

**INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF
SLAVIC LINGUISTICS
AND POETICS**

XXXIV

1986

Slavica Publishers, Inc.

MULTIPLICITY OF PERSPECTIVE AS METAPHOR
FOR POETIC CREATION IN PASTERNAK'S
"OPREDELENIE POËZII" AND
"OPREDELENIE TVORČESTVA"

Olga Peters Hasty

The inherent capacity of metaphor and metonymy to function both as links between disparate phenomena and as disruptions of existing relationships plays a vital role in Pasternak's poetics, enabling him to create a dynamic system of shifting perspective which becomes an important structural component in his poetry. Employing a variety of domains—acoustic, semantic, syntactic and thematic—Pasternak constructs highly intricate, ambiguous metonymic and metaphoric structures which are as difficult to pin down as the elusive perspectives of M. C. Escher's graphics.

The significant role of metonymy in Pasternak's poetry has been discussed in considerable depth by Roman Jakobson¹ and Krystyna Pomorska.² Jakobson illustrates that metonymy is for Pasternak not merely a frequently employed device, but that "Pasternak's poetry is a realm of metonymies awakened to independent life."³ "A connection once created," Jakobson points out, "becomes an object in its own right. Pasternak does not tire of underlining the thing to be connected . . . The poet defines art as the mutual interchangeability of images."⁴ Pomorska develops this further in her treatment of the affinity between Pasternak and the Futurists which she characterizes as "orientation toward metonymy in poetic structure" which Pasternak "elevates . . . to a philosophical postulate and views as the basic pattern of the universe."⁵

Study of the structural organization of such metonymies, which are frequently complicated by metaphoric functions, reveals Pasternak's proclivity

¹ Roman Jakobson, "Randbemerkungen zur Prosa des Dichters Pasternak," *Slavische Rundschau*, No. 6, 1936. English translation: "The Prose of the Poet Pasternak," *Modern Judgements*, D. Davic and A. Livingstone, eds. (Aurora Publishers, 1970).

² Krystyna Pomorska, *Themes and Variations in Pasternak's Poetics* (Lisse: The Peter De Ridder Press, 1975).

³ Jakobson, p. 142.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

⁵ Pomorska, p. 28.

to interconnect various aspects of poetic images in such a way as to permit a number of possible yet incompatible readings. In an attempt to understand the poem the reader perceives first one configuration of images, then another and the work vibrates with the energy of these shifts in perspective. In other cases, Pasternak leads his reader to assemble elements of the poem into a comprehensible pattern which is then shattered as the poem unfolds, forcing a new perception and reorganization of the given parts. Thus the structure is particularly emphasized and becomes itself one of the themes of the poem.

To illustrate this particular feature of Pasternak's poetics two metapoetic texts will be considered—the poems "Opredelenie poëzii" and "Opredelenie tvorčestva" from the "Zanjatie filosofiej" section of the 1917 cycle *Sestra moja žizn'*.⁶ The discussion presented here does not provide an exhaustive analysis of the poems but only an examination of prominent aspects of the dynamic nature of their structures.

The title "Opredelenie poëzii" suggests that the poem is a metaphor for poetry. This metaphoric description is comprised of a series of interacting metaphors and metonymies.

ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ ПОЭЗИИ

Это — круто налившийся свист.
 Это — шелканье сдавленных льдинок.
 Это — ночь, ледящая лист,
 Это — двух соловьев поединок.

Это — сладкий заглохший горох.
 Это — слезы вселенной в лопатках,*
 Это — с пультов и флейт — Фигаро
 Низвергается градом на грядку.

Всё, что ночи так важно сыскать
 На глубоких купаленных доньях,
 И звезду донести до садка
 На трепещущих мокрых ладонях.

Площе досок в воде — духота.
 Небосвод завалился ольхою,
 Этим звездам к лицу б хохотать,
 Ан вселенная — место глухое.

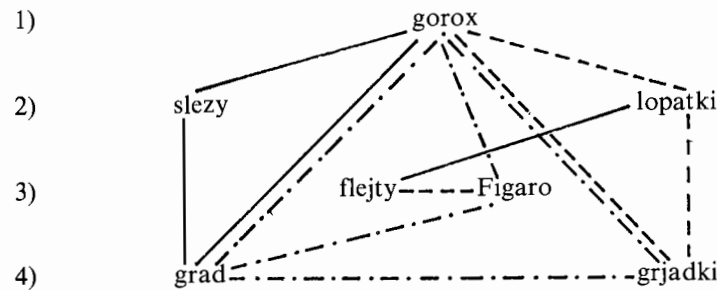
* Лопатки — стручки гороха. Примеч. автора.

