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## Sound in Verse: Two Interpretations of Echo in Bulgarian Poetry

### Abstract

This article examines the relationship between sound and meaning, addressing the questions of the arbitrariness or (partial) motivation of their connection, as well as the related problem of the specific value of linguistic sound in poetic texts. The analytical section of the article comments upon three poetic texts: an episode from the third book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (ca. AD 8), Ivan Vazov’s poem “Echoes” (1884), and Nadezhda Radulova’s poem “Echo” (2020). The article argues that these three texts share a common poetic strategy that functionalizes sound by combining the repetition of words or word fragments with a transformation of meaning. Thus, new meanings arise through the repetition of an already existing acoustic image.

**Keywords:** Ovid, echo, Bulgarian poetry, sound and meaning

### Introduction: On sound in poetry

The relationship between sound and meaning in poetic texts has been a central topic in literary theory since the earliest stages of its history, beginning with the interest of Russian Formalists in the specific use of language in early avant-garde poetry (Russian Futurism). Subsequently, this relationship became a central question in literary structuralism from the 1940s onwards, mainly thanks to the work of Roman Jakobson as one of its leading figures. A key feature of Jakobson’s approach concerns the application of strict linguistic analysis to literary (mainly poetic) texts, both on the grammatical and phonetic levels (see, for example, Jakobson 1979). Jakobson introduced his views on the role of sound in language in a summarized form in his *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*, delivered in

1942 – 1943 at the *École libre des hautes études* in New York<sup>1</sup>, where the Russian scholar insisted on the unique possibilities derived by verbal language from its phonetic nature:

So, the phoneme, this cardinal element on which everything in the linguistic system hinges, stands in contrast to all the other integral parts of the system, and has a completely exceptional and distinctive character, a character which is not to be found in any entity analogous to the phoneme in the other sign systems. [...] Only the phoneme is a purely differential and contentless sign. The phoneme's sole linguistic content, or more generally its only semiotic content, is its dissimilarity from all the other phonemes of the given system. A phoneme signifies something different from another phoneme in the same position; this is its sole value. (Jakobson 1978: 65 – 66)

Thus, the phonetic nature of verbal language distinguishes it from other sign systems “due to the specific character of its components, to the paradoxical character of elements which simultaneously signify and yet are devoid of all meaning” (Jakobson 1978: 67). In this respect, Jakobson was primarily interested in linguistic sound as described by Baudouin de Courtenay and later by Nikolai Trubetzkoy on the level of phonology (see Trubetzkoy [1939] 1969), while preserving the traditional principle of arbitrariness in the description of the relationship between signifier and signified.

However, in his works on poetics, Jakobson explored various ways in which both phonetics (pure linguistic sound outside language) and phonology (systematic sound within the framework of language) become able to circumvent semiotic arbitrariness and constitute alternative types of meaning within poetic use. In *The Sound Shape of Language* (1979), a monograph co-authored with Linda Waugh, Jakobson summarized his earlier views on the function of sound in poetic language under the general idea that “the notion of verse implies the indispensable presence of a certain specific, *ad hoc* organization of the verbal sound matter” (Jakobson, Waugh [1979] 2002: 219). This additional organization applies not only to traditional forms of versification, such as syllabic or syllabotonic rhymed verse, but also to *vers libre*. Here we can find statements such as the following:

A dynamized tension between *signans* and *signatum* and in particular the direct interplay of the speech sound with meaning – is superimposed [...] by poets upon their creation destined:

to overcome the palling flatness and univocity of verbal messages,  
to curb the futile and impoverishing attempts aimed at ‘disambiguation’,  
and to affirm the creativity of language from all infusion of banality.  
(Jakobson, Waugh [1979] 2002: 233 – 234)

Here, “the direct interplay of the speech sound with meaning” in verse is the

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<sup>1</sup> Jakobson delivered his lectures in the presence of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who wrote the preface to the published edition of the lectures some three decades later (Jakobson 1978: xi).

