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Prosody and versification in relation to musical means in Karol Szymanowski's song 'Słowisień' (from *Słopiewnie*)

DOI: 10.34861/aspmuz12-11_prob-proso

Setting a text to music is a special kind of creative experience. Excluding some specific situations, in most cases the text already exists before the composer begins writing the music. Therefore, it is already fixed in terms of structure, vocabulary, etc., on one hand suggesting, but on the other hand limiting the range of possibilities open to the composer. A text – any text – 'makes demands'. And a poem is a particularly demanding type of text.

The stichic construction, regular (or irregular) distribution of accents, repetitiveness of metrical patterns and intonation – a combination of these factors provides a text with a distinctive rhythm of its own, a rhythm perceptible while one is reading a poem or listening to its recitation. One of the tasks the composer of a song is faced with is deciding how to transfer this rhythm to the musical rhythm on every level, from single durations to bars and hypermeasures.

These factors are an object of interest for two fields related to linguistics and literary theory, namely, prosody and versification. The term 'prosody' is defined as:

1. the study of poetic metre and of the art of versification, including rhyme, stanzaic forms, and the quantity and stress of syllables,

2. a system of versification,
3. the patterns of stress and intonation in a language.¹

Maria Dłuska, basing her definition on the Greek term, describes prosody as ‘the study of the melodious qualities of syllables, of their quantity and stresses’.² She points to the long history of the term in literary theory with regard to the metre and rhythm of Polish poetry or the Polish language in general, referring to works on the subject written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Tadeusz Nowaczyński, Józef Elsner and Józef Franciszek Królikowski.³

Versification is a related term, partially overlapping with prosody. Some definitions of prosody exclude or marginalise the versification aspect, focusing only on accentuation and intonation, considering versification as referring to something that seems more of an external framing of the poem – its metrical structure.

Słowieńie – the origins of the lyrics

The cycle of five songs *Słowieńie* was composed by Karol Szymanowski in 1921. It is based on the text of a poetic cycle written by Julian Tuwim (1894–1953), a Polish poet, writer and translator associated with the Skamander group of poets. Tuwim’s set of poems is even dedicated to Szymanowski, and it was first published in 1923, two years after the first performance of its musical setting.

Słowieńie is a work of an exceptional character and of crucial significance not only in Tuwim’s output, but in Polish poetry in general, principally on account of its unique language. Tuwim attempted to ‘reconstruct’ an imaginary ‘Old Slavonic’ language using different lexical and syntactic means; the result has been described by Roman Ingarden:

What makes *Słowieńie* [my italics] significantly different from ‘normal’ literary works is that besides Polish words, some ‘virtual’ words are included: some newly-created sounds with no semantic meaning [...]. However, the sound of those neologisms is formed in such a way that either they are evident transformations of normal Polish words, which suggests their meaning to the reader, or thanks to their structure, i.e. proper endings, they at least resemble actual Polish words. In either case, it is feasible to read the poem as a work with both meaning and

¹ ‘Prosody’, in *Collins English Dictionary* [online], <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/prosody>, accessed 10 Nov. 2022.

² M. Dłuska, *Prozodia języka polskiego* [Prosody of the Polish language] (Warsaw, 1976), 9.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

a sentence-based structure, the sense of which is at least approximately outlined or possible to guess.⁴

While the vocabulary and potential meaning of the text is not a major point of interest in this article, to facilitate a better understanding of the text as such, a short explanation concerning the specificities of this original language must be provided.

Jadwiga Sawicka describes *Słowień* as follows: ‘The words opalesce with a multiplicity of meanings’.⁵ She follows this statement with the example of the title word, *słowień*, which has connotations with some actual Polish words, like *słowo* (word), *Słowianie* (Slavs), *śpiewać* (to sing) and *piąć* (to crow, but also derogatory about singing) – *śpiewne słowo* (a singsong word). The ambiguity has been achieved here by merging parts of different words, creating, to quote Sawicka, an ‘opalescent’ conglomeration. Other examples provided by this author come from the first poem of the cycle, ‘Słowień’, the musical setting of which is the subject of this article:

- *białopal* = white ember/glow (*biały* – white, *palić się* – to burn)
- *pęk słowień* = a bunch of sweet cherries (*pęk* – bunch, *słodki* – sweet, *wiśnie* – cherries)
- *sierpiec* = crescent moon in the month of August (*sierp* – crescent, often used in poetry in reference to the moon, *sierpień* – August)
- *niebłocze* = cloudless sky (*niebo* – sky, *nie* – no/not, *obłok* – cloud).⁶

In addition to this technique, Sawicka’s account of Tuwim’s experimental linguistic strategies includes the following:

- neologisms that imitate archaisms;
- actual archaisms;

