

Reviving Andrei Bely's heritage: Metricalization in Vladimir Gubin's *Illarion i Karlik*

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Abstract

The heritage left by the literary experiments of the Silver Age and of the avant-garde was almost forgotten until the 1960s, when dissent towards the socialist realism's guidelines became stronger and the cultural underground started to take shape. In this context, some authors re-discovered the achievements of the 1920s' literature and mixed them with the feelings and perceptions of the Soviet man. One of them was V. Gubin, whose *povest' Illarion i Karlik* is a clear sample of this attempt of recreating the connection, previously abruptly broken, between the underground culture of the 1960s and the Silver Age.

The aim of this paper is to focus on *Illarion i Karlik*, underlining the connection between his artistic sensibility and the explorations of Andrei Bely, who started to pursue the complete metricalization of the prosaic text. This rhetorical device indeed constitutes the basis of the novel and offers a sample of how aesthetics became the main way of resistance against the regime.

Keywords

Metricalization; Silver Age; Underground; Andrei Bely; Vladimir Gubin

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The presence, in prosaic texts, of fragments with a clear metric character has been a constant in Russian literature since the 18th century, but it was only during the Silver age and thanks to the linguistic and artistic reform implemented by Andrei Bely that this phenomenon assumed a precise role in identifying authorial poetics oriented on the purely aesthetic perception of the literary work and process. For this reason, Bely's studies became an essential point of reference for anyone who has subsequently attempted to follow similar paths.

The idea that there is no boundary between poetry and truly artistic prose (which is deeply different from journalism and popular fiction), arise in Bely's writings around 1909, when he began to add an increasingly higher metric coefficient to his prose (starting with *Serebriany golub*¹, 1909), and has given its most complete theoretical definition in the article *O khudozhestvennoy proze*², published in the «Gorn» magazine in 1919. In the very first lines he highlights the sameness of prose and poetry, stating also an equivalence between the prose that he considers as the «best one» and the metricalized structure of prose:

¹ Transl.: The Silver Dove. – Here and in all the following occurrences, translations from Russian into English are mine (N.A.).

² Transl.: On Artistic Prose.

[...] не даром мы делим речь на художественную и прозаическую; между поэзией и прозой художественной нет границы; признаки поэтической и прозаической речи одни: тут и там цветы образов; тут и там те же встречаются нас фигуры и тропы; размеренность характеризует хорошую прозу; и эта размеренность приближается у лучших прозаиков к определенному размеру, называемому метром; размеренность внутренняя («ритм» или «лад») характеризует хорошую прозу³ (Bely 1919: 49).

Bely also finds in the prose of great authors such as Gogol, Pushkin or Tolstoy the presence of a well-defined sequence of accents⁴. Therefore, he discarded the traditional idea that the difference between prose and poetry lies in the presence or absence of metre. To demonstrate that the metre is present and can be traceable in every literary work, Bely refers to the classical metres and at the same time expands the boundaries of traditional measures. He identifies 24 measures (19 more than the ones traditionally used in Russian poetry, i.e. iamb, trochee, dactyl, amphibrach and anapaest), various combinations of which would define the framework of each text. This approach has been criticized and is certainly exaggerated and can be considered valid only theoretically, as an expression of Bely's overall aesthetic conception; but it is not applicable to the everyday literary

³ Transl.: It is not by chance that we divide the discourse into literary and prosaic; there is no boundary between poetry and artistic prose; the characteristics of poetic and prosaic discourse are the same: images flourish in both; in both we meet figures and tropes; rhythm characterizes good prose; and in the best writers, this rhythmicity approaches a precise measure called metre; the internal rhythmicity ("rhythm" or "tone") characterizes good prose.