crucial formula, an idea that can be traced back as early as *The Newest Russian Poetry* (1919 – 1921; Jakobson 1979: 299 – 354).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in the 1960s, Jakobson found substantial confirmation of his approach to poetic language in Ferdinand de Saussure’s posthumously discovered writings on the so-called *anagrams* (Starobinski 1971). In these manuscripts, Jakobson detected the idea that poetry should be regarded as a constellation of sounds functioning independently from conventional meaning, rather than as some sort of ornamentally ordered communicative message. This is what he designated with Saussure’s term *poétique phonisante* (Jakobson, Waugh [1979] 2002: 224 – 225). Thus, Jakobson advanced an argument against both traditional linguistic principles: the codified link between signifier and signified, and the linearity of speech (Jakobson 1971: 23). In this line of inquiry, the key question will concern the various forms that “the direct interplay of the speech sound with meaning” can take in particular poetic texts. The self-sufficiency of the poetic text now unequivocally manifests itself as a priority of phonetic organization over the propositional dimension of speech.

There is a strong Bulgarian tradition of research on these aspects of literary texts, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s with the Fifth International Congress of Slavic Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia in September 1963 – a gathering attended by Jakobson himself (Велчев 1963) – and continuing with the seminal works of Miroslav Yanakiev ([1960] 2023), Radosvet Kolarov (1983), and Nikola Georgiev ([1985] 2017: 248 – 266) on poetic and prose texts in Bulgarian.<sup>3</sup>

Radosvet Kolarov’s monograph *Zvuk i smisal* (*Sound and Meaning*, 1983) builds on Jakobson’s work in examining the phonetic organization of poetic texts, broadening both its theoretical foundation and literary scope (Коларов 1983: 128 – 129). In this study, Kolarov introduces the concept of *metaphony*, defined as “the *construction* of an additional phonic structure *layered over* the normal phonological structure of a text, with corresponding new functions – *besides* and *beyond* the sign-differentiating function and other related functions that ensure the process of linguistic communication” (Коларов 1983: 22).<sup>4</sup> Kolarov was also the first to refer to Saussure’s anagrams as an analytical tool for exploring certain types of metaphonic structures (Коларов 1983: 65 – 66).

Parallel to constructing a systematic typology of metaphonic structures,

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<sup>2</sup> For example: “In emotional and poetic language, linguistic representations (both phonetic and semantic) attract stronger attention to themselves, the relationship between the sound aspect and meaning is closer, more intimate, and consequently, language becomes more revolutionary” (Jakobson 1979: 304; this translation from Russian is mine). This “attraction of attention” to the linguistic dimension itself is later defined as “poetic function” of language, the “self-sufficient word” (*самовитое слово*) as designated by Velimir Khlebnikov (Jakobson 1979: 305).

<sup>3</sup> These tendencies have been examined more recently in depth at two thematic conferences held at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” – in November 2012 (Николчина и др. 2014) and November 2014 (Николчина 2020).

<sup>4</sup> This translation from Bulgarian is mine; emphasis in original.

Kolarov examines some possible functions of metaphony in Bulgarian prose. He observes that the uses of metaphony can be classified with respect to their relation to meaning (“Correlation of sound to meaning”, Коларов 1983: 127); while some metaphonic structures tend to align with meaning, others rather contrast with it (Коларов 1983: 128 – 150). In the following analysis, we will focus on a specific metaphonic construction in poetry related to the echo effect. We can designate it as “poetic echolalia”. This structure falls under the category of those uses of metaphony that, in Kolarov’s classification, suggest harmony and correspondence between sound and meaning, although Kolarov does not explicitly comment on such cases – probably because of their rarity, especially in prose, it is not obvious why they might constitute a separate type. Through the analysis of these structures, we will revisit the question of the poetic function of linguistic sound, this time in relation to the problem of new production of meaning. Thus reframed, the question will fundamentally refer to another problem – that of the arbitrariness of the sign in verbal language. However, the conclusions of this article will avoid making definitive claims about the status of this problem, as it requires more extensive and detailed examination.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. The mythological figure of the nymph Echo in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (ca. AD 8)

