

Published by the decision of the Scientific Council
of Khachatur Abovian
Armenian State Pedagogical University



Department of Philosophy and Logic
named after Academician Georg Brutian



W I S D O M

Special Issue 2(3), 2022

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE



*WISDOM is covered in Clarivate Analytics' Emerging Sources
Citation Index service*

YEREVAN – 2022

PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTION OF STABLE VERSE FORMS (BASED ON YEGHISHE CHARENTS'S POETRY ANALYSIS)

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the analysis of stable verse forms in the poetry of great Armenian poet Yeghishe Charents (1897-1937), introducing the structural opportunities for the development of the theme and the idea with some philosophical logic. It has long been criticized that the structure of these verse forms has a clear logic, the roots of which come from ancient and medieval ritual art. Many of the stable forms of Roman poetry (sonnet, triolet, rondel, rondeau, etc.) arose from widespread national dance songs that were popular in medieval Europe, inheriting the lengthy stanza of three parts typical to them, which, in its turn, is associated with the triad often encountered in antique tragedies and odas (strophe, antistrophe and epode). Triolet, sonnet and rondeau resemble ancient superstrophe in their structure, showing the same logic of the development of the theme. Stable forms from Eastern poetry (ruba'i, ghazal, mukhammaz, etc.) also have sound principles of structure and rhyme, which contribute to the expression of their philosophical content. The poetry of Yeghishe Charents, rich in stable verse forms, provides a vast opportunity to demonstrate the philosophical conception of the connection between their form and content.

Keywords: Yeghishe Charents, sonnet, triolet, ghazal, ruba'i, distich, monostich, bait, rondeau, tanka, haiku.

Introduction

It is known that the stable verse forms developed over centuries have two main origins - Eastern and European, and are the result of two different worldviews and different philosophical concepts. Some of them (monostich, distich, etc.) existed in ancient poetry, and others were formed in medieval Europe (sonnet, triolet, rondeau, etc.) and Eastern countries (bait, ruba'i, ghazal, mukhammaz, etc.).

Having apparent structural features, they also have certain principles of content expression, which are characteristic only of the given forms. The part and the whole are in a dialectical connection in those types of verses, and it is not possible to understand and interpret one without the other. Speaking about the hermeneutic principles

of the interpretation of an artistic work, the famous German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1988) wrote: "Thus, the process of understanding constantly passes from the whole to the part and back to the whole. The task is to expand the unity of the understood meaning in concentric circles. The correspondence of all particulars to the whole is the criterion of the correctness of understanding. The absence of such a correspondence means a misunderstanding" (p. 344).

The discoveries of the connection between artistic realities and philosophical concepts have always occupied artists and philosophers. Philosophical generalization in art, according to A. Zis (1987), is possible only at a specific structural level of the artistic image through historical and cultural analogies. In his opinion, the traditional oppositions of Hegel's dialectic to the musical

conflict of Beethoven's works can be considered as such (p. 64). These analogies also include stabilized forms of constructing a poem, which lead to the dynamic development of verse content and internal conflict.

Many critics have addressed this topic. The work of Johannes Becher (1965) under the title "Philosophy of the Sonnet, or a Little Instruction on the Sonnet" is noteworthy, in which the "philosophy" of the sonnet is clearly outlined in the context of the dialectical connection of its form and content. Becher (1965) specifically writes: "But what is the content of the form which is the specific form of the sonnet? In a sonnet, the content is the law of the movement of life (moreover, it manifests itself differently from the point of view of the content), consisting of position, opposition and denouement in conclusion, or from the thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Schematically, this can be defined as follows: the position, or thesis, develops in the first quatrain; it is answered in the second quatrain by the opposition or antithesis; the conclusion, or synthesis, develops in two tercets" (p. 191). Considering the sonnet as a dialectical type of poetry, Becher (1965) also considers sharp dramatism, expressed in contrasts and dynamic internal development, to be characteristic of it (p. 194). Moreover, while maintaining the integral structure of the sonnet, the poet forms a dialectical unity of thought and feeling: "The author of a sonnet is, first of all, a designer, and a creative verse construction can be a success if the poet has learned to feel while thinking and think while feeling" (Becher, 1965, p. 195).