⁶ The texts of the two poems under discussion are quoted from *Boris Pasternak, Stixi i poëty, 1912-1932*, G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov, eds. (Ann Arbor, 1961).

The poem opens with seven statements. The ripened whistle and the clicking ice of the first two lines suggest poetry's acoustic properties—perhaps the swelling of a poetic line and the impact of rhyming words. The last two lines of the stanza present traditional romantic images—night and nightingale—as metaphors for poetry. However, night is depicted as icy cold, devoid of mysticism, while the nightingales, traditional singers of harmony, are shown in combat. This first stanza presents more than merely four definitions. Its lines are interconnected in that they are presented as diverse signifiers for the same signified. They are linked by parallel structure occasioned by the anaphoric use of *eto* and by the A-b-A-b rhyme scheme and anapestic meter. Acoustically they are related in their insistence on the "l" sound. Moreover, the four lines are joined metonymically. *Svist* and *ščelkan'e* of lines one and two respectively are words commonly used to describe the sound produced by the nightingales of line four. The ice of line two is linked to the leaf-freezing night of line three, and an obvious link exists between the night and nightingale of lines three and four. Thus each line contains an element which can be metonymically linked to the nightingales, weaving yet another thread of unity into the stanza.

The second stanza continues the anaphoric pattern, meter, and rhyme scheme of stanza one. The images, however, reverse their movement. Whereas stanza one consists of a convergence of a variety of interlinked images to the central poetic image of the nightingales, stanza two deals with one image—that of peas—which is splayed out to participate in a wide range of representations. Again, all four lines are metonymically linked. The first mentions peas, the second their pods, whereby the "tears" are likened to peas—for they are in the pods and are round like the peas. Lines three and four of this stanza describe Figaro hailing from music stands and flutes into furrows. The furrows again related to the image of peas and thereby suggest the roundness of the notes spilling out. The visual symbols of an acoustic phenomenon are implied—the printed notes on a page which are round like the peas and rest on the furrow-like lines of a staff. Yet another metonymic link is created here: if the notes are peas, then the flutes from which they spill are pea pods and the similarity of their shape is thus called to the attention of the reader. The epithet *zagloxšij* is initially understood as choked (by weeds). The metonymic link of pods to flutes and peas to notes, occurring in the rest of the stanza, encourages the recollection of another meaning—that of deafness. Thus *zagloxšij gorox* stands in contrast to the acoustic nature of the tonal peas. The hail to which the tones are likened suggests a freezing (cf. stanza one) of the tears of the universe. Acoustically the stanza is unified by a predominance of "gar" and "gra,"

and it is sound similarity which establishes the contiguity of *gorox* and *Figaro*. The entire stanza is a developing chain of metonymies interconnected in the following manner:



KEY: Shape similarity —————
 Sound similarity - - - - -
 Proximity - - - - -

Every noun is directly or indirectly metonymically linked to every other noun as the reader is presented with an inventory of metonymies. Furthermore, a metaphoric function is superimposed on this metonymic structure, for these metonyms serve, individually and together, as metaphors for poetry. This, as well as the wide range of possible metonymic links, creates a dynamic interaction of shifting images and relationships.

Stanzas three and four differ significantly from the first two stanzas of the poem. The rhyme scheme and meter remain unchanged, but the anaphoric use of *eto* ceases and the question can be posed as to just what it had stood for. It must be admitted that *eto* may refer to *opredelenie* and not necessarily to *poèzija*, which would make the individual statements and the poem as a whole metaphors not for poetry, but for the *act of determining* what poetry is. The difficulty arising from any attempt at such definition is suggested by the diversity and complexity of the first eight lines which point to the power of poetry to realize the potential link between any two images.

Pasternak described reality as consisting of interchangeable parts. This view is apparent in both the images and poetic devices of this poem, illustrating the difficulty of ascertaining what poetry is. Its elusiveness is particularly evident in the complexity of the many possible interactions of its parts. Because each image participates in a variety of connections, it has no *fixed* place within the poem. Like the two nightingales of stanza one, each

possible configuration battles for recognition and the reader of a Pasternak poem, like the viewer of an Escher etching or wood cut, finds it impossible to remain satisfied with perceiving the work from *one* perspective. This highly dynamic, creative complexity is, to be sure, a significant feature enriching most, if not all, art. In works of Pasternak, however, this becomes an emphasized structural element, indeed a theme of the work.

