Stankiewicz, Edward

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THE FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE AND THE LITERARY GENRES

Edward Stankiewicz (Yale University)

In an article entitled "The Major Moments of Jakobson's Linguistics" published in *Language, Poetry and Poetics. The generation of the 1890s* (Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), I had occasion to state what I consider some of Jakobson's major contributions to the study of poetry, as well as some of the shortcomings. Jakobson's influence on my literary ideas is, I believe, apparent in the various papers I have written on the subject, since Jakobson more than anyone else paved the way to an understanding of the relation of linguistics and poetics. However, in the course of time I have come to believe that poetry is not to be treated as a function of language, at least not in the Jakobsonian sense, and that Jakobson's lingustic poetics is not equipped to deal with some of the central problems of poetry, such as the integral and dynamic aspects of literary texts, the nature of literary genres, or the functions of verse. I stated some of my criticism of Jakobson's poetic theory in the above–mentioned paper delivered in Cambridge two years after Jakobson's death. Permit me to paraphrase some of the remarks contained in that paper, which should serve as an introduction to the problems I shall touch upon today.

Jakobson, I wrote, is the only outstanding linguist of our time who incorporated the study of poetry into science of language. His lifelong work on poetics nad literary texts was an outstanding achievement, particularly since it went against a tradition which viewed linguistics as an objective, technical and almost natural science and poetics as the study of the artificial and individual creations of men. Jakobson gave linguistics a more "human" face by insisting on the social and esthetic functions of language, on the significance of poetry in everyday speech, and on the role of language in poetic works. But it may be useful to recall that the confrontation of these problems was not the work of a single man; it was part of a development whose time had arrived. By the end of the last century linguistics had broadened its horizons by setting itself new theoretical goals, while the poets of that time turned to language, rather than to nature or social causes, for the means of poetic invention and renewal. The rapproachment of lingustics and poetics was facilitated by the tradition of the Romantics for whom poetry was far more than a product of individual invention: it was language in its pristine, most concentrated

form, the reflection of the creative energies of man, and the primary form of emotive expression. In spite of their metaphysical leanings, the Romantics enriched both poetics and linguistics with concepts that are still valid, such as the autotelic function of art, the interdependence of parts and wholes, or the unity of opposites. However, the development of modern poetry took a far more radical turn when its practitioners (beginning with the Symbolists) decided that poetry has no other commitments than the work itself, or, as E. E. Cummings put it, "poetry must not compete with elephants and locomotives." In asserting the autonomy of their art, poets, like Aragon, declared that the poet's work requires "at each step meditation on and reinvention of language;...Ce qui implique de briser les cadres fixes du langage, les règles de la grammaire, et les lois du discours." The phonetic texture of verse, lexical innovation, playing with the rules of grammar, unusual syntactic collocations, collisions of meanings, all these became the requisites of poetry and the hallmark of the poetic avantgarde.

The experiments of the avantgarde did not escape the attention of Jakobson who wrote that he learned from the Futurists, and particularly from Khlebnikov "the complex anatomy of the [poetic] work." But he could have claimed a similar affiliation to Gerald Manley Hopkins who taught him that a poem must be analyzed with "a microscope and dissecting knife", and to Baudelaire, who believed that grammar, dry grammar provided the magic of poetic evocation. Contemporary poetry found in Jakobson its most articulate spokesman and interpreter. Beginning with the studies on Khlebnikov and Czech verse up to his latest studies of a vast number of poems of different languages and times, Jakobson's goal was to uncover the relation of phonology to the structure of verse, the grammatical and phonological "inscape" of lines, and the poetics of everyday speech. Though his ideas, like the Formalist doctrine he had helped define, had in the course of time undergone some change, he remained true to two of its main tenets, namely, that poetry is a function of language, and that the poetic message is made up of a set of linguistic devices. Both of these tenets are most clearly articulated in the article "Linguistics and Poetics" of 1960 which represents Jakobson's most condensed outline of his poetic theory.