From this perspective, Shakespeare's 35th sonnet, the theme of the betrayal of a close friend, was subjected to a peculiar consideration. In her article, J. Landy (2021) shows how this theme develops in different parts of the sonnet. On the first quatrain, a peaceful mood reigns, combined with beautiful images of nature: "Once we get to lines 5-9, suddenly the vocabulary becomes religious ("faults," "trespass," "corrupting," "amiss," "sins") and in 10-14 it is legalistic ("adverse party," "advocate," "lawful plea,"

"accessory," "thief," "robs"). Glowing moons and sweet-smelling roses are long gone; the betrayal was a crime, and maybe even a sin. For miscreants and felons, there is no forgiveness" (Landy, 2021, p. 225).

Several stable forms of Roman poetry (rondeau, rondel, triolet, etc.) are constructed by the triple repetition of certain lines or parts of a line. These originated from medieval dance songs characterized by their three-part structure. These dance songs, in their turn, are genealogically connected with the triad (strophe, antistrophe and epode) widely used in ancient tragedies and epics, where the antistrophe acted as a contrast to the strophe, and the epode was the summary and conclusion of the two.

The well-known Russian philologist M. Gasparov (1989) notes that the triolet, sonnet and rondeau (also a medieval ballad) with their three-part structure and repetitions resemble an ancient superstrophe, demonstrating a similar logic of theme development (p. 143). Examining the verse forms common in Russian poetry, A. Ostankovich and E. Shpak (2013) consider them to be so harmonious that they ensure the inner connection between the verse with philosophy and other areas of life (pp. 154-158).

Friedrich Schlegel (1983) compared philosophy to music in his "Fragments" - in both, the most important theme is constantly repeated, giving philosophy a musicality and philosophical content-to music (p. 308). In this very context, the philosophical conception of verse forms with repetitive lines appears. Not only the triolet, rondeau, rondel, and ballad, which are genealogically related to dance songs, but also the eastern ruba'i, ghazal, and mukhammaz are constructed by the logic of repeating lines or a part of them. These repetitions are based, on the one hand, on their ancient connection with music, on the other hand, on the logic of the development of the theme: each time the repeated line acquires new semantic shades and sounds in a new way and creates a logical connection between different parts of the verse. This is what V. Zhirmunsky (1975) calls the "circular structure" or "composi-

tional spiral" of the verse (pp. 515-516, 518-520).

The poetry of Yeghishe Charents is distinguished by an unprecedented wealth of verse forms and a variety of verse construction "tricks". In the history of Armenian literature, it is not easy to point to another poet with comprehensive coverage of metrical forms like Charents. Literary expert Davit Gasparian (1979) writes: "The technical arsenal of Charents is inexhaustible and incredibly rich. It can be confidently said that only Charents used more metrical forms than the rest of the Armenian poets put together" (p. 225). In the poetry of Charents, stable verse forms occupy an unprecedentedly prominent place and are very diverse- they not only reveal new folds of his poetic interests but also draw the bridges that connect Charents, on the one hand, with Eastern, on the other hand, with European and Russian poetic traditions.

It is known that these forms were transferred to the Eastern Armenian reality mainly through Russian poetry-in the case of Charents, the influence of Russian symbolist and futurist poets is especially significant. On the other hand, in this respect, he was also the direct heir of Vahan Teryan, and the couplets were written under the direct influence of Goethe. To this should be added the experience of Tumanyan, many of whose quartets are real oriental ruba'is and served as a source of inspiration and imitation for Charents with their elaboration and perfection of form.

Why did Charents use diverse verse forms at different stages of his creative life? The point is that stable forms have their philosophical conception; they best embody the solid integrity of the poetic speech and draw a certain logic of the development of feeling and image, which cannot be accommodated within the framework of the usual verse structure.