The following analysis of metaphony will address the problem of the relationship between sound and meaning in poetic texts through the lens of the mythological figure of the nymph Echo. Echo makes her first appearance in Western literary tradition in Ovid’s mythological epic *Metamorphoses*, where she is paired with another character who later became much more popular – Narcissus. Scholars remain uncertain whether this pairing predates Ovid or was his invention in the late 1st century BC (Rosati 1983: 22). In later sources, Echo occasionally appears alone, as an independent character in her own mythological narrative. For example, in the late Ancient novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, attributed to a certain Longus and dated to sometime between the 2nd and the 5th century AD (Longus, Parthenius 1916: 1 – 247; Hunter 1996: 367 – 386), Echo is portrayed as a female version of Orpheus rather than as the supporting character she represents in Ovid’s story of Narcissus (Longus III.22 – 23; 1916: 160 – 163). In this respect, *Daphnis and Chloe* could serve as a basis for a substantial feminist subversion of Narcissus’s (scopic) primacy. However, Ovid’s version is important for its use of language in verse. In the episode of the encounter between Narcissus and Echo, Ovid employs linguistic sound in an unusual manner through the method of echolalia:

Forte puer comitum seductus ab agmine fido,  
dixerat “ecquis adest?” et “adest!” responderat Echo.

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<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of possible paths of these questions, readers can refer to John E. Joseph’s excellent monograph, *Limiting the Arbitrary* (2000).

Hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnes,  
 voce “veni!” magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem.  
 Respicit et rursus nullo veniente “quid” inquit  
 “me fugis?” et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.  
 Perstat et, alternae deceptus imagine vocis,  
 “huc coeamus!” ait: nullique libentius umquam  
 responsura sono “coeamus” rettulit Echo,  
 et verbis favet ipsa suis egressaque silva  
 ibat, ut iniceret sperato brachia collo.  
 Ille fugit fugiensque “manus complexibus aufer:  
 ante” ait “emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri.”  
 Rettulit illa nihil nisi “sit tibi copia nostri.”  
 (Ov., *Met.*, III. 377 – 390)

The boy, by chance, had wandered away from his faithful band of comrades, and he called out: ‘Is there anybody here?’ Echo answered: ‘Here!’ Narcissus stood still in astonishment, looking round in every direction, and cried at the pitch of his voice: ‘Come!’ As he called, she called in reply. He looked behind him, and when no one appeared, cried again: ‘Why are you avoiding me?’ But all he heard were his own words echoed back. Still he persisted, deceived by what he took to be another’s voice, and said: ‘Come here, let us meet!’ Echo answered: ‘Let us meet!’ Never again would she reply more willingly to any sound. To make good her words she came out of the wood and made to throw her arms round the neck she loved: but he fled from her, crying as he did so, ‘Away with these embraces! I would die before I would have you touch me!’ Her only answer was: ‘I would have you touch me!’ (Ovid 1955: 84; translated by Mary N. Innes)

Since, due to the curse of the goddess Juno, the nymph is unable to initiate speech and can only repeat what others say, the dialogue between Echo and Narcissus is constructed of two elements: short sentences spoken by Narcissus and Echo’s repetition of the final elements of each phrase – or the whole phrase, if it is short enough. Nevertheless, this structure creates the effect of an actual dialogue, as the repeated elements form new meaningful phrases. Narcissus perceives these repetitions as answers to his questions. In Radosvet Kolarov’s classification, this would be a metaphonic use of sound in harmony with meaning, and since the character’s specific traits are reflected on the level of verbal sound, this example could also fall under the category of “thematic-vocal parallelism” (Коларов 1983: 173 – 180).

To this analysis, we can add a further, more abstract, element. The episode of Narcissus and Echo demonstrates one of the most remarkable features of verbal language: thanks to the phenomena of homonymy, paronymy, and synonymy, and generally – thanks to what Jakobson defined as “the paradoxical character of elements which simultaneously signify and yet are devoid of all meaning” (Jakobson 1978: 67) – pure verbal sound can detach itself from a particular meaning and convey another. Through the material medium of sound, language becomes

able to produce new meanings, rather than merely communicating what has been initially implied in it. Thus, sound exhibits a certain degree of autonomy.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Ivan Vazov – “Echoes” (1884)

Ovid’s strategy of depicting Echo by using linguistic sound in repetition found further development in Modern Bulgarian poetry. Here we will examine two examples of similar application of poetic echolalia in Bulgarian poetry, commenting upon them from the perspective of the relationship between sound and meaning.