⁴ It is worth noting that Bely, talking about the difference between prose and poetry as it is traditionally understood, does not link it to the double segmentation and, therefore, to the formal organization of the text that seems to be, nowadays, the only valid criterion to distinguish prose from poetry. Instead, Bely was convinced that the difference is structural and to be found in the metric sequence.

practice, and, in any case, productive. Bely himself was well aware of this, and, in his own literary practice, he preferred using traditional metres. In his work we can identify the first phase, where certain fragments in binary metres (trochee or iamb) are accompanied by a precise graphic setting of the text, organized according to principles reminiscent of visual poetry (we refer in particular to the cycle *Simfonii*⁵, 1902-1908), and the second, more mature phase, its climax being represented by *Maski*⁶ (1932), where the metrical pattern is intended to be present in the whole piece of work, and this is accomplished through the use of ternary patterns, more productive than the binary ones (see Orlitsky 1999).

Sploshnaya metrizatsiya, the complete metricalization, which requires accurate examination and longer periods of perception of texts that should preferably be read aloud, can be considered a great innovation of A. Bely's and the yardstick for all the authors aspiring to the poetics focused on the aesthetic perception of the word and aiming to bring the prose, in its refinement, to the level of poetry:

Белый же и его последователи метризуют весь текст; при этом метр, даже не захватывая все слоговые группы, выступает именно как знак эстетической природы прозаического текста, приравнивая его к высокой (стихотворной, силлаботонической по преимуществу) поэзии⁷ (Orlitsky 2002: 38).

Therefore, Bely tries to make the metricalization process universally applicable. On the one hand, this attempt makes the metricalization clearly recognizable and a sign of "high" art; on the other hand, making the process pervasive and applying it to every type of text,

⁵ Transl.: Symphonies.

⁶ Transl.: Masks.

⁷ Transl.: Bely and his successors apply metricalization to the entire text; and the metre, although not covering all the syllabic groups, acts precisely as a sign of the aesthetic nature of the prosaic text, making it equal to the higher poetry (in verse, predominantly accentual-syllabic).

Bely weakens its strength and often obtains results that have been considered by different critics as too artificial. This is the main objection that Bely's opponents made to this literary device. Note, for instance, Mikhail Girshman's comment (Girshman 1982: 309), according to which the real problem with this kind of texts lies in the fact that readers – even if not educated or specially trained – are led to perceive the metre as something separated from the text itself and not as an integral part of the work.

According to this line of thinking, the real sign of art is precisely the imperceptibility of the rhythm in prose, which allows to retain the multiformity of speech, not flattening it on a metrical pattern that can become redundant and uniform: «[р]итмизация прозы хороша, покуда она незаметна, покуда проза не похожа на стихи. Будучи явной, намеренной, ритмизация убивает прозу так же, как, скажем, внутренняя рифма»⁸ (*idem*: 319). Furthermore, it should always be kept in mind that any attempt to mechanically apply the methods of poetic text analysis to prose (in addition to Bely, we can recall theories of Peshkovsky and Shengeli; see Peshkovsky 1928, Shengeli 1921 and, for a general overview, Orlitsky 2008) can be considered an acceptable starting point but they cannot but fail as they do not take into account processes and ways of organization inherent to prose.

Thanks to Bely, metre in prose, traditionally clausal (*klauzal'nyj*), «однозначно задающий разбиение текста на условные строки, аналогами которых выступают его фрагменты»⁹ (Orlitsky 2002: 51), becomes mostly catenary (*tseпnoy*), «подобного разбиения не предполагающий и не имеющий точного аналога в стиховой культуре»¹⁰ (*ibidem*), so it is realized as an uninterrupted flow.

⁸ Transl.: Rhythmization of prose is fine as long as it is imperceptible, as long as it does not make prose resemble verse. When it is made evident, intentional, rhythmization kills prose just as, for instance, internal rhymes do.

⁹ Transl.: Which univocally establishes the division of text into conventional [verse] lines, the text's fragments being considered the lines' analogues.

¹⁰ Transl.: Which does not imply such a division and does not have a precise analogue in verse culture.