Eastern Verse Forms

Charents' interest in stable forms of Eastern poetry - ghazal and ruba'i - appeared in the earliest period of his creative life - in the 10s. In

one of his first collections, "Rainbow", the young poet included a whole series of small ghazals comprised of three stanzas under the general title "Ghazals", from which it becomes evident that Charents had already mastered the tricks of constructing this verse form at that time, skillfully applying internal rhyme and end-of-line repetitions (redifs).

"Tagharan" series, which came out at the beginning of the 20s, reveals Charents' strong inclination towards the forms, themes and methods of construction of the Eastern-bard (ashugh)poetry. In "Tagharan", Charents used several popular forms of Eastern-bard poetry: ruba'i, ghazal, mukhammad, etc. However, in the later period, the poet referred to these forms, particularly the "Rubayat" (series of ruba'is) written in 1926 reached a new qualitative level. The series comprised of 44 rubais has a pronounced philosophical content and is a unique summation of the writer's life experience. Let us focus on the structural analysis of the ruba'i, showing what role repeated rhymes and redif play in the lines – the logic of the unrhymed line and how it contributes to the development of the theme. By presenting the principles of ruba'i construction, we can also explain the "philosophy" of ghazal construction. As it is well known, at the end of the 1st, 2nd and 4th lines of a rubai, some word group is repeated, which summarizes the primary meaning of the verse-the triple repetition allows emphasizing further and fixing that meaning. The third, unrhymed line has the so-called "defeated expectancy" effect when the reader or listener expects the repetition of the exact phrase and rhyme but is unexpectedly presented with something else.

Roman Jakobson (1975), who introduced the concept of *defeated expectancy*, writes: "...both in terms of metrics and in terms of psychology, the feeling of reward for the unexpected, which arises in the reader based on "expectation"; the unexpected and the expected are inconceivable without each other" (p. 211). This "reward" is associated with the new meaning that the unrhymed line brings; it summarizes the seman-

tic density of the quatrain but at the same time somewhat breaks the monotony of repetitions in other lines. Here is an example of XIX ruba'i:

*One day you will close your eyes so that
someone else will take your place.*

*You will go, you will pass from the
world so that someone else will be born
in your place.*

*“That’s you, wise man, that’s you, but
you’ve already become someone else,
He affirmed, denying you so that
someone else would be born in your
place.*

(Charents, 1964, p. 211)

In ruba'i, the fourth, the final line is also essential, as it closes the circle of the verse formed by rhymes. In one of his letters, Charents explains this phenomenon very accurately. “...the most important thing in ruba'is (from the point of view of the form) is that the rhymes, especially in the fourth, final line, should sound particularly accurate; otherwise, the rhyme is lost in the repetitions, and thus the quatrain makes an incomplete, vague impression” (Charents, 1967, p. 440).

According to many philologists, ghazal arose as a result of the expansion of ruba'i (ruba'i has the aaoa structure, whereas gazelle - aa oa oa oa...) and exhibits almost the same logic of development. There, odd lines of stanza have a critical role in the dynamic development of the verse theme- through them, it can be said, the poetic image and the lyrical experience are unfolded, and the pairs of lines are continuously drawn back to the same circle, with the same final rhyme and repetition of lines (redif). Charents' "Ghazal for my mother" (1920) best represents the logical structure of that verse form. The first stanza simply describes the poet's memories of his mother ("I remember your old face, my precious mother and very sweet"). In stanzas 2-4, the roles seem to change – here, the mother remembers her long-gone son ("You are sitting sadly and silently, remembering those old days"),

and in the 5th-6th stanzas, there appear primarily images of the departed son's struggles ("And you wonder if he has been tired or he has been cheated by love, and in whose laps has he made love?..."), and the last 7-8 stanzas go back to the image of a mother suffering for her son ("And then sour- bitter tears drop down your eyes one by one"). In all these stanzas, the weight of the development of the theme lies on the odd lines, and the even lines go back again and again to the image of the "sweet and precious" mother (Charents, 1962, p. 315).

