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VERSO- LOGIES

This issue of “Forum of Poetics” devoted to versification studies ultimately took on a surprising form: not only does it discuss theoretical concepts, it also shows how versologies relate to other areas of philology and other fields. In thinking about versologies (we assume that there are many and that one traditional versology no longer exists, hence the plural form), I was also interested in how they shape/can shape, modify, and influence the practice of modern poetics.

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Versologies

Adam Dziadek

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In September 2001, at the 30th Literary Studies and Theory Conference in Krasiczyn, as the Twin Towers were collapsing in New York, Janusz Sławiński was answering a question asked by one of the panelists. The question was: “What is left of structuralism?” Sławiński’s answer was unequivocal: versology. I have never forgotten his answer, and I often return to it. Indeed, I thought that we should refer to Sławiński’s claim in this issue of Forum of Poetics, twenty years after that conference, and carefully and critically examine the Polish tradition of versification studies but also ask about contemporary versology and its most recent accomplishments, tracing the changes that have taken place in recent years and the various trajectories of development in the field. In this issue of Forum of Poetics, versology is first examined from a theoretical perspective. In Free verse poem as a graphic text – in translation: Reverdy and Pound, Witold Sadowski expands on the questions

he examined in his earlier works, this time looking at translated works. Wojciech Pietras addresses the fascinating question of the “grey area” between free verse poem and prose (Ambiguous free verse/prose forms in versification studies: An attempt at diagnosis). In Enjambment and versification (a side note to works by Giorgio Agamben and Adam Kulawik), Arkadiusz Sylwester Mastalski traces the various recent versological complications involving enjambment. In turn, Iga Skrzypczak presents an original and very interesting reflection on versological silence. Respectively, in the “theoretical section” of this issue of Forum of Poetics, Igor Pilshchikov’s very informative text, translated from Russian, The Concepts of “Verse,” “Meter,” and “Rhythm” in Twentieth-Century Russian Verse Studies, provides insight into the history of key versological concepts. In the “practices” section, we present analytical texts which discuss how various theoretical tools work.

This issue of Forum of Poetics devoted to versification studies ultimately took on a surprising form: not only does it discuss theoretical concepts, it also shows how versologies relate to other areas of philology and other fields. In thinking about versologies (we assume that there are many and that one traditional versology no longer exists, hence the plural form), I was also interested in how they shape/can shape, modify, and influence the practice of modern poetics. Apart from these problems, the field of practical versological analysis has also been opened up. It was also particularly important to me to show how contemporary versologies influence the interpretation of literary texts, how they can shape them and contribute to discovering their meanings. The texts published in this issue of Forum of Poetics raise such questions. Perhaps they do not resolve them definitively, but they may be regarded a starting point for further versological reflection, which will certainly be developed. In my reflection on versologies, I always refer to Henri Meschonnic’s Critique du rythme and, in particular, to the following words: “la métrique est la théorie du rythme des imbéciles” [meter is the theory of rhythm for idiots]. This is what happens when versologies are reduced to mere sterile metric. In this issue of Forum of Poetics, of course, there is not a single text which adopts such a reductive perspective. On the contrary, all texts open versological perspectives wide, as regards both theory and practice. I treat this issue as a special foundation for further versological research, which, as we can see, continues to grow and develop, but always silently and on the margins of the great ideas in the humanities. Perhaps it must be so, because such studies usually concern the microsphere; they are micrologies, microscopies which, however, sometimes allow us to extract from literary texts a unique and new light of meaning.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

Free Verse as a Graphic Text – in Translation: Reverdy and Pound

Witold Sadowski

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The free verse is taken here to be a technique of versification which manipulates the arrangement of handwritten or printed characters on the page. In this perspective, the contents of free verse are determined by the relationship between the parts of the page filled with text and empty spaces. In other words, key elements here are the division into verses, their graphic structure, as well as vertical and horizontal relations, which come into being through particular visual components now being brought together, now moved apart.

A free verse thus defined should be referred to as a graphic text rather than a verse. Still, the latter term, alongside “poem”, will be used here, following traditional nomenclature. Markedly, however, a free verse is neither the one that is defined by a lack nor by its derivative nature. It is not a “meter-less poem”, let alone “a parasite on the tradition of versification”. It is something else still, distinct from both poetry and prose. Unlike prose (but similarly to verse), it utilises a secondary, non-syntactic delimitation. That added-on delimitation, through its graphic properties, offers a visual message, thus distancing the free verse from poetry and brings it closer to prose. Just like in the latter genre, the fact that a graphic text is meant for visual reading does not mean that its phonic structure is irrelevant and will not be recorded in the process of reading. It is true, however, that it is not the sound value that constitutes the added-on delimiting factor. As has already been stated, the single aspect influencing the delimitation of a free verse is the distribution of written characters on the page.

Since the concept of a free verse as a graphic text has been extensively theorised in Polish literary studies¹, there is no need to address its main tenets here. This paper focuses on issues of translating graphic texts; a topic which hitherto garnered no scholarly interest. It is hoped that this publication will be a first step in expanding graphic text theory onto all European free verse poetry. The point of departure for the following discussion are three related questions: How does the process of translating a work from one language into another affect the graphic structure of its lines? Is that structure copied mechanically or is it also translated and if so, what are the criteria?

1.

In *Main d'œuvre*, a book of poetry by Pierre Reverdy published in 1949, one can find the poem *Portrait*, which attracted the attention of Polish poet and translator Julia Hartwig. When read as parallel texts, the French and Polish fragments are noticeably different. Those differences are not so much in the lexicon but in verse structure:

Des fleurs de couleurs	Kolorowe kwiaty
Des feux	Ognie
La main ramenait des lignes	Ręka wyrzucała linie
à travers l'eau	Poprzez wodę
L'air	Powietrze
Des lignes vivantes dans la nuit	Linie żyjące wśród nocy
La pire des choses	Najgorsze z wszystkiego
Pierre Reverdy, <i>Portrait</i> ²	<i>Portret</i> (transl. Julia Hartwig) ³

A literal translation of Hartwig's version is as follows:

Colourful flowers
 Fires
 A hand was throwing away lines
 Across the water
 The air
 Lines living in the night
 The worst of all

A Portrait

¹ See Witold Sadowski *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny* [*Free verse as a graphic text*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), *passim*.

² Pierre Reverdy, *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Étienne-Alain Hubert (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), Vol. 2, 184. Graphic structure of the work is identical to the one in the edition from which Hartwig was working: Reverdy, *Main d'œuvre: poèmes 1913–1949* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), 216.

³ Reverdy, *Poezje wybrane* [Reverdy, *Selected poems*], transl. Julia Hartwig (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986), 128.

The French noun *ligne* 'line' appears twice in the poem, which supports Isabelle Chol's remark that this word had a special importance for Reverdy. On the one hand it pointed to ontological issues, pursued in his works, and on the other, it emphasised the semantics of visual representation of verses.⁴ A single glance at the text suffices to notice that Julia Hartwig's translation does not recreate faithfully the original graphic arrangement of Reverdy's verses. While both in the original version and in the translation the verses are typographically aligned, the reference point for this alignment is different for each text, both in visual and semantic terms.

In the Polish translation the noun "lines" is used twice, corresponding to two vertical groupings, one of which links left-justified verses, and the other – brings together the fourth, fifth, and seventh lines in the middle of the poem. These alignments make possible distant syntactic relations⁵ and "transversal relations of meaning"⁶. The latter are frequently achieved through rhyme in numeric poetry⁷; here they arise through visual record. The sixth verse is a continuation of the third one content-wise, but this effect is achieved not only through syntactic relations and the anadiploic "lines", but also because both verses belong to the same visual category. The similarity of poetic devices in left-justified segments suggests that also the middle verses *Poprzez wodę* 'Across the water', *Powietrze* 'The air' and *Najgorsze z wszystkiego* 'The worst of all' belong to a common set, expressive of some shared train of thought.

Obviously, none of these are to be found in the original text. This does not mean, however, that the French version lacks graphic alignments altogether. It is just that in the original text these graphic forms were arranged differently to what can be seen in the translation. Apart from the words *des feux* 'fires' and *L'air* 'air', both of which follow a left indent, there is also a diagonal line in the French version. The third, fourth and fifth verses are grouped into a set of expressions which are moving steadily to the right and are optically truncated.

Do these differences matter?

In order to answer this question, one needs to return to the role that the word *ligne* plays in Reverdy's works: one of Reverdy's key terms referring to the brink of death, and, by extension, to the horizon, beyond which people look for answers concerning the durability of existence. According to Michel Collot, for many years after his father's death, Reverdy experienced a feeling of emptiness, which was not only related to the loss of someone close. That sense of emptiness resulted from the poet's realisation that a loved one departed towards a reality which Reverdy saw as a huge vacuum. He translated that vacuum into white spaces which showed in the graphic record of his texts. In the 1920s, having experienced a religious conversion, the poet reworked some of his earlier poems, boldly attempting to remove some of the

⁴ See Isabelle Chol, *Pierre Reverdy. Poésie plastique. Formes composées et dialogue des arts (1913-1960)* (Genève: Droz, 2006), 38–40.

⁵ Different "performative actions in the reception" of a free verse were addressed by Krzysztof Skibski, in "Relacyjność składniowa wiersów w wierszu wolnym" ["Syntactic relationality of verses in a free verse poem"], *Poezja jako iteratura. Relacje między elementami języka poetyckiego w wierszu wolnym* [Poetry as literature: relations between elements of poetic language in a free verse poem.] (Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2017).

⁶ Adam Dziadek uses this term in describing Henry Meschonnic's theory of rhythm (*Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [Somatic criticism project]) (Warszawa, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2014), 35.

⁷ Cf. Lucylla Pszczołowska, *Rym* [Rhyme] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1972), 52–58.

intra-linear spacing and replace it with text. In a way, this enterprise allowed him to verbalise the semantics of earlier silence, but painful questions remained, only now they became a more visible part of Reverdy's poetic imagery. His core representation of death remained the image of the setting sun, representing the moment when the entire horizon is lit up. In Collot's words, whenever this motif appears, that spot on the horizon into which the red ball descends "turns out to be the abyss, into which the light vanishes"⁸ and "the entire space seems to be drawn in by a gaping hole on the horizon, which raises like "the call of the wind", "sweeping off the landscape."⁹

Importantly, not all the empty slots in Reverdy's poems were filled in the course of his conversion. The boundary between the blackness of words written on the page and the whiteness of the rest of the page remained a central artistic equivalent of the inseparable connection between what seems to belong to the material world (reflected in the scenery of sunset) and fading nature, no longer visible because it has been dragged beyond horizon, with the lengthening shadows of a mystical night.

The poet tried different ways of representing this boundary, while avoiding direct transfers of verse structure from one work to another. Still, Collot was able to identify a number of compositional tendencies in Reverdy's versification. One of these is worth mentioning, i.e., "a gradual transposition to the right with a dramatic truncation of the final verse".¹⁰ It was this type of relation that connected the third, fourth and fifth verses in the French version quoted above. A reversed pyramid effect was achieved thanks to Reverdy's lexical choices: the effect of using a three-letter word *air* cannot be replicated by its Polish equivalent 'powietrze'. Regardless of the translator's motivation for changing the original versification, in the text, with the loss of graphic relations, the semantic suggestion of crossing boundaries was also lost in translation.

If one agrees with Collot's claim that in Reverdy's works "the agony of the sun is a daily repetition of his father's death"¹¹, then it can also be added that this scene is a pretext for more general musings on the condition of every being. For the poet each being can be considered in two ontological perspectives: in its current existence (the one which can be seen and experienced) and in its form as an object absorbed by emptiness. An awareness of that emptiness is not a product of empiricism, materialism or nihilism. Rather, it reflects the subject's unease in seeing all the things attracted by the abyss and not being able to see what happens once the boundary between one state and another has been crossed. In its present existence, the being is existentially sucked in by the abyss, which reveals itself in the act. The poet, in turn, encodes the forces of metaphysical dynamics in black verses, which guide the reader's eyes towards the surrounding whiteness of the page.

⁸ Michel Collot, "L'horizon typographique dans les poèmes de Reverdy", *Littérature* 46 (1982): 51.

⁹ Collot, 52.

¹⁰ Collot, 51.

¹¹ Collot.

Au bord du toit
Un nuage danse
Trois gouttes d'eau pendent à
la gouttière
Trois étoiles
Des diamants
Et vos yeux brillants qui regardent
Le soleil derrière la vitre

Midi

Pierre Reverdy, *En face*¹²

Na skraju dachu
 tańczy obłok
Na rynnach zawisły
 trzy krople
Trzy gwiazdy
 diamenty
I twoje błyszczące oczy które patrzą
 w słońce za szybą

Południe

Naprzeciw (transl. Julia Hartwig)¹³

The following is a word for word rendition of the Polish translation:

On the edge of the roof
a cloud is dancing
From the gutter hanging are
three drops
Three stars
diamonds
And your sparkling eyes which are looking
at the sun behind the window pane

Noon

Opposite (transl. Julia Hartwig)

The discussion about the French work, quoted here in its entirety, should begin from the words *la gouttière* ‘gutter’. Seeing how they are shifted to the right, one is under the impression that the verse which contains them was purposefully linked to the ending of the preceding line – like a gutter, attached to the final flap on the roof. Since this relationship is not replicated in the translation, it not only deprives that version of an amusing representation of an architectural detail, but also (if not predominantly) removes the image of a being hanging on the edge of an apophatic emptiness, holding on to matter by the thinnest of threads. In the French version the preposition *à* ‘from’ is visually separated from *la gouttière* ‘gutter’, and thus frozen, waiting for whatever will come next. That *à* is directly confronting the whiteness which opens up to the right, allowing the reader to associate the increasingly heavy drops of water about to be drawn by the space, with the ball of the sun, described in the poem. The ball itself will momentarily begin to roll from the southern sky towards the abyss of the horizon. The sun is visible – as the work has it – from behind the windowpane, which is one more possible reference to a boundary. Under-

¹²Reverdy, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 194. Graphic structure identical to the edition consulted by Hartwig: Reverdy, *Plupart du temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), vol. 1, 201.

¹³everdy, *Poezje wybrane*, 123.

neath that verse, there is an empty line, raising questions about the invisible force which recalls the above-mentioned beings from behind a threshold, which can be variously interpreted.

Theo Hermans notices that in Reverdy's poetry "the poem itself is built on a constant interplay between conceptual fragmentation and cohesion, and relies on the interaction between, on the one hand, a necessary degree of semantic disparity between a number of relatively isolated syntagms, and, on the other, the perception of the whole as a unity held together by contiguity relations and in which each element has its proper place."¹⁴ Hermans' views seem to align with Isabelle Chol's interpretation of the same poem. She points to the co-occurrence of two opposing tendencies (advertised in the title). While "the final isolated word, exposed in the middle of the page, repeats the features suggested by the work, which in itself is a volatile point of balance"¹⁵, in the work as a whole one can discern the oval shape, which in the verbal dimension corresponds with "the meaning of roundness suggested by *goutte* 'a drop' and *soleil* 'the sun'".¹⁶ Chol's analysis of tension, produced by antagonistic forces, leads her to the following conclusion: "Writing the space is thus driven by two opposing desires: a search for stability turning into symmetry and lack of completeness, both in the concrete and abstract senses. These desires meet in the centre of balance and in everything which assumes fragility".¹⁷

Let us now turn to the translation, to see how many elements of the original version were successfully rendered in Polish. Where Chol was able to discern an oval shape in the graphic arrangement of the original lines, the same cannot be said about the graphic structure of the Polish version. The word *południe* 'noon' is indeed suspended in the air, just like its French equivalent *midi*, but the fact that it was moved away from the left margin and now occupied the same spot as the line containing "diamonds" seems to suggest an entirely different ordering than the one that was intended in the original version. The French "des diamants" line, moved to the right, was an expression of tendencies, referred to by Chol as "the desire to decentralise and unload graphic segments". The middle of the French text was thus emptied of words, whereas the surrounding plural nouns were meant to show the multiplicity of phenomena which exude brightness. Drops, stars, diamonds, sparkling eyes – through associating written words with observable phenomena the reader was able to consider the analogy between the distance that their eyes cover in search of letters and the infinite, towards which the light described in the work escapes. Here one is reminded of Collot's interpretation of Reverdy's use of whiteness: "To depart in the direction of the horizon is to join the death of the setting sun." In this context, filling the poem with whiteness multiplies the "effects of remoteness"¹⁸.

"Filling the work with air" was practiced by a large number of modernist poets; Reverdy was no exception here. Paul Claudel devoted long fragments of his 1925 essay [The philosophy of book] to this issue.

¹⁴Theo Hermans, *The Structure of Modernist Poetry* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 161.

¹⁵Chol, *Pierre Reverdy. Poésie plastique. Formes composées et dialogue des arts (1913-1960)*, 52.

¹⁶Chol.

¹⁷Chol.

¹⁸Collot, "L'horizon typographique dans les poèmes de Reverdy", 53.

Whiteness then is not only a material requirement for the work, externally imposed. It constitutes a condition for its existence, its life and breathing. The poem is a verse, which stops – not because it has reached a material boundary and there is no more space left, but because its inner message is complete and its meaning has been exhausted. Between the completeness of the poem and of the page containing it (the platter on which it is presented to us, like on Japanese crockery on which miniature landscapes are painted) there is some kind of a musical relationship.¹⁹

Whiteness associated with air can also be found in other literatures of European modernism, for example in Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*:

Firm even fingers held to the firm pale stone;
Swung for a moment,
 and the wind out of Rhodéz
Caught in the full of her sleeve.
 . . . the swallows crying:
'Tis. 'Tis. Ytis!
 Actæon...
 and a valley,
The valley is thick with leaves, with leaves, the trees,
IV²⁰

This fragment contains many words pointing to the perspective of openness, which provides a visually accessible landscape, and becomes the space for the birds' singing. Polish translators took varying approaches to conveying the functions of empty elements. In the English original these empty spaces extend and delay the process of the actuation of meaning. Let us now compare two Polish versions:

Mocne stanowcze palce ścisnęły mocny blady kamień;
Chybotała się chwilę
 i wiatr od Rhodéz
Wydał jej rękaw.
 ...jaskółek krzyki:
I tu. I tu. Itu!
 Akteon...
 i dolina,
W dolinie tyle liści, tyle liści, drzewa,

(transl. Leszek Engelking)²¹

¹⁹Paul Claudel, "La Philosophie du livre", in *Œuvres en prose*, ed. by Jacques Petit, Charles Galpérine (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 77.

²⁰Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1993), 13–14. The original version was slightly different (likewise different from the two translations discussed here). Cf. Pound, *A Draft of XVI Cantos* (Paris: Three Mountains, 1925), 13–14. However, in this article this poem, as well as others are quoted following the 1993 edition, which preserves the revised edition version of the work, published three years after the poet's death (Pound, *The Cantos* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975)). This revised version we take to be binding for translators. "Canto IV" and "Canto I" by Ezra Pound, from THE CANTOS OF EZRA POUND, copyright ©1934 by Ezra Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

²¹Pound, *Pieśni [The Cantos]*, selected by Andrzej Sosnowski (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1996), 16.