Stanzas one and two of "Opredelenie poèzii" bring poetic images—both literally and figuratively—down to earth. The images of stanzas three and four are combined in such a way as to make any specific determination impossible, again recalling Escher's works. One cannot ascertain in stanza three, for example, whether poetic imagery has transformed the star into a fish, or the fish into a star. The following clues are presented: night, bathhouse floor, star, fish hatchery, and trembling wet hands. These clues can be assembled to suggest an attempt to capture the reflection of a star on the water. Yet the star can also be interpreted as a metaphor for a glistening fish shimmering in the water. Similarly, the adjectives *glubokix*, *trepeščuščix*, and *mokryx* are common epithets for nouns other than the ones they modify in this stanza but which are found or suggested in it: "deep" for night and "trembling" and "wet" for fish (evoked by mention of the hatchery). *Ladonjax* is linked by rhyme to *don'jax*, but by the adjectives *trepeščuščix* and *mokryx* to the suggested fish, recalling thereby also the similarity of shape between hand and fish. Thus the hands can be seen simultaneously as containers for the fish/star-reflection and as fish themselves. The stanza's richness stems from the fact that no one interpretation can be finally determined—certainly a comment on the title of the poem. The rhymes are not as precise as those of the first two stanzas. Just as it can combine distant images, so poetry can combine distant rhymes.

Stanza four also contains directional ambiguity. The "vault of heaven" is obstructed by alder trees, suggesting an upward gaze, but the verb *zavalilsja* indicates the participation of gravity and therefore a downward motion. It is of some significance to recall that the alder grows in damp soil. Its wood is highly resistant to water and therefore very slow to rot, making it well suited for bathhouse construction. This provides a link between the alder and the wet boards and damp heat and turns the *nebosvod* into a floor. The shifting perspective here is similar to the movement which occurs in stanza three, for it is possible to interpret the image as that of the heavens reflected on the wet floor or in the water seen through the cracks of a bathhouse floor. The entire space created within the stanza resounds with the laughter of the stars in the echoing *xo* of the final word of each line.

A variety of possible interconnections is present among the stanzas as

well. The first two lines of the final stanza are linked thematically with the preceding one. The rhymes occurring between stanzas three and four also provide a link: *duxota* (stanza four, line one) is rhymed with *sadka* (stanza three, line three) and *xoxotar'* (stanza four, line three) is rhymed with *yskat'* (stanza three, line one).

The third line of the last stanza of the poem sets off a series of associations with material found in stanza two. The laughter of the stars provides a contrast to the metaphor (for stars) in stanza two—*slezy vselennoj*. *Vse-lennaja* of the fourth stanza is first mentioned in stanza two which paronomasia (*xo-ox*) and the epithet *gluxoe* link to *zagloxšij gorox* (stanza two, line one). These connections suggest a new, additional interpretation of stanza two. If “*vselennaja—mesto gluxoe*,” then “*zagloxšij gorox*” as well as “*slezy vselennoj*” can be viewed as metaphors for stars. Therefore, while the notes of Figaro are likened to peas, they are thus linked also with stars and the acoustic brilliance of the flute is thereby compared to the visual brilliance of the stars. (A similar synesthetic association has already been noted in stanza two which depicts the visual signs of an acoustic phenomenon.) The entire second stanza is rich in appeals to the senses. Synesthesia by its very nature continues on a sensual level the complexity of interactions of images which make the structure of the poem highly dynamic. Further complexity is extended to directional perspective as well—stars are encountered on the ground and as reflections in water.

The entire poem is constructed of ambiguous and shifting images, which taken together serve as a metaphor for poetry and/or its definition. In “*Opredelenie poëzii*” Pasternak presents examples of a variety of poetic devices and the possibilities of their arrangement. The metonymically related statements of the poem can be interpreted individually as metaphors for poetry or its definition. They are then made much more complex by the interrelations which are evoked in such a manner that their polyfunctionality emerges and creates shifting perspectives. Additional poetic material provided as the poem unfolds increases the range of possibilities. This multilevel shifting of perspective is insisted upon not only within the realms of metonymy or metaphor, but *between* them as well.

The poem “*Opredelenie tvorčestva*,” also from the “*Zanjatie filosofiej*” section of *Sestra moja žizn'*, is similarly dominated by highly dynamic multiple perspectives which are here however occasioned primarily by acoustic links and syntactic displacements.

ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ ТВОРЧЕСТВА

Разметав отвороты рубашки,
Волосато, как торс у Бетховена,
Накрывает ладонью, как шашки,
Сон и совесть, и ночь, и любовь оно.

И какую-то черную дóведь,*
И — с тоскою какою-то бешеной,
К преставлению света готовит,
Конноборцем над пешками пешими.

А в саду, где из погреба, сó льду,
Звезды благоуханно разахались,
Соловьем над лозою Изольды
Захлебнулась Тристанова зáхолодь.

И сады, и пруды, и ограды,
И кипящее белыми воплями
Мирозданье — лишь страсти разряды,
Человеческим сердцем накопленной.

* Дóведь — шашка, проведенная в край поля, в дамы. Примеч. автора.

The first two stanzas develop paronomastically from the title “*Opredelenie tvorčestva*” (*otvoroty, volosato, tors, ladonju, sovest', noč', černuju, doved', toskoju, prestavleniju, sveta*). The word *tvorčestvo* itself does not appear in the poem except in fragments of sound.

Stanza three employs this same device, using it as a source of self-propelling motion. The neologism *zaxolod'* emerges paronomastically from the preceding line (“*Solov'em nad lozoju Izol'dy*”) but also semantically from line one of the stanza. “*A v sadu*” (line one) is metonymically connected with the nightingale (line three) by proximity and “*so l'du*” provides acoustic motivation for “*Isol'dy*.” *Izol'da* in turn leads of course to the mention of Tristan, whose name, especially in the dative presented here (*Tristanova*) is paronomastically closely tied to *tvorčestva* of the title of the poem. The mention of Tristan and Isolde is particularly appropriate here, for the legend centers around Isolde who is torn between two possible but obviously incompatible relationships. It is precisely such a situation in the realm of poetic structure that is the moving force in both poems under discussion.

Here again Pasternak sports with spatial elements. Stars emerge from the cellar in synesthetic raptures (*blagouxanno razaxalis'*). The syntactic construction provides the reader with a shifting comprehension. The typically

Pasternakian use of the "marginal" instrumental case⁷ in the third stanza makes it appear at first reading to be a phrase elaborating the stars' "ah-ing" which is being compared to the raptures of a nightingale. This reading must be entirely readjusted, however, when the actual subject of this phrase is revealed in the final position of the concluding line of the stanza.

A comparable temporary syntactic deception is also set up in the first stanza of the poem. The position of *volosato* (line two) suggests an adverbial function in relation to *razmetav* or possibly to *nakryvaet*. The subject *ono* appearing in final and unaccented position in the last line of the stanza however, permits the interpretation of *volosato* and line two in its entirety as an adjectival phrase modifying *ono*, i.e. *tvorčestvo*. This syntactic ambiguity remains unresolved, permitting, indeed because of the inherent incompatibility of the two readings, encouraging dynamic shifts in the perception of the stanzas. The understated *ono* must further function as the presumed subject of the following stanza as well, as grammatical considerations overcome the conclusiveness of the period separating the two stanzas.

In the first line of stanza four, by placing gardens, ponds, palings and the universe into one series, Pasternak encourages the reader to recognize the existing metonymic links as well as the distinctions among them. The first stanza presents a similar situation. The metonymic relation of sleep, conscience, night and love is augmented by the fact that they are also united metaphorically in that they are compared with checkers. Thus Pasternak creates a type of equivalence and interchangeability among these nouns. Just as checkers are moved from place to place affecting the relationships of the game pieces and assuming various functions (see Pasternak's footnote regarding *doved'*), so are elements of creative play shifted in function and meaning.

For Pasternak, a major force of creativity, specifically of poetry, lies in its vast power to form connections. The possibility of realizing potential relationships—the creative element of reading as well as writing verse—are highlighted in these poems by disruption and restructuring of configurations of the various disparate images and by the impressive variety of possible linking features. The principle purpose of the "definitions" Pasternak offers is not to provide merely a descriptive set of metonymies or metaphors for poetry and creativity, but to portray the *act* of combining their various facets and to draw the reader into this creative process. To this end he exploits the richness of a variety of properties comprising every poetic image. Not only the image as a whole, but each of its attributes can partici-

⁷ Pomorska, p. 19.

pate in a wide range of possible interconnections with other images and *their* parts. Pasternak illustrates moreover that these relationships can be presented in such a way as to create a state of constant flux of perspective. The forcing of one image into several disparate, ambiguous and often incompatible relations gives depth to the works and permits Pasternak to break away from linearity of description and to insist upon the unique complexity of artistic perception.

Trinity College