Of the forms of Eastern poetry, E. Charents also used bait, a short two-line composition, often with repetitions at the end of the line-turning rhyme (Abeghyan, 1971, pp. 381-382). Baits are usually written in long lines so that any completed thought can be summarized in a small amount. Here is one of the baits of Charents dedicated to Firdawsi written in long 20-syllable lines (by the way, after the poem by Av. Isahakyan "Abu-Lala Maari" there appears no such length in Armenian poetry):

*Gilded many interests, your self-
interested effort, Ferdowsi!*

*But there was no profit to gild your
helpless life, Ferdowsi!-*

(Charents, 1968, p., 425)

Among the Eastern verse forms, a particular reference should be made to Charent's tankas and haikus taken from Japanese poetry. He made some "edits" in the verse form of tanka. In particular, he changed the 5-7-5-7-7 stanzas to 5-7-7-5-7, and-as is commonly accepted. In the first three lines of tanka, some thought and mood unfold, and in the last two lines, one can feel a unique summary of that mood:

The wind rose...

The leaves are falling

They fly to death...

In this sad hour

My heart is already filled with fear...

(Charents, 1983, p. 232)

Haiku, which is an abbreviated version of tanka with lines of 5-7-5 syllables, also found a place in Charents' latest poetry- as if the poet was trying to find the best way to express some compressed emotion in short lines and fewer words:

*It's a blue ray
it's a blue ray...
Your smile, my love, is a blue ray...*
(Charents, 1983, p. 234)

European Verse Forms

Charents' interest in European verse forms (sonnet and triolet) was formed in the 1920s. The first sonnets that reached us were written in 1920-21. In 1928, he wrote "Two sonnets in memory of Arpik", where he presents two poems that are thematically and ideologically related to each other and essentially form one whole.

"A Book of a Road" collection (1933), which is notable for its unprecedented variety of verse genres and forms, contains only one sonnet- the opening poem of the "Verse Art" section, entitled "Sonnet" ("With hard, hard fever I wrote my songs...") (Charents, 1968). This sonnet highly differs from the previous ones in its size and rhyming principles. It is evident that Charents had already reached a qualitatively new level in the field of sonnets. It is fascinating to observe the logic of the theme development, the internal organic connection and the contrast of the quatrains with the example of this sonnet. In the first quatrain, the thesis is put – the theme of the difficult path of the poet's creative life.

*I wrote my songs with a hard, hellish
fever,
As a weary farmer, I carried my song
Through the paths of life, both dark and
hazy and torrid,
And fatigue has often deprived me of the
sun.-*

In the second quatrain (antithesis), Charents talks about his great love for art despite many difficulties in life.

*But I have always loved and my sunny
love
Toward my Art, it was mouldy and hot,
I always burned my heart like a price-
less resin,
So that the lights of our verse will re-
main bright.-*

The last stanzas (synthesis) summarize the entire meaning of the verse – those who throw stones at the poet fan the fire of his spirit that burns against their darkness:

*Oh, you-that are cruel and stupid, have
always stoned me.
You have never caused me sadness and
grief.
To your darkness - my spirit is forever
on fire.*

*And I can only sing to you
Piercing your darkness, black on your
raid,
That had my flashlight always burned
out –*
(Charents, 1968, p. 399)

After "A Book of a Road", the period of Charents' more intense interest in the sonnet begins. During 1934-1936 he writes more sonnets than in the entire previous period of his creative life. This circumstance was undoubtedly related to the revival of his interests in classical art. A large number of sonnets, many with multiple versions, have been preserved in the unique pages of Charents' last years, in handwritten and draft manuscripts, which proves Charents' great interest in that verse genre. He called the series of sonnets dedicated to Grigor Narekatsi "A word from the heart to God" and "Tetraptykos" (a work of four parts), as it consists of four sonnets, which are connected by a common theme and a solid logic of its development. Charents, following the Great Narekatsi, addresses his lamentation to God. In the first sonnet, the particular reason for this lamentation is given (for him, the sad dawn has changed into a bloody sunset). In the second

sonnet, the poet reveals his own “sin” in all of this (being earthly, he believed only in the earth and matter). In the third sonnet, the lamentation becomes bitter, taking desperate tones (the poet was left helpless, his faith was lost, and the odas dedicated to the sunset turned into lamentation and crying). However, the fourth sonnet is full of faith that God is the most merciful:

*But I know that you, with your creative
breath,
As the rain poured in the endless field,
Not a single mosquito or sprout - will
not be left thirsty...*
(Charents, 1983, p. 198)

Here we see a double model of theme and mood development. On the one hand, each sonnet has its own internal development, which reaches its peak in the last sextet. On the other hand, we also see a clear development in the structure of the tetraptych, which reaches its logical conclusion in the last sonnet.

In the 20s, Charents also wrote triolets. They seemed to be dearer to him than the sonnet. The triolets of the “The Enamel Profile of Yours” (1920) series represent a new quality of poetic mastery. The triple-repeated line opens up new nuances of meaning every time and acquires an entirely new quality in the poem’s context. Here is the last triolet of the series, where the image of the night gets a new meaning every time:

*The starry night rings around me
And illuminated memories dance
around me -
Tonight my heart remembered you
again...
The starry night rings around me.
Oh, I don't care, that my song and my
dizzy love?
Your mockery and laughter will move
The starry night rings around me
And illuminated memories dance
around me.*
(Charents, 1962, p. 202)

At the beginning of the triolet, the starry night seems to represent a peaceful landscape, which, combined with the poet’s memories in line 4, acquires alarming tones and, in the end, is saturated with dramatic breath.

In the last period of his career, Charents writes triolets also tautograms (artistic, mostly poetic text, all words of which begin with the same sound). The direct effect of a tautogram-triolet by a Russian poet V. Brusov is definitely observed in those triolets of Charents. It is obvious that the verse form of the triolet, with multiple repetitions of lines, is one of the best means of constructing a tautogram.

Rondeau also occupies a specific place in the poetry of Y. Charents. Two rondeaus dedicated to the Muse (1937) are very interesting here. The threefold repetition of the beginning of the first lines (“My love is clean”, “My Stone Sister”) each time brings with it new shades of meaning and mood.

Charents’ experiments with forms inherited from ancient poetry were also attractive (they were mediated by the experience of Russian and European poets). We are talking about minor verse forms- a monostich (a single-line verse) and a distich (two-line verses), in which the poet needs excellent skills to include a lyrical summary of thought and the emotional experience. Here are two examples of monostich verses:

*Ghars, and Maku, and the world - what
was your land, poet...*
(Charents, 1983, p. 214)

*Love sings in your language - // and
that language - the Delphian...*
(Charents, 1968, p. 215)

The distichs included in the “A Book of a Road” collection also reveal interesting layers of poetic mastery. In ancient poetry, two-line unrhymed poems, the first line written in hexameter and the second line in pentameter, were called distichs. It is also often called *an elegiac*

distich because it contains philosophical thoughts and profound observations of vital issues. More than six hundred distichs of Goethe and Schiller are known in modern times, and Charents turned to that genre most likely under the influence of these very works. It is no coincidence that for his "Distichs" series, he chose a half-line from Goethe's distichs in German as an epigraph, which literally translates as follows: "Come forth, distichs, bold...", and the XXII distich is dedicated to the great Goethe himself:

*With your genius, you rose above your
century, life, and yourself.
How did your soul not die in small and
insignificant Weimar?*
(Charents, 1968, p. 419)

These verse forms have a great potential to present any philosophical thought or thoughtful summary in one line (monostich) or two lines (distich), which Charents was undoubtedly able to use masterfully.