Mocno a pewnie wpiły się palce w kamień krzepki i blady:
 Zwisła na chwilę
 i wiatr gdzieś od Rhodez
 Wydął jej rękaw.
 ... w krzyku jaskółek:
 'Tis, 'Tis, Itis!
 Akteon...
 i dolina –
 W dolinie gęsto od liścia, liści i drzew,

(transl. Jerzy Niemojowski)²²

In general, both translations operate the verses in the same manner as the original does. The elements that were supposed to be moved to the right can be found on the right. Gradation of distance was also preserved. And yet, the final appearance of the two versions is different. While Leszek Engelking scrupulously reconstructed every detail of empty spaces, in Jerzy Niemojowski's translation these spaces were squeezed to the bare minimum.

One need not look too far to find an explanation for the differences in the two Polish versions. Niemojowski's approach was clearly influenced by the typographic design of his book, which involves short, unified indentations. These could not have been more different from Pound's unrestrained poetics. In Engelking's version the image of clothes fluttering in the wind ('i wiatr od Rhodes/ wydął jej rękaw') corresponds to the uncontrollability of verses, now thrown away closer, now further away from the left margin. Niemojowski's verses two through to seven, alternatively aligned as they are to two vertical lines, introduce a kind of automatism, which is absent from the original.

Graphic representation of the wind proved to be problematic for one more translator of Pound's works, i.e., Andrzej Sosnowski. Translating another graphic text from that same cycle, *The Cantos*, he proved his mastery in translating into Polish this long, hermetic work. A short fragment from the middle part of the poem is remarkable:

but this air brought her ashore a la marina
 with the great shell borne on the seawaves
 nautilus biancastra
 By no means an orderly Dantescan rising
 but as the winds veer
 tira libeccio
 now Genji at Suma , tira libeccio
 as the winds veer and the raft is driven
 and the voices , Tiro, Alcmene

LXXIV²³

²²Pound, *Poezje [Poems]* [Translated by Jerzy Niemojowski] (Warszawa: Wojciech Pogonowski, 1993), 163.

²³Pound, *Pieśni* (1993), 463. Contents identical with Pound, *The Cantos* (1975), 443. Structure of quoted lines analogous to Pound, *The Pisan Cantos* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), 27. "Canto LXXIV" by Ezra Pound, from THE CANTOS OF EZRA POUND, copyright ©1948 by Ezra Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

ale to powietrze wyniosło ją na brzeg a la marina
 z wielką muszlą toczoną przez fale
 nautilus biancastra
 W żadnym razie nie regularne dantejskie podejście
 ale jak róża wiatrów
 tira libeccio
 a teraz Genji w Suma , tira libeccio
 jak wir wiatrów i dryf tratwy na fali
 i głosy , Tyro, Alkmene

(transl. Andrzej Sosnowski)²⁴

In the center of the fragment quoted above – where the Polish translation mentions the wind rose ('róża wiatrów') in translating the English 'the winds veer' and the Libyan wind (*libeccio*) – there is a rugged belt of empty space, which disturbs the continuity of the text and does not help the reader, whose eyes roam around the text trying to figure what order of reading was intended for these dispersed fragments. Sosnowski first uses the phrase 'tira libeccio' in the middle of the verse so that it encroaches on all neighbouring fragments, thus introducing a linear order. By doing that, the translator calmed down the reading and got rid of the problem.

2.

Hitherto quoted examples point to the translators' (or their publishers') tendency to ignore the graphic composition of a free verse poem, even if sometimes following the original version seemed to be the easiest option, dependent on a mechanical transposition of textual distances from the English to the Polish version. One of the causes for this lack of precision could be the poets' rather than the translators' awareness of versification. The translators may well have been deceived by the title *The Cantos*, and its reference to melic poetry, only to take Pound's declaration concerning the musicality of a free verse poem at face value²⁵ (this idea had been in circulation since the time of the French symbolists). At the end of the 19th c. this concept of musicality acquired theoretical underpinnings, which largely influenced future views on the problem:

Gustave Kahn, who always introduced himself as the inventor of the French free verse (he surely was its first theorist) wrote that "the poet speaks and writes for the ears, not for the eyes". The new poem was for him "the shortest possible piece which reflects the arresting of voice and sense": *voix* and *sens*, sound and meaning are two defining criteria of a free verse poem. *Vers libre* of symbolism thus becomes a rhythmical, logical unity, regardless of visual or graphic aspects. Symbolist poetry, propelled by musical aspirations, is characterised by a sophisticated rhythmic and phonic, which was to allow the poets to create the real and appropriate "verbal music".²⁶

²⁴Pound, *Pieśni*, 97.

²⁵See Chris Beyers, *A History of Free Verse* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2001), 20.

²⁶Elena Coppo, "Pour l'oreille o pour l'oeil. Il verso libero di Laforgue e Claudel", in: *Oralità e scrittura: i due volti delle parole*, ed. by Teresa Cancro, Chiara De Paoli, Francesco Roncen, Valeria Russo (Padova, Padova University Press, 2019), 144.

Among the first theorists of free verse one can also enumerate Édouard Dujardin, who accounted for the emergence of this phenomenon in the following manner: “if the musical phrase has won the freedom of rhythm, one should also strive for a similar rhythmic freedom for the poem”²⁷. What he meant by this was not freedom of thought. T. Navarro Tomás, a Spanish versologist from mid-20th c., emphasised the fact that “in a free verse poem the factor which artistically arranges words into specific groups depends on the sequence of psychosemantic bases, which the poet applies – consciously or not – as a result of inner harmony, which directs him in the creation of the work”²⁸. It was, then, freedom from metric principles, rather than from one’s individual impulses, which were responsible for the creator’s mental rhythmic compulsions.²⁹

The work’s graphic record was supposed to play a secondary role. Robert Pinsky defined this role briefly: “the line is vocal, a sound; the typographical arrangement is a notation for that sound”³⁰. Regardless, poets tended to have too high expectations of printed versions of their work. Paul Claudel’s versification aimed at “recreating linguistic rhythm, dependent on the physiological rhythm – that of heart and breath – which is an expression of a universal vital rhythm”³¹. It is worth pointing out that even before Claudel, a Polish theorist of poetry, Stanisław Młeczko, believed the Greek hexameter to be the perfect tool for reflecting physiological rhythms. In his opinion, it suffices to recite to the contemporary reader the *Illiad* or the *Odyssey* correctly in order to hear “the heartbeats of forty generations of the Greek nation. We can hear the heartbeats of people living three thousand years ago.”³² Bolesław Leśmian, wrote in his theoretical essays an oft quoted sentence that “any proces of creation is accompanied by a rhythmical movement”³³. In his own literary practice, he attempted to reflect this movement in the rigid structures of syllabic and accentual-syllabic verses. The creators of free verse had a similar aim: to submit the versification to a “pure expression of a personal rhythm”³⁴. At the same time, they preferred “to compose in

²⁷Édouard Dujardin, *Les premiers poètes du vers libre* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1922), 63.

²⁸T. Navarro Tomás, *Métrica española, Reseña histórica y descriptiva* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1956), 454.

²⁹This view is supported by numerous statements from poets, referring the experience of being possessed by self-imposing internal rhythms. Some of these statements (from Paul Claudel, Paul Valéry, Julian Przyboś, Czesław Miłosz) are quoted by Joanna Dembińska-Pawełec in “*Poezja jest sztuką rytmu*”. *O świadomości rytmu w poezji polskiej dwudziestego wieku* (Miłosz — Rymkiewicz — Barańczak) [*Poetry is the art of rhythm. On the consciousness of rhythm in Polish poetry of the 20th c.* (Miłosz — Rymkiewicz — Barańczak)]. (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2010), 22, 39–40, 131, 208–209. Some of these statements are related to the belief that the free verse poem – from the author’s point of view – has a pre-textual state of existence, which was perhaps named in the title of Urszula Koziół’s text “Przedwiersze” [“Pre-poem-ness”] in her *Stany nieoczywistości* [*States of non-obviousness*] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1999), 90. This state is frequently experienced in the sphere of inner touch rather than hearing, which in the poetry of Krystyna Miłobędzka is sometimes compared to the way a mother feels the embryo in her womb. Cf. Sadowski “«Potyczka we wsi Wiersze», czyli wersyfikacja jako temat poezji najnowszej” [“A duel in the village of Poems”, or versification as the topic of modern poetry] in *Nowy autotematyzm? Metarefleksja we współczesnej humanistyce* [*New authoritarianism? Metareflexion in contemporary humanities*] ed. by Agnieszka Waligóra (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2021), 55–57. On the somatic basis of versification, see Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej, passim*.

³⁰Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry. A Brief Guide* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 109

³¹Coppo, “Pour l’oreille o pour l’oeil. Il verso libero di Laforgue e Claudel”, 153. Cf. Joanna Dembińska-Pawełec, “*Poezja jest sztuką rytmu*”. *O świadomości rytmu w poezji polskiej dwudziestego wieku* (Miłosz — Rymkiewicz — Barańczak), 21–22.

³²Stanisław Młeczko, *Serce a heksametr, czyli geneza metryki poetyckiej w związku z estetycznym kształceniem się języków, szczególnie polskiego* [*Heart and the hexameter, or the genesis of poetic meter in relation to the aesthetic development of languages, especially Polish*] (Warszawa: Wende, 1901), 44. Cf. the discussion of the theory in Dembińska-Pawełec, “*Poezja jest sztuką rytmu*”. *O świadomości rytmu w poezji polskiej dwudziestego wieku* (Miłosz — Rymkiewicz — Barańczak), 111–113; Sadowski, “Psychofizjologia rytmu Stanisława Młeczki” [*The psychophysiology of Stanisław Młeczko’s rhythm*], published March 14th 2012, *Sensualność w kulturze polskiej* [*Sensuality in Polish culture*], accessed June 24th 2021, <http://sensualnosc.bn.org.pl>; Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*, 24–26.

³³Bolesław Leśmian, *Szkice literackie* [*Literary sketches*] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1959), 84.

³⁴Victoria Utrera Torremocha, “Tipografía y verso libre”, *Rhythmica* 2, issue 2 (2004): 257.

the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome”³⁵. “The poem’s appearance on the page” was supposed “to make this rhythm visible”³⁶. This is the origin of the view that “in a free verse poem the graphic composition is something like musical notation, which allows one to figure out what the meters are and thus notice rhythmical values”³⁷.

The subordinate role which was assigned to the graphic record proved to be problematic for two reasons. The first one was voiced by Mikhail Gasparov: “This trend effaced the difference between verse creation and verse recitation. Verse dissolved into recitation; it became merely one of the elements of declamation”.³⁸ Secondly, rejecting meter was a consequence of its inadequacy for whatever the artists dreamt of achieving through their work. Free verse was supposed to expose those rhythms which were unpronounceable in regular versification and subdued by its metric uniformisation³⁹.

Therefore, particularly in the period influenced by Marinetti and Apollinaire, poets striving to convey to the reader the musical fluctuations of speech and its changing amplitude bent over backwards to somehow influence typography, to squeeze out of it, to yank out of it the ability to emanate with the kind of sound “the poet would have wanted”⁴⁰. Literary theory proved helpful in exerting pressure on the audience. In his 1945 essay Kazimierz Wyka wrote:

The graphic form is like a musical notation, pointing to logical senses and voice cadences, intended by the author. That is why we are not talking about prose, because the appearance of notation is governed by a purposeful artistic directive. This directive has to be discovered; one has to read it in order to find out which rhythmic tension governs the layout.⁴¹

Repeating the words “directive” and “has to” in the quotation above establishes a kind of a rescue mission, initiated on a conviction that anything the reader was not induced to by poetry can be enforced by theory. The very risk that the graphic arrangement can evoke in the reader other phonic connotations than the ones intended by the poet needs to be mitigated, it *must* be mitigated by a scholar’s rebuking voice, which makes the science of verse the last stand of normative poetry. The target of these interventions was, however, the readers rather than the poets. Paradoxically, any indication of that difference between what the audience actually read and what they were meant to have discerned in the text exposed the problem of graphic record even further. In order to make communication with the recipient more efficient, and transfer to their imagination a more nuanced, idiomatic “music of poetry”, “different for each work”⁴², the modernists unintentionally locked themselves up in a fairly rigid convention, dictated by the technology of print (less normalised than the meter but still schematic), and even more so – by

³⁵Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 130.

³⁶Coppo, “Pour l’oreille o pour l’œil. Il verso libero di Laforgue e Claudel”, 148.

³⁷Pietro G. Beltrami, *La metrica italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 16.

³⁸Mikhail L. Gasparov, *A History of European Versification*, trans. G.S. Smith and Marina Tarlinskaja (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 289.

³⁹Cf. Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*, 32–34.

⁴⁰Julian Przyboś, *Linia i gwar. Szkice* [*The line and the noise. Sketches*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1959), vol. 2, 261.

⁴¹Kazimierz Wyka, “Wola wymiernego kształtu” [“The will of a measurable shape”], in: *Rzecz wyobraźni* [*A matter of imagination*] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1977), 233.

⁴²T.S. Eliot, “Muzyka poezji” [“The music of poetry”], in: *Szkice krytyczne*, przeł. Maria Niemojowska [*Critical sketches*, translated by Maria Niemojowska] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972), 49.

the typewriter. Richard Andrews points to the non-coincidental emergence of this new invention and the popularisation of free verse:

The advent of the typewriter in the late 19th century gave poets the opportunity to score words on a page in closer proximity to musical compositional principles and thus to express and represent different rhythms from the conventional, regular ones that had dominated poetry. The typewriter afforded exact calculations of spaces between letters, words and lines thus suggesting more exact timing in terms of composition and delivery.⁴³

One of the poets, who used spaces between words to indicate intended manners of recital was Pound.⁴⁴ If that was his intention, then the task of the translator is not so much to copy precisely the graphic layout, as to enforce that same suggestion in the reader of a poem. In Polish versology the strong influence of the Romantic tradition, which emphasised the key role of the poet, was a factor additionally reinforcing the idea that the graphic notation played a subsidiary role.⁴⁵ This is why it took so long for the poets to realise that against all hopes for preserving melodic uniqueness of the free verse poem, the only aspect of versification a typewriter was able to convey was the layout of the text on the page. The first attempt to describe free verse as a poetry for the eye was published abroad in 1980⁴⁶, whereas in Poland similar works started appearing at the turn of the 21st century⁴⁷ – when the typewriter was already becoming a thing of the past.

3.

Let us then ask ourselves whether translating a free verse poem, understood not as a musical or melodic text but as a graphic form, necessitates an exact reproduction of the original version's appearance.

Before answering this question, let us consider an interesting point. Regardless of the fact that it is impossible to make notation perform the task of a phonograph, i.e., to record the idiomatic melodies intended by the poet, the incidental nature of structure – not acoustic but visual – can be achieved in the text. In print one is thus able to achieve a result similar to the one which in the sphere of language was defined years ago by Edward Balcerzan, describing the communicative situation in Julian Przyboś's poetry:

The whole point is to make the signs of language, yanked from vernacular speech, “ambush one another”, “stick with one another”, lock them in thus “arranged” network of co-references, which Przyboś calls a “linguistic policondesate”, so that *every ingredient of the text becomes a non-substi-*

⁴³Richard Andrews, *A Prosody of Free Verse: Explorations in Rhythm* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 25. Emphasis original.

⁴⁴Cf. Beyers, *A History of Free Verse*, 31.

⁴⁵It is not irrelevant that the founders of Polish versology were the tutors of the Romantics: Józef Elsner (Frederick Chopin's teacher) and Józef Franciszek Królikowski. The longevity of their ideas in the 20th c. was upheld, regardless of accompanying polemics, reflections of the most renowned Polish scholar of poetry – Maria Dłuska, in *Studia z historii i teorii wersyfikacji polskiej* [*Studies in history and theory of Polish versification*] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978), vol. 1, 299–306.

⁴⁶Por. Otto Lorenz, *Poesie fürs Auge* w Hans-Jost Frey, Otto Lorenz, *Kritik des freien Verses* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider 1980).

⁴⁷Cf. Artur Grabowski, “Czemuż to wiersze pisze się wierszem?” [*Why are verses written in verse?*] *Pamiętnik Literacki* 86, issue 3 (1995); Sadowski, *Tekst graficzny Białoszewskiego* [*Białoszewski's graphic text*] (Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki UW, 1999), *passim*.

tutable element. The non-substitutability of words is guarantee of the inimitability of the model. To repeat a given communicative model would mean to *copy* “word for word” the entire text of a poem. And that is no longer imitation. This is vulgar, “criminal” plagiarism.⁴⁸

In a graphic text this communicative model engages not so much a singer and a listener as two partners in communication, whose gaze was arrested on the same page of a book. The author and the reader may well have never met and they may never have had a chance to pass by one another because one of them was working, say, a hundred years ago and the other one is alive today. But they are both connected in their perception of the same space, as if they were construing a joint event which they attend from two different periods in time. Like in any literary event, the structure of this space, when copied onto another work, would have been an element of plagiarism. Things look differently, however, when it comes to translation. A precise transposition of the structure of a graphic text onto the translation process is not a criminal procedure. It is an invitation, sent to a foreign reader, to join the same event, in the course of which a specific free verse poem is viewed by both the poet and its translator.

The act of translating a graphic text need not proceed in distinct steps (whereby the author provides the reader with a form, and the reader – in the next step – creates another form, i.e., a translation for a foreigner). Still, as far as versification is concerned, all of the above can occur within a single communicative event. A meeting of two subjects is simply joined by a third party: the recipient of the translation. In that case, the free verse, whenever it is in its power to do so, incites hopes for a pre-Babel situation. While translating a numerical verse often begins by finding semantic or functional equivalents in another language (e.g., the Polish thirteener is taken to be equivalent to the French alexandrine), a graphic text requires no such equivalence. In literatures of European civilisation such text constitutes an important element of an international language of poetry and it need not be escorted over the border by professional translators.

Let us come back to an earlier question and rephrase it: does any departure from the original composition of the graphic text become an error of versification, just like omitting a syllable required by the meter was a problem (intended or accidental) in the syllable-accentuated verse?

Unfortunately, one must conclude that such errors are quite frequent. This happens for a variety of reasons: often the translators are to blame; frequently it is the publishers’ indifferent attitude to the nuances of typography; sometimes versologists tolerate in their academic and didactic practices deeply entrenched yet inadequate ideas about the free verse. Nonetheless, the answer provided here is definitely not universal and perhaps does not even explain half the graphic differences between the original and its translation. One can point to at least three circumstances complicating this relationship.

First, as far as the message of versification is concerned, the international readability of a free poem makes the translator a superfluous participant of the communicative circuit. In the graphic text the space acknowledged while reading the text creates conditions for a direct understanding between the poet and the foreign reader, even if the latter does not understand the language of the text.