Leaving aside criticisms and discussions that arose around Bely's ideas, it is unquestionable that they made a very strong impact on the contemporary artistic world and influenced the aesthetics of all succeeding Russian authors, both those who deliberately detached themselves from them, avoiding any metrical pattern (even accidental¹¹) or making an ironic and caricatural use of the process, and those who made metre a crucial element of their own artistic conception.

Because of his purely aesthetic approach, not applicable to the practical revolutionary needs, the work and research of Bely and the entire Silver Age were condemned to oblivion by the Soviet system and by the normative canons of socialist realism. The latter, aiming at a clear definition and delimitation of every aspect of art and life, did not approve of the mixture of verse and prose, which within socialist realism returned to being two separate and monolithic poles. This same division can be also found in the first period¹² of the Russian literature in emigration, but for a different reason: emigrant writers wanted to place themselves in the wake of the great 19th century Russian novel tradition (see Orlitsky 2008: 304).

Later on, it is thanks to Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), an extraordinary figure beyond any classification, group or school, representative of the second generation of writers-émigrés, that the link with the poetics of formal elaboration and contamination between prose and poetry of the beginning of the 20th century, broken by the Soviet government, is reestablished again. His example was actively followed

¹¹ It is interesting to note that the attempt to avoid any metric inserts at any cost often results in great artificiality, since in every Russian text, including journalistic ones, due to the nature of the language itself, one can find the standard metric coefficient of about 15% (see Orlitsky 1991 and 2002). Going up over 20% indicates the deliberate authorial will to move in the direction of prose metricalization, while falling below 10% indicates the opposite desire.

¹² We are referring to the first (during the Revolution of 1917 and the following civil war mainly) and to the second (during and after World War II) waves of Russian emigration; for an overview of the different waves, see Magarotto 2007 and Raev 1994.

by the “unofficial” literature (in particular in Leningrad, while in Moscow writers mostly referred to the avant-garde experiments) starting from the late 1950s–early 1960s¹³. In this period searches in the field of metricalization of the entire piece of prose or its fragments start again, and the boundaries between the two poles appear once more permeable, becoming the basis of the aesthetics of the so-called Bronze Age of Russian literature. The mixture of prose and poetry and, specifically, the metrical pattern, defines an artistic alternative to the aesthetics proposed by the regime, therefore not subordinated to the criteria – dear to the official propaganda – of an art at the service of the construction of the new Soviet era, but based on stylistic refinement and formal perfection. In this sense, the tendency towards metricalization of prose can be considered as an integral and characteristic aspect of those works that are anti-Soviet from the merely aesthetic point of view. In the practice of various authors, this attempt is carried out in different ways, as it adapts to each author’s specific poetics.

Vladimir Andreyevich Gubin (Leningrad, 1934 – Saint Petersburg, 2003) can be considered as a true follower of Andrei Bely's theories and practice. In his *Illarion i Karlik*¹⁴, a *povest'* continuously elaborated, refined and rewritten in the period of over twenty years, Gubin pursues the complete metricalization, making the metrical pattern the focus of the text’s artistic nature and value.

The name of Vladimir Gubin is well-known to those who have been an active part of the Leningrad underground, but, unfortunately, even

¹³ «Литературная практика 1960–1980-х гг. демонстрирует обостренный интерес к поискам на стыке стиха и прозы, берущим свое начало в массовых экспериментах 1910–1930-х гг. и глубже – в отдельных опытах поэтов и прозаиков XIX в.» (Orlitsky 1991: 4). Transl.: The literary practice of the '60–'80s shows an exacerbated interest for searches at the borderline between verse and prose, which started in mass experimentations of the '10–'30s and, earlier, in certain experiments by some 19th century poets and prose-writers.

¹⁴ For an introduction to V. Gubin, his poetic and to *Illarion i Karlik*, see Caramitti 2015.

today it remains almost totally unfamiliar to anyone outside that circle. He lived all his life in Leningrad (then St. Petersburg) and was part of LitO (*literaturnoye obyedinenie*, literary circle) lead by David Yakovlevich Dar, a master and an unquestioned *maître à penser* for the young generation. It is thanks to his relationship and continuous cultural exchanges with Dar that Gubin developed his own poetics, focused on a constant *labor limae* and on a refined elaboration of the phonic and rhythmic material.

Another crucial meeting for Gubin was the one with Boris Vakhtin, Vladimir Maramzin and Igor Efimov. They immediately found some common aesthetic point of view among them, and founded, in 1964, the Gorozhane¹⁵ literary group, that has been considered the most important unofficial association of prose writers in '60s Leningrad (see Arieiev 2015: 648). Together they compiled (and tried to publish, but without success) two prose collections, in 1964 and 1966, clearly stating the intention to recreate a link with the literary tradition of '20s. Although they were not openly against the current *status quo* as defined by the socialist realism, their works were not accepted by any publishing house, and received a few negative and often specious reviews (in particular, the one signed by Vera Ketlinskaya; see Dolinin *et alii* 2003).

After the failure to publish the two collections of prose, Gubin decided to stop his efforts to see his works published and chooses to pursue the path of a lifetime self-isolation, in which he rethinks all his work, refining, chiselling and condensing it¹⁶. *Illarion i Karlik* is clearly the major result of this "poetic work" (see *idem*: 647), based not on the

¹⁵ Transl.: The city dwellers. For an overview of this literary group, see Iocca 2018.

¹⁶ Realizing the impossibility to publish his work was for Gubin a painful moment, which reflections could be found in *Illarion i Karlik*, in particular in the characters of Grafaill (in his name, *Rafail*, Raphael, and *grafoman*, graphomaniac are merged), a dissident poet, and of Karlik himself, described as a *pisar'*, a scribe. For a complete analysis of this theme, see Caramitti 2015.

idea of fame and success but on the one of «достоинства и самодостаточности, верности и веры»¹⁷ (Juriev 2014: 137).

It is exactly on the basis of this idea that writing became for Gubin across the years a way to re-read the morally and aesthetically unacceptable Soviet era, capable to allow him to go beyond any political compromise. Unable or unwilling to resist in a different way, he chose the faith in Literature and in the Russian language as an alternative to the given reality, identifying the mission of every writer, and therefore his mission, in being a «сотовари[щ] по выживанию»¹⁸ (Gubin 2003: 455), despite all the difficulties and pains of everyday life.

In the novel *Illarion i Karlik*, started in 1976 and accomplished in 1996, Gubin carries to extremes that particular conception of language already born in the environment of *Gorozhane*, embodied in the "традиция вывернутого, сдвинутого, орнаментального слова, загоняющего смысл в невозможность никому и ничему служить, кроме себя самого"¹⁹ (*idem*: 139). According to this principle, the motivation and reason of art is far from the work's plot: it only lives in and on the poetic Word.

It is possible to distinguish 4 main published versions of the novel:

1. *Illarion i Karlik*, subtitle: *Skazano na Rusi v 4-kh chastiakh doveritelno Mikhailu Efrosu*²⁰, published in Paris (and is, therefore, a case of *tamizdat*²¹), in 1984 in «Echo» (n. 13), magazine of Russian

¹⁷ Transl.: Dignity and self-sufficiency, loyalty and faith.

¹⁸ Transl.: Survival companion.

¹⁹ Transl.: Tradition of the twisted, moved, ornamental word, which drives the sense into the impossibility of serving anything or anyone else, but itself.

²⁰ Transl.: Said in Rus' in 4 parts confidentially to Mikhail Efros.

²¹ As anticipated, after understanding the impossibility to be officially published in the Soviet Union, Gubin retired. He continued writing just for himself and shared his works only with his closest friends, in particular the former *Gorozhane*. Their continuous support and interest for Gubin's narrative is the reason why he finally decided to publish the first version of his main work (which did not circulated even in *samizdat*) in *tamizdat*, on the journal directed by V. Maramzin, a former *Gorozhane* member, emigrated in 1975.

- emigration published by V. Maramzin. The 4 parts are titled: *Karlik, Potseluy-menya-za-nozhku*²², *Illarion, I na smekh, i na smert*²³;
2. *Bashnia (Glava iz romana «Illarion i Karlik»)*²⁴, published in the Petersburg magazine «Sumerki», 12, 1991, pp. 40-70;
 3. *Illarion (Glava iz romana «Illarion i Karlik»)*, published in the literary almanac «Kamera khraneniya» (Saint Petersburg – Frankfurt/Mein, V, 1996, pp. 43-69);
 4. *Illarion i Karlik*, subtitle: *Povest' o tom, chto...*²⁵ published by the «Kamera khraneniya» publishing house in Petersburg in 1997 and reprinted in 2003 in the second volume (dedicated to the 1970s) of the three-volume anthology *Kollektsiya: Peterburgskaya proza (leningradskiy period)* published by «Ivan Limbakh». This version is considered the canonical one, faithful to the author's last wishes, and is divided into four parts, with titles slightly differing from the 1984 edition: *Bashnia, Pomezana, Illarion, I na smeckh, i na smert*.

The difference between the four texts is impressive and allows to clearly understand the evolution of Gubin's poetics and style; in this article, we will refer only to the last edition (published in 1997 but, according to the author's note, dating back to 1976–1980), the most complete from stylistic point of view.

As the Word itself is the centre of the *povest'*, the plot of *Illarion i Karlik* is very sparse: Karlik is the guardian of a phantom tower in which the heads, detached from the bodies but still thinking, of the 'great' of the nation are kept. He has a sister, Pomezana, who has the habit of flying around the world naked. In one of her flights she ends up in the clutches of the henchmen of the bloody monarch Illarion, few pages before described in his merciless destruction of the idyllic village of Shnurki. Illarion falls in love with Pomezana and therefore tries to convince her to marry him, but without any success. Karlik tries to free

²² Transl.: Kiss-my-foot.

²³ Transl.: Both for fun and for death.

²⁴ Transl.: The tower (a chapter from the novel «Illarion and Karlik»).

²⁵ Transl.: Short novel about what...

his sister but ends up in prison, from where he manages to escape only thanks to the help of Procent, Illarion's derided and humiliated brother and inventor, who proposes to use a device of his own invention, able to transfer souls from one body to another. In the general confusion the device is no longer used, and it is not clear what happens to Karlik, who suddenly reappears in a courtroom, accused of the murder of the monarch. At the same time, in the characteristic confusion of temporal planes and alternated flash-backs and flash-forwards, Illarion's lustful feelings towards Pomezana are transformed into mere hunger that leads him, frustrated by the failed attempts to conquer her, to tear the girl to pieces; shortly afterwards he will die devoured by the flames that almost magically burst out of the fireplace.

These few elements of the plot are essentially condensed only in the fourth part of the *povest'*, *I na smeč, i na smert*; in the first one, *Bashnia*, the discourse is focused on Karlik and is full of digressions on different themes, like the role of the artist, poetics, happiness, and love. The second part, *Pomezana*, is made up only of ellipsis²⁶ and the third one, *Illarion*, is also rich in digressions and focuses on the destruction of Shnurki. The whole action takes place in an unrecognizable time and space, halfway between past and future, but it is possible to read in some small details, such as bloody and insane deeds of Illarion, or the description of how authorities treat artists, a clear echo of the Soviet present of the author, which allows us to interpret the text as an aesthetic claim of the role of writers in a society that has lost every poetry and freedom to create.

For this reason, the role of the metricalization is crucial, even if its presence is not clear in the first reading, at first sight. The task of the ideal reader, cooperative and deeply involved in the literary process, is to recognize the *priyom*, finding the key to understanding and proper

²⁶ To give to the reader a better idea, this is all the content of the second part: «.....И Т.Д. И Т. П. Это не для печати.» (Gubin 2003: 489) / Transl.: [...] etc. etc. This is not to be printed.

reading of a work that otherwise remains, even for the Russian readers – as confirmed, among others, by the critic Yu. Orlitsky and by the poet D. Davydov during private conversations held in winter 2014 – unintelligible. It is therefore possible to apply to Gubin the same analogy that Bely, in his introduction to *Maski*, used for his own art, not immediately understood by his contemporaries, comparing it to Impressionism: «Импрессионисты были непонятны до момента, пока кто-то не подсказал: вот как их нужно смотреть; с этого момента – вдруг: непонятные стали понятны»²⁷ (Bely 1989: 762). Therefore, one needs to find the right way of reading, which consists, in the case of *Illarion i Karlik*, in recognizing the centrality of the musical and rhythmic element, realized in accordance with specific metrical patterns. It is exactly Bely's novel *Maski* (1932), the third volume of the trilogy *Moskva*, that can be considered, from the metrical point of view, the noble antecedent of the operation carried out by Gubin in *Illarion i Karlik*. For this reason, the author's introduction, placed at the beginning of the novel, is fundamental; here Bely provides a sort of business card, «художественный паспорт»²⁸ (*ibidem*) of himself and of his work. After a brief summary of the plot of the two previous volumes and an anticipation of what is contained in the third, the author, aware of the fact that many readers and critics considered his style unusual and not very comprehensible, identifies the problem in the centrality reserved to sound and intonation, underlined as well by the particular segmentation of the phrase:

Кто не считается со звуком моих фраз и с интонационной расстановкой, а летит с молниеносной быстротой по строке, тому весь живой рассказ автора (из уха в ухо) – досадная помеха, преткновение, которое создает непонятность: непонятность – не оттого, что непонятен автор, а оттого, что

²⁷ Transl.: The Impressionists were misunderstood until someone suggested: that's how you need to look at them. From that moment, they suddenly became understandable.

²⁸ Transl.: An artistic passport.

очки, т. е. специальный прибор для ношения на носу, не ведающий о назначении читатель [...], начинает нюхать, а не носить на носу²⁹ (*idem*: 763).

Bely concludes by saying that *Maski* is actually not a prosaic text, but a poem in verse, «написанная прозой для экономии бумаги»³⁰ (*ibidem*) where, thanks to punctuation, the main pauses and intonational accents are highlighted. Metricalization is a fundamental aspect of such an artistic framing, and *Maski* is the work with the highest metric coefficient in Bely's entire production; here metres – mainly ternary – are alternated in a fluid way, and non-metric fragments are almost completely absent.

In order to give a sample of how *Maski* is organized on the metric level, and of the use that Bely makes of punctuation, it is interesting to recall the incipit of the novel. It is quite a long fragment as it extends until the moment when the end of the phrase, indicated by a full stop, coincides with the end of the metrical chain:

Козиев Третий с заборами ломится из Гартагалова к Хапших-Иппахена особняку (куплен Элеонорой Леоновной Тителевой); остановимся: вот дрянцеватая старь!

И Солярник-Старчак с Неперепревым думали, что покупалось пространство двора, а не дом: для постройки.

Репейник, да куст, да лысастое место – большой буерачащий двор, обнесенный заборами от Гартагалова, Козиева, Фелефокова и Синюкишенского переулков, которые вместе с Жебривым и Дриковым – головоломка сплошных загогулин,

²⁹ Transl.: To those who do not take into account the sound of my phrases and the intonational arrangement, but flies along the lines with flash-like speed, the whole author's tale (from the ear to the ear) is but annoying hindrance, and obstacle that creates obscurity: not because the author is unintelligible, but because the reader, ignorant of the function of glasses, that special device that should be worn on one's nose, begins to sniff them instead of putting them on his nose.

³⁰ Transl.: Written in prose only to save paper.

куда скребачи-скопидомы, семейные люди, за скарбами сели, где улицы нет никакой, и в тупик выпирает перинами толстое собство.

Задержась здесь, – чортов с двадцать; и пот оботрешь двадцать раз, как теленок, Макарами загнанный в Козиеву, сказать можно, спираль.

От нее – тупички, точно лапочки сороконожки. Заборчики, крыши; подпрыгивает протуварчик; скорячась, пройдешь – кое-как; **[Дак96М]**³¹ коли прямо пойдешь, – разлетятся берцовые кости; и будет разбитие носа о дом Неперепрева: красный фундамент на улицу вышел.

Другие дома не доперли; лишь крыши кривые крыжовниковых красно-ржавых цветов, в глубине тупиков повалятся, трухлеют под небом; а дом Неперепрева прет за заборик; из сизо-серизовой выприны «сам» с пятипалой рукой **[Ан38]**³² и с блюдечком чайным, из окон своих рассуждает.

Напротив заборчик, глухой, ослабляясь ржавыми зубьями; сурики, листья сметает; подумаешь – сад.

Здесь когда-то стояла и кадка-дождейка; и куст подрезной был; латук, лакфиоль разводили; цвела центифолия; ныне же тополь рябою листвою шумит да склоняется липа прощепом – сучьистое, мшистое и заструпелое дерево; коли кору оторвешь, – запах прели; скамеечка: «Хаппих-Иппахен, Ипат» – на ней вырезано³³ **[Амф49ГД]**³⁴ (Bely 1989: 367-368).

³¹ 96 dactyl chains with a masculine caesura. Here and in all the following occurrences, the indication of the metrical pattern in bold is mine (N.A.) and it is always located at the end of each metrical series. The indication of the meter (дак for dactyl, амф for amphibrach and ан for anapaest) is followed by the number of feet and, when relevant, by the indication of the caesura (M for masculine and ГД for hyper-dactylic).

³² 38 anapaest chains.

³³ This fragment (as the following one from *Illarion i Karlik*) is not translated as the focus is not on the content but on the metrical pattern.

³⁴ 49 amphibrach chains with a hyper-dactylic caesura.

The metricalization of the prosaic text implemented by Bely is pervasive, it covers the text almost in its totality, creating very long chains. In order to make this experiment possible, the author made a lot of choices at the lexical and spelling levels of words (for example, using the termination of the feminine singular instrumental *-oyu* instead of *-oy*, or the verbal ending form *-sya* instead of the regular *-s'*, resulting in an extra syllable), and in some cases they are perceived by the reader as extremely artificial and redundant.

Building on the example of *Maski*, Gubin follows the path of the complete metricalization of the text, but manages to make the rhythm not too evident, avoiding in this way the criticisms that have been made against Bely, who has been accused (as already mentioned) of rhythmic monotony and of excessive predominance of the metrical aspect over all the others. To achieve this result, the author of *Illarion i Karlik* focused on a different perception of the unity of the text, linking it not to the logical-syntactic aspects of the plot (that is quite weakened), but to the centrality of the poetic word and of its density, that is able to create wide and pervasive textual links. The length of the metrical chains is on average around 10 to 20 units, so they are far shorter than the extensive chains created by Bely. Even when he uses the same metre in subsequent chains, Gubin chooses to interrupt the rhythm, to segment it, even against any logical, syntactic or intonational pause, making the rhythm unpredictable and giving the text a major variability, as can be clearly seen in the incipit of the *povest'*:

Блохи — вот ураган! [Ан2]³⁵ Эта сыпучая мгла без единого пятнышка света спешила навстречу тебе — как опилки железа навстречу магниту. Стихия, чиркалая, чиркала [Дак16]³⁶ по корпусу носа, [Амф2]³⁷ настропаляла глаза прослезиться, царапала незащищенную плоть, ела теплую шею, не кашу.

³⁵ 2 anapaest chains.

³⁶ 16 dactyl chains.

³⁷ 2 amphibrach chains.

Вторжение длилось ускоренно, длилось оно [Дак16М]³⁸ всего ничего [Амф2]³⁹ (Gubin 2003: 453).

The entire text is metrically organized and structured, as it has been proved by the analysis of the entire *povest'* as per the principles of the metrical scan of poetic texts, applicable also to prose as demonstrated by the researches by Yu. Orlitsky and S. Kormilov (in particular, see Orlitsky 1991, 2002 and Kormilov 1995, 2012). This investigation, conducted for the first time by the author of this contribution⁴⁰, showed the coexistence of very long and short fragments where all the canonical patterns mostly used in Russian poetry (the two binary, iamb and trochee, and the three ternary, dactyl, amphibrach and anapaest) interchanges and are carefully balanced, creating a final effect of high harmonization. The longest metricalized fragment is composed of 73 amphibrach chains (Gubin 2003: 481), but this is an unicum; in the rest of the *povest'*, Gubin prefers higher variability and alternance, which contributes to create the impression of a very refined prose, close to poetry in his rhythm.

The final result is an extraordinary and compact text which can be understood and deciphered properly by a participating and patient reader thanks to the metrical element. Even in the first version, published in 1984, there is a tendency towards the metricalization of the text in prose, but here it is absolutely less pervasive, thus revealing a tension towards the poetic element, more specifically rhythmic, which is not necessarily translated into the use of the metre.

Continuing working on *Illarion i Karlik* for twenty years, Gubin chooses to make the metre the centre of his art and the unifying element of the text itself, also demonstrating a maturity of elaboration and an

³⁸ 16 dactyl chains with a masculine caesura.

³⁹ 2 amphibrach chains.

⁴⁰ The results of the integral scan of *Illarion i Karlik* by V. Gubin have been realized and reported for the first time in N. Albanese, *Procedimenti poetici in prosa: dinamiche sperimentali nella letteratura underground degli anni '60 e '70*, PhD thesis, University of Rome "Tor Vergata", 2017.

inclination for the *labor limae* much deeper than a young man at his first literary experiences could have done. To give an idea of the real weight of the metre in Gubin's *povest'*, it seems interesting to report the statistical data elaborated from the integral analysis of the text: out of the total 53,659 syllables, a good 96% were metricalized. This number has been obtained including in the calculation the metric fragments with a number of feet lower than the generally accepted one⁴¹ (therefore, with less than 3 feet for the ternary metres and 4 for the binary ones). This percentage goes down to 92% if the short fragments are not considered. Inside the metricalized fragments, the proportion among the different metres shows a clear predominance of ternary metres on the binary ones, as shown in *table 1*:

	Percentage calculated on properly metrical chains + short chains	Percentage calculated on properly metrical chains only
Dactyl	55,5 %	57,1 %
Amphibrach	31,1 %	30,8 %
Anapaest	12,2 %	11,4 %
Tot. ternary patterns	98,8%	99,3 %
Iamb	0,8 %	0,4 %
Trochee	0,4 %	0,3 %
Tot. binary patterns	1,2 %	0,7 %

Table 1. Distribution of the metrical patterns in the metricalized fragments of V. Gubin's *Illarion i Karlik*

⁴¹ The practice to include in the calculation shorter fragments is common and scientifically accepted if they are inserted in a general metric context, or if they are preceded or followed by standard length metric chains (see Orliksy 2002: 49).

These are certainly impressive numbers, that have never been reached after Bely by any author who has not used metricalization for parodistic purposes; there is significant predominance of ternary patterns, in particular of dactyl, but thanks to the careful work carried out by the author, the final effect is of great harmony and refinement, that identifies *Illarion i Karlik* as a perfect sample of aesthetical non-conformity to the Soviet standard.

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