Conclusion

Summing up, it can be claimed that the stable verse forms, emerging in different pieces of national literature and different periods, summarize a particular philosophical concept in their structure. The origins of these forms are very different – there are forms inherited from ancient poetry (monostich, distich, etc.), verse forms that arose in Medieval Europe, especially in Italy and France (sonnet, triolet, ballad, rondeau, rondel, etc.), in the countries of the Near East (ruba'i, bait, ghazal, mukhammaz) or the ones that originated in the Far East (tanka, haiku). Each has certain principles of construction of poetic experience and mood, which are characteristic only of those forms and cannot be expressed within the framework of the usual verse structure.

In the poetry of Yeghishe Charents, these verse forms occupy a considerable place: their influence was often mediated by the experience of Russian, European and Armenian poets. Thro-

ugh each of these forms, Charents expresses a specific perspective of world perception, finding a clear concept of lyrical expression and realizing the possibilities of those verse types.

References

- Abeghyan, M. (1971). *Erker* (Works, in Armenian). (Vol. 5). Yerevan: ASSR Academy of Science Publication.
- Becher, J. (1965). *Filosofia soneta, ili Malen'koe nastavlenie po sonetu* (Philosophy of the sonnet, or a Little instruction on the sonnet, in Russian). *Voprosi literaturi (Literature Questions, in Russian)*, 10, 190-208.
- Charents, Ye. (1962). *Erkeri joghovatsu* (Set of works, in Armenian). (Vol. 1). Yerevan: ASSR Academy of Science Publication.
- Charents, Ye. (1964). *Erkeri joghovatsu* (Set of works, in Armenian). (Vol. 3). Yerevan: ASSR Academy of Science Publication.
- Charents, Ye. (1967). *Erkeri joghovatsu* (Set of works, in Armenian). (Vol. 6). Yerevan: ASSR Academy of Science Publication.
- Charents, Ye. (1968). *Erkeri joghovatsu* (Set of works, in Armenian). (Vol. 4). Yerevan: ASSR Academy of Science Publication.
- Charents, Ye. (1983). *Antip ev chhavakvatc erker* (Unpublished and uncollected works, in Armenian). Yerevan: ASSR Academy of Science Publication.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1988). *Istina i metod. Osnovi filosofskoi germenetiki* (Truth and method. Fundamentals of philosophical hermeneutics, in Russian). Moscow: "Progress" Publication.
- Gasparov, M. (1989). *Ocherk istorii evropeiskogo stikha* (Essay on the history of European verse, in Russian). Moscow: "Nauka" Publication.
- Gasparyan, D. (1979). *Sovetahay poeziayi tagha-*

- chapat'yuny* (The metrics of Soviet Armenian poetry, in Armenian). Yerevan: ASSR Academy of Science Publication.
- Jakobson, R. (1975). *Lingvistika i poetika* (Linguistics and poetics, in Russian). In E. Basin, & M. Polyakov, *Structuralizm "za" i "protiv", Sbornik statei (Structuralism "for" and "against", Set of articles, in Russian)* (pp. 193-230). Moscow: "Progress" Publication.
- Landy, J. (2021). Lyric self-fashioning: Sonnet 35 as a formal model. *Philosophy and Literature*, 45(1), 224-248. <https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.2021.0015>
- Ostankovich, A., & Shpak, E. (2013). *Sinergicheskii potencial tvordikh form stikha (rondo, pondel', triolet)* (Synergistic potential of stable verse forms (Rondo, rondel, triolet), in Russian). *Vestnik Severo-Kavkazskovo federal'noyo universiteta (Bulletin of the North Caucasian Federal University, in Russian)*, 4(37), 154-158.
- Schlegel, A. (1983). *Estetika. Filosofiya. Kritika* (Aesthetics. Philosophy. Criticism, in Russian). (Vol. 2). Moscow: "Iskusstvo" Publication.
- Zhirmunsky, V. (1975). *Teoria stikha* (Theory of verse, in Russian). Leningrad: "Sovetskii pisatel'" Publication.
- Zis, A. (1987). *Filosofskoe mishlenie i khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo* (Philosophical thinking and artistic creativity, in Russian). Moscow: "Iskusstvo" Publication.