⁴⁸Edward Balcerzan, *Przez znaki. Granice autonomii sztuki poetyckiej. Na materiale polskiej poezji współczesnej* [Through signs. Limits of the autonomy of poetic art. On the basis of Polish contemporary poetry] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1972), 191. Emphases original.

The fulfillment of a longing for a perfectly transparent translation proves to spell the death of the translator, for whom the only way to regain their agency is to reveal cracks in this perfect image.

Secondly, one has to remember that there is hardly any unity of typographic norms in the world of Latin or Cyrillic alphabets. For instance, emphasis, which in Polish prints is indicated by means of spacing, in English publications tends to be signalled by means of italics. The translator is then faced with a decision which to choose: form or content.

This leads us to the third cause: just like there is no pure, independent versification in traditional poetry, because a numeric poem is a phonic organisation of an utterance (or at least one that is based on glossolalia, neologisms or onomatopoeia), likewise wordless graphic texts, which only rely on punctuation, are a minority. A free verse poem is therefore always a result of cooperation between the appearance and the message. This is not a simple relationship, however, between the visual aspect of print versus verbal message. This is a multilayered interdependence, which takes into account the variability of the verbal message (its genre, syntax or phonetics), and of the appearance of print (its semantic contents). Finally, the syntax of a language need not always allow a graphic segmentation in *loci* acceptable in another language. It is the complex character of such references that can be responsible for the translators' purposeful and conscious decision to disregard the appearance of the original text.

We can analyse this context by considering two competing solutions adopted by Sosnowski and Niemojowski in their translations of a short fragment from the first song of *The Cantos*.

"Stand from the fosse, leave me my bloody bever

"For soothsay."

And I stepped back,

I⁴⁹

Odstąp od tego dołu, daj mi mój krwawy trunek,

Bym wieszczył."

I odstąpiłem,

(transl. Andrzej Sosnowski)⁵⁰

Odstąp od fosy, pozwól mi napić się krwi,

A przepowiem."

Odszedłem tedy,

(transl. Jerzy Niemojowski)⁵¹

Sosnowski's versification is faithful to the original source: in the first two lines the translator seeks out words which have a similar number of syllables to those which were used in the original ver-

⁴⁹Pound, *The Cantos* (1998), 4. Structure identical to Pound, *The Cantos* (1975), 4. The structure of quoted lines analogous to Pound, *A Draft of XVI Cantos*, 6. "Canto IV" and "Canto I" by Ezra Pound, from THE CANTOS OF EZRA POUND, copyright ©1934 by Ezra Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

⁵⁰Pound, *Pieśni*, 7.

⁵¹Pound, *Poezje*, 158.

sion. The third line overlaps visually with the second one. Lexical equivalents of the words used in the third line also seem to be accurate: Polish *i* is basically synonymous with ‘and’, and *odstąpiłem* is indeed the closest equivalent to ‘I stepped back’. Apart from communicating the basic meaning of withdrawing towards restraint, it is also linked etymologically with the word *stopa* (‘foot’), emphasising the short distance (a foot away), just like in the English version “stepped” suggests a single step.

Niemojowski was not so meticulous, which does not mean his is an inferior translation. Still, in line three alone one can point to at least a few divergences from the English version (the equivalent of “And” used here, i.e. the word *tedy*, finishes the clause, rather than opens it; *Odszedłem*, even though synonymous with some of the meanings of “I stepped back”, has lost a number of other elements of the original, like the etymological reference to a step, the meaning of a short distance, and the sense of restraining one’s emotions (“departure”, which is the closest synonym of *odszedłem* does not reflect spatial relations depicted in Pound’s poem). One could say it would be hard to be more imprecise in such a short verse. Paradoxically, this range of incongruities creates a coherent, although not immediately obvious and readily accessible, combination of equivalence with the original poem.

Let us begin by stating that the minimal spacing before the third line aims at regaining visually the verbally absent meaning of ‘a small step’. The verb *odszedłem*, in turn, creates the opposite effect: it verbalises distance, communicated in the original version by empty space. Where is then the equivalent of the English “back”? Perhaps it can be found in the inversion, moving *tedy* to the end of the line? Considering all of Niemojowski’s decisions, one reaches the conclusion that the translator not only transposes the text from English into Polish but also translates words into images and vice versa, working towards a combination of things isolated and juxtaposed by Sosnowski (while *odstąpiłem* was suggestive of a minor movement, the indentation just before the line actually suggested something different).

A similar decision was taken by Julia Hartwig with some of the elements in Reverdy’s *Réclame* (*Advertisement*):

Hangar monté	Gotowy hangar
la porte ouverte	drzwi otwarte na oścież
Le ciel	Niebo
En haut deux mains se sont offertes	Dwie dłonie uściśnęły się na wysokości
Les yeux levés	Podniosły się oczy
Une voix monte	Głos biegnie w przestrzeń
Les toits se sont mis à trembler	Dachy ogarnia drżenie
Le vent lance des feuilles mortes	Zeschłe liście lecą na wietrze
Et les nuages retardés	I spóźnione chmury
Marchent vers l’autre bout du monde	Suną na inny koniec świata

Pierre Reverdy, *Réclame*⁵²

Reklama (transl. Julia Hartwig)⁵³

⁵²Reverdy, *Œuvres complètes*, tom 1, 159. Graphic structure identical to the edition used by Hartwig: Reverdy, *Plupart du temps*, tom 1, 165.

⁵³Reverdy, *Poezje wybrane*, 115.

The literal translation of the Polish version is as follows:

Ready hangar
Wide open door
The sky
Two hands clasped in the heights
Eyes lifted
The voice is running into space
Roofs begin to shimmer
Dry leaves are flying in the wind
And belated clouds
Are moving to the other end of the world

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Hartwig's version is less graphically radical than the original. While in Reverdy's text the second and sixth lines appear to be escaping from preceding verses, the translation attaches them to it firmly. In exchange for that, the words of the translation convey a bit more than the French text. In the original the doors are just open, while in Hartwig's text they are "wide open". In the former the voice is just rising, in the latter – it is running into space. These differences are not trivial, even though they do seem to be logically connected. Reverdy did not need to name the opening movement; the "wide-openness" and "into-the-space-ness" of it have already been expressed by means of versification. But because the translator decided not to copy the graphic layout, she is trying to reflect this division through her lexical choices. In this manner she replays the French poet's earlier decision who, as mentioned before, also rewrote his earlier works and filled some of the empty spaces with text.

4.

The analyses presented in this paper, even though based on a limited number of examples, seem to warrant some generalisations. European graphic verse need no longer be described as a concept embracing a number of national versifications, as is the case with the numeric poem, but it can be treated as a phenomenon common to the European cultural circle, connected to various languages, which have carried it to different continents. It deserves the name *lingua franca* not so much because of the ease with which contemporary literature spreads and not because its recipients can easily access information on how to read a given sentence in a foreign language. Graphic texts became an international poetic language because readers in various countries can look at a work and *see* its appearance. This does not mean that versology is no longer interested in translations. It is in translations that one can notice true differences between the actual verse structure and what free verse poems were supposed to be in the light of poetic projects or what translators (and versologists), seduced by these visions, thought they would be. Translations also give the translators a new role, in which they do not have to make the graphic text *more accessible* (sometimes, in fact, they

should not). All they need to do is make the original version *available* to the reader. However, if the translator decides to translate the versification as well, then the translation will be not only from one language to another, but also from one image to another, from language to image or from image to language.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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KEYWORDS

graphic text

free verse

misunderstanding

Ezra Pound

ABSTRACT:

The free verse is taken here to be a graphic text, i.e. a technique operating the layout of signs on a page. The problem of translating thus understood versification into foreign languages is considered here on the basis of Reverdy's and Pound's poems. This article puts forward a hypothesis, that misunderstandings resulting from differences between the original structure and the one appearing in the translation are caused by culturally embedded beliefs about the melodic nature of a free verse poem. At the same time, considerations of the specific role of the translator of a graphic text lead to conclusions as to why that translator sometimes decides to verbalise the semantics of versification and translate the words of the original by means of the graphic layout.

visual poetry

PIERRE REVERDY

TRANSLATION

versification

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Witold Sadowski – born 1974 is a professor at the University of Warsaw, literary scholar, author of publications on the history and theory of the poem, relations between literature and plastic arts, religious forms in European poetry, works of (contemporary and earlier) Polish poets and genology. He published, *inter alia* *Tekst graficzny Białoszewskiego* [*Białoszewski's graphic text*] (1999), *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny* [*Free verse as a graphic text*] (2004), *Litania i poezja. Na materiale literatury polskiej od XI do XXI wieku* [*Litany and poetry. On the basis of Polish literature from the 11th to the 21st century*] (2011), *Europejski wiersz litanijny. W innej czasoprzestrzeni* [*European litany verse. In another time and space*] (2018). His 2011 and 2018 monographs are devoted to analyses of the litany as a numeric poem genre, operating on syntagmatic structures and stress alignments. His 1999 and 2004 books propose a theory of free verse, which takes into consideration its graphic form.

Enjambment and Versification (a Side Note to Works by Giorgio Agamben and Adam Kulawik)

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1.

Imagine a social gathering (say, a *cocktail-party*) – and that one person who always arrives late, when everyone else has already taken their seats, discussed everything and everyone; and – in all fairness – is becoming bored with the whole affair. This is when *she* appears and (whether she likes it or not) almost immediately attracts everyone's attention.

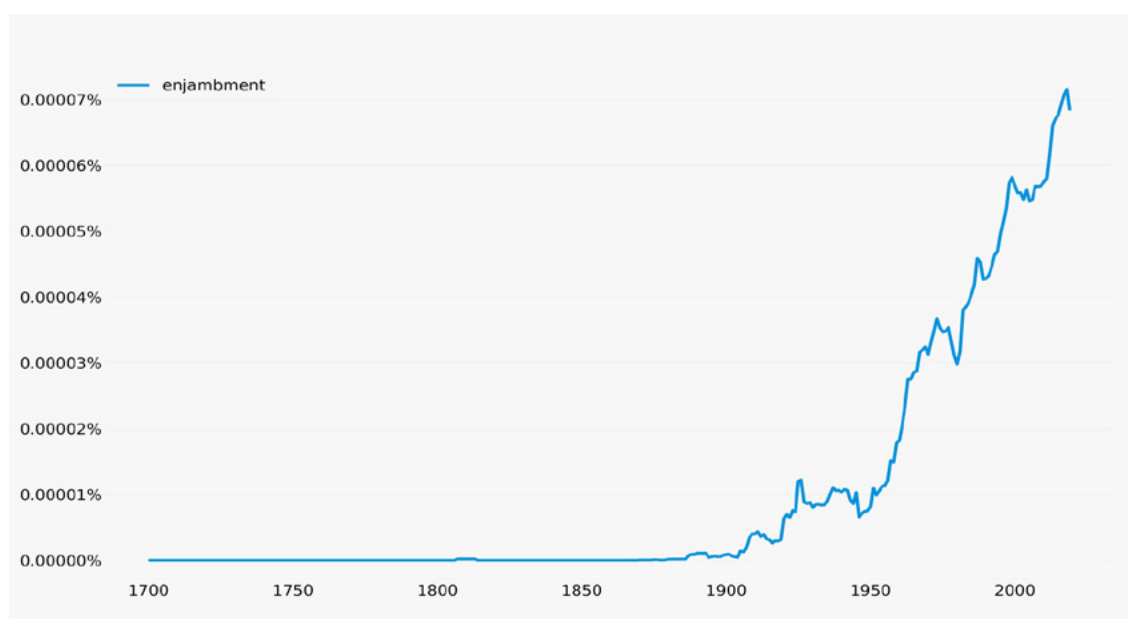
Her name is enjambment.

In theory, enjambment has always been common in poetry and most versifications¹. Nonetheless, upon closer inspection, it is uncertain whether it has been as historically and geographically common as we believe it to be. And, more importantly, neither is it certain whether this phenomenon, present across various places and times, is in fact what we understand as enjambment today. We do not know whether people from different cultures and times reacted to this prosodic phenomenon in the same way, and neither do we know whether enjambments observed in their poetry were perceived as such by them (and if yes – how did they work?).

I would like to present a slightly dissenting (maybe even controversial?) opinion, as evidenced by a few forthcoming texts². This opinion boils down to stating that enjambment in its currently prototypical form is inextricably linked with transformations that have taken place in verse since circa the late 19th century, but mostly in the 20th century and later. On the other hand, I would classify older enjambments (the Renaissance, baroque) as a separate issue. Like any generalization, the above is obviously a significant simplification – nonetheless, I will rely on it for the purposes of this text.

Interestingly, if we investigate the frequency of appearance of “enjambment” in the English Google Book Ngram Viewer corpora, we will see that indeed the closer to the present day, the higher the frequency of occurrence. Clearly issues which are not discussed are not important for a given community at a given moment – and when an issue gains importance, it automatically becomes a subject of heated discussion (just look at the frequency of occurrence of such words as *war*, *revolution*, or *terrorism*!).

Chart 1. Frequency of occurrence of *enjambment* in Google Books Ngrams]



¹ Roland Greene and Stephen Cushma, eds., *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2016), 99.

² Among others, in the following two-volume work: Arkadiusz S. Mastalski, “Ruch i znaczenie (w) przerzutni” [Movement and meaning (in) enjambment], *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis: Studia Poetica* (2022 and 2023).

2.

However, let us put this topic aside, and move on to the major subject of this paper: (as far as I know) in recent decades there have been at least two theoretical proposals in which enjambment is considered a key issue in versology, or (to the same effect) considering it to be a verse element of major significance, although derivative in terms of other factors. These concepts are by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and Adam Kulawik, the latter being one of the most important Polish verse theoreticians. We should also mention here studies into enjambment by the Israeli literary scholar and theatrologist, Harai Golomb (*Enjambment in Poetry. Language and Verse in Interaction*, Tel Aviv 1979)³.

However, how did enjambment not only get citizenship in the versification domain, but actually feel at home there? Let us look back and see what it looked like in old studies in versology.

In a 1957 paper by Maria Dłuska the word “enjambment” does not appear at all. This is not surprising considering its title: *Sylabotonizm a kryteria rytmiki*⁴ [Accentual-syllabic verse and rhythmic criteria]. Enjambments and accentual-syllabic verse do not have much in common. Another major Polish versologist, Maria Renata Mayenowa, mentions enjambment in the context of accentual-syllabic verse only once⁵. Dłuska’s text on versification in Mickiewicz (published in the same year as Mayenowa’s) mentions enjambment 18 times⁶. In the paper *Wiersz* [Verse] she uses the term as many as 11 times (when and in what circumstances this takes place is relevant too)⁷. In turn, Dłuska’s 1954 paper on the melic verse mentions enjambment only four times, but the context is rather obvious⁸ (I trust that the Reader has a rudimentary knowledge of this kind of verse). A conclusion that stems from those (slightly superficial) calculations may seem simple: when a paper discusses poetry which either does not use enjambment, or uses it only marginally, there is no point elaborating on it. Hence the high frequency of the term in Dłuska’s monumental *Studia z historii i teorii wersyfikacji polskiej* [Studies in history and theory of Polish versification] (first edition: Kraków 1948, second edition: Warszawa 1978⁹), an attempt at a complete discussion of Polish versification. Research areas such as accentual-syllabic or melic verse are naturally not associated with enjambment, as evidenced by other works by Pszczołowska – in her 1959 paper on versification in Mickiewicz’s plays the term appears 10 times¹⁰, and in *Przyczynek do opisu współczesnej wersyfikacji*

³ I will devote a separate paper to this concept. Originally it was supposed to appear in the present paper, however, after giving it some thought I decided it deserves a longer discussion.

⁴ Maria Dłuska, ‘Sylabotonizm a kryteria rytmiki’, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 48, no. 3 (1956).

⁵ Maria Renata Mayenowa, ‘Jeszcze o sprawie polskiego sylabotonizmu’ [More on the issue of the Polish accentual-syllabic verse], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 46, No 4 (1955).

⁶ Maria Dłuska, ‘O wersyfikacji Mickiewicza: część druga’ [On Mickiewicz’s versification: part two], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 47, No 2 (1956).

⁷ Maria Dłuska, ‘Wiersz’ [Verse], in *Problemy teorii literatury* [Issues in literary theory], vol. III, ed. Henryk Markiewicz (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1987), 204.

⁸ Maria Dłuska, ‘Wiersz meliczny – wiersz ludowy’ [Melic verse – folk verse], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 45, No 2 (1954).

⁹ See Kazimierz Wiktor’s extensive paper-review, ‘Metryka a intonacja’ [Metrics and intonation], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 40, No 1 (1952).

¹⁰ Lucylla Pszczołowska, ‘O wierszu dramatu Mickiewiczowskiego’ [On the verse of Mickiewicz’s plays], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 50, No 2 (1959).

polskiej [A contribution to a description of contemporary Polish versification] (1975) as many as 36 times¹¹. Clearly someone writing about contemporary versification in the 1970s simply had more opportunities to mention enjambment than someone studying accentual-syllabic or melic verse two decades earlier.

However, a question arises: why does the same scholar not mention the term even once in her 1995 overview text on verse studies published in “Teksty Drugie”¹². Was enjambment not as big an issue at that time? Not necessarily. We can look at this problem from a slightly different perspective; for many decades Polish (and not only) versological studies preferred topics which focused on phenomena other than enjambment, resulting in papers of a metrical or metrocentric character.

Such a perspective seems rather obvious, for verse and versification, since their very beginnings, have actually been mostly defined in terms of a rhythmical organization of language, i.e., meter; hence identifying studies in verse with studies in metrics, and taking the metrical perspective as the starting point. However, it is not epistemologically neutral, for it establishes a system of reference, in which what is metrical is central – it is the norm, rule, archetype, or prototype – and what does not belong to this form is somewhat automatically shifted to the peripheries of discourse, or even beyond it, and becomes identifiable only in reference to this cognitive center. The so-called “free verse” (implicitly free from what makes verse: a repeatable, recognizable meter) is the emblematic example, but this phenomenon also refers to enjambment, i.e., abandoning the basic, original form of verse.

In works by other scholars of verse, enjambment seems to be (as described by Dłuska in an already mentioned paper) “always only a **deviation** from the general course [in which the end of a verse overlaps with the end of a sentence or a clause], its **collapse**”¹³, or, as observed by Adam Ważyk: “an **exception** that proves the rule” (the rule being the end of a verse overlapping with the end of a sentence)¹⁴. Roman Jakobson arrived at similar conclusions in his seminal work: “Yet even a vehement accumulation of enjambments never hides their digressive, variational status; they always **set off the normal coincidence of syntactic pause and pausal intonation with the metrical limit**”¹⁵.