The first example is from Ivan Vazov (1850 – 1921), often regarded as the most canonical Bulgarian poet of Late Romanticism. In his 1884 poetry collection *Italiya (Italy)*, Vazov included a poem titled “Echoes” (plural of the common noun “echo”, not of the proper noun).

Ековете

I

Скиталец беден по светът,  
аз не намерих никой път  
душа – душа си да излея,  
да кажа за какво копнея  
без колебанье и без страх:  
тук укор дигнах, тамо смях.  
И злобна ярост ме върхлете,  
и викнах: „Вий, кои без жал  
убихте моя идеал  
и моя бог, да сте проклети!“

Но чух там отзив: „Клетий! Клетий!“

II

Отидох в тъмните гори:  
„На вас, извиках, поне мога  
да изповядам, кат на бога,  
пожара, дето в мен гори.  
В мен има демон, демон страшни:  
аз искам щастие, но то  
не е ни в корист, ни в златò,  
ни в мир, ни в радости домашни...  
Аз друго търся, като луд,  
но страх ме е да бъда чут:  
Аз искам: слава, слава, слава!“

И екът рече: „Лава... лава!“

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<sup>6</sup> Additionally, we can discern here Jakobson’s idea of the retreat of the communicative function of language in poetry, while the self-referential poetic function comes to the fore.

### III

Бегах в задрямалия дол  
и рекох: „Слушай мойта бол!  
Аз мрачен съм, но йощ съм млад,  
в мен злото всичко не погуби,  
аз търся в тоя красен свят  
душа да любя – да ме люби,  
душа, но чиста от разврат,  
душа без маска, без приструвка,  
що дава нектара без яд  
и на гореща си цалувка  
не туря никаква цена...  
За таз душа, душа една,  
бленувам, мисля и лудея.“

Но екът рече: „Де я?... Де я?...“

### IV

В усои страшни се найдох,  
де вятър даже не дохажда:  
„Усой диви, аз дойдох  
със мойта мъка, с мойта жажда.  
Вий нямате ли у вас кът  
затулен, таен от светът,  
къде поетът да отдъхне,  
да наиде тишина и мир,  
къде сърце да му заглъхне –  
да няма струни, ни кумир –  
където бремето да снема?“

И чух аз отзив: „Нема!... Нема!...“

### V

Дойдох в пространното море,  
де нищо не цъфти, не мре.  
„Море! Вълни! Стихия, вечност!  
Дълбоки бездни, безконечност!  
Кажете ми: Що е живот?  
Що е човек? И кой го праща  
в света за мъки, скръб и пот?  
Защо той мре, защо се ражда?  
Къде е висшата му цел?  
Дали в задгробния предел?  
Или в борбите на живота?  
Или на страстите в хомота?  
Защо е той – безсилен роб –

от люлката до самия гроб  
проклет за битка непрестайна?“

Морето рече: „Тайна!... Тайна!...“  
(Вазов 1955: 101 – 103)

Echoes

I

A poor wanderer on earth,  
I never found  
another soul to whom I could pour out my soul,  
[and] tell without fear or doubt  
what I longed for:  
at times I was met with reproach, at others, with laughter.  
And spiteful rage came upon me,  
and I cried: “You, who mercilessly  
killed my ideal  
And my god, curse be upon you!”  
But then I heard a reply: “Poor you! Poor you!”

II

I went into the dark forest:  
“To you”, I cried out, “I can at least  
confess as to God  
the fire that burns inside me.  
A terrible demon lives inside me:  
I strive for happiness, but it lies  
neither in self-interest, nor in gold,  
nor in peace, nor in domestic joy...  
It’s something else that I madly seek,  
but am afraid to say it:  
I strive for fame, fame, fame!”  
And the echo said: “Lava... lava...”

