический стих в чешской литературе две системы стихосложения, или же они являются вариантами лишь одной системы стихосложения.

В начале эпохи чешского национального возрождения, когда Иозеф Добровский формулировал основы новочешского стихосложения и встретился со сильным противодействием со стороны В. Стаха, действительно ощущались стихи, написанные „старинным способом“ (это были, по современной терминологии, чисто силлабические стихи) и стихи, написанные „по правилам г. Добровского“ (это были, по современной терминологии, силлабо-тонические стихи) как две разнокачественные явления. На самом деле, чешский чисто силлабический и силлабо-тонический стих можно привести к общему знаменателю. Если считать, что чешский чисто силлабический стих и силлабо-тонический стих образуют две различные системы стихосложения, то в таком случае нужно придать чешскому чисто силлабическому стиху (с точки зрения дистрибуции словесных ударений) совершенно аморфный характер. Однако такая аморфность чешского стиха, соблюдающего регулярное число слогов, встречается совершенно исключительно. Силлабо-тонический и чисто силлабический стих отличаются в чешском языке друг от друга лишь с точки зрения количественной, а не качественной. Варианты так называемого чисто силлабического стиха, зависящие от числа и распределения словесных ударений, приобретают характер стилистического приема, в то время как в силлабо-тоническом стихе эти варианты подчиняются более строгой норме. Что касается сущности чешского силлабо-тонического стиха, то можно считать его особым типом силлабизма. Это обстоятельство имеет значение и для исторической метрики, так как выявляет общую основу древнечешского и новочешского стиха. Можно было бы сказать, что чешский стих с числом слогов, подчиненным норме, следует тем же требованиям с древнейших времен до наших дней. С этой точки зрения так называемый чешский „классический“ стих (т. е. стих, характерный для чешской литературы) стоит значительно ближе к польскому классическому стиху, чем это было принято думать до настоящего времени.