Thus emerges a clear image of enjambment as a peculiar versification transgression, something that goes beyond the norm, occurring sporadically, as a challenge to the *status quo* (one paper notes that it only refers to 6.2% of metrical verses¹⁶). This peripheral role of enjambment can be easily observed in the universe of versological metareflection also in a 1955 text by Mayenowa:

¹¹Lucylla Pszczołowska, “Przyczynek do opisu współczesnej wersyfikacji polskiej” [A contribution to a description of contemporary Polish versification], *Teksty*, No 1 (1975).

¹²Lucylla Pszczołowska, “Badania nad wierszem: problematyka i obecny status w nauce o literaturze” [Studies in verse: problems and current status in literature studies], *Teksty Drugie*, No 5 (1995).

¹³Dłuska, *Wiersz*, 204. Unless noted otherwise, all highlights are by me, - ASM.

¹⁴Adam Ważyk, *Esej o wierszu* [Essay on verse] (Warszawa: Czytelnik 1964), 8.

¹⁵Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics”. Polish translation used in the Polish text: “Poetyka w świetle językoznawstwa”, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 51, No 2 (1960): 451.

¹⁶See Adam Kulawik, *Teoria wiersza* [Theory of verse] (Kraków: Antykwa 1995), 15-6.

All of us, with no exceptions, are aware of the existence of enjambment. Every reader of poetry has experienced this feeling, resembling setting foot on a non-existing step: when a cadence-type intonation, which we are inclined to realize at the end of each verse, clashes with a syntax-dictated intonation, which does not allow to realize a cadence intonation in the place determined by the structure of the verse, unless we resign from reading it in a meaningful way. The phenomenon raises no doubts whatsoever. We would not even notice it if it did not result from the clash of two intonation structures. What stems from the fact that the reader encounters an enjambment? Typically, the intonation dictated by (generally speaking) semantics wins. Otherwise, we would have to aim for a humorous effect, like in the free verse (such as in fables). We should remember that the cadence character of a closure is not limited to where it would also occur in prose, for it also appears where it would not have to in prose; it appears where this type of intonation is impossible in prose by its very nature. Hence it is a prosodic, linguistic phenomenon, which may take a different shape in prose than in verse and as a result of the syllabic extent of verse. The limits of this “different” have not been studied yet. In the versological practice we can more or less deal with enjambment – but the fact that the very existence of this phenomenon is conditioned by an intonation which specifically belongs to verse seems to raise no doubts¹⁷.

The atmosphere of mystery, ambiguity – rather untypical for versological works – is striking here, as well as the elaborate description, the tendency for using metaphors as cognitive “prostheses” allowing one to understand a somewhat less studied and understandable phenomenon in terms of what is empirically cognizable, using first person plural to refer to shared experiences. We should bear in mind that in the works discussed here “enjambment” appears in specific contexts, such as in Dłuska, where we can read about the baroque **“enrichment with enjambments, more or less acceptable”**¹⁸ or that pseudo-classicism **“decisively proscribes enjambments and rhyme extravagances”**¹⁹, whereas in terms of Dłuska’s general reflections concerning the prosody of sung (folk) and spoken (literary) poetry, she observes that the former neither knows nor uses enjambment due to its melic nature²⁰, adding that:

verse, which in its spoken form not only **emerges triumphantly from enjambment** numerous times, but even resorts to it – in order to boost expression, liven up, diversify the pace – **hates and avoids it** in its melic form²¹.

In turn, in her text on Romantic drama, Pszczołowska states way more frequently that there are “no enjambments”²², the verse is free from enjambments²³, or that someone **resorted to enjambment** only several times²⁴, for “it was a strong means of expression used with **great caution by very few**”²⁵.

¹⁷Mayenowa, “Jeszcze o sprawie polskiego sylabotonizmu”, 477.

¹⁸Dłuska, “Wiersz”, 195.

¹⁹Dłuska, 197.

²⁰Dłuska, “Wiersz meliczny”, 475.

²¹Dłuska, 474.

²²Pszczołowska, O wierszu dramatu..., 537.

²³Pszczołowska, 541, 547.

²⁴Pszczołowska, 563.

²⁵Pszczołowska.

It is clear that what the scholars cited here write about enjambment (and whether they do it at all!) generally overlaps with the extent to which it constitutes an important element of poetics of the works the scholars discuss, and an element of the poetic verse technique in general. However, if the presence of enjambment cannot be captured in academic works devoted to it in a clear, unquestionable way, then the frequency of occurrence of this phenomenon in books of poems seems to give a good idea of how well Google corpora reflect its frequency of occurrence: the trend is generally upward, and post-Romanticism poets statistically use enjambment more often than their predecessors did.

Already in the 1970s Pszczołowska observed that

enjambment [...] has so far been a rare situation in terms of aligning the end of verse with the end of a sentence to a different degree, it has been an element of shaping intonation and expression *ad hoc*. **Now the proportions are being reversed**²⁶.

Based on my microanalysis of 2,501 lines of verse randomly selected from poems by five poets (four male and one female) from the 20th or 21st century it is rather clear that enjambment is becoming more common; at the same time the number of texts with no enjambments is decreasing, and each individual poem is more and more saturated with them. Even considering that in Kochanowski's *Laments*, full of examples of disagreements in syntax, the frequency of enjambment is 9.7%, and in Mikołaj Sęp-Szarzyński it is as high as 21.3%, the presence of enjambment in contemporary verse is in fact impressive²⁷:

Author's name	Total No of lines	Frequency of occurrence of enjambment in %	Poems with no enjambments in %	Max. frequency of enjambment in %
Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004)	500	12,6	30,7	58,6
Wisława Szymborska (1923-2012)	504	13,7	16,6	52,4
Ryszard Krynicki (1943-)	501	35,5	8,6	85,7
Marcin Świetlicki (1961-)	500	35	13,1	82,3
Tomasz Pułka (1988-2012)	496	47,8	6	77,8

²⁶Pszczołowska, "Przyczynek...", 16.

²⁷Bogusław Wyderka, "O rodzajach przerzutni", *Stylistyka*, No 7 (1998), 254.

Of course, what I mean here is a thought-provoking example rather than a statistically significant sample or method. However, I am convinced that in the future, when we have corpora more adequate for quantitative analyses, we will find that the frequency of occurrence of enjambment in Polish poetry would be very similar to what I have presented here²⁸.

3.

However, there are scholars of poetry for whom enjambment plays a decisively more significant role, starting with Giorgio Agamben — an Italian philosopher who has also written on linguistics and poetics. He wrote about enjambment in *Corn: From Anatomy to Poetics* (1995), *The End of the Poem* (1999)²⁹, and, first and foremost, in his 1985 *Idea of Prose*³⁰. The main idea behind all of Agamben's considerations regarding enjambment seems simple – even banal – although eventually it presents itself almost as revolutionary due to being radically different than traditional conceptualizations: similarly to most contemporary scholars of poetry, Agamben claims that enjambment is only possible in verse; hence, it is at the same time the only element of poetic construction differentiating poetry (verse) from prose, where this prosodic phenomenon cannot appear³¹. Devoting a chapter entitled *Idea of prose* to enjambment as a verse-constituting phenomenon which cannot occur in prose and which – as the only one, as opposed to rhythm, verse length, or the number of syllables – determines “the identity of verse”³² seems unusual, as Agamben defines prose negatively, i.e., as something which does not allow enjambment. He also states that each verse contains some potential for enjambment – what he calls “zero enjambment”³³. And when defining versification, he states that enjambment is its necessary and sufficient condition³⁴. In his concept, the very rule of verse is reevaluated: poem and verse are what they are because they allow enjambment (as opposed to prose), whereas their other qualities (such as meter) are facultative and non-obligatory. This is a reverse of the metrical definition of verse, in which verse is metrical, and enjambment is only an option; the rule is metric, and enjambment is an exception. Hence, according to Agamben, verse – prototypical in metrical concepts, equal to a sentence or a few sentences (no enjambments, based on syntax) – is subject to a negative definition, similarly to prose: it is a zero-enjambment verse, whose identity is confirmed only by breaking the syntactic relationship of the syntactic verse based on mimesis in terms of syntactic rules³⁵. If the possibil-

²⁸It should be mentioned that quantitative studies in versification are being conducted quite intensely in Czechia. See *Quantitative Approaches to Versification*, edited by Petr Plecháč, Barry P. Scherr, Tatyana Skulacheva, Helena Bermúdez-Sabel, Robert Kolár (Prague: Czech Academy of Sciences 2019).

²⁹Both texts are from: Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, translated into Polish by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press 1999).

³⁰Giorgio Agamben, “Idea prozy”, in *Idea prozy*, translation into Polish and afterword by Ewa Górniak-Morgan, commentary by Andrzej Serafin (Warszawa: Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego 2018).

³¹Sporadically scholars accept the existence of enjambment-in-prose. However, this phenomenon requires a separate discussion. See Witold Sadowski, “Wersyfikacja w reportażu” [Versification in reportage], *Teksty Drugie*, No 5 (2005), 96-9; see Agnieszka Kluba, *Poemat prozą w Polsce* [Epic poem in prose in Poland] (Toruń: Wyd. Nauk. UMK 2014), 375.

³²Agamben, *Idea prozy*, 23.

³³Agamben, 23.

³⁴Agamben, 25.

³⁵Agamben, 26.

ity to go beyond syntax's *dictum* (even if it is only potential), gains primacy over versification, becoming the rule of verse, a question about this only place in a poem (an epic poem or a text written in verse), where enjambment is impossible in principle, emerges: about its ending.

Agamben undertakes this topic in his famous study *The End of the Poem*, and *Corn: from Anatomy to Poetics* – however, those texts do not offer any new insights in reference to his earlier work. *The End of the Poem* is obviously not a study on enjambment, however, it plays a significant role here, because “poetry lives only in the tension and difference (and hence also in the virtual interference) between sound and sense, between the semiotic sphere and semantic sphere”³⁶. In further parts of the essay, he repeats and elaborates on his thought from *Idea of Prose*, for example referring to Nicolò Tibino's texts about poems in which a sentence does not end in a rhyme, and its sense remains incomplete³⁷. This split between meaning and sound is typical and natural (in fact, necessary) for verse³⁸, however, as Agamben puts it, a poem is “an organism grounded in the perception of the limits that define (...) sonorous (or graphic) units and semantic units”³⁹. Next, following Dante⁴⁰, he considers the difference between a *canzona* (defined as a unit of meaning) and a *stanza* (defined as a metrical unit⁴¹), and deals with verses which find their rhyming pairs in a different stanza, i.e., the *pan-verse* “essence of a poem” (versification composition), thus going beyond the limits of a stanza, which should constitute a semantic-metrical unity and be iterated in this form⁴². Meanwhile there are such lines (*corn*) in medieval poetry which do not find their pair within their stanza, and thus break the metrical unity in order to recreate it on a new level, beyond the unity of a stanza⁴³. Combining verses belonging to subsequent stanzas with a rhyme goes beyond this unity, being a sign of disrupting this identity and coherence, it causes incompleteness or “insufficiency” of meaning in the former, which seems to constitute an analogy to how enjambment works⁴⁴. It is the opposition of the metrical and the semantic⁴⁵ constituting (as we should remember!) the essence of poetry (verse) according to Agamben – however, it is impossible in the final verse, where the poetic structure and meaning both need to overlap harmoniously; this is where Agamben identifies the crisis (a breakthrough moment) of a poem⁴⁶. However, it is not my intention to recapitulate Agamben's discussion as such, but – by referring to it – to add a significant conclusion to considerations regarding enjambment so far: if he asks whether the fact that the final verse enters the territory of prose in the light of the impossibility of occurrence of enjambment (it does not abandon its poetic, verse-like character, it does not become a non-poem)⁴⁷, it confirms the role of the close and inseparable relationship between enjambment and verse in Agamben's concept in two ways. As he states in *On Guy Debord's Films*:

³⁶Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 109.

³⁷Agamben, 25.

³⁸Agamben.

³⁹Agamben, 110.

⁴⁰Dante Alighieri, *O języku pospolitym* [On vernacular eloquence], translated into Polish by Włodzimierz Olszaniec (Kęty: Wyd. Antyk 2002), 60.

⁴¹Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 111.

⁴²Agamben, 110-111.

⁴³Eva Geulen, Agamben. Introduction, translated into Polish by Mikołaj Ratajczak (Warszawa: Sic! 2012), 55.

⁴⁴Interestingly, he does not mention enjambment between two stanzas.

⁴⁵Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 112.

⁴⁶Agamben, 113.

⁴⁷Agamben, 112.

Many elements that characterize poetry can also pass over into prose (from the viewpoint of the number of syllables, for example, prose can contain verse). The only things that can be done in poetry and not in prose are the caesura and the enjambment (that is, the carryover to a following line). The poet can counter a syntactic limit with an acoustic and metrical limit. This limit is not only a pause; it is a noncoincidence, a disjunction between sound and meaning. This is what Paul Valéry meant in his very beautiful definition of the poem: “the poem, a prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning.”⁴⁸

As observed by William Watkin, this opposition goes beyond Agamben’s literary meaning⁴⁹. However, I would like to focus on how a peripheral element in a given system (i.e., enjambment) has been placed in its center and started to define it. Such a shift would not be possible even in the 19th century, and perhaps even later, whereas its foundations were shaped along with the development of versification (and 20th-century versology), in order to find their expression around 1970s and 1980s – a process supported not only by “advancements” in versification understood as a poetic verse technique, but also versology (i.e., academic versification meta-reflection). The idea that the non-enjambment-like character of the final verse is able to question its ontological status in any way seems to be impossible not only in the 14th or 15th, but also in the 19th century. The situation with the very understanding of verse (in a poem and in poetry) as a unit or form of thought defined by enjambment is similar: although it is connected (at least to some degree) both to Agamben’s logics and state of exception⁵⁰, and to changes within the very thinking of verse, which were not conceptualized by Agamben – in fact, he grew out of them.

4.

Approximately around the time Agamben published his *Idea della prosa* (and perhaps even a few years before that, in the French Aix-en-Provence, where he lived in 1977-1980), a significant revolution in Polish versological thought took place in Cracow, resulting in the following books: *Istota wierszowej organizacji tekstu* [The essence of verse organization of text] (1984), *Wprowadzenie do teorii wiersza* [Introduction to the theory of verse] (1988) and *Wersologia* [Versology] (1999) as well as another, less relevant to the present discussion, by the versologist and hermeneutist Adam Kulawik. However, as I have discussed Kulawik’s versological concepts extensively elsewhere⁵¹, here I would like to provide a summary based only on two short pocket books, i.e., *Wprowadzenie do lektury wiersza współczesnego* [Introduction to reading contemporary poetry]

⁴⁸Giorgio Agamben, “Kino Guy Deborda” [On Guy Debord’s Films], translated into Polish by Piotr Sadzik, *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej*, No 3 (2013), 4. English version translated by Brian Holmes, https://1000littlehammers.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/agamben-difference_repetition_debord.pdf

⁴⁹William Watkin, “Enjambment”, in *The Agamben Dictionary*, edited by Alex Murray, Jessica Whyte (Edinburgh, Edinburgh Univ. Press 2011), 62-63.

⁵⁰See Giorgio. Agamben, *Stan wyjątkowy* [State of Exception], translated by Monika Surma-Gawłowska, afterword by Grzegorz Jankowicz, Paweł Mościcki (Kraków: Ha!art 2008); see Geulen, 79 onwards.

⁵¹For a discussion see: Arkadiusz S. Mastalski, “Ostatnia «wielka narracja» w polskich badaniach wersologicznych. Prozodyjna teoria wiersza Adama Kulawika w trzydziestą rocznicę publikacji «Istoty wierszowej organizacji tekstu»” [The last «great narrative» in Polish versological studies. Adam Kulawik’s prosodic theory of verse thirty years after the publication of «Istota wierszowej organizacji tekstu»], *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis: Studia Poetica*, No 2 (2014).

(1977) and his “small” *Teoria wiersza* [Theory of verse] (1987)⁵² which provide an outline of contemporary knowledge of versification for the purpose of “science for everyone”, as the title of the series proclaims. Following the Latin *[rerum] brevem esse oportet, quo facilius ab imperitis teneatur*, I assume that the *brevi manu* should provide the essence of the subject.

Although the two books were published within only a decade from each other, in terms of the versification worldview they are separated by an *enjamber* (if we want to play slightly cliquy philological word games). Already in 1977 Kulawik did not hesitate to define verse in general as “a way of dividing text [...] into section-verses which are in some way equal”⁵³, whose essence is “the rigor of rhythmical constants comprising regularity and linguistic rhythm”⁵⁴. Based on this foundation he defines free (contemporary) versification as free from such rigors⁵⁵, with external displays of traditional verse – its graphic representation – as its essence⁵⁶. Meanwhile already a few years later (after all, ideas presented in the 1984 publication were not *ad hoc*) Kulawik radically reevaluated and reformats not only his approach towards contemporary ways of versifying, but to the phenomenon of versification as such.

In his pocket edition *Teoria wiersza* Kulawik deals with the concept of meter already at the very beginning; he writes that the notion of versification systems based on equivalence and meter (syllabic, accentual-syllabic, and tonic verse) are of no relevance here⁵⁷. Instead, he offers to conceptualize verse as “a way of dividing text into segments based on prosody, with the use of [arbitrarily applied — ASM] pause”⁵⁸. This arbitrariness is crucial here, as it sets free conceptualizing versification as stacking Lego blocks or solving a crossword in order to make the poet (functioning, obviously, within the possibilities of the prosodic system of a given language) the actual agent in versification, rather than simply an executor of meter’s directives⁵⁹. This agency takes place via segmentation with verification pause, which can occur either with the end of a syntactic clause (syntactic system), or in opposition to it (asyntactic system), and both these phenomena can co-occur within one poem-text⁶⁰, which degrades the triad of old verse systems to mere ways of its metrical rhythmization, which can be used in a versification composition – although they do not have to⁶¹. Classification of verse becomes simple: it can be either syntactic or asyntactic, and both types can take a metrical or non-metrical form⁶²; the notions of verse and meter are thus separated⁶³.

Kulawik proposes a total idea of verse, encompassing any of its manifestations in the history of Polish verse, and at the same time completely different from what we know from the

⁵²Używam tu przymiotnika dla odróżnienia od „dużej” *Teorii wiersza* stanowiącej drugie wydanie *Wprowadzenia* (Kraków: Antykwa 1995).

⁵³Adam Kulawik, *Wprowadzenie do lektury wiersza współczesnego* (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1977), 8.

⁵⁴Kulawik, 13.

⁵⁵Kulawik.

⁵⁶Kulawik, 14.

⁵⁷Adam Kulawik, *Teoria wiersza* (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1987), 3-5.

⁵⁸Kulawik, 9, 19.

⁵⁹Kulawik, 9-10.

⁶⁰Kulawik, s.18.

⁶¹Kulawik, 19-21.

⁶²Kulawik, s. 23.