⁴ ‘Co *Słowień* w sposób istotny odróżnia od „normalnych” dzieł literackich, to występowanie obok słów języka polskiego wielu „słów” pozornych: brzmień nowoutworzonych i nie posiadających znaczenia [...]. Te nowotwory są jednak tak w brzmieniu swym ukształtowane, że albo są wyraźnym przekształceniem normalnych słów języka polskiego [...] i nasuwają czytelnikowi ich znaczenie, albo też w budowie swej przypominają przynajmniej słowa polskie przez odpowiednio dobrane końcówki itp. W każdym razie całość da się czytać jako twór posiadający znaczenie i budowę zdaniową o sensie co najmniej w przybliżeniu wyznaczonym lub domyślnym. R. Ingarden, ‘Graniczny przypadek dzieła literackiego’ [The borderline case of a literary work], in *Studia z estetyki* [Studies in aesthetics], iii (Warsaw, 1970), 178.

⁵ J. Sawicka, *Julian Tuwim* (Warsaw, 1986), 213.

⁶ Ibidem.

- words based on authentic Slavonic root words;
- transformations of commonly used Polish words by means of new inflectional endings, contamination of word parts or modifications of the root;
- words that serve as an entire sentence.⁷

The features described above make those poems incredibly difficult to translate into another language. It should be noted that the German and French translations included in the score of Szymanowski's song cycle⁸ do not attempt to preserve the original lyrics' experimental qualities, providing instead a solid general language-based text with no semantic ambiguity.⁹

At the risk of oversimplification or misinterpretation, yet to facilitate the understanding of both the implied semantic meaning(s) and the syntax for non-Polish-speaking readers, an English translation is presented here, using general language in analogy to the said German and French versions:

<p>W białodrzewiu jaśnie dźni słoneczno, miodzie złoci białopałem żyśnie, drzewia pełni pszczelą i pasieczną, a przez liście kraśnie pęk słowisnie.</p>	<p>In the trees the sun is shining brightly, pouring whitely burning gold of honey, trees are stuffed with bees and swarmed with beehives and the leaves are turning red with cherries.</p>
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<p>A gdy sierpiec na niebłoczcu łyście, w cieniem ciemnie jeno niezaśpiwy: w białodrzewiu ćwirnie i sreblisście słodzik słowi słowisieńkie ciewy.¹⁰</p>	<p>When the moon in cloudless sky will sparkle, no song sounding in the dark in shadows: in the trees there ringing silv'ry shining there's a nightingale, still singing sweetly.¹¹</p>
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⁷ Ibidem, 214.

⁸ Translations by, respectively, Rudolf Stephan Hoffman and Zofia Szymanowska. See K. Szymanowski, *Słopiewnie*, in *Lieder II: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Kraków, 1987).

⁹ Interestingly, there are significant differences between those two versions, but in fairness, they may be attributed not only to the ambiguity of the original, but equally to the fact that the versions are 'singable' translations (matching the rhythm of the music; in the case of the German translation, even rhyming). In cases like this, with priority given to rhythmic compatibility, translations tend to become quite loose, and differences between various language versions are not unexpected.

¹⁰ The poem is reproduced here after the score of Karol Szymanowski's song 'Słowisień' (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1923/1951). There are other versions of the poem, differing slightly in lexis and punctuation (editor's note).

¹¹ Translation by Agata Krawczyk.

A significant volume of research into Tuwim's poetry emphasises the poet's sensitivity to sound, which can be particularly clearly observed in *Słopiewnie*, resulting in a very conscious approach to working with the phonetic aspect of the text: the use of vowels, consonants in all their variety, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc.¹² This kind of 'sound-focused' poetry may be particularly inspiring for a composer, since it is likely to prompt some solutions in the music, particularly in terms of harmony, timbre, register, etc. This aspect of Szymanowski's musical setting of *Słopiewnie* has been analysed by Michał Bristiger in his description of 'Wanda' – the last song of the cycle.¹³ It is also a part of the analysis provided by Mieczysław Tomaszewski.¹⁴

Just as the phonic aspect of the lyrics may influence harmony, timbre or register, the prosody and versification may affect some elements of the music – mainly the rhythmical structure. As mentioned before, a poem has its own rhythm, and it is for the composer to decide how those two kinds of rhythm – the poetic and the musical – will interact. The following analysis will focus on this phenomenon in 'Słowisień' – the opening piece from Szymanowski's opus.

Rhythm is naturally not the only element influenced by the specificities (structural, phonic or semantic) of the lyrics. Also the aspect of pitch – the intervallic structure, range and shape of melodic lines – may be subject to determinants of this kind. However, the matter of melody, although undoubtedly inspiring as a potential subject for further research, exceeds the limits of this article.

