

Sound as a Primary Mode of Desire in Poetry

Miloš Ćurčević

For me, a poem more than anything begins with a certain sound. Sound in a particular, most certainly audible, almost palpable way inscribes the internal configuration of the verse, and consequently envelops and maintains the poem as a verbal-mental unit. Sound is what makes a certain poem, or cycle of poems, and, eventually, an entire book, recognizable and coherent. It can be intuitively recognized as a distinctive feature in a stylistic and even, let's say, auto-poetic sense. The experience of poetry, which is always in essence individual and most certainly unique—which is thus most often located somewhere on the verge of the possibility of verbalization of content that we are intending to communicate—could thus be defined by the movement of the sound. In addition, by following the sound's trajectory we can trace almost all the particularities of someone's poetic speech. Sound is also what allows us to recognize certain rules that can be followed, or else broken, in order to establish that verbal-intuitive connection, be it in the form of a dialogue or a monologue, by means of which our experience of poetry takes place.

When it comes to so-called free verse, i.e. the open poetic form that marks a great deal of modern and contemporary poetry, sound is most often equated with the particular, authorial voice. Its diversity and particularity can thus be identified on what we can call a sound platform as a prominent feature of a certain poet's expression. The intonation of the verse, its organization and word-choice, the compression or dispersion of its rhythm, the colloquial or defamiliarized syntactic constructions, a variety of verbal effects; all of these features and more take shape against the individual sound as a main feature that distinguishes certain poetry.

The latter imperative continues to be the prime moving force behind the poem and poetry in general, and gives the reason why in our contemporary experience poetry is considered as an elementary expressivity; poetry, like no other form of artistic expression, with its ability to allow direct access to often hazy and repetitive quotidian experiences, allows us to create such experiences in a way that we feel to be the most appropriate—by making impossible and apparent connections, through repetitions, semantic shifts and other means which we apply in order to anchor these sporadic drifts of sensations and words, wanting to come as close as possible to the paradoxical and ephemeral nature of our modern experience.

When it comes to the closed forms, one of the most famous and most widespread of these is the sonnet. Its matrix attracts me first of all because it is actually completely illusionary. Fourteen or more lines, with a turn after the eighth or ninth line, or without a turn, the length and the number of syllables, the rhyme scheme, all of these actually stand for a convention which is constantly shunned or broken, and which is at the same time necessary if we want this loose square of words to function at all. Its sound, etymologically ringing, thus rests on a completely individualized understanding of sound in verse, as well as on an individual perspective of accompanying intuition as to where the real sound of certain poetry lies. And as its rules can in a certain way be extrapolated, that is, be viewed as general, for me it was intriguing to set the frame that would reflect the communication going in several directions.

One branch of this conversation goes back historically towards the form and the rules of the sonnet. And as the sonnet is an imported Italian product, I tried to somehow saturate it with the rhythms of everyday, colloquial speech. Here are naturally present cadences and rhythms that can be ascribed to a particular speaker, and the whole intonation is directed towards what is meant to be

said in an economical and effective fashion, that is, towards what would be even more effective not to say.

In the opposite direction there is a certain accumulation of mostly one-way speech, turned outside, towards some subject, content, towards the very motive for writing a particular sonnet. Whether this is a comment on someone else's artwork, for example a performance piece whose elements are transferred and made ironic by employing literal figures of speech, or a feigned dialogue with other sonnets (for the authors of said sonnets are treated as dead, and thus are not expected to respond in any way) the sonnet is a very gratifying form that easily allows for exploitation, rewriting, alteration, reversing, reading-into, and which, in a word, allows the usual literary hoaxes to be made more effective and even more acceptable.

As a poetic form, the sonnet was constructed with a specific purpose. This is a form of love poetry where in a very small space, in a very small amount of time, one wishes to express as much one can, in order to make one's desire for a moment visible to everyone else. This is why eroticism is still a very powerful and basic fuel for the sonnet. And, as in its nature, desire is more accessible to us as deprivation or personal incapacity, then we can pick at what is left in order to empathize with one of our own versions of past events.

Translated by Tomislav Kuzmanović