⁶³Kulawik, s. 24.

metrical paradigm; not only does he set verse free from the metrical “ballast”, but he also shifts the rule of verse from itself to the border between individual lines (verse pause), i.e., beyond verse.

Thus, enjambment becomes – apart from the agreement of pause and syntax, i.e., a syntactic system – one of the main ways of generating verse units (verses), creating (together with syntactic divisions of verse) a syntactic system, which means that it becomes a verse-constitutive notion, and (analogically to Agamben), it is shifted from the margins of versological discourse to the center. Kulawik might as well build upon Agamben’s work: each verse can be asyntactic, including the final one, although in it the rule of asyntactic verse can be realized only through a syntactic segmentation of verse – not by enjambment, which would be impossible here.

Thus, Kulawik is forced to state that as far as the asyntactic segmentation of verse (of whom enjambment is a function) seems to be an obvious category, the syntactic system requires a separate comment⁶⁴, whereas:

Past statements that “verses end in a syntactic boundary”, and enjambments are exceptions that prove the rule, and — far less restrictive — that verse “respects lexical boundaries in principle [...] and ends with the end of a word” cannot be positively verified either in the theory of verse, or in the light of versification practice, and as such – should be rejected⁶⁵.

An observation which contrasts Agamben’s and Kulawik’s approaches to enjambment seems equally important. The former sees enjambment as a manifestation of disagreement between syntax and poetic meter (i.e., it remains within the circle of understanding verse as synonymous to meter)⁶⁶, whereas Kulawik — unsurprisingly — does not connect enjambment with the metrization of text in any way, locating both phenomena on different levels of the organization of a text. As I signaled in the introduction, I am inclined to believe that enjambment in metrical verse, and enjambment in contemporary free composition, are two qualitatively (perceptibly, culturally) different phenomena: the distich, strophic form of historical metrical poetry that goes beyond verse in relation to the atomistic, astrophic, line-based nature of the non-metrical verse. Hence Kulawik clearly goes one step further than Agamben, but not without a good reason: he derives his concept of “looking at” contemporary verse by projecting it onto the past. Hence this concept is of a clearly modernizing character, i.e., it takes the perspective of modern verse practice and wants to provide a conceptual apparatus that would be applicable to any versification. Obviously, this is acceptable — however, only when we remember (as Kulawik stresses numerous times) that the prosodic theory of verse is a concept from literary theory, rather than a historical-literary attempt at recreating what past poets and readers thought of verse⁶⁷.

⁶⁴Adam Kulawik, *Wersologia: studium wiersza, metru i kompozycji wersyfikacyjnej* [Versology: a study of verse, meter, and versification composition] (Kraków: Antykwa 1999), 50.

⁶⁵Adam Kulawik, 56.

⁶⁶Giorgio Agamben, *Corn*, 34.

⁶⁷See Reuven Tsur, “What can we Know about the Mediaeval Reader’s Response to Rhyme?”, in: *Polyphonie pour Ivan Fonagy*, edited by Jean Perrot (Paris, L’Harmattan: 1997), 467.

5.

Adam Ważyk saw enjambment as an “emanation of anxiety, negation of order, divergence, disagreement, disharmony”⁶⁸. Pszczołowska wrote about: “expressing anxiety and fear”, “dissonance”, “a welter of overlapping images fighting one another”⁶⁹. Both voices can be read not only as a diagnosis of the function of enjambment in individual texts, but also as an element of characterizing the subject — not only the subject that is speaking in a poem, but also the speaking and reading subject, the human community in general, or even the whole epoch. Enjambment gains acceptance whenever this dark element enters the poetry or life of a poet, such as in the case of Kochanowski, Emily Dickinson or Shakespeare, or whenever it is in agreement with the *zeitgeist* characterized by uncertainty or a peculiar darkness⁷⁰. This was the case with baroque, Romanticism with its revolution (to some extent), but first and foremost: the last century, with its tragic global events, followed by the blurring of foundations (also *de facto* global) on which people and nations based their identities, multiplication of perspectives, the fluency of world and individuals. Perhaps this is the reason behind the popularity of enjambment in recent years and decades – however, such a cultural or social motivation is not enough; the emergence of a new device based on a disagreement between the division of a verse and of a sentence cannot take place without the right conditions in the matter or verse.

Although enjambments in late poetry by Kochanowski definitely express the darkness he had experienced, they could not have emerged if he had not mastered a new, revolutionary way of thinking of the role of rhythm and clause, and if he had not lived in times when the written word gained a whole new form of existence thanks to the printing press. Similarly, although today enjambment is an excellent tool for poetic expression, its universality should be mostly connected with the new kind of verse, in which meter does not play any role (apart from being an allusion or a styling device), and the form of verse results from an arbitrary gesture of the poet.

However, disregarding artistic creativity: in the area of versology, the interest in enjambment is still inadequate compared to its role in shaping the diction of verse in contemporary poetry, as evidenced by not only a modest number of publications (although this is changing), and – first and foremost – a lack of monographs devoted to this subject, neither in Polish nor in any other language. Paradigms of meter-centered thinking about versification are still strong and lively in their subsequent forms (as evidenced by works from such areas as cognitive, quantitative, or experimental studies⁷¹) and it should not be surprising if – looking at verse in its broadest form, from its earliest manifestations to the most recent ones – various meters have been an inherent determinant in most examples of verse. This is best evidenced

⁶⁸Adam Ważyk, *Amfion. Rozważania nad wierszem polskim* [Amphion. Considerations regarding the Polish verse] (Warszawa: Czytelnik 1983), 50-51.

⁶⁹Pszczołowska, „Przyczynek...”, 27-31

⁷⁰Giorgio Agamben, “Czym jest współczesność?” [What is the Contemporary], in *Nagość* [Nudities], translated into Polish by Krzysztof Żaboklicki (Warszawa: WAB 2010), 19

⁷¹See: Nigel Fabb, Morris Halle, *Meter in Poetry: A New Theory* (Cambridge - New York: Cambridge Univ. Press. 2008), Reuven Tsur, “Metre, rhythm and emotion in poetry. A cognitive approach”, *Studia Metrica et Poetica*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (2017)

by the fact that meter still functions as a synonym – rather than, more accurately, a hyponym – of versification. Enjambment, if it could at all take place, was marginal in terms of verse-creation, being an optional element, a peculiar addition in the history of versification. Nonetheless, such (i.e., metre-centered) studies are typically of marginal importance for modern verse practice, and they do not tell us much about how contemporary poets write their poetry. This classifies studies in meter as historical poetics, whereas theories of verse based on enjambment (Agamben) or those assigning a significant role in the shaping of poetic matter to it (Kulawik) are decisively modern, questioning the centuries-old order of description and thought patterns, as attempts at achieving the same goal in versology as was already achieved in verse some time ago.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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KEYWORDS

verse

VERSIFICATION

ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses two twentieth-century theoretical-literary concepts regarding broadly understood versology, pioneering expressions of new way of thinking of versification based on enjambment (i.e., the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line, couplet, or stanza) rather than on meter. By investigating the role of enjambment according to Giorgio Agamben and Adam Kulawik, the paper refers to transformations that have taken place in perceiving this prosodic phenomenon over the past decades, i.e., how verse has changed by transitioning to non-numerical (so-called free) composition from meter and equivalence.

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Giorgio Agamben

enjambment

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Ambiguous Free Verse/Prose Forms in Versification Studies: An Attempt at Diagnosis

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1. Introduction

Although free verse is a form that is meant to “overcome demarcations,”¹ nowadays it is increasingly seen as a demarcating category, which writers try to overcome in various ways. At the same time, Polish versification studies, focused on defining and classifying free verse, has so far either briefly mentioned or completely ignored the question of ambiguous free verse/prose forms, which means that the discipline is not currently able to analyze such works. However, this issue cannot be further ignored because it effectively means ignoring a vast section of contemporary poetry and literature. Therefore, drawing on existing criticism, we should formulate a suitable method for analyzing such ambiguous cases. In order to find such a method, it is first necessary to recognize the reasons behind the exclusion of ambiguous forms from versification studies.

¹ Juri Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977), 298.

2. Invisible ambiguous forms: Possible causes

The main reason why ambiguous free verse/prose forms have not yet been the subject of systematized research appears to be as follows: all Polish approaches to the free verse poem, either as a separate subsystem or as a form that meets the general definition of the poem, are (more or less explicitly) based on the categorical opposition between prose and free verse, which in many cases is further embedded in the opposition between prose and poetry. Consequently, formulating the definition of the (free verse) poem effectively involves demonstrating that it is fundamentally different from prose. The more precisely researchers describe the mechanisms and unique nature of the free verse poem, the more they distinguish it from prose, understood both as a method of delimitation and a stylistic variety of language.

The second reason becomes visible once we adopt the following assumption: ambiguous free verse/prose texts need to be recorded, because their essence lies in their unique layout. The reasons behind this approach, supported by analyses of specific examples, can be found elsewhere.² As we know, the majority of canonical Polish works in versification studies demonstrate insufficient interest in the visual aspect of the poem and excessive interest in sound patterning (or more precisely: phonology and prosody). While this has changed in recent years, neither Dorota Urbańska,³ who in her polemic with Adam Kulawik emphasized the role of the layout in the free verse poem, nor Artur Grabowski, who draws attention to unique, visual, aspects of the line,⁴ nor Witold Sadowski, who formulated a “graphic” definition (and theory) of the free verse poem,⁵ have given up on finding and identifying the aforementioned distinct difference between prose and free verse (Urbańska, Sadowski) or, more generally, between prose and poetry (Grabowski). Thus, the versification turn towards the visual did not involve opening up to the problem of ambiguous forms.

Meanwhile, at least since the end of the 1950s, and definitely in recent years, numerous works which are “graphic” (i.e., are defined by their unique layout) but not in the traditional sense of division into lines have been published, thus questioning the opposition between prose and poetry. Often, these works are nearly devoid of traditional features of the poetic style, or for other reasons cannot be classified as poetry, and as such they also undermine the prose/poetry division. The three examples quoted below, selected more or less at random and representing genologically diverse texts, shall illustrate this point.

² Wojciech Pietras, “Wers na pograniczach wersologii” [Grey areas in versification studies], *Prace Filologiczne. Literaturoznawstwo*, no. 11 (14) (2021): 259–73, <https://doi.org/10.32798/pflit.541>.

³ Dorota Urbańska, *Wiersz wolny: próba charakterystyki systemowej* [Free verse poem: Attempt at systematic description] (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 1995), 50–51.

⁴ Artur Grabowski, *Wiersz: forma i sens* [Poem: form and meaning] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 1999), 30, 41, 178–180.

⁵ Witold Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny* [Free verse poem as a graphic text] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2004).

A.

Potem byłem kochankiem i czytelnikiem Platona
Po dłuższej przerwie zostałem oficerem rezerwy
Proszę mi wierzyć to nie jest praca łatwa ani
nieodpowiedzialna

Przede wszystkim nie mogłem sobie poradzić z su-
mieniem które w tej sytuacji zachowuje się agre-
sywnie

Najtrudniej jednak przychodziły rozmowy ze zna-
jomymi

Każdy miał dom i pewne osiągnięcia cywilizacyjne
a ja coś

Then I was Plato's lover and reader
After a long break, I became a reserve officer
Believe me, it is neither an easy nor an
irresponsible job

First of all, I couldn't cope with my con-
science which, in this situation, behaves vio-
lently

However, the most difficult thing was talking to
friends

Everyone had a home and some civilization achievements
and me well

B.

Najpierw pojawia się ogień na niebie. To rakieta świetlna.

Sygnał do ataku.

Zaraz potem – strzały.

Dachy płoną jak główki od zapalek. Matki wołają dzieci.

Zwierzęta płoną żywem.

Chwilę później – krzyki:

Wpered na Lachiw!

First there is fire in the sky. It's a light rocket.

The signal to attack.

Immediately after – the shots.

Roofs burn like matchsticks. Mothers call their children.

Animals burn alive.

Moments later – the screams:

Wpered na Lachiw!

C.

(mam dialog bardzo

fajnie

cześć aneta mówi markus cześć markus co słyhać źle dlaczego mam

spotkanie bardzo ważne i nie mogę mieć lekcja dobrze markus polsce jest

bardzo ważny ale twój prace jest ważniejszy)

(I have a dialogue very

cool

hello aneta it's markus hi markus what's up I have a problem what happened

i have a very important meeting and I can't come to my lesson ok markus poland

is very important but your job is more important)

Quotation A comes from Marian Grześczak's "Karzeł" [Dwarf],⁶ a unique text in *Lumpenpoezje* [Lumpen-poetry], precisely in terms of layout. Some segments exceed the length of one line, and the section that "steps over" to the next line has not been right-aligned, as is the case in the entire collection. As such, they function as paragraphs (each paragraph is a sentence), which intertwine with segments that do not exceed the length of a single line, thus meeting the definition of the free verse poem as a graphic text. The layout, especially against the background of the entire collection, comes across as unique. "Karzeł" is not simply prose, because the lines break, and prose suggests narrative continuity. Indeed, Grześczak's monologue is visually fragmented – it breaks and every now and then comes to an end – and reads like a narrative, like prose, only at times, before it is interrupted when the lyrical I turns shy or hesitant.

Quotation B comes from the reportage *Sprawiedliwi zdrajcy* [Righteous Traitors].⁷ In terms of layout, it could easily be classified as a graphic text, which, however, raises the question of whether a graphic text can be found outside the domain of poetry. Another problem is that later on in the book, the quoted fragment smoothly transforms into prose. The fragment "Roofs burn [...]. Mothers call their children. Animals burn alive" is also ambiguous – it can be perceived as a unit that has been broken into two lines, but it can also be read as a single, and therefore very dense and dynamic, paragraph. In such an interpretation, and perhaps especially then, the visual arrangement is not accidental, even though it is not limited to individual lines.

Quotation C comes from Aneta Kamińska's *rozdział 2. / dzień 2* [chapter 2 / day 2].⁸ This example demonstrates that unusual graphic arrangement does not consist only in breaking one

⁶ Marian Grześczak, "Karzeł" [Dwarf], in *Lumpenpoezje* [Lumpen-poetry] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1960), 67–68. All translations into English by M.O.

⁷ Witold Szablowski, *Sprawiedliwi zdrajcy: sąsiedzi z Wołynia* [Righteous Traitors: Neighbours from Volhynia] (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2016), 83.

⁸ Aneta Kamińska, "rozdział 2. / dzień 2." chapter 2 / day 2], in *Gada !zabić?: pan(n)toologia neolingwizmu* [Gada !zabić?: pan(n)toology of neolinguism] ed. Maria Cyranowicz and Paweł Kozioł (Warsaw: Staromiejski Dom Kultury, 2005), 264.

sentence into parts, but may also be based on combining answers, which would be usually written in separate lines, into one long line. Such a line, however, falls apart, loses its integrity, and any attempt at an integrated reading, emphasizing the division into lines, seems doomed to failure. And that was probably the point: to convey the impression of communicative chaos and fragmentation in dialogue.

Such unusual works, which challenge the precise definition of the poem, have not been taken into account in versification studies. It was universally assumed that ambiguous texts, with their ambiguous status, are simply not poems and should not be analyzed by versification scholars. Today, however, such an unjust, and, one might add, arbitrary, approach seems to imply that critics are simply not able to address one of the important trends in the recent history of Polish poetry, and literature in general. Revising such narrow definitions of free verse is therefore more beneficial. Indeed, I shall address three key questions: 1) what exactly is the difference between free verse and prose based on? 2) what is the role of layout in the mechanisms of poetry delimitation? 3) what limitations result from looking at the (free verse) poem as one of the manifestations of poetic language, which lies at the heart of the opposition between prose and poetry?

3. The history of the problem – review of critical and theoretical approaches

a) *The heritage of Ohrenphilologie and formalism*

The close connection between poems and poetry, defining poetry in categorical opposition to prose, and the focus on sound patterning have lain at the heart of Polish versification studies from the very beginning. Drawing on the principles of *Ohrenphilologie*, Wóycicki wrote: “the [p]oet feels more or less clearly, hears internally a certain sequence of tones, the rhythm of this sequence, the melody, the sound that he wants to resound in his work.”⁹ Rhythm played a fundamental role in expressing the “musicality” of the poem, and it was increasingly the rhythm pattern that became the main criterion for distinguishing between poetic and ordinary prose, and, later, for distinguishing between poems and poetic prose.¹⁰ Wóycicki was not interested in the layout of the poem; indeed, if it interfered with his “musical” analyses, he simply ignored it.¹¹

Wóycicki’s successors, following in the footsteps of Russian formalists, defined verse in such terms. Although Tynyanov¹² and Bernstein,¹³ and, in Poland, Siedlecki, formulated their theo-

⁹ Kazimierz Wóycicki, *Forma dźwiękowa prozy polskiej i wiersza polskiego* [Sound patterns in Polish prose and Polish poetry] (Warsaw: Skład główny w Księgarni E. Wende i Spółka, 1912), 32–40.

¹⁰ Wóycicki, 40.

¹¹ Wóycicki, 105–6.

¹² Yuri Tynyanov, „Zagadnienie języka wierszy” [Poetic language], in *Rosyjska szkoła stylistyki* [Russian school of literary studies], ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa and Zygmunt Saloni, trans. Franciszek Siedlecki and Zygmunt Saloni (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970), 80–81.

¹³ Sergei Bernstein, „Wiersz a recytacja” [Poem and oral performance], in *Rosyjska szkoła stylistyki*, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa and Zygmunt Saloni, trans. Zygmunt Saloni (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970), 180.

ries in opposition to *Ohrenphilologie*, its “axioms” (the essence of verse lies in the sound; verse is essentially different from prose) remained intact. Formalists argued that the essence of verse was to be found in poetry that was not intellectual but based purely on sound.¹⁴ And although it was recognized that poetry was not actually “material speech,” it always had a potential for “producing sound.”¹⁵

Such approaches to the poem, shared by *Ohrenphilologie* and formalism, had been taken for granted until the 1990s. As Maria Renata Mayenowa argued, “as a prosodic structure, each poem is opposed to all prosodic forms that are not poetry, both colloquial and written.”¹⁶ Also, other formalist theoretical and critical inspirations did not contribute to the understanding of the unique status of ambiguous texts. What turned out to be particularly important was Tynyanov’s focus on the rhythmic “unity and uniformity” of the line as the basis for equivalence with other lines,¹⁷ regardless of their “content.” Tynyanov thus created a shared theoretical basis for studying metrical and non-metrical poems,¹⁸ and thus the long history of versification equivalence, also in Polish literary studies, began. Moreover, for both formalists and their Polish followers the graphic arrangement was only a (requisite) vessel for a non-metrical poem. It was argued that the layout could not give rise to a poem, because the free verse poem was a poem and not prose that was recorded using a unique layout.¹⁹ The border between poetry and prose was to be impenetrable, and it also included non-metrical works.

b) The problem of the emotive clause

Such a theoretical focus of post-war Polish versification studies, one which excluded ambiguous free verse/ prose forms, was further strengthened and developed by Franciszek Siedlecki. The focal point of his “euphonological” analysis was the metrical structure “as the fundamental poetical structure.”²⁰ Similarly to Wóycicki, Siedlecki did not pay much attention to the free verse poem, and he completely ignored ambiguous poetry/prose forms. Instead, he focused on sound, and assigned a special role to intonation. While he believed that “poetical intonation may be achieved in and through graphic elements – by dividing certain lexical groups, particles, phrases, etc. into lines (intonation units),”²¹ he did not devote much attention to the layout. He also did not say categorically if the graphic arrangement could independently give rise to poetic intonation.