III

I ran away to the drowsy dale  
and said: “Listen to my pain!  
I am despondent, but I’m still young,  
evil hasn’t ruined everything in me yet,  
in this lovely world, I seek  
a soul to love and to love me,  
a soul, but pure and chaste,

a soul with no mask, no false pretences,  
[a soul] who oozes no venomous sap,  
who doesn't put a price  
on her passionate kiss...  
For such a soul, a single soul  
I yearn, seek and crave madly.”  
But the echo said: “Where is she?... Where is she?...”

#### IV

I found myself in deep and terrifying woods,  
where not even wind enters:  
“O wild woods, I've come to you  
with my grief, with my thirst.  
Don't you have a secret spot,  
far away from the world,  
where the poet can rest,  
and find silence and peace,  
where his heart can become quiet –  
no strings, no idol –  
where I can put down my burden?”  
And I heard a reply: “We don't!... We don't!...”

#### V

I went to the wide-open sea  
where nothing blooms and nothing dies:  
“O sea! O waves! O eternal element!  
Bottomless depths, endlessness!  
Please tell me: What is life?  
What is man? And who sends him  
in the world for sorrow, pain, and sweat?  
Why does he die, why is he born?  
Where does his higher purpose lie?  
Is it in the realm beyond death?  
Or in this life's battles?  
Or under passions' yoke?  
Why is he – a powerless slave –  
from the cradle to the very grave,  
cursed to dwell in an incessant battle?”  
The sea replied: “Secret, secret!...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This literal prose translation of the poem from Bulgarian is my own.

The poem consists of five stanzas with a parallel structure. Its style is generally Romantic, and it represents the typical Romantic character – the lyrical “I” is portrayed as a “wanderer” deeply connected with Nature. Gifted with the ability to comprehend Nature’s speech, he traverses various realms of the natural world during his restless travels. The intensity of his experience of life reveals the complex figure of the Romantic “poet” – a sensitive and lonely soul, misunderstood by others, plagued by “the eternal questions” about life and death.

Within this rather typical framework, what distinguishes the poem is its use of the vocal materiality of language to construct its poetic message. This technique evokes the verbal behaviour of Ovid’s Echo. The closing line of each of the five stanzas delivers Nature’s replies to the poet’s tantalizing questions. However, Nature never replies in her own voice – she communicates through echoes, which coincide with the poet’s own voice. By repeating the final syllables of each question, the echo produces a new speech act – a new meaning – that is an answer in the form of paronomastic rhymes. Let us examine the final lines of stanzas II, III and V. In the second stanza, the final distich constructs the almost tautological rhyme “слава” – “лава” (“fame” and “lava”). The word “лава” is fully contained within “слава”, and since an echo would only repeat the ending of a word – in this particular case, omitting the initial “с-” (the sound “s”), an enigmatic yet clearly related answer is given here. Certainly, it is not only echolalia but rhyming itself that contributes to the impression that the structure of question and answer is at play here. Nikola Georgiev, for example, argues that rhyming unavoidably establishes secondary semantic relationships between rhymed words (Георгиев [1985] 2017: 261).

In the third stanza, the verb “лудея” (here meaning “to be crazy about, to crave for madly”), which is part of the poet’s problem, is rhymed with “де я” (“Where is she?”), a phrase that is formally a question. However, in this case the reader is encouraged to read it as a rhetorical question that is actually a negative or at least doubting response to the poet’s demand. Thus, by rhetorically asking, “Where is she?”, Nature implies that the object of the poet’s craving can never be found. Here Vazov’s originality lies in the very structure of the rhyming elements: he pairs a composite rhyme (“де я”) that is actually a whole verbal phrase or even a sentence, with a single verb form (“лудея”). In this way, Vazov implies that the rhyming phrase is already embedded in the form that it is to be rhymed with in the first place.

Thus, the “sound shape” of a word (as Jakobson puts it) appears to hide in plain sight the key to answering the problem raised on the semantic level. A similar technique is seen in the fifth stanza, where “непрестайна” (an archaic form of the adjective “incessant”) is rhymed with the noun “тайна” (“secret”). This rhyming structure not only implies the unsolvability of the secret’s mystery (the reader easily associates the two forms even grammatically, as “an incessant secret”) – it also intertwines the two within a single vocal figure (“непрес-тайна”).