'Słowisień' – general structural characteristics of the lyrics

In order to determine the potential that a poem offers for a musical setting, one must first recognise the properties of the text. For 'Słowisień', the most basic of those would be the following:

¹² M. Osiurak, 'Muzyczność poezji Juliana Tuwima' [The musicality of Julian Tuwim's poetry], in E. Gorlewska, M. Jurkowska and K. Korotkich (eds), *Julian Tuwim. Tradycja, recepcja, perspektywy badawcze* [Julian Tuwim: tradition, reception and research perspectives] (Białystok, 2017), 71. W. Szturc, '„Bez stóp — ani rusz!”'. Wersologika Juliana Tuwima' ['Without feet – not a move!': Julian Tuwim's versologic], in *ibidem*, 26.

¹³ M. Bristiger, *Związki muzyki ze słowem. Z zagadnień analizy muzycznej* [The relationship between music and words: issues relating to musical analysis] (Kraków, 1986), 59–69.

¹⁴ M. Tomaszewski, 'Słopiewnie Szymanowskiego według Tuwima' [Szymanowski's *Słopiewnie* to poems by Tuwim], in *Nad pieśniami Karola Szymanowskiego. Cztery studia* [On the songs of Karol Szymanowski: four studies] (Kraków, 1998), 49–76.

- the poem consists of eight lines,
- it is divided into two stanzas, four lines each,
- it is decasyllabic (contains 10 syllables in each line),
- a caesura after four syllables is present, yet not too distinct.¹⁵

It should be noted that since the language used in *Słowieńie* – for all its innovativeness – is generally derived from Polish, it preserves the characteristics of prosody typical for Polish. One of them is paroxytonic stress, which means that, as a rule, the word stress is placed on the penultimate syllable. This particular feature has a huge impact on the versification of Polish-language poetry (for instance, the predominance of female over male clausulae, the preference for some metrical feet, i.e. trochee and amphibrach), and in consequence on the rhythmic aspect of musical settings of said poetry.

While analysing the distribution of stresses, whether in verse or speech, a frequent approach is to take as a starting point not separate words but rather the stresses and try to break the text into groups of syllables, with each group consisting of one stressed syllable and surrounding unstressed ones. This is called a ‘stress group’ or ‘accent group’, although these terms do not appear to be widely used in the anglophone linguistics literature.¹⁶ In this article, the phenomenon will be referred to as a ‘stress group’. Here the text of ‘Słowieńie’ is divided into stress groups; stressed syllables are marked in bold and underlined.

W białod**drzewiu** / **jaśnie** / **dźni** / słoneczno,
miodzie / **złoci** / białop**ałem** / **żyśnie**,
drzewia / **pełni** / **pszczelą** / i pasieczną,
 a przez **liście** / **kraśnie** / **pek** / słow**ie**śnie.

A gdy **sierpiec** / na nie**błoczu** / **łyście**,
w cieniu / **ciemnie** / **jeno** / nieza**śpiewy**:

¹⁵ As emphasised by Tomaszewski, this kind of decasyllable (with a caesura after the fourth syllable) is very rare in Polish poetry. See *ibidem*, 55.

¹⁶ A definition of a ‘stress group’: ‘a unit of speech sound constituted by a single primary stress and usually marked by relatively open juncture or pause before and after: a single syllable with primary stress or a series of syllables united by the fact that among them there is only one with primary stress’. See ‘stress-group’, in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* [online], <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stress-group>, accessed 10 Nov. 2022. A similar definition may be found in Polish literature (for the term *zestwór akcentowy*): ‘a group of syllables whose prosody is subordinated to one common stress’. M. Dłuska, *Prozodia języka polskiego*, 13.

w białod**drzewiu** / **ćwirnie** / i srebli**ście**
śłodzik / **słowi** / słowis**ieńkie** / **ciewy**.

The stress groups contain from one to four syllables, which is not surprising, since that range basically exhausts the possibilities for this type of unit in Polish. The four-syllable groups, aside from the primary stress, contain also a less strong secondary stress that falls on the first syllable. In the lyrics of ‘Słowisień’, this applies to the following (primary stresses bold and underlined, secondary stresses bold):

*w białod**drzewiu**,*
*białopa**ł**em,*
*i pasie**cz**ną,*
*a przez li**ś**cie,*
*a gdy sier**piec**,*
*nieza**śpie**wy,*
*isrebli**ś**cie,*
*słowis**ieńkie**.*