¹⁴Jewgienij Poliwanow, „Ogólna zasada fonetyczna wszelkiej techniki poetyckiej” [General phonetic principle of all poetics], in *Rosyjska szkoła stylistyki*, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa and Zygmunt Saloni, trans. Zygmunt Saloni (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970), 113–17.

¹⁵ Bernstein, „Wiersz a recytacja”, 217.

¹⁶Maria Renata Mayenowa, *Poetyka teoretyczna: zagadnienia języka* 3. [Theoretical poetics: language issues, 3], new extended edition (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich - Wydawnictwo, 2000), 410.

¹⁷ Tynyanov, „Zagadnienie języka wierszy”, 105.

¹⁸ Tynyanov, 93.

¹⁹ Tynyanov, 109.

²⁰Franciszek Siedlecki, „Studia z metryki polskiej”, in *Pisma* [Collected essays], ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa and Stefan Żółkiewski (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1989), 308.

²¹Siedlecki.

Maria Dłuska also initially focused on precise, countable, rhythmic regularities and the systemic evolution of the Polish poem. As a result, in *Studia z historii i teorii wersyfikacji polskiej* [Studies in the History and Theory of Polish Versification Studies], she discusses the free verse poem and the (in)famous “anti-poem” only briefly. The author also does not comment on the relation between such ambiguous forms and prose. Dłuska assumed, in line with Tynyanov, that “any signal that tells us that we should treat sentences as a part of a poem forces us to read them differently than when they are classified as prose.”²²

In *Próba teorii wiersza polskiego* [Towards the Theory of Polish poetry], the rhythm itself is relegated to the background, giving way to versification equivalence. Nothing changed, however, as far as the opposition between prose and poetry was concerned. The latter is always characterized by compositional repetition, meanwhile in prose, the sentences “are not regular, neither as regards their function, nor their form and length.”²³ For Dłuska, the poem is “a structure of excess” and she thus classifies it as artistic and poetical language, which uses different devices but is also ultimately characterized by a clear focus on prosody.²⁴ Respectively, as regards prosody, intonation, which in the poem is determined by the division into lines, is considered the most important.

At the same time, in *Próba ...* the relationship between poem and poetry, which has not been addressed before, ceases to be an *a priori* axiom. In her attempt to explain the relationship between poetry delimitation and poetic expression, Dłuska introduces the concept of the emotive clause. Her definition of the emotive poem reveals, however, that more precise concepts need to be employed, especially since three elements are involved in it: the poem, poetic expression, and the layout. Without metrical structure, only an expressive *intonem* (final stressed vowel) marks the end of the line, and, in turn, only the layout, which shows the distribution of the “subjective key points in the text,” gives us an idea about where *intonems* should appear.²⁵ Nevertheless, for Dłuska, the division into lines is but a trace of an *a priori* ideal intonation that is independent of it, even if this dependence raises doubts as to whether the layout should reflect the intonation designed by the author or whether the intonation is supposed to reflect the layout. If the poem is perceived in terms of sound, and that was Dłuska’s perspective, the layout is of course secondary. As a result, however, a poem which cannot be performed orally, or, as Dłuska puts it, an “anti-poem,” comes across as an anti-linguistic structure, and thus is not seen as a poem at all.

For when it comes to the relationship between the emotive clause and the expressive value of the poem, Dłuska herself noticed its bidirectional character: expressive dominants which divide the text may be “virtually indispensable for the structure of the poem,” and their “structural function [...] in turn increases and enhances their expressive value.”²⁶ However, since the motivation and

²²Maria Dłuska, *Studia z historii i teorii wersyfikacji polskiej* [Studies in the History and Theory of Polish Versification], vol. 2 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978), 173.

²³Maria Dłuska, *Prace wybrane 2. Próba teorii wiersza polskiego* [Selected works 2. Towards the theory of Polish poetry], ed. Stanisław Balbus, *Klasycy Współczesnej Polskiej Myśli Humanistycznej* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2001), 41.

²⁴Dłuska, 25–28.

²⁵Dłuska, 43–45.

²⁶Dłuska, 171–72.

reason behind the emotive division of the free verse poem is the subjective expressive nature of clauses, and at the same time the said emotion is also the result of this fragmentation, i.e., its effect, then cause and effect merge into one. As such, the definition of the free verse poem is highly subjective: an emotive poem is endowed with poetic expression, because someone has coded it into the poem. The division into lines ceases to be a means of expression that can be subject to a universal analysis and may only be studied in terms of individual expression. The fact that a clause appears in a given place points to a subjective emotional load and the reader must find it or rather guess that it is there. In fact, the reader or the critic does not describe the mechanisms of poetry delimitation, but what they believe they can “sense” behind a given layout or division into lines.

As a result, the study of versification in irregular metrical structures must take into account the layout, the division into lines, in order to find and understand these “subjective key points in the text.” However, if the critic does not think that the layout is “binding” but only suggests one of the possible formats, it is the critic-reader who decides whether the emotive clause is effective and whether the poem is or is not divided into lines. If they decide that emotive clauses appear in places that they do not consider expressive key points, they may not see a given text as a free verse poem, which would at the same time obscure the problem of texts bordering on prose.

Of course, Dłuska did not directly indicate such a possibility. Indeed, she analyzed the problem of ambiguous forms in, so far, the most comprehensive way.²⁷ However, the above-mentioned assumptions about the nature of the poem also affect ambiguous forms. Dłuska observes that there is “a large field of ambiguous linguistic compositions where the features of poetry and prose intertwine and it is sometimes difficult to decide how to classify a given text.”²⁸ When we analyze a specific text, however, we have to decide whether it is “prose or poetry.” And ambiguous forms are texts that could be simultaneously read in two different and contradictory ways. And although Dłuska argues that such works should not be “forced into one of the two categories,” she nevertheless formulates “criteria for systemic ordering of ambiguous poetry/prose forms.”²⁹

The main criterion is artistic structure and organization of the text, which governs poetic expression. In practice, in her analysis of ambiguous forms, Dłuska focuses on looking for traces of rhythm in prose. For example, in her analysis of Żeromski’s *Powieść o udatym Waltheriu* [The Story of the Valiant Waltherius], which is clearly divided into lines, Dłuska focuses on looking for the traces of metrical feet. In conclusion, she states that “[s]ome parts read like poetry – amphibrach and free verse,”³⁰ and ignores paragraphs that are not written in amphibrachic meter, as if the lack of meter, to draw on Siedlecki, eliminated the problem of the division into lines.

²⁷Apart from the quoted fragments of *Próba* see also: Maria Dłuska, “Między prozą a wierszem” [Between prose and poetry], in *Prace wybrane 3. Poezja wierszem i prozą* [Selected works 3. Poetry and prose poetry], ed. Stanisław Balbus, *Klasyki Współczesnej Polskiej Myśli Humanistycznej* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2001), 357–66; Dłuska, „Drugi szkic o pograniczu prozy i wiersza” [Second essay on ambiguous prose/poetry forms], in *Prace wybrane 3. Poezja wierszem i prozą*, 367–87.

²⁸Dłuska, *Prace wybrane 2. Próba teorii wiersza polskiego*, 43–44.

²⁹Dłuska, 48.

³⁰Maria Dłuska, „Modernistyczny barok Żeromskiego. Studium prozy poetyckiej pisarza” [Żeromski’s modernist baroque. A study of Żeromski’s poetic prose], in *Prace wybrane 3. Poezja wierszem i prozą*, ed. Stanisław Balbus, *Klasyki Współczesnej Polskiej Myśli Humanistycznej* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2001), 335.

Indeed, the unique nature of ambiguous texts prompts us to reformulate the relationship between the layout and poetic expression: the layout is not a reflection of any external organization; it is not a record of expressive intonation but can itself become a means of expression as soon as it ceases to be invisible. Once we pay attention to the layout and the division into lines, we read a given text differently than prose, and intonation may thus be said to result from the graphic organization of the text. We can then analyze the potential result of a given layout, instead of looking for its emotive justification. We can also move away or beyond the study of artistic structure, because in general the mechanism of graphic delimitation can be analyzed regardless of the text's poetic value.

Critics who have addressed this issue after Dłuska tried to resolve the difficulties associated with the very concept of the emotive poem. Adam Kulawik unequivocally, at least in theory, argued that the poem is independent of the poetic organization of the text. On the other hand, when it came to the free verse poem, Witold Sadowski focused on graphic arrangement. Both approaches overcome one of the limitations indicated at the beginning. This, however, is not enough and neither theory may be employed to systematically describe ambiguous works, especially since both are rooted in binary divisions between poetry and prose and between poem and visual text.

c) Poem beyond poetry in Adam Kulawik's works

Kulawik's goal was to develop "a theoretical foundation for a uniform interpretation of metrical and non-metrical poems."³¹ However, since versification studies "must ask about the difference between poetry and prose,"³² the discipline cannot focus on ambiguous texts (which are in-between poetry and prose).

Kulawik focuses solely on sound: the layout is for him "an 'instruction' for arbitrary delimitation, but only insofar as the layout corresponds to the possibilities and efficiency of systemic prosody."³³ However, such assumptions prove problematic when we try to analyze longer fragments of text, which we believe to be poetry, if they contain a number of strong syntactic sections. They "silence" the versification pause:

Łódzki gotyk. Aura jak szkarlatyna. Nie kocham Cię. Nie daję rady. Nie biorę.³⁴

Lodz Gothic. An aura like scarlet fever. I do not love you. I can't do this anymore. I'm out.

Thus, in such segments, the layout is the only readable signal of delimitation. Kulawik, however, categorically claims that it does not turn prose into poetry. While he notices that in various syntactic and versification circumstances the pause functions differently, at the

³¹Adam Kulawik, *Wprowadzenie do teorii wiersza* [Introduction to the theory of poetry] (Warsaw: Państwowe wydawnictwo naukowe, 1988), 16.

³²Adam Kulawik, *Wersologia: studium wiersza, metru i kompozycji wersyfikacyjnej* (Kraków: Antykwa, 1999), 29.

³³Kulawik, 229.

³⁴Szymon Domagała-Jakuć, „Ulica Zarzevska” [Zarzevska Street], in *Zebrano się śliny* [Some saliva], ed. Tomasz Bąk i Marta Koronkiewicz (Stronie Śląskie: Biuro Literackie, 2016), 121.

same time he considers it an indispensable part of the poem.³⁵ According to Kulawik, the author should make this signal legible, and the scholar in versification studies shall judge how successful the author was in that respect. The answer to the question about how effective divisions in the poem are is therefore the answer to the question about the difference between poetry and non-poetry; although, as Kulawik emphasizes, one should not classify whole texts, but delimitation mechanisms (tricks) used in its respective parts.³⁶

d) Witold Sadowski's poem beyond sound

Claiming that the layout determines *the* canonical form of free verse poems basically means that the theory of graphic text is best suited for explaining the unique nature of in-between forms, with their clearly autonomous, though ambiguous, delimitation.

As Sadowski points out, the layout is not a stable medium for a more complete form of the poem (i.e., sound). In works that rely on visual perception, the layout itself endows, in its own way, the text with "sound," that is, non-verbal means of expression.³⁷ Thus, the poem turns into "an autonomous two-dimensional spatial structure"³⁸ that is "endowed with semantic possibilities – one only needs to divert attention from the metrical corset or ignore it altogether."³⁹

According to Sadowski, the properties of this structure may be described in terms of the prosody of the layout, which is equivalent to the prosody of speech. Indeed, this feature is independent of other aspects of the text – it is, as Lotman puts it, a "special graphic construction."⁴⁰ In the theory of the graphic text, the activated prosody of writing is ensured and activated by the autonomization of the length of the line and graphic segmentation. In the structure of works which meet this condition, "each line is not only a unit, but also the next step in the text, which develops both linearly [...] and in leaps: from one line to the next."⁴¹ As a result, "versification, which presupposes visual reading, also enforces a specific way of writing [...], a specific way of representing the world."⁴²

This effect, as Sadowski points out, may be achieved only in graphic texts and the critic contrasts it with both metrical poetry and prose. However, in *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*, Sadowski does not discuss the relationship between graphic delimitation and syntax in detail, which renders the assumption that prose and graphic text are direct opposites questionable. Sadowski only generally states that in graphic terms, "any layout is possible" in prose, which "questions the autonomy of the layout." Respectively, "graphic arrangement

³⁵Kulawik, *Wersologia*, 46.

³⁶Kulawik, 225.

³⁷Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*, 228–37.

³⁸Sadowski, 181.

³⁹Sadowski, 8–9.

⁴⁰Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 103.

⁴¹Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*, 239.

⁴²Sadowski, 63.

in a syntactically organized text automatically transforms it into a graphic text.”⁴³ However, while the autonomy of graphic arrangement and the metrical structure may be easily verified, the possible autonomy of syntax seems more problematic, as the non-metrical (i.e., graphic) sentence poems indicate. While a sentence divided into lines is more “expressive” thanks to visual delimitation, i.e., due to the fact that it is a graphic text, the opposite is also true: placing each sentence in a separate line exposes syntactic and logical relations which almost disappear in the “prose” layout, and the layout becomes “transparent.” Consequently, graphic delimitation “creates” non-metrical lines and is nevertheless, or perhaps as a result, governed by syntax. This ambiguity, which is undoubtedly also present in the Polish free verse sentence poem, allows us to analyze graphic delimitation from a new perspective.

This new perspective seems useful also in ambiguous graphic structures, in which autonomous delimitation is present, but the segments exceed the length of one line (as in Grześczak’s *Karzeł*, quoted at the beginning). In the light of the theory of graphic text, we cannot determine which order, be it graphic or syntactic, is the dominant one. According to Sadowski, the layout is either autonomous and “creates” individual lines, or it does not show this autonomy. Sadowski only discusses these two possibilities. Also, in the light of this theory, the opposition between prose and graphic text is distinct and leaves no room for any ambiguous forms.

4. Looking for a remedy

The above considerations lead to the conclusion that in order to analyze ambiguous free verse/prose forms we must look at this object of versification studies, and in particular the graphic organization of the text, from the right perspective. We need a perspective that will allow us to see the grey area between the free verse poem and prose as a unique field, and not a troubling collection of deformed works which resist the binary divisions into either prose or (free verse) poetry.

First of all, the study of ambiguous forms requires that we pay special attention to the graphic organization of the text and see it as an autonomous formal problem. In this respect, one can follow the direction indicated by Sadowski.

Secondly, it seems necessary, in line with Kulawik’s observations, to acknowledge that delimitation mechanisms and poetic features are not equivalent, i.e., we must move beyond the opposition between poetry and prose. As such, it will be possible to search for objective mechanisms of graphic delimitation and their possible impact on the reception of the text. These mechanisms, in turn, should be treated as the foundation of the poetic effect, and they should also be seen as universal, that is, as also existing outside the field of poetry. In contrast to Kulawik, the critic should therefore refrain, at least at an initial stage of their analysis, from evaluating the delimitation of the text, especially in terms of its function-

⁴³Sadowski, 243.

ality or non-functionality. Rather, the starting point should be the assumption that each written text, not only poetry and not necessarily divided into lines, is arranged graphically, which may (but does not have to) influence its reception, expression, or semantics. The question about the effects of the layout in question should therefore be preceded by a careful analysis.

It is impossible to indicate here (probably it will never be possible) all necessary and sufficient steps of such an analysis. However, the category of the prosody of the layout seems to be very useful in this regard, albeit in the broader sense discussed in a study that precedes *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*. In *Tekst graficzny Białoszewskiego* [Białoszewski's Graphic Text], Sadowski convincingly showed the general cognitive potential of a graphic text, arguing that it stems from a handwritten note⁴⁴ (later, graphic text was unambiguously assigned to the domain of poetry). This would mean that the prosodic properties of the layout do not have to be limited to graphic texts.

In this broader approach, the prosody of the layout would constitute a set of properties of each written text – specific parameters which guide the reader in the process of reading.⁴⁵ The most important parameter, especially in the context of ambiguous works, is the degree of continuity-fragmentation. On the scale of continuity-fragmentation, prose texts are of course closer to the continuity end (though they are not continuous in their entirety⁴⁶), and graphic texts are closer to the fragmentation end.⁴⁷ This prosodic feature of the layout may be considered fundamental, because, on the one hand, it is crucial for the process (pace, course) of reading, and, at the same time, it is visible at first glance. On the other hand, the degree of continuity (fragmentation) can be shaped in almost any textual medium: on a piece of paper in handwritten notes, on a book page, but also in any text editor or even an instant messaging window. Perhaps the most important, and certainly one of the most expressive, mechanisms of graphic delimitation is the beginning of a new line; this factor is most visible when such a transition made before the previous line is “filled,” i.e., in accordance with the definition of the graphic text. However, this is not the only possibility.

The analysis of graphic arrangement is also the analysis of the author's conscious choice(s). Since these “atypical” traces are visible only against the background of a (by default) “typical” context, this background should also be analyzed. The distinguishing features of a text that is graphically disorganized include, for example, the degree of continuity present in conventional prose writings and the typical layout of the text: relatively narrow margins, justified alignment, the regular distribution of text on the page, etc. Any and all visual arrangements

⁴⁴Witold Sadowski, *Tekst graficzny Białoszewskiego* [Białoszewski's Graphic Text], ed. Eugeniusz Czaplewicz (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski. Wydział Polonistyki, 1999), 88–93.

⁴⁵Artur Grabowski points to the relation between the layout (and, consequently, also contemporary versification studies) and the mechanisms of linguistic perception. He argues that the “foundation” of the typographic convention of the poem “may be found in the foundations of language itself.” Grabowski, *Wiersz*, 178.

⁴⁶On maximum continuity and the difficulties associated with it cf. Aleksandra Kremer, *Przypadki poezji konkretnej: studia pięciu książek* [Concrete Poetry: Case Studies of Five Books (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Pro Cultura Litteraria, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2015), 27–28.

⁴⁷Extreme values, i.e., the opposite poles of the aforementioned scale, are hypothetical due to practical reasons: from a certain point, increasing continuity or fragmentation means that the text becomes illegible.

– including ambiguous forms, but also graphic texts – which do not comply with the above may be classified as texts which are graphically organized. The pair of concepts “organized-disorganized” does not, however, constitute a privative opposition, but rather defines the limits of the scale of texts that are more and less organized, both in quantitative (the entire text or only a part of it is arranged in a specific way) and qualitative (more or less expressive organization) terms.