This theory hinges on the assumption that poetic language is one of the six functions of language. To the model of Bühler, who recognized three such functions (the cognitive or referential, the appelative and the expressive), Jakobson added three more functions; the phatic, the metalinguistic, and the poetic. The theory of several linguistic functions marked an advance over early Formalist doctrine which had recognized the existence of two functional languages; a practical language and a poetic language. Despite its seeming simplicity, Jakobson's hexagonal scheme is both too complex and too simple

because the status of the six functions is incommensurable and ill–defined. The notion of a lingustic function can be justified only if the function in question is rendered by elements of the linguistic code (of *la langue*). The functions established by Bühler fulfill this condition: the referential function is rendered by means of the predicate, the appelative by means of the vocative or imperative, and the expressive function by means of interjections or special expressive forms. The so–called poetic function is implemented by none of such forms, because it is, with some striking exceptions, entirely a function of the message (of *la parole*). It is of course true that the messages of poetry differ profoundly from those of ordinary speech. The latter fluctuate and vary according to the situational context, the needs of the speaker and the position of the interlocutor, while the poetic message is speech in its maximally organized, autonomous and creative form.

Equally questionable is Jakobson's idea that the metalinguistic and poetic functions are diametrically opposed. The former is, according to him, "the use of the sequence to build an equation", and the latter "the use of an equation to build a sequence." But notice that the word "equation" has in each case a different sense; in the case of metalanguage the term refers to true synonyms (as in the phrase "a mare is a female horse"), while in the case of poetic language it refers in Jakobson's own reformulation to "equivalents", i. e., to linguistic similarities as well as to opposites. The status of metalanguage is likewise suspect since the statements of metalanguage are couched, like those of "object language" in a declarative form differing from the latter not in their grammatical status but only with respect to their referent. The formula that differentiates metalanguage from poetic language would also be more persuasive if it were reversed because poetic language is, according to Jakobson himself, a sequence which results from the projection of equivalents from the axis of similarity into that of contiguity.

It is precisely this formula which is at the heart of Jakobson's poetic theory, and which is, in my opinion, most vulnerable because it threatens to reduce poetics to an art of devices, to "figures of sound" and "figures of thought" which are distributed, like stick figures, on the syntagmatic chain. Jakobson's "projection rule" may do justice to the syntagmatic organization of verse, but it can hardly explain the integral, autonomous and dynamic aspects of a poetic text, and even less the complex structures of artistic prose for which Jakobson's theory has no place at all. The tendency to describe poetry in terms of specific devices has the further inconvenience that it blurs the difference between integral literary works and everyday speech (including scientific prose) which hardly dispenses with the use of one or another poetic device. Jakobson must have been aware of this problem when he attempted to draw a boundary between the two types of expression by introducing the

concept of the "dominant" (first formulated in 1935 but published in 1981 in *Selected Writings* III, pp. 751–756). But since the concept of the dominant is of a statistical nature, it can hardly account for the qualitative difference which sets poetic works apart from such practical messages as jingles, advertisements, political slogans or mnemonic formulas. In terms of the dominant we would have to believe that the rhyming slogan "I like Ike" is more poetic than a line from a Shakespearean sonnet (such as "When my love swears she is made of truth, I believe her, though I know she lies"), or that the philosopher Descartes was more of a poet than Racine because he made use of more metaphors.

In conclusion we would have to agree that the definition of poetry formulated by Jakobson, as well as the notion of a special poetic function are too restrictive to account for some of the basic problems of poetry. We must treat with no less caution the claim that poetics is an extension of linguistics inasmuch as the theory of literature or poetics faces problems and goals that transcend both the competence and interests of the linguist. On the other hand, we must not forget that poetry is a verbal art which is deeply rooted in the structure of language. Its roots involve not only the phonetic and semantic resources of language, but also the literary genres that define and distinguish particular texts and cannot be understood without reference to language. In recognizing that poetry both resembles and differs from the other arts of man, it may be proper to view poetics, in the eighteenth century spirit, not as a branch of linguistics, but as one of semiotics.

2. This is the gist of my critique of Jakobson's poetic theory expressed in the above–cited volume. Permit me now to present at somewhat greater length my views on the position of language in poetry and on the problem of the literary genres.

Jakobson's attempt to treat poetry with relation to the other functions of language (especially to those of cognition and emotion) has a long and distinguished tradition extending from the Greeks to the present day. It was Aristotle who first declared that the statements of poetry have, unlike those of history, no claim to truth; they are, he wrote, "neither true nor false", but are, on the other hand, more philosophical and more universal than the statements of history. Aristotle did not, unfortunately, explain what makes them more philosophical or exempt from the truth test. Jakobson alluded to the Aristotelian view when he quoted Sir Philip Sidney as saying: "Of all the writers under the Sunne, the Poet is the least lyer. For the Poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth." The tendency to define literature in negative terms, i. e., by emphasizing the non–referential function of its utterances, has lost none of its hold. Thus John Austin defines it as a "parasitic language" which is "in a peculiar way hollow and void", while for John Searle literature is "a

let's pretend mode of meaning" which "changes in no way the meaning of words or other linguistic elements." For Carnap and Ingarden it is a form of language made up of "pseudo–statements", and for Roland Barthes a system of "deceptive signification." The belief in the non–referential function of literature is in collision with the equally well established view that the poet is capable of telling profound truths, and that his function is that of a bard and seer. The classical formula that the role of poetry is to "instruct and delight" (*prodesse et delectare*) bears witness to the same trust, and is reiterated in Dante's advice to the reader to look for "the doctrine concealed under the strange verses" (*mirate/ a dottrina che s'asconde sotto il velame degli versi strani*). The interest of historians, sociologists or psychiatrists in literary works is proof enough that literature can "hold up a mirror to nature" and to the affairs of men without compromising the esthetic enterprise. However, to forget that the latter overrides, blurs and reinterprets the non–esthetic functions conveyed by a literary work is to miss the very nature of such a work, and with it the very purpose and achievement of verbal art.

The concern with the cognitive aspects of literature went out of fashion with the advent of the Romantics who proclaimed the primacy of the heart over the mind and of the irrational over reason. The tendency to attribute poetry to the subconscious and irrational had likewise a long philosophical and literary tradition; it was promulgated by Plato who viewed the poet as a plaything of gods, a being imbued with *mania* or poetic furor, and it found an echo in Shakespeare's playful phrase: "the lunatic, the lover and the poet are of imagination all compact". The promotion of the emotive to the primary function of poetry went hand in hand with the conviction that lyrical poetry was the most suitable form for its expression, and therefore the highest poetic genre. After Goethe's pronouncement that the lyric is "a natural form" (a *Naturform*) for the expression of emotion (for *das enthusiastisch aufgeregte*) hardly anyone (including Jakobson) bothered to remember that so much lyrical poetry (philosophical, revolutionary, religious) had nothing whatsoever to do with emotion. It is only when literature switched to more austere and more intellectual forms that the emotive theory of poetry fell into some disrepute. To Wordsworth's claim that poetry was "emotion recollected in tranquility" T. S. Eliot could then respond that it was "neither emotion, nor recollection, nor tranquility," while Baudelaire went so far as to say that "les signes du sentiment sont des mauvauis artistes." But the emotive theory of poetry has not entirely lost its grip on some scholars who continue to think of literature only in such terms (e. g., I. A. Richards, Suzanne Langer).

The quest for a pure art initiated by the Symbolists led to an overhaul of many of the Romantic creed but retained two of their basic tenets, namely, that lyrical poetry is the highest literary genre, and that music is the purest of

the arts. But as lyrical poetry ceased to be valued both for its cognitive and its emotional force, its merit was now to be seen only in its language and compositional form. Valéry gave expression to this creed when he wrote that the poet must draw from language, "a maid of all work", a pure voice, a voice that would aspire to the condition of music. Verlaine envisaged such a poetry when he insisted on *de la musique avant toute chose*, while Mallarmé tried to assure his friend Degas that poems are made of words and not of ideas. The renunciation of "ideas" is also proclaimed in Archibald MacLeash's *Ars Poetica*: "A poem should be palpable and mute,/ As a global fruit,/ Dumb,/ As old medallions to the thumb...A poem should not mean/ But be."

The Russian Formalists raised on the experience of the Symbolists did not renounce the ideas of their predecessors, but if anything gave them a more austere and more intellectual form. Lyrical poetry retained a central position, as before, but the poem was valued for traits discovered and promoted by the poetic avantgarde. These included the use of freer metrical forms, a greater emphasis on the phonetic orchestration of verse, the use of "daring" metaphors, a preference for brevity and for the near mathematical precision of verse (the last two propounded by Edgar Allan Poe). But the fundamental innovation was, as I indicated above, the experimentation with the language and a quest for pure form, a form to be advanced at the cost and through the suppression of communicable meaning. It is in this context that the ideas of the Formalists had come to full bloom assuming a distinctly "formalist" shape. The essence of their program is clearly enunciated in their oft–repeated formulas and slogans, such as: "the content of a poem is a pretext for its form," "poetry is the emphasis on the message," "literariness is the art of the device (*priem*)", "poetry is the deautomatization of language", "poetry attracts attention to itself," "poetry makes palpable the lingustic sign."

Most of these formulas were coined by Jakobson and his followers who gave them a decidedly linguistic stamp. Nor were they construed in a way that would allow them to account for the integral and dynamic aspects of an individual text, or for types other than lyrical verse. The formal and grammatical parallelisms of verse and the linguistic devices that constitute their form remained the abiding center of their work. The concern with the linguistic or rhetorical devices should also explain why Jakobson has never articulated the difference between a poetic text as a work of art and the fluid, open–ended and poetically tinged utterances of everyday speech.

It might of course be argued that the borderline between a work of art and a poetically tinged practical message is never entirely sharp. But transitional phenomena can be described only with reference to their clearly delineated poles, and the identification of a work of art can be decided only on the basis of clearly marked forms. Thus we do not read Milton's or Dante's

works for their theological or philosophical ideas, nor Balzac for his description of French bourgeois society. The concept of value that clings to artistic works is surely not absolute for it is known to vary according to culture, traditions and literary trends. But genuine works of art tend to survive the vicissitudes of taste, and it is precisely such works that help us define our conceptions of art. One must also keep in mind that the recognition of a work of art requires artistic competence, for otherwise one may behave like the country yokel who runs up to the stage to kill perfidious Judas or the villain who is about to harm the innocent maiden. The way one approaches a work of art depends in addition on the point of view of the observer who may look at it for clues to history, psychology, religion, and so on. But these clues cannot be found without dismantling the unity of a text and without the reconstruction of its external context.

The lack of concern with the holistic aspect of a text should also account for Jakobson's inclination to describe the literary genres in extraliterary terms. But, as I have tried to show, the age–old attempts to define literature in terms of its cognitive or emotive values have never yielded more than partial truths. Equally superficial are the attempts to describe the genres in terms of one or another grammatical form, such as the lyric with the first person or the epic with the third (Goethe's poem which ends with *Warte nur, balde ruhest Du auch* contradicts the former claim and Proust's *Swann's Way* or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* the latter). The effort to describe literary works as hybrids of the poetic and practical functions is of no greater value for it would compel us to view any poetic text as a specimen of applied art. The belief that literary works cannot be described in other than such terms is also implied in Jakobson's definition of the literary genres: "The linguistic study of the poetic function," he wrote, "must overstep the limits of poetry; ...The particularities of diverse poetic genres imply...the participation of the other verbal functions along with the dominant poetic function. Epic poetry, focused on the third person, strongly involves the referential function of language; the lyric, oriented toward the first person, is intimately linked with the emotive function; poetry of the second person is imbued with the conative function." But the true achievement of verbal art lies not in its ability to combine with other functions, but in its ability to transform them, for only then can we grasp the value of the old claim that "the poet nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth." The nature of this transformation was compellingly formulated by Valéry (in *The Art of Poetry,* 1958, 98; 63): "The poet's use of words is quite different from custom and need. The words are without doubt the same, but their values are changed," and "poetry is a strange discourse, as though made by someone other than the speaker and addressed to someone other than the reader."

The explanation of how this transformation comes about, i. e., of what converts a verbal message into a work of art, must be viewed as one of the central problems of poetics.

3. The formation of a literary text, or, for that matter, of any esthetic artifact, involves the interplay of two interrelated processes: the separation of the text from its immediate, external context and the integration of the parts or constituents of the text into a structured whole. We may call the two processes the **de–contextualization** and **re–contextualization** of a work of art, or the **external** isolation and the **internal** integration of a literary text.

Modern art has witnessed the attempt to treat as such a work any man-made or natural object which satisfies the **external** condition, though not everyone would be willing to consider any *objet trouvé* or such a thing as a urinal placed in a museum as a work of art. The separation of the work from the *hic et nunc* of its situational context is rendered by a set of devices that vary according to genre, tradition and individual taste. These devices are made up of features of closure that define the beginning and end of a work and resemble the frame of a painting or the enclosure of a statue. A typical closural device is the curtain and stage of the theater.

The **internal** organization of a poetic text can be described as the "unity of opposites". A more appropriate term may be the classical definition of "coincidentia oppositorum" since the esthetic opposites are never completely reconciled. But it is precisely the tensions resulting from their encounter that produce the sense of ambiguity, anticipation and discovery which characterize the esthetic experience. Limitations of space prevent me from discussing the sets of oppositions that make up the totality and the dynamics of a literary text. For a fuller discussion of these points I refer the reader to my article "Structural Poetics and Linguistics" in *Current Trends in Linguistics* (ed. T. A. Sebeok), vol. 12, 2, 1974, 629–659, and "Poetics and Verbal Art" in *A Perfusion of Signs,* 1977, (ed. T. A. Sebeok), 54–76. Following is a list of some of the oppositions. It must be emphasized that, unlike in linguistics, these oppositions are not mutually exclusive but imply, complement and enlarge each other. They include the relation of 1) Part and wholes; 2) Simultaneity and succession; 3) The complementarity of semantic opposites (the so–called *concordia discors* and *discordia concors;* Goethe's *Polarität und Steigerung*); 4) The verbal and non–verbal components; 5) Innovation and tradition; 6) Text, subtext and metatext; 7) Sound and meaning (on this point, more below).

4. The list (no doubt incomplete) of the major systematic tensions of a poetic text should allow us to broach more closely the problem of the literary genres, the types that represent the invariant and distinctive features of literary texts. If the above–listed properties are shared by some of the other arts

(notably painting), the division of literary works into genres is a strictly literary phenomenon which is rooted in the very structure of language. The term "invariant" is meant to underscore the fact that all literary works, regardless of their historical and cultural variants or transitional forms, fall into one or another of the major literary types, i. e., the drama, the epic, or the lyric.

In order to specify the distinctive properties of the types let us consider again the two pragmatic functions of language, the cognitive (or referential) and the socializing (under the latter I subsume the appellative and the emotive). The implementation of these functions is totally dependent on the participation of the speech act; in the case of the cognitive function, the speech act defines the *hic* and *nunc* of the utterance but its target is the referent (the narrated event), while in the socializing function the target is the participants of the speech act. The categories of the speech act include the shifters, i. e., the categories of person, tense, or mood which define the relation of the speech act (i. e., of its participants) to the narrated event. In the case of the socializing functions the place and person of the participants is provided by the situational context itself. The utterances of poetry are by contrast impersonal in that they have neither a specific addressor nor a specific addressee. The poetic message severs its relation to the situational context, for as a work of art it establishes its own esthetically defined space. That is why the question of the authorship of Homer or Shakespeare is basically irrelevant and that is why folk poetry is typically a literature without authors. The independence of poetry from the situational context is dramatically illustrated by the fate of Hölderlin who continued to write verse after he lost the capacity for speech. The suppression of the actual speech act is also apparent in the theater where the actor plays the role of a speaker and where the role of the audience is that of an eavesdropper rather than that of an addressee.

The suppression of the speech act does not eliminate the shifters which constitute the indispensable and most universal categories of language, but converts them into constructive elements of the poetic text. In losing their relation to the situational context, the shifters become the participants and counterparts of the work's "story", of its narrated event. It is the relation of the narrating and narrated events that determines the difference between the literary genres.

Each one of the genres interprets in a different way the relation of the narrating and the narrated events. The drama and the epic (including its modern variant, the novel) are characterized by the confrontation of two obligatory features: a narrated event, i. e., a story or plot that evolves in time and moves ineluctably toward a resolution, and a narrator or a speech event that advances and comments on the narrative and its participants (the protagonists; the *dramatis personae*). The difference between the two narrative genres is in

the treatment of the speech event. In the epic the narrator and narrative occupy separate though tightly interlocking realms; the narrator may act as an impartial or omniscient observer, or he may play the role of any one of the protagonists, though his presence and authority are inevitably felt. In the drama the speech event is implemented through the speech and performance of the actors, who are at the same time the participants of the narrated event and who perform in a setting that resembles an actual speech event (with or without concomitant props). The affinity of the two genres is indicated by the fact that they are easily convertible into each other (notably in the cinema which uses the material of novels), and that they may partially overlap, as when the author of a play steps forth to act as the narrator (as in Brecht's "epic" theater), or in the sustained dialogues of a novel that may be fit for the stage. In contrast to the epic and the drama, the lyric does not develop any narrative line and has no need of a distinctive narrator. The subject of the lyric and its narrator do in fact overlap in many lyrical poems. The structuralist concept of markedness should enable us say that the narrative genres are marked, whereas the lyric is unmarked since it is not built on the opposition between a narrator and a narrated event. The unmarked status of the lyric is partly indicated by the fact that, as opposed to the epic and the drama, it had for a long time lacked a generic name or any significant interpretation of its kind. The structural integrity, which is in the other genres constituted by a goal–directed narrative line, is in the lyric established by its compositional or metrical form, i. e., by means of rhymes, division into stanzas, syntactic parallelism, sound orchestration, as well as by non–verbal devices, such as typographic arrangements, musical accompaniment and dance. It is in fact the non–verbal features that have bestowed upon the lyric most of its traditional names (i. e., *das Lied, ode, canto, sonnet, rondeau, ballad, madrigal, ritornello*). Rhythmic and phonetic devices are by no means avoided in the narrative genres (as shown by the works of James Joyce or Nabokov), but here they play an optional, ornamental role. It is not by chance that the traditional metrical forms of the epic or the drama have invariably veered towards simple, monochromatic types (e. g., the hexameter, the alexandrine, blank verse), and that the narrative genres were the first to abolish the use of verse.

The formal organization of the lyric is by contrast the life of the genre, and meter itself (including the choice of rhyme) may play a role in generating the meaning of a poem. Thus Valéry tells us that the rhythm of *endecasillabo* suggested to him the subject of *Le cimetière marin*, while Goethe remarked (probably half in jest) that "in order to write verse, one need not have anything to say, for such a person may still write verses and select rhymes in which one word generates another and something will still come out. And although it still does not mean anything, it seems as if it means something."

Without the integrating function of the meter, the lyrical poem is constantly in danger of falling apart or of dissolving into a series of fragments, as happens in so much modern verse. The renunciation of traditional metrical forms, which has been the hallmark of contemporary verse, has, on the other hand, been compensated by an increased use of rhythmic devices and a greater condensation of meaning.

The distinctive character of the genres cannot be fully comprehended without reference to their secondary, supplementary features which are themselves a source of artistic tensions. These features are known to have changed according to time, genre and cultural fashions. Thus the classical epic assigned a more or less fixed role to an "omniscient" author, whereas the modern novel has found a source of tension in the changing position of the narrator (the hidden or overt narrator, the single or multiple voices, the direct or reported speech). The theater has expanded its dramatic effects by actions that take place off the stage, by the juxtaposition of static and mobile props, by the changes of costumes and the use of puppets, by the overlap of scenes, by the more active interplay between the stage and the audience.

Nor should the division into distinctive genres be construed as coterminous with their isolation, especially in our times when the critical attitude toward rigid codes tends to blur the boundaries between the genres, the verbal and non–verbal arts, and between art and its applied forms. Ever since the Romantics began to clamor for heterogeneous, syncretic forms (for a *Gesamtkunstwerk*), the division of genres has been in some flux. The epic has incorporated lyrical and dramatic parts; the lyric has adopted the everyday language of realistic prose, while the drama has reduced the significance of the plot (as in the plays of Chekhov and Beckett), or has put the author of the play on the stage (as in the plays of Pirandello or Brecht).

The literary canons we associate with classical literature indeed long ago lost their binding force. The same is true of the literary genres which can no longer be defined in prescriptive terms. It is enough that they retain the invariant properties that enable the literary artist to produce a poem, compose a play, or make up a story. The ultimate shape of these works thus results from the encounter of individual creativity with the limits of the genre. As in all forms of art, it is the expression of freedom tempered by law.

ФУНКЦИИ ЯЗЫКА И ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЕ ЖАНРЫ

Статья отстаивает целостный характер поэтического произведения, отчасти подвергая критике известное определение поэзии в высказываниях Р. О. Якобсона как «проекции принципа эквивалентности с оси отбора на ось комбинации.» Автор считает, что

любое произведение словесного искусства в конечном счете отличается от повседневного дискурса («практического языка»), с одной стороны, своей подчеркнутой оторванностью от непосредственной коммуникативной функции (от т. н. *hic et nunc*, «ситуационного контекста» нехудожественного дискурса), а, с другой стороны, своим внутренним единством, своей обязательной обрамленностью. Согласно традиционной поэтике, автор предполагает три основных литературных жанра, т. е. эпос, драму и лирику; но, исходя из своего положения об «упразднении» по отношению к поэтическому произведению «речевого акта», он предлагает новые критерии для определения этих жанров, и констатирует их структурные, инвариантные различительные признаки. В отличие от прагматического высказывания наставленного на референтную или общественную значимость, деиктическая природа языка и речевое событие входят в структуру литературного произведения на тех же правах, как рассказываемое событие. Переключение функций говорящего (или говорящих) и характера речевого акта создает основу для расчленения литературы как целого на различные жанры.

Особые взаимоотношения, в которых находятся рассказываемое событие и речевое событие (или же рассказчик, повествовательная форма) в данном литературном произведении решают вопрос о том, относится ли это произведение к эпосу или драме (т. е. к одному из двух «повествовательных жанров») или же к лирике. Рассказываемое событие и речевое событие в определенной мере совпадают, сливаются в драме, поскольку действие передается в репликах действующих лиц; различие этих событий сохраняется и в эпосе. С другой стороны, оно подавляется, размывается в лирике, которая, за отсутствием стремительно развивающейся фабулы для достижения своего эстетического единства, зависит всецело от возможности соединения составляющих ее частей и от сжатости своей композиционной формы. Таким образом, лирика является максимально маркированной по отношению к форме и наименее маркированной по отношению к сюжету и семантической организации. Автор вводит известные уточнения, касающиеся вопроса поэзии и языка как речевых кодов. Жанровый код и нормы поэтического языка в историческом развитии являются особенно открытыми и незавершенными, поскольку литературные коды различных периодов и языков полностью совместимы. Поэтический язык в то же время обладает способностью соединить семантические противоположности разного рода. Автор вводит понятие комплементарности оппозиций и эстетического равноправия «и того, и другого», в отличие от бинарного противопоставления «или ... или», характерного для оппозиций лингвистического кода.