The foregoing observations regarding accentuation lead to the conclusion that the stress distribution is largely regular. If the secondary stresses are taken into account, the distribution can be interpreted as completely regular. Hence, ‘Słowisień’ represents a syllabo-tonic poem – a type of poem where not only the number of syllables, but also the pattern of accentuation is constant (another term for this type is accentual-syllabic). This is a metrical type of syllabo-tonism; the fundamental metrical foot in ‘Słowisień’ is the trochee – a set of two syllables, the first of which is stressed and the second unstressed. In some instances where two trochees are expected, an alternative foot called a third paeon is introduced instead. This is a four-syllable foot with the stress falling on the third syllable. However, this break in the trochaic metre is not significant enough to exclude the categorisation of the poem as syllabo-tonic or metrical. This kind of variation is quite typical for syllabo-tonic poetry in its late phase. As a matter of fact, Julian Tuwim and his fellow poets from the Skamander group are particularly known for the irregularities they introduced in their syllabo-tonic verse.¹⁷

Also, if the secondary stresses are overly emphasised, the impression of a regular trochaic metre will be created. Overall, given the marginal role of the

¹⁷ Eadem, *Studia z historii teorii wersyfikacji polskiej* [Studies in the history and theory of Polish versification], ii (Warsaw, 1978), 170.

sporadic paeons, the verse can be classified as trochaic pentameter. According to Maria Dłuska, in the case of the Polish language, the trochaic metre has particularly rich potential because of the paroxytonic stress.¹⁸

An argument can be made that the trochaic metre has particularly strong connotations with the system of note durations, which is also based on a bipartite division and the succession of strong and weak beat (in that order). However, there is also an opposite concept, according to which the elementary rhythmic unit is a succession of weak and strong beat.¹⁹

Needless to say, some specific features of prosody or versification carry a particular range of possibilities for a potential musical setting. When a syllabo-tonic text is considered, the most obvious solution would be to respond to the regularity of the poetic rhythm with analogous regularity in the musical rhythm. That which is so clearly visible on various levels of the structure of the text (lines, half-lines, stress groups, metrical feet) could potentially manifest itself on various levels of the musical structure as the symmetry of phrases and motifs and the repetitiveness of rhythmic groups. One could easily picture the lyrics of 'Słowisień' rhythmised in a very simple, schematic way (see Example 1a and b).

Example 1. The simplest possible versions of rhythmisation of the trochaic metre.

a)

W bia - lo - drze - wiu jaś - nie dźni slo - necz - no,

Mio - dzie zło - ci bia - lo - pa - lem żyś - nie,

Drze - wia peł - ni pszcze - lą i pa - siecz - ną,

A przez liś - cie kraś - nie pęk sło - wiś - nie.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 60.

¹⁹ In Polish musicology, this idea has been developed by Witold Rudziński, who was strongly inspired by the works of André Mocquereau. See W. Rudziński *Nauka o rytmie muzycznym* [The study of musical rhythm], i (Kraków, 1987), 153–163.

b)

W bia - ło - drze - wiu jaś - nie dźni slo - necz - no,

Mio - dzie zło - ci bia - ło - pa - łem żyś - nie,

Drze - wia peł - ni pszcze - łą i pa - siecz - na,

A przez liś - cie kraś - nie pęk sło - wiś - nie.

Naturally, no composer would settle for such a schematic and simplistic approach, barring perhaps a few specific situations, like a stylisation or music written for children (as audience or performers). Neither, of course, did Szymanowski. The rhythmisation of the vocal part of ‘Słowisień’ displays a high level of diversity and complexity (see Example 2).

The distribution of syllables is far from schematic, which is visible more clearly with the melismata reduced (see Example 3, where each of the melismata has been replaced with one longer duration).

It is also very apparent that the regularity of the trochaic metre is not reflected in any regularity or periodicity in the musical rhythm. The stressed syllables are distributed quite irregularly, with different time intervals between them. The musical motifs matching respective lines of the text vary in length, regardless of the symmetry of the decasyllabic verse. To sum up, no two lines are rhythmised in the same way. The following discussion of each line in turn focusses on the relationship between the characteristics of the text and the musical setting.

Example 2. Rhythmisation of the vocal part in ‘Słowisień’.

W bia - lo - drze - wiu ja - nie dźni slo - necz - - no,
mio - dzie zło - ci bia - lo - pa - lęm żyś - nie, drze - wia peł - ni pszcze - łą i pa - siecz - na,
a przeżył - cie kras - nie pęk slo - wiś - - - nie.

A gdy sier-piec na nieb - lo - czu łyś - nie, w cie-niem cie-mnie je - no nie - do -

śpie - - - wy: wbia-lo - drze - wiu ćwir-nie i sre-bliś - cie

sło - - - - - dzik sło - wi sło - wi - sien - kie cie - wy.

Example 3. Rhythmisation of the vocal part with melismata reduced.

W bia - ło - drze - wiu jaś - nie dźni slo - necz - - no,
mio - dzie zło - ci bia - ło - pa - lem żyś - nie, drze - wia peł - ni pszcze - lą i pa - siecz - na,
a przez liś - cie kraś - nie pęk slo - wiś - - - nie.

A gdy sier - piec na nieb - ło - czu lysz - nie, w cie - niem cie - mnie je - no nie - do -
śnie - - - wy: w bia - ło - drze - wiu ćwir - nie i sre - bliś - cie
sło - - - dzik sło - wi sło - wi - sień - kie cie - - - wy.

Rhythmisation of the lyrics in detail

First stanza – musical metre²⁰

Even at first glance, in the musical setting of the first stanza, some level of irregularity is certain to be expected, due to a combination of two time signatures marked at the very beginning. To rhythmise a text of such syllabo-tonic regularity with a variable musical metre is undoubtedly an unconventional artistic choice that goes against the periodicity inherent to metrical poetry.

Line 1

W białodrzewiu / jaśnie / dźni / słoneczno,



- Overall time-span: approx. 5 bars, 11 quavers (since the bars are of unequal length, due to the variable metre, the quavers make more objective units of measurement).²¹
- In the first stress group (four-syllable – *w białodrzewiu*) – the secondary stress (on the first syllable) is stronger than the primary stress, due to the grace note. As said before, a strong emphasis on the secondary stress reinforces the impression of the trochaic metre, although the metrical foot observed here is, in reality, a third paeon.
- The use of grace notes and the element of repetition in the first two bars emphasises the caesura after four syllables.
- The word *słoneczno* (similar to ‘sunny’) is highlighted by means of both rhythm and melody. In terms of rhythm, that is achieved by prolongation, to the extent that this one word becomes longer than the whole preceding part of the line. In terms of melody, there is a peak on the note F#5).

²⁰ Since so much terminology regarding poetry and music is shared (metre, rhythm, etc.), and this article deals with both fields, to prevent confusion, some specifying adjectives are included (hence ‘musical metre’, ‘musical rhythm’, ‘poetic pause’, ‘trochaic metre’, etc.). As for musical metre, the term ‘time signature’ is used where acceptable.

²¹ For each line, the overall time-span is expressed in both the number of bars and the number of quavers. The objective of the latter is to provide measurements that can be compared, since bars are not equal in length due to the changes in musical metre.

Line 2

miodzie / złoci / białopałem / żyśnie,



- Overall time-span: 3 bars, 7 quavers.
- Hence the musical setting of this line is much shorter than the setting of line 1 – regardless of the equal number of syllables.
- However, just as in line 1, the last stress falls on the sixth quaver. In a way, the rules of syllabo-tonic verse have been used here: the ‘mathematics’ of syllabo-tonism covers the syllables only until the last stressed syllable of a line. What happens after the last stress may vary; an unstressed syllable may be added or subtracted (a hypercatalectic or catalectic line, respectively), but it does not affect the classification of the poem as a particular metrical type. However, in ‘Słowisień’, that is not the case; all the lines have exactly the same number of syllables and end with an identical type of clausula. Any operations in the final clausula are implemented by purely musical means (like introducing longer durations or melismata), as was displayed in line 1 and will be displayed in a few other lines as well.

Line 3

drzewia / pełni / pszczeła / i paśieczna,



- Same overall time-span as line 2 (3 bars, 7 quavers).
- In terms of rhythm, this is a variant of the previous line. An even higher level of similarity may be observed in the melody; in fact, it is the same melodic motif, rhythmised slightly differently. The order of the time signatures is a permutation of the order used previously (line 2: 3/8+2/8+2/8, line 3: 2/8+3/8+2/8).
- What is characteristic for both line 2 and line 3 is a particularly strong emphasis on the first stress (the first syllable), achieved by melodic means. The F5 note, matching that syllable, is the highest pitch of the line. This solution serves to highlight and stabilise the trochaic metre.

- Line 3 does not include any melismata. It gives the impression that the narrator is rushing through the text. This solution may be rooted in the semantic meaning of this fragment and the role it plays in the context of the whole poem. In the landscape description that constitutes the first stanza, line 3 is the middle part; the image that comes to mind here is a storyteller growing increasingly animated in his speech and condensing his tale, either to create suspense or to get to the turning point as quickly as possible.

Line 4

a przez liście / kraśnie / pek / słowiśnie.



- Overall time-span: 5 bars, 11 quavers.
- In the first two bars, the succession of semiquavers supports the trochaic metre, while at the same time it is being counteracted by an opposite tendency. The grace notes on every other note contradict the ‘weak’ position of those notes.
- The last stressed syllable falls on the fifth quaver, which is similar, though not identical, to lines 1, 2 and 3.
- The final clausula is extended again (on the word *słowiśnie*) by a large melisma (six and a half quavers in length). Along with the melisma from line 1, it constitutes a sort of bracket that closes the first part of the composition as well as the first stanza of the poem.

Second stanza – musical metre

The second part of the song, starting from bars 28–29 and following a short instrumental bridge, brings a change of the metro-rhythmic characteristics. First, the combination of 3/8 and 2/8 is abandoned in favour of a constant 4/8 metre (except for the last phrase). Secondly, the overall way of rhythmising the lyrics becomes slightly different; this will be described further on.

This shift is rooted in the semantics of the text. The fifth line begins with the words *A gdy* (‘And when’), which implies a change to the poetic image. While the first stanza constitutes a description of some pre-existing state, the second describes a new situation, which will arise when a specific condition is fulfilled (*A gdy sierpiec na niebłoczcu łyście* – *When the moon in cloudless sky will sparkle*).

Line 5

A gdy sierpiec / na niebłoczu / łyście,



- Overall time-span: 3 bars and an upbeat,²² 13 quavers.
- This is the first time a line opens with an upbeat. As a result, the first stress, instead of falling on the first syllable, which would typically result from the trochaic metre of the poem, falls on the second syllable – the word *gdy* – placed on the strongest beat in the bar. This stress is reinforced by an octave leap in the melody. Such a strong emphasis of this word stems from its semantic meaning and the important role it plays in the structure of the poem. *Gdy* means ‘when’; hence it is the very word that implies the shift of the described image, which prompts an analogical shift in the music.
- Compared to that of lines 1–4, this rhythm is simpler. If the final melisma is reduced, it becomes even extremely simple, to an extent reminiscent of the ‘naïve’ rhythmisation proposed in Example 1. Thanks to this level of simplicity, the trochaic metre is perceptible very clearly.
- The trochaic metre is also supported by the piano part, which provides impulses on the first and third quavers of each bar.

Line 6

w cieniu / ciemnie / jeno / niezaśpiwy:



- Overall time-span: 3 and 1/2 bars, 14 quavers.
- Continuing the tendency initiated in line 5, the trochaic metre is outlined very clearly at the beginning of the line.
- The final clausula is again extended through the introduction of a melisma five and a half quavers in length. As a result, the time-span of the final clausula is almost equal to the time-span of the whole preceding part of the line.

²² The term ‘upbeat’ is used in the meaning of ‘anacrusis’ – a note or set of notes preceding the first bar line (in this case, the first bar line of the fragment matching the line in the lyrics).

- The last stressed syllable falls on the fifth quaver. This apparent similarity with lines 1, 2 and 3 provides an element of regularity; consequently, despite all the differences, some level of recurrence may still be perceived in the song's rhythm.

Line 7

w białodrzewiu / ćwirnie / i srebliście



- Overall time-span: 2 bars and an upbeat, 9 quavers.
- The upbeat covers two syllables. They are in an unstressed position, so the secondary stress in *w białodrzewiu* does not stand out this time, and priority is given to the primary stress. Therefore, unlike in line 1, in this case the paeon is plainly exposed – not hidden and disguised as two trochees.
- In the stress group *w białodrzewiu*, there is a melisma three quavers in length on the third syllable. This is the first case of a relatively long melisma being positioned at the beginning of the line and not in the final clausula. As a result, the anaphora of lines 1 and 7 is highlighted.

Line 8

słodzik / słowi / słowisieńkie / ciewy.



- Overall time-span: 5 bars, 19/20 quavers.²³
- This line brings the return of polymetre. The time signatures change every one or two bars in the following order: 4/8, 3/4, 4/8, 3/8.
- Similarly to line 7, there is a melisma in the first stress group and not in the final clausula. Its time-span is almost seven quavers (six and three-quarters). The opening position of the melismata in lines 7–8 is the reversal of a tendency observed in previous lines. It provides further variety to the range of

²³ 20 quavers if we take into account the rest at the beginning of bar 29.

possible musical interpretations of the trochaic metre. At the same time, at this point in the composition, the metre has already been well established, and even if a line begins with a melisma, it is still perceptible.

- After the first word – the one that is prolonged by the melisma – the following passage returns to the simpler rhythmisation of the trochaic metre. In the final clausula, a longer note value is introduced to mark the end of the song.

Line openings in relation to the metrical grid

One can also compare the different positions at which the beginnings of lines in the lyrics are placed – with quite telling results. In ‘Słowisień’, the lines start in three different ways:

1. on the first beat of the bar – lines 2, 3, 4, 6;
2. after the first beat of the bar, following a quaver rest – lines 1, 8;
3. before the first beat of the bar, on the upbeat – lines 5, 7.

Ad 1. This way of opening is the most frequent in the composition: it is used in four out of eight lines. That is not surprising, considering it is the most natural solution for the trochaic metre, since it puts the first syllable in a stressed position.

Ad 2. In this case, if the first syllable is to be stressed (which would be expected for the trochaic metre), it has to be emphasised by non-metrical means. Line 8 is an instance of such a case, with a prolongation on the first syllable resulting from a melisma.

Ad 3. This solution may potentially come in useful in the instances where a paeon is introduced instead of a trochee. The secondary stress does not require a comparably strong beat as the primary stress. It may be observed in line 7, where placing the first syllable (the one with the secondary stress) on the upbeat allows for the third syllable to be emphasised in a way that prioritises the primary stress. In line 5, the upbeat is used differently, in order to transfer the stress to the second syllable – a procedure which, as described above, is determined by the semantics of this fragment.

A 'poetic pause' and its ramifications

One of the most essential features of a poem – as opposed to prose – is its stichic construction. Whether it is regular in length or not, rhymed or not, the fact that it is built of distinct lines is crucial to poetry. The ability to separate lines from each other in our perception is why we identify a poem as a poem.²⁴

Two factors play a major role in this process of identification. The first is repetition, which in the case of syllabo-tonic poetry is represented by the regularity of the poetic rhythm and also by the occurrence of rhymes.

It is only the repetition of elements in the same combinations and the same functions, imposing on a text a partition into equivalent entities-lines, that lends those elements the potential to create verse, thus shaping the text into a poem. It is also thanks to their repetition that we recognise lines as such. No entity that is not linked by repetition to other adequate entities can be recognised as a line. Therefore it may be said that what makes a text a poem is the act of creating an additional linguistic partition.²⁵

The second element is what might be called the 'poetic pause' separating adjacent lines. It is a 'moment of silence between [verbal] sentences, phrases, parts of phrases, stress groups, words, syllables and phones',²⁶ and it most often occurs in accordance with the syntax and punctuation of the text.

In a song, one might expect the partition of the lyrics into separate lines to be reflected in the construction of the music. This can be done by means of a clear motivic-phrasal structure, and also by ensuring that the 'poetic pause' between lines is reflected in an analogical pause (or other type of caesura) accomplished by musical means.

²⁴ M. Dłuska, *Prace wybrane* [Selected works], i: *Odmiany i dzieje wiersza polskiego* [The varieties and history of Polish poetry] (Kraków, 2001), 8.

²⁵ 'Dopiero powtarzanie się elementów w tych samych zespołach i tych samych funkcjach, narzucających tokowi językowemu rozczłonkowanie na ekwiwalentne całości-wersy — robi z tych elementów czynniki wierszotwórcze, a utwór kształtuje w wiersz. Wersy rozpoznajemy jako takie też dzięki ich powtarzalności. Żadna całośćka nie powiązana powtarzalnością z innymi adekwatnymi całośćkami nie może być rozpoznana jako wers. Stąd można określić, że funkcja wierszotwórcza polega na wytwarzaniu dodatkowego językowego rozczłonkowania'. Dłuska, *Prace wybrane*, 6–7.

²⁶ 'moment ciszy między zdaniami, frazami, członami fraz, zestrojami, wyrazami, sylabami, głoskami'. M. Dłuska, *Studia z historii i teorii*.

In 'Ślowisień', this kind of caesura occurs between:

- lines 1 and 2,
- lines 4 and 5 (this one is the longest and most distinct, because it separates two parts of the composition that correspond to two stanzas of the poem),
- lines 6 and 7,
- lines 7 and 8.

In the last two instances, the pauses are quite minor but still perceptible, facilitating the recognition of the structure of the lyrics.

Some pairs of adjacent lines (2+3, 2+4, 5+6) have no caesura but flow smoothly into one another. In the case of these particular pairs, this makes the rhymes less distinct, which affects perception of the 'verseness' of the lyrics, since rhymes, along with pauses, are among the most important factors that make a text recognisable as poetry.

A single trochee – different variants of rhythmisation

As mentioned before, regardless of the regularity of the original poem in terms of the length of the lines and their stress patterns, no two lines in the analysed song are rhythmised in the same way. But the same can be said about the rhythmisation of a unit occurring on a much more detailed level. The musical rhythm is varied to the point where there are almost no two single cases of a trochaic metrical foot that are assigned the same rhythmic model.

The variants of the trochee rhythmisation fall largely into two categories: syllabic and melismatic. The first category includes the following combinations:

- two quavers,
- two semiquavers,
- dotted quaver plus semiquaver.

The second category covers all the melismata described in the above overview. In this case, the emphasis of the word stress by the music is determined not only by the metrical position of the syllable but also by its length.

In the second part of the song, a third intermediate category is added. In a group of one quaver and two semiquavers, the latter two fall on one syllable, creating a tiny melisma of just two notes.

The extremely wide range of rhythmic solutions applied to a very simple, two-syllable prosodic unit is an artistic choice with particular significance. It con-

stitutes an ironic contradiction of the idea of syllabo-tonic metrical verse, since the core of that idea lies in repetition on various levels, namely, repetition of the number of stresses in particular lines and repetition of the same metrical feet within a line.

Conclusions

The main conclusion resulting from the above analysis is the variety of musical (specifically rhythmic) means used to turn the poem into a song. The way that Tuwim's text is set to music is anything but schematic, and the conscious strategy of the composer, aimed at blurring the regularity of the verse, is very apparent. The compositional methods that serve this purpose include the following:

- differentiating the time-span of lines using different musical metres and occasional melismata that extend the length of selected syllables;
- using a variable musical metre in the first part of the song, which naturally results in a multiplicity of rhythmic variants of the trochaic pentameter;
- differentiating the ways in which a trochee is rhythmised, including both syllabic and melismatic models;
- emphasising (by melodic means) selected words in various lines – words that are placed in different positions in a line;
- eliminating the 'poetic pause' between some lines.

As a result, not much is left of the regularity of the original poem. This statement is not, however, a criticism. The irregularity of the musical setting is not a flaw, but an added value. The text acquires a natural 'flow' specific to speech rather than poetry. This creates the impression that the composer is spinning a tale rather than reciting a poem – a tale that has its own narrative pace and structure. Therefore, the choice of irregularity is much more than a way of preventing the music from being simplistic or 'boring'. At the same time, 'Słowisień' provides an interesting example of how the text becomes liberated from the strictures of regularity with no detriment to its syllabo-tonic metrical characteristics.

An analogy may be found between Tuwim's approach to poetry and Szymanowski's approach to vocal music (as displayed in this particular work). In a way, Szymanowski treats the syllabo-tonism in the same way Tuwim treats the language. On the surface, the language in *Słowień* may seem deprived of semantic meaning, as suggested by those scholars who focus mainly on emphas-

ising the sound qualities,²⁷ but a closer look reveals that the meaning is there; even if not unequivocal, it still exists – implied, suggested, awaiting individual associations and interpretations. In the same way, on the surface, Szymanowski's song is deprived of regularity – and yet that regularity is still perceptible, affecting the listener on the subconscious level.

Both artists meet their objectives by rejecting what is conventional: general language for Tuwim, symmetry of musical form for Szymanowski. Yet ironically both of them accomplish that goal by reaching for another conventional element. Szymanowski exploits the possibilities of the musical metro-rhythmic system to the limits, yet in his combinations of various rhythmic durations, weak and strong beats and rhythmic patterns he still stays within those limits. And Tuwim's experimental vocabulary is able to carry its meaning – or meanings – thanks to the author's faithfulness to the rules of Polish syntax and word formation. Thus, the correspondence and interaction between 'Słowisień' the poem and 'Słowisień' the work of music go far beyond the question of rhythm; they are deeply rooted in the very core of the creative process.

²⁷ See Ingarden, *Graniczny przypadek*, 178; M. Głowiński, *Poetyka Tuwima a polska tradycja literacka* [Tuwim's poetics and the Polish literary tradition] (Warsaw, 1962), 222; M. Urbanek, *Tuwim. Wylękniony bluźnierca* [Tuwim: the fearful blasphemer] (Warsaw, 2013), 51.

ABSTRACT

For a composer planning to write a song, the prosody of the text plays a crucial role. The distribution of accents, metrical patterns, intonation – all of those factors have a great impact on the musical setting, particularly on the rhythmical structure. The specific features of the chosen text have the power to at the same inspire and limit the musical means possible to use while setting the lyrics to music. *Słopiewnie* is a song cycle composed by Karol Szymanowski, based on the text of a poetic cycle authored by Julian Tuwim. The significance of those poems in the history of Polish literature stems from their experimental language, which is based on innovative vocabulary derived from the idea of ‘reconstruction’ of the imaginary Old-Slavonic language. From the structural standpoint, the text of *Slowisień* – the opening song from Szymanowski’s work – is an example of syllabo-tonism. It consists of eight lines that are equal in length and also, barring a few minor aberrations, identical in terms of their accentuation patterns. As for the former, the poem is decasyllabic; as for the latter, it follows the poetic metre of trochaic pentameter. Despite the text being regular to such a large extent, the musical setting created by Szymanowski in a way contradicts that regularity. Due to the repetition of the stress patterns – the main characteristic of a syllabo-tonic poem – one could expect analogical repetitive patterns in the musical rhythm. However, in Szymanowski’s song, each line of the text is rhythmised in a different way. The differentiation of the rhythmic motives and groups, combined with some occasional melismata that extend selected syllables, provide the text with a natural ‘flow’ which resembles speech rather than poetry. This approach is also reinforced by a certain variety with regard to the positioning of the beginning of lines in the lyrics in relation to the metrical grid, as well as by the reduction of the caesurae between some of the lines. As a result, the regularity of the original text is blurred and the song acquires its very own narrative pace.

KEYWORDS: music and text, prosody, syllabo-tonism, song, Szymanowski

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