If we adopt such an approach, the degree of textual continuity and graphic arrangement intersect, but they are not contained in one another. The degree of continuity or fragmentation is an objective, at least to some extent, property of the text on the page, as is font size or typeface. The question of the visibility or transparency of a given graphic arrangement, that is, the perceived degree of organization, is, in turn, methodologically framed by reception studies.

Lastly, I argue that the study of ambiguous forms should go beyond the prose/ (free) verse opposition and distinguish between texts that are or are not graphically organized instead. Consequently, in analyzing graphic delimitation, one should not look for one fundamental principle that gives rise to poetry and is absent in prose. Neither does one have to look for a basic compositional unit of a poem (graphic text) or prove that it is integral and essentially different from prose. As a result, the concept of the line, defined as the only possible and necessary result of an autonomous graphic delimitation, can be abandoned.

This limiting concept of the line seems to stem from Sadowski’s understanding of the page as a certain predefined matrix, where “each line is as if a specific design idea which gives rise to a series of abstract rows, in which the exactly designated number of characters must fit.”⁴⁸ Thus, the entire page consists of a strictly defined “series of rows” that can be filled in, in whole or in part, or left blank. However, the properties of the lines themselves are inviolable, as if “absolute:” each line has the same capacity, and there is no space between those rows. Therefore, the concept of the line, i.e., a row that is filled in part or in whole, as an indivisible unit of a graphic text is also subject to some sort of absolutization.

The above assumptions could, of course only metaphorically, be described as “Newtonian.” This notwithstanding, poetry provides “evidence” that the line can be treated “relativistically:”

to jakby Jezusowi zarzucać samolubstwo. Czemu nie?
Wszystkie udane wiersze są takie same. Mówię w idiolekcie nie dlatego, że to lepszy idiolekt
niż mojego bliźniego, lecz bo jest mój,
ale dopóki nie ma on armii ni floty, brak mi domu na świecie⁴⁹.

⁴⁸Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*, 26.

⁴⁹Jakub Głuszak, „Ma osoba odkryła swą męską stronę [I have discovered my manly side], in *Moje przesłanie do pokolenia współczesnych trzydziestolatków* [My message to the generation of modern thirty-somethings] (Warsaw: Staromiejski Dom Kultury, 2013), 29. Translated into English by M.O.

it is like accusing Jesus of being selfish. Why not?
 All great poems are the same. I am speaking in an idiolect not because this idiolect is better
 than my neighbor's, but because it is mine,
 but as long as he has no army or navy, I have no place I could call home in this world.

The font in the second line is smaller, so that everything can fit in it. It is suggested that the I is not fully in control of the argument, because he is unable to arrange his thoughts into segments which both maintain the integrity of the single line and fill it in. Using a smaller font seems to be a last-minute trick that is meant to hide these alleged shortcomings of the I. However, as a result, the second line is governed by different rules than the other lines, because the default format of the row is different. Therefore, it is impossible to divide a page filled with such lines into a series of identical, abstract segments. In his other work (*Wprowadzać pin tak, że każdy przycisk innym palcem*⁵⁰ [Enter your pin number so that you press each button with a different finger]), Głuszak goes even further, changing the size of the font within one line and thus dividing it into two parts.⁵¹ This increases the fragmentation of the text, also disrupting the uniformity of the lines. In return, however, reading becomes more dynamic, and the relations between the segments of different size enrich the semantics of the text.

If the line is seen as one of the possible, but not the only, manifestation of autonomous graphic delimitation, we may solve the problems with classifying works which are in part (continuous) prose and in part graphic texts (Sadowski's theory does not explain the status of such works). Since it is possible for the metrical and non-metrical lines to coexist "on equal terms in the same work,"⁵² graphic segments of different length may also coexist in the same text. If after a series of lines, i.e., after a paragraph, the author starts a new line, he does so fully aware of the fact that this line will be read in opposition to the paragraph. It will be read as different against this background. In this case, not only the line but also the paragraph make up this graphic arrangement.

The above assumptions point to and help one notice the unique nature of ambiguous forms. The category of graphic text allows one to move beyond the prose/poetry or prose/poem opposition, and, consequently, ambiguous forms cease to be an annoying systematic problem in versification studies. Instead, they function as a field of distinctive and inimitable means of artistic expression.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁵⁰ Jakub Głuszak, „Wprowadzać pin tak, że każdy przycisk innym palcem” [Enter your pin number so that you press each button with a different finger], in *Moje przesłanie do pokolenia współczesnych trzydziestolatków*, 15.

⁵¹ Another proof for the relative nature of the line may be found in Jarosław Lipszyc's *Się* [Self] and *Jałowe obroty* [Idle rotation], published in the anthology *Gada!zabić?*. Unlike all the other texts in this collection, these poems are arranged horizontally on the page, and thus make use of longer lines. So, if we were to compare *Się* or *Jałowe obroty* with some other graphic text in *Gada!zabić?*, we would conclude that they were created using different principles and it is difficult to compare the visual arrangement of the respective texts; for example, 10 characters in Lipszyc's "horizontal" texts take up proportionally less space than 10 characters in "vertical" texts. Indeed, the entire anthology demonstrates that contemporary poets experiment with the page with great ease. Jarosław Lipszyc, „Się” [self], w *Gada!zabić?: pan(n)tologia neolingwizmu*, ed. Maria Cyranowicz and Paweł Koziół (Warsaw: Staromiejski Dom Kultury, 2005), 42; Jarosław Lipszyc, „Jałowe obroty” [Idle rotation], in *Gada!zabić?: pan(n)tologia neolingwizmu*, 43.

⁵² Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*, 213.

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of the article is to identify the reasons behind excluding ambiguous free verse/prose forms from contemporary versification studies, and to outline the perspectives for their rein-statement. This absence seems to be the result of the following assumptions: looking for a pre-cise definition of the free verse poem, focusing on the sound and the rhythm, and thinking in terms of the binary logic and divisions between free verse and prose and between poetry and prose. The theory of free verse as a graphic text may be employed in the study of ambiguous works but it must be modified to eliminate the above-mentioned constrictions.

ambiguous free verse/prose forms

theory of free verse

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The Silent Line*

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Silence in free verse

In recent years, the theory of free verse has engaged with questions of silence, stillness, or the related categories of emptiness and absence. The role of the arbitrary pause, as discussed Adam Kulawik,¹ or the hierarchical structure of pauses, which Dorota Urbańska writes about, come to the fore. Indeed, in opposition to the predictable and steady structure of the metrical poem, based on syntactic and phonetic units, pause seems to determine the very nature of free verse.² In his concept of the graphic poem, Witold Sadowski drew attention to the signifying role of empty spaces – he compared the space of the page that is not filled with text to a Gothic cathedral, 99% of which is “filled” with void – “it is not an artistically underdeveloped project; it is not a field of white in an unfinished painting; it is filled with a sense of God’s Presence.”³ Often, the theory of free verse points to a special role played by the categories related to silence and stillness – they appear to determine the shape of the free verse poem. Respectively, Artur Grabowski writes that: “the transformations of forms in modern art seem to be a process of reduction – to an empty frame, a blank page, three minutes of silence.”⁴ Joanna Orska, on the other hand, draws attention to *figurae per detractionem*, and their role in the additive-tautological poetical strategy.⁵ Krzysztof Skibski, in turn, also writes about the role played by ellipsis in poetry and the role it plays in shaping the linguistic and semantic structure of free verse poems.⁶

¹ See: Adam Kulawik, *Poetyka. Wstęp do teorii dzieła literackiego* [Poetics: Introduction to the analysis of a literary work of art] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1990 and subsequent editions), *passim*.

² See: Dorota Urbańska, *Wiersz wolny. Próba charakterystyki systemowej* [Free verse: Attempt at systemic analysis] (Warsaw: Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, 1995), *passim*.

³ Witold Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny* [Free verse as a graphic text] (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), p. 30.

⁴ Artur Grabowski, *Wiersz. Forma i sens* [Poem: Form and meaning] (Kraków: Universitas, 1999), p. 58.

⁵ See: Joanna Orska, *How Does Free Verse “Work”? On the Syntax of the Avant Garde*, *Forum of Poetics*, autumn 2017, <http://fp.amu.edu.pl/jak-dziala-wiersz-o-skladni-zdania-awangardowego/> (date of access: May 15, 2021).

⁶ See: Krzysztof Skibski, *Poezja jako literatura. Relacje między elementami języka poetyckiego w wierszu wolnym* [Poetry as literature: Relations between elements of poetic language in free verse] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2017).

So far, researchers have paid relatively little attention to the role played by marks of silence (e.g., dashes and dots) in the structure of the poem, and especially their non-standard use (use that is inconsistent with the rules of punctuation and grammar) which refers to the sphere of silence. I will try to demonstrate that punctuation marks used in such a way are equivalent to words, and that they function in the poem as words. However, semantically and axiologically, in many cases, they constitute the supravocal layer of the text. In order to describe this phenomenon, the dominating critical theories of free verse, which usually refer to syntactic, visual, or phonic approaches, and often assume (especially in recent years) that there are more than two planes of delimitation, must be reviewed. The problem of semantic punctuation, which structurally functions as an equivalent of the word, has not yet been discussed in depth in versification studies. In this text, the dash (and other punctuation marks) will be seen as a sign of silence in the poem and examined in detail.

The question of typographic silence in free verse both corresponds to and eludes existing classifications. It is still regarded as a visual element which refers to the sphere of sound, pointing to the relationship between the visual and the phonic, which makes it difficult to classify it as belonging to only one category. Respectively, in syntactical analysis, signs of silence are classified as non-standard use of punctuation – they are semantic in nature because they influence syntax and prosody, but they are still not equivalent to the word or the morpheme. And instances when only graphic signals of silence appear in a free verse poem, instead of words, are particularly problematic – critical approaches based on syntactic verse-by-verse equivalence simply lack the right tools to analyze them effectively. Considering the above, Krzysztof Skibski's definition found in *Poezja jako literatura* [Poetry as literature] seems to be a good starting point for my original analysis. Skibski writes: "in the free verse poem each line may stand on its own, in keeping with the principle of equivalence. The line possesses a specific semantic value in itself, and its dormant deficiency only adds to its potentiality."⁷ As such, the sign of silence also possesses a semantic value, insofar as it refers to meanings that have not been expressed verbally, for various reasons, because they elude language or because, in keeping with authorial intent, they function as understatements.

I propose to treat the signs of silence (in this case the dash) as a "part of speech," a meaningful part of the poem, and discuss its potential uses and functioning. Such a sign has a potential lexical and semantic value. In the case of silence or ellipsis, it may be compared to the mechanism of accommodation – the reader's response is to fill in the void, but only within the limits imposed by the (con)text. It also prompts us to reexamine ellipsis, which traditionally, in its most basic form, has been defined as a syntactic void or a void that refers to "phenomena which become visible when the text is reduced to a semantic structure."⁸ I propose, however, that it should also refer to situations where, even though the text does not provide enough signals for the reader to fill in the text in a manner intended by the author (or otherwise intended), a graphic mark activates the search for potential meanings with which the supposedly empty space may be filled.

⁷ Skibski, 54-55.

⁸ Maciej Grochowski, "O pojęciu elipsy" [The figure of the ellipsis], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, vol. 1 (1976), 124.

The dash

In his study of punctuation marks in contemporary Polish poetry, Zdzisław Jaskuła observes that: “The dash is perhaps the most popular ‘lonely’ punctuation mark in contemporary poetry.”⁹ Jaskuła argues that the dash often remains in a loose relation with syntax, although it has certain emotive qualities related to compositional and versification criteria.¹⁰ Indeed, in terms of function, the dash breaks syntactic rules (e.g., it is used in an unexpected place) and stands on its own as a visual sign: “it is clearly visible, which intensifies both its basic properties (in terms of punctuation) as well as the secondary tasks and meanings assigned to it by the text.”¹¹

The choice of a punctuation mark, even when its function challenges the grammatical needs of the text, still depends on its basic function. Tomasz Karpowicz thus writes about the dash in *Kultura języka polskiego* [The culture of the Polish language]:

The dash, among others, conveys some non-verbal aspects of the communication process, especially pauses in speech. When you read a text, the dash marks a pause, temporary silence before one continues with what they have to say.¹²

The dash is thus endowed with a systemic potential for communicating a moment of silence. It is also directly connected with the figure of ellipsis, which Karpowicz also points out, paying attention to the so-called elliptical dash. At this point, he also adds that “the more important the part of the sentence that has been omitted is, the more necessary the dash is.”¹³

At the same time, we should remember that according to the rules of syntax and punctuation: “the dash is used primarily to signal parts of the text that are obvious to the reader and can be easily predicted thanks to syntactic context or knowledge of extra-linguistic reality.”¹⁴ The poetic, non-standard use of this punctuation mark stems directly from what is codified in the language, and at the same time gives rise to modifications that are necessary from an artistic point of view, insofar as they shape the semantic layer of the text. The dash, as in those “typical” situations described by Karpowicz, points to omission, and thus the extra-linguistic context. However, unlike in its standard use, an “empty space” is not easy to “fill in,” neither does the extra-verbal context help. Instead, the dash is a sign of something that, for various reasons, cannot be expressed verbally.

The poetic use of the dash as a visual sign of silence is therefore largely justified by the use of this mark in the system, which is naturally connected with ellipsis. However, such an understanding of ellipsis goes beyond linguistic definitions – ellipsis and the reader’s ability to understand the omitted is a much broader and more complicated issue. Ellipsis is no longer a space that the reader

⁹ Zdzisław Jaskuła, “Interpunkcja we współczesnej poezji polskiej” [Punctuation in contemporary Polish poetry], *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, vol. XXX no. 1 (1982): 73.

¹⁰ Jaskuła.

¹¹ Jaskuła, 74.

¹² Tomasz Karpowicz, *Kultura języka polskiego. Wymowa, ortografia, interpunkcja* [The culture of the Polish language. Pronunciation, spelling, punctuation] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2018), 250.

¹³ Karpowicz, 251.

¹⁴ Karpowicz.

fills in intuitively, because instead of words that can be easily added or “filled in,” it often refers to words, expressions, or sentences which are not obvious. Although they often function as certain potentialities, they are performatively hidden from the reader, thus challenging their interpretation. Versification studies should therefore take into account the semantic and structural capability of the sign of silence to create verse, insofar as its unique use may be treated as equivalent to words. In certain poetic situations, the dash in a way takes over the functions of the grammatical elements (or syntactic situations) which it represents. The dash used in this way turns into ellipsis also because it points to standard, at least from the lexical-syntactic point of view, situations in the text, such as meanings which have not been expressed verbally but which create the semantic layer of the poem (e.g., content that is not expressed explicitly), or meanings which cannot be expressed verbally. If such a reading is justified, the unique status of the dash cannot be ignored, even if it is difficult to pin down its meaning in the process of interpretation. From the perspective of versification studies, this assumption is important especially in relation to lines which consist mainly or entirely of signs of silence. Such instances reveal a theoretical grey area of many versification theories, especially in relation to the free verse poem. I argue that the “silent line” made of dashes has the same semantic value as the line which consists of lexical or morphological sign(s). Therefore, I argue that each line in the poem signifies – it is an independent meaningful structure.

Exemplification and interpretations – Norwid’s case

In order to understand and justify such an approach, let us analyze examples of non-standard uses of punctuation marks which clearly refer to or reflect on silence. Such examples may be found in the works of many poets – they use punctuation marks in different ways, in accordance with their personal artistic concepts. I shall discuss and analyze various case studies in which typographic elements referring to the sphere of silence are used in a way that significantly affects the semantics of the poem.

There is no doubt that, for example, in the case of Norwid, silence plays an extremely important role as the subject and object of study (including *Białe kwiaty* [White flowers] or *Milczenie* [Silence]), but also as a structural element expressed in and through punctuation marks (the en/em dashes, dots). Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki first analyzed this important aspect of Norwid’s philosophy and poetics.¹⁵ Other scholars have analyzed this issue as well (for example, Janusz Stanisław Pasierb in *Filozofia milczenia u Mickiewicza i Norwida* [Philosophy of Silence in Mickiewicz’s and Norwid’s works],¹⁶ or Piotr Śniedziwski in his extensive comparative study *Mallarmé – Norwid. Milczenie i poetycki modernizm we Francji oraz w Polsce* [Mallarmé – Norwid. Silence and poetic modernism in France and Poland]).¹⁷ Norwid marks the beginning of the history of silence as a theoretical, literary, and semiotic category in Polish literary studies. Norwid developed a coherent artistic theory of silence and related phenomena and there is no doubt

¹⁵ Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki, *Patos i milczenie* [Pathos and silence]. In: Cyprian Norwid, *Białe kwiaty* [White flowers] (Warsaw: PIW, 1965).

¹⁶ Janusz Stanisław Pasierb, “Filozofia milczenia u Mickiewicza i Norwida” [Philosophy of Silence in Mickiewicz’s and Norwid’s works], *Studia Norwidiana*, no. 30 (2012): 145-171.

¹⁷ Piotr Śniedziwski, *Mallarmé – Norwid. Milczenie i poetycki modernizm we Francji oraz w Polsce* [Mallarmé – Norwid. Silence and poetic modernism in France and Poland] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2008).

that, according to the *intentio auctoris*, visual marks of silence (and ellipsis) are not merely visual ornaments but are at least equivalent to words (in terms of the equivalence of the sign). In most cases, however, axiologically, they constitute the supravocal layer of the text.

In this context, Sławomir Świontek's observations in the introduction to *Pierścień wielkiej damy* [Great Lady's ring] seem particularly important. Świontek thus writes about Norwid's silence:

For Norwid, silence is a "grammatical part of speech;" it is a functional element of a conversation, a dialogue, that is, those forms of expression in and through which people communicate. Moreover, for Norwid, each utterance, even a monologue, which he sees as a conversation with oneself or with the spirit of things (VI 232), meets the condition of dialogicality, demanding that it be filled with the omitted, i.e., dialogicality is a potential tendency to alternate two or more semantic contexts, a tendency found not only in dialogue but also in monologue.¹⁸

Not only in dramatic dialogue and monologue, but also in Norwid's poems, one can find this unique dialogicality, with silence as a "grammatical part of speech." However, the attempt to classify this phenomenon becomes problematic. We should therefore ask a question, or rather a series of questions, about the place and the role of silence in the theory of free verse.

Świontek's comment about grammatical issues seems intuitively accurate. Indeed, we can draw such conclusions about silence in Norwid's works because silence is treated at least as equivalent to the word (as a textual sign), and at the same time exceeds the boundary of the (traditionally) vocal.