Since the answers given by Nature (or the echo) are no more consoling than the

questions, this poetic structure creates the effect of an inner dialogue of the poet's troubled soul with itself. A double interpretation is also possible: is it Nature's voice responding, or simply the poet himself (relying on the knowledge that is already implied in his own language)? What matters is that the poetic message is conveyed through the masterful refunctioning of sound itself. Thus, sound takes on the leading role here, positionally reshaping its own meaning.

However, it is important to note that although the presence of Nature (as a female figure) is suggested by both the overall Romantic atmosphere and the natural places where the lyrical "I" seeks solace, the echo itself aligns more closely with a male lyrical character. This is due to Vazov's choice to use an alternative (now archaic) form of the noun in Bulgarian – "ек" (plural "екове") – instead of the neuter "exo". This form is already gendered as masculine, thereby dispelling the female aura traditionally associated with the mythological figure of the nymph.

### 3. Nadezhda Radulova – "Echo" (2020)

The next example comes from the work of a contemporary Bulgarian poetess, Nadezhda Radulova. Nearly 140 years after Vazov's *Italiya*, Radulova has included a poetic cycle dedicated to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in her 2020 poetry collection *Malkiyat svyat, golemiyat svyat (Little World, Big World)*. The cycle's title, "Preobrazheniya", can be translated as "Transfigurations" or "Metamorphoses" (Радулова 2020: 51 – 67). This cycle is a modern feminist take on several myths used by Ovid (and one by Hesiod – the myth of Pandora). It consists of eight poems, each titled after a heroine who undergoes some kind of metamorphosis. One of these eight heroines is Echo:

Ехо

Еехооо, върнии сеее – исе исе исе исе  
Ще те хвааанааааа – ана ана ана ана  
Още ли се сърдиш – диш диш диш диш  
Повече няма да правя така – ка ка ка ка  
Много те обичам – ичам ичам ичам ичам  
Хайде стига де – аде аде аде аде  
Не беше нарочно – очно очно очно очно  
Почваш да ме ядосваш – сваш сваш сваш сваш  
Само да ми паднеш в ръчичките – ите ите ите ите  
На ехо ще ми станеш – анеш анеш анеш анеш  
Кучкооо – уо уо уо уо  
Млъквай ма – ма ма ма ма  
Веднага идвай тук – ук ук ук ук  
Да пукнеш дано – но но но но  
Мри, бе, мършо – ршо ршо ршо ршо  
Край казах – ах ах ах ах

Умирай и край – ай ай ай ай  
Край! Край! Край с теб! – еб еб еб еб  
(Радулова 2020: 60)

Echo

Hey [Echo], come baaaack – ack ack ack ack  
I'm gonna gechaaaa – echa echa echa echa  
Are ya still pissed off – off off off off  
I ain't doin' it again – ain ain ain ain  
I love you so much – uch uch uch uch  
Come on stop it – opit opit opit opit  
I didn't do it on purpose – pose pose pose pose  
You're starting to piss me off – meoff meoff meoff meoff  
Just you wait till I catch ya! – ya ya ya ya  
You'll turn into one hell of an echo – co co co co  
You bitch – itch itch itch itch  
Shut up, you hear me – me me me me  
Come back here right away – way way way way  
Hope you die – die die die die  
Die, bitch – itch itch itch itch  
I said stop – top top top top  
Shut up and die – ay ay ay ay  
That's it! You're done – on on on on<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Vazov's typically Romantic use of language, Radulova's poem can be defined as avant-garde (or even postmodern) in its approach to verbal materiality. It is much more difficult to translate, even literally, because of its use of colloquialisms. It is almost impossible to reproduce the vocal echo-effect. The poem addresses violence against women – a theme that runs throughout the entire cycle of eight poems. This focus aligns closely with Ovid's original, where female characters are almost invariably depicted as victims of various forms of sexual violence. Crucially, this violence – and, by extension, the problem of hubris and divine retribution – is directly related to the very process of metamorphosis. Radulova preserves this aspect in her interpretation but subverts it completely, foregrounding a critical assessment of sexual violence to replace Ovid's at least apparent acceptance of the (unjust) divine punishment.

In Radulova's "Echo", all eighteen lines of the poem follow a parallel structure: each consists of a short statement or phrase – sometimes an explicit insult or threat – followed by a fourfold repetition of the final syllable in the preceding phrase. Thus, every phrase uttered by the perpetrator re-sounds as if in a desolate space. The female character is quasi-absent, her voice reduced to a desubjectivized sound. Vazov's patriarchal echoes and responsive Romantic

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<sup>8</sup> My English translation of this poem has been approved by the author.

Nature have disappeared, reverting to Ovid's and later Longus's portrayal of Echo as a female and a victim.

Radulova's echolalic technique is both simpler and more complicated than Vazov's. She does not necessarily aim for meaningful repetitions of sound. In some lines, however, the repeated syllables form a word or phrase that allows for a meaningful interpretation. For example, in the sequence "аде аде аде аде" (line 6), the repeated syllables can be read as the vocative form of the word "ад" ("hell"), giving the phrase a meaning akin to "O hell, hell, hell, hell". An alternative interpretation of these sounds would suggest that "аде" is a colloquial idiomatic expression – a combination of particles: "а, де!" Although this phrase does not have an adequate translation, it conveys nuances similar to phrases like "Oh, really!" or "You don't say!"

In line 12, the syllable sequence "ма ма ма ма" can be interpreted as a cry, "mommy" ("мама" in Bulgarian), while in line 14, the repeated syllable "но но но но" may be heard as an attempt to object or provide a counterpoint: "but but but but". In other lines, the resounding syllables merely reproduce the affective quality of repetitive violence, as in the series of interjections like "ax ax ax ax" and "ай ай ай ай". These are simply sounds of pain. Thus, instead of the sensible responses found in Ovid or Vazov, the language of Echo (the woman victim) begins to fall apart into purely affective interjections, into onomatopoeic sounds that mimic the experience of pain (Коларов 1983: 96 – 99).

Furthermore, the interjective quality of language unfolded by the poem extends to the level of the proper noun and the title of the text. As noted earlier, the Bulgarian word "exo" is particularly polysemic – it has at least three distinct meanings. First, as a common noun – written in lowercase – it refers to the phenomenon of an echo. When capitalized, it functions as a proper noun. However, it is also homonymous with a third Bulgarian word: the interjection "exo" meaning "hey" or "hello". This interjection serves a phatic function – it is used to check if someone is present (e.g., when entering an apparently empty room or place, or answering the phone). Thus, in line 1, the opening form "Ee-xooo" can be read alternatively as the vocative of the proper name or as an interjection with characteristically elongated vowels. This intonational variant of the vowels is actually quite frequent and typical in colloquial Bulgarian usage of the interjection "exo", and therefore clearly suggests that the first word should be read precisely as the interjection.

### **Conclusive remarks**

In the three poetic examples analysed in this article, the figure of Echo is portrayed on the level of poetic text through similar strategies, based on echolalia – the repetition of phrases, words, or syllables. In Radosvet Kolarov's classification, such instances reflect a correspondence relationship between sound and meaning, and are related to the phenomena of what he terms "thematic-vocal parallelism" (Коларов 1983: 173 – 180). However, despite the similarity, the

use of language in each of the three examples differs significantly. Ovid was the first to establish the echolalic poetic function, drawing on the mythological idea of the potency of language to be part of the objects themselves and the precepts of poetic stylistics of the Augustan Age. However, in the two examples of Echo from modern Bulgarian poetry, language serves different functions. Whereas in Ivan Vazov's poem language plays the role of the Romantic "home of being" where language as the instrument of poetry coincides with Nature's own voice, in Radulova's 21<sup>st</sup> century "Echo" language becomes a site of disarticulation of meaning for the sake of the pure expression of pain. Despite these differences, in both cases the poetic function operates on the level of verbal *sound* itself. On the other hand, since the model of the poetic techniques used by both Vazov and Radulova can be found in Ovid's Echo, the mythological figure of the nymph Echo can arguably be defined as the conceptual character who displays the inner mechanisms of linguistic sound as a source of poetic devices.

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