As explained by Marta Ewa Rogowska in her analysis of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [On the freedom of the word],¹⁹ in Norwid's works, a special role played by the dash may be connected with intonational-rhetorical punctuation. However, the question of the typography of silence is much broader. It cannot be explained using strictly rhetorical concepts either – the use of punctuation marks often goes beyond grammar – not in the sense of bending its rules, but in the sense of introducing punctuation marks that are not justified by syntactic concepts. The expression "grammatical part of speech" thus implies that both the elements of the codified language system and the omissions signaled by punctuation marks (visual signs) signify. Janusz Kaczorowski has analyzed punctuation marks and editorial problems in Norwid's works in detail, arguing that the dash was clearly the poet's favorite punctuation mark. Kaczorowski further lists the roles played by the dash, e.g., it is used when someone does not finish a sentence, wishes to emphasize something important or add something. Kaczorowski also points to the fact that in some of Norwid's manuscripts we can find three or four dashes in a row.²⁰ Most importantly, however, he also draws attention to the semantic autonomy of the "poetical" dash, insofar as it cannot be replaced by another "part of speech:"

This punctuation mark is used in the most perfect manner in the entire cycle in the poem

¹⁸Sławomir Świontek, *Introduction*. In: C. Norwid, *Pierścień Wielkiej Damy* [Great Lady's ring], ed. S. Świontek, (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1990), LIV-LV.

¹⁹See: Marta Ewa Rogowska, "Intonacyjno-retoryczna interpunkcja u Norwida" [Intonational-rhetorical punctuation in Norwid's works], *Studia Norwidiana* no. 30 (2012), 23-38.

²⁰Janusz Kaczorowski, "Grafia Norwidowskiego tekstu jako współczesny problem edytorski (na przykładzie *Vademecum*)" [The graphic layer in Norwid's works as a contemporary editorial problem (on the example of *Vademecum*)], *Roczniki Humanistyczne* vol. LI no. 1 (2003), 69-94.

XXX. *Fatum* [XXX. Fate]. The arrangement of dashes builds, in a way that cannot be expressed through other means, the tension associated with waiting (impatiently) for a man to lose and the feeling of sudden relief once he disappears.²¹

Let us take a closer look at the poem, in which the dash conveys the hidden tension and the unsaid:

Fatum

I
Jak dziki zwierzę przyszło **Nieszczęście** do człowieka
I zatopiło weń fatalne oczy...
– Czeką – –
Czy człowiek zboczy?

II
Lecz on odejrzał mu – jak gdy artysta
Mierzy swojego kształt modelu –
I spostrzegło, że on patrzy – co? skorzysta
Na swym nieprzyjacielu:
I zachwiało się całą postaci wagą
– – I nie ma go!

Fate

I
Such beastly Anguish, human-baiting,
With fateful eyes transfixed its prey. . .
– Waiting – –
Now will he turn away?

II
Instead, the stare was fair returned,
– as artists size up subjects top to toe;
Aware the human had discerned –
What gain he'd draw
from such a foe,
It shuddered to its very core
– – And it's no more!²²

In the line “– Czeką – –/ “– Waiting – –,” the dashes play a twofold role. First of all, as noted by Kaczorowski, they point to a delay, as indicated by the act of waiting. This artistic procedure builds up the tension – the meeting between man and “wild beast” is delayed. At the same time, as Świontek observes, “the potential tendency to alternate two or more semantic contexts” (in keeping with the proposed approach to ellipsis) implies that the dashes may be read as a non-existent description of the atmosphere of the meeting, since its unusual character cannot be expressed in words. This notwithstanding, this situation is an essential part of the text, regardless of the extent to which the reader is able to decode the meanings hidden behind it. Norwid decided that silence better expresses a given state or feeling. As Piotr Śniedziwski points out:

[...] the poet works with language that turns out to be imperfect in the face of thoughts it is supposed to express – this language is therefore subject to the law of decomposition and deconstruction – this is how a poem which lacks precision and is full of silences is created – and the reader, in the end, has to work with this poem that is neither transparent nor impossible to understand.²³

Moments of silence may be challenging for the reader, but they nevertheless constitute a semantic element of the text, which in the case of such a clearly indicated tendency cannot

²¹Kaczorowski, 84.

²²Cyprian Norwid, *Fatum* [Fate]. In *Wiersze* [Poems], ed. Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki, (Warsaw: PIW, 1966), 583. Translated into English by Patrick Corness (source: https://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/113/113_brajerska_mazur.pdf).

²³Śniedziwski, 182-183.

be omitted in the process of interpretation or formal analysis. Versification studies have to address the question of poetry which exceeds the limits of traditional syntax, often named as one of the basic forms of delimitation.

Towards futurism – Młodożeniec

Stanisław Młodożeniec employs a completely different strategy of using silence and ellipsis. In his use of punctuation marks, he is guided by different artistic concepts than Norwid, but this allows us to comment on some crucial similarities and differences between the two poets. Futurists developed the phonic layer of the text in a unique and creative way, often basing the entire structure of the work on it. We may draw certain conclusions about the interdependencies between sound and silence from the futurist artistic manifesto. For example, in Młodożeniec's *Noc* [Night] from the collection *Kwadraty* [Squares], we read:

Noc

- - - - na granatową niebios balię
 wypłynął księżyc – jak rogalik –
 gwiazdy tłą –
 jak rybki skaczą po akwariu –

 - - - daleki – długi – (czyj to?) ton

 w leżące lgnie milczenia –
 gwiazdy tłą –
 i płoszą płaski cień na ziemi –

 mętnieje wody srebrna toń –
 ciemnieje nieba drżące tło –
 rogaty księżyc chmurę bodzie –
 gwiazdy tłą –
 oczy tłą –

 - daleki – długi – (czyj to?) ton –
 - - - - - -
 to czyjeś usta – cichy podziw –
 - - - - - - o!²⁴

²⁴Stanisław Młodożeniec, *Noc* [Night]. In: *Kwadraty* [Squares] (Zamość: Zamojskie Koło Miłośników Książki, 1925), 16. As noted above, linguistic, phonic, and syntactic complexity renders this poem almost untranslatable. Transcribed in English, which does not convey the full meaning of the original, it reads: “- - - - into the navy blue tub of the sky/ there came out the moon – like a croissant –/ the stars shine –/ jump around in the tank like fish –/ - - - distant – long – (whose) sound (is it?)/ it cuddles up to the lying silence –/ the stars shine –/ and they scare a flat shadow on the ground –/ deep silver waters turn cloudy –/ the trembling background of the sky darkens –/ the moon touches the cloud –/ the stars shine –/ the eyes shine –/ – distant – long – (whose) sound (is it?)/ – - - - -/ it’s somebody’s mouth – quiet admiration –/ - - - - - oh!”

Importantly, Młodożeniec himself draws attention to sounds, emphasizing the length of the sound which “w leżące lgnie milczenie” [cuddles up to the lying silence]. Such a signal, testifying to creative self-awareness, prompts us to take an even more careful look at the poem, in which silence which resounds after the sound, is to play a special role. Again, there is no doubt that there is no grammatical justification for the use of multiple dashes. The key problem is the visual representation of an auditory phenomenon and a mark that is more adequate than the word that must be used.

In her analysis of the phonic layer of futuristic poems,²⁵ Beata Śniecikowska explains that Młodożeniec plays with sound in his poem:

The most interesting line is “– – – daleki – długi – (czyj to?) ton” [– – – distant – long – (whose) sound (is it?)]. It is repeated twice and moves away from the “sophisticated” syntax of Young Poland. Words devoid of additional descriptions, “accentuated” by means of typography, literally stand out on. They are visually and phonically prominent (alliteration). The sound is distant, and it was emphasized by a simple typographic procedure (which still points to a long pause): two lines of dashes. The exclamation “o!” [oh!] at the end also challenges the traditional canons of poetry and typography. This distinctive exclamation may be found at the end of ... a line of dashes.²⁶

It is an interesting example: a barely audible, distant “sound” is associated with silence that may result from, among other things, the limited perceptual abilities of the subject, who is not able to hear the words coming from a distance which at this moment become almost one with silence. Consequently, it can be concluded that a specific meaning was omitted in the text. In this case, we are not predominantly dealing with a crisis of faith in the possibility of linguistic representation but witness an attempt at conveying a verbal exchange together with the moments of silence embedded in it when the sound “w leżące lgnie milczenie” [cuddles up to the lying silence].

It is a kind of game with spatial sound and silence: the poet uses (single and multiplied) dashes in the initial position, (single) dashes in the final position, and some dashes in the middle position (e.g., dashes which in-between the words), and finally there are also lines without words, filled with dashes – they are not the only marks of silence, because there are empty spaces in-between. The poem thus constructs its own typology of silence. Textual signs refer to experiences which are represented visually. The dash in a way functions or points to ellipsis, even though there are no verbal clues as to how “empty” places should be read (as to what the reader should “add”). The line of dashes, combined with the special role played by the signs of silence, which are fundamental to the poem’s structure, pose a very interesting problem in versification studies. The assumption that they function as a form of ellipsis endows them with semantic value, pointing to the existing equivalence between the verbal and the silent line. Thus, such a line functions as an independent semantic unit and as such is essential to the poem.

²⁵See: Beata Śniecikowska, “Nuż w uhu”? *Koncepcje dźwięku w poezji polskiego futuryzmu* [“Nuż w uhu”? Concepts of sound in the poetry of Polish futurism] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 2017).

²⁶Beata Śniecikowska, *Dźwięk a typografia w awangardzie (futurizm)* [Sound and typography in the avant-garde (futurism)]. In: *Sensualność w kulturze polskiej* [Sensuality in Polish culture], ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki, <https://sensualnosc.bn.org.pl/pl/articles/dzwiek-a-typografia-w-awangardzie-futurizm-659/> (date of access: 15 May 2021).

Marks of silence in contemporary poetry

In the case of both Norwid and Młodożeniec, one can speak of clearly defined artistic strategies, rooted in the theoretical and critical texts of both poets. In such situations, determining the semantic value of signs of silence is not problematic. However, it is also worth paying attention to poets who are often not directly associated with the use of the dash. The dash line can be found in the poems of, among others, Miron Białoszewski's, for example in the poem *autoportret odczuwany* [instinctive self-portrait]:

Nieraz mi ręce	Sometimes my hands
żyją zupełnie osobno.	Live quite separately
Może ich wtedy nie doliczać do siebie?	Maybe they don't add up to me?
-----	-----
Gdzie są moje granice? ²⁷	Where are my borders?

In this poem, silence and self-reflection come hand in hand, filling the time between the subsequent questions addressed to and about the self. Again, we can speak of a delay which creates a unique atmosphere, emphasizing the existential nature of the questions. When thrown against the background of silence, words and their meanings come into sharp focus and silence thus becomes an integral element of the semantic layer of the text.

Another important, and relatively popular, feature is the use of the dash in the final position, i.e., at the end of the line. However, such use of the dash is not motivated syntactically, i.e., the dash does not connect the two subsequent lines, or, even if it does and there is a syntactic connection between the lines, the dash may play a still different role. For example, Jaskuła discusses Herbert's *Różowe ucho* [Rosy ear]:

śmieszny płatek skóry	a comic petal of skin
muszla z żyjącą krwią	a conch with living blood
w środku	inside it
nic wtedy nie powiedziałem —	I didn't say anything then—
dobrze byłoby napisać	it would be good to write
wiersz o różowym uchu	a poem about a rosy ear
ale nie taki żeby powiedzieli też sobie temat obrał	but not so that people would say
pozuje na oryginała ²⁸	what a subject he chose
	he's trying to be eccentric

²⁷Miron Białoszewski, *Autoportret odczuwany*. In: *Sprawdzone sobą. Wiersze wybrane* [Selected poems] (Warsaw: PIW, 2008), 81. English translation by Peter Harris and Danuta Loposzek: *instinctive self-portrait*. In: *Shifting Borders: East European Poetries of the Eighties*, ed. W. Cummis et al. (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1993), 274.

²⁸Zbigniew Herbert, *Różowe ucho*. In: *Wiersze* [Poems] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1971), 120-121. Quote after: Jaskuła, p. 74. English translation by Czesław Miłosz: *Rosy ear*. In: *The Poetry of Men's Lives: An International Anthology*, ed. Fred S. Moramarco, Al Zolynas (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 264.

Jaskuła points out that:

the dash can be both a sign of unfinished thought and a sign of a semantic and compositional pause. It plays a twofold role. It refers to the line “I didn’t say anything then” and at the same time separates one stanza from the other.²⁹

In addition, it should be emphasized that the dash may be found at the end of the line “I didn’t say anything then,” which directly refers to silence, ellipsis, thus indicating a potential, non-existent statement. Something is left unsaid but this something is represented textually.

The dash in the final position may also appear at the end of the stanza. As such, it does not connect two lines and does not play a twofold role. Julia Fiedorczuk often uses the dash at the end of the stanza in her poems. For example, in *Psalm* [Psalms]:

niektórych wierszy nie można już napisać.
niektórych nie dało się napisać wcześniej.
nocą rozpacz z powodu dzieci, utopionych
dzieci, powieszonych dzieci, spalonych
dzieci, zgłodzonych dzieci, maskotek dzieci
w rozbitym samolocie, bo macierzyństwo
jest dożywociem, a rozpacz szuka atrakcji
i pokupnych kształtów, żeby się w nie wystroić,
żeby się zasłonić, żeby się ochronić;
więc lepiej milcz, mówię, więc mówię: żadna
z waszych kości nie będzie połamana, powiedzmy,
“nie zabraknie wam żadnego dobra”, powiedzmy,
“będzie zasadzone drzewo u strumieni wód” – ³⁰

In the case of Fiedorczuk, the dash usually symbolizes an opening in the text; it points to the words that are to be uttered and the words that the reader can add (e.g., in the case of biblical quotes and prayers), or, on the contrary, to the words that should not be uttered or added because, in accordance with the *intentio auctoris*, they have been left unsaid, unfinished. In the case of this poet, we can speak of silence on at least two levels: in connection with ecopoetics³¹ and giving voice to creatures that have not been “heard,” and in connection with Fiedorczuk’s most recent

²⁹Jaskuła, 74.

³⁰Julia Fiedorczuk. *Psalm I* [Psalm I. In: *Psalm* [Psalms] (Wrocław: Fundacja im. Tymoteusza Karpowicza, 2017), 12. Transcribed in English, the poem reads: some poems can no longer be written/ some could not have been written earlier/ at night despair at children, children/ who drowned, children who were hanged, burned/ children who were murdered, children’s mascots/ in a plane that crashed, because motherhood/ is a life sentence, and despair seeks attractive/ and salable forms to dress up in,/ to cover up, to protect itself;/ so you better stay silent, I say, so I say none/ of your bones will not be broken, let’s say,/ “You will be provided for,” let’s say,/ “a tree shall be planted by the rivers of water” –.

³¹See: Julia Fiedorczuk, Gerardo Beltrán, *Ecopoetics* (Warsaw: Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego, 2015); Marta Stusek, “Milczące wiersze. Obraz i podmiot na tle ekopoetyki” [Silent poems. Image and subject in eco-poetics], *Studia Europaea Gnesnensia* no. 18 (2018), p. 115-127.

original essayistic and theoretical reflections.³² The meaning of the dash in the poem appears to be clear: it is an inherent semantic element of the line, pointing to the unsaid and the omitted.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned examples demonstrate that versification studies should also recognize and examine the role played by the signs of silence. Their semantic value is equivalent to the semantic value of words or morphemes, which is confirmed both by their non-standard use, be it “one-off” or in a sequence, and refers to the supravocalic. Such moments in text function as a special type of ellipsis – something important is omitted in the text and the reader must recognize this fact – but, usually, the omitted is neither obvious nor easy to recreate. Consistent artistic choices made by poets, which are usually associated with some kind of reflection on silence, demonstrate that the dash, or the silent line, do indeed signify. In Poland, such artistic concepts were developed mainly by Norwid, and the poets of the avant-garde and their followers learned from him. It should be emphasized that poets who are associated with the avant-garde use these signs of silence most often (and clearly these marks have a semantic value). Distrust of the conventionally understood language system or an attempt at conveying the full communicative experience (which transcends the verbal) often motivate the use of the dash. The dash, as a sign of silence, points to the supravocalic. The use of the dash is a message; it points to the importance of the non-verbal. For the same reasons, the conscious use of the dash should always be acknowledged from the editorial point of view – especially in poetry, which pays special attention to the form and the material space of text.

Respectively, artists who refer to completely different traditions also use the dash in non-standard ways, although in this case the dash usually plays a twofold role (e.g., in Herbert’s poetry). This notwithstanding, when they refer to the unspoken, such marks should be treated as a crucial element of the line on par with the word and the morpheme, and thus become the *bona fide* object of versification studies. Consequently, to draw on Skibski’s definition, if we agree that the dash line is also semantically autonomous, the principle of equivalence should be based on the potential semantic autonomy of every line.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

³²See: Julia Fiedorczuk, “W poszukiwaniu ciszy” [In search of silence], *Przekrój*, <<https://przekroj.pl/artykuly/felietony/w-poszukiwaniu-ciszy-czesc-pierwsza-julia-fiedorczuk>> (date of access: 28 June 2021); Julia Fiedorczuk, “W poszukiwaniu ciszy II” [In search of silence II], *Przekrój*, <<https://przekroj.pl/artykuly/felietony/w-poszukiwaniu-ciszy-cz-ii-julia-fiedorczuk>> (date of access: 28 June 2021).

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KEYWORDS

ELLIPSIS

silence

ABSTRACT:

The article analyzes moments of silence in the free verse poem which are marked by the non-standard use of the dash (inconsistent with the rules of punctuation and grammar). The aim of the article is to show that the dash, and other punctuation marks, used in this way are equivalent to words, and function in a poetic text on the same rights as the word. Indeed, semantically and axiologically, they often constitute the supravocal layer of the text. In the process, theories of free verse which in their assumptions do not recognize semantic punctuation as structurally equivalent to words are reexamined.

p a u s e

dash

FREE VERSE

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Slave to the Rhythm?

The Many Different Definitions of Rhythm

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I was prompted to write this text after reading Igor Pilshchikov's article devoted to rhythm in this issue of *Forum of Poetics*. I was all the more inspired because Pilshchikov brilliantly discusses the history of "meter" and "rhythm" in Russian literary studies, which, in turn, inspired Henri Meschonnic and Julia Kristeva (especially as regards the works of Russian formalists), and I will refer to both scholars many times (I created my own "project of somatic criticism" years ago inspired by their works). The title of my essay refers to one of Grace Jones's brilliant songs,¹ which was accompanied by a brilliant music video. In this text, I return to my

¹ "Slave to the rhythm" on: Grace Jones *Slave to the rhythm*, Island Records 1985. The lyrics: <https://genius.com/Grace-jones-jones-the-rhythm-lyrics> (date of access: 28 Nov. 2021). The entire song (apart from the ending, i.e., the dialogue): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCqW2ubP7-c> (date of access: 28 Nov. 2021). The lyrics (but not the music) unequivocally refers to the work songs of black people from the South of the United States (in the mid-nineteenth century), i.e., to the roots of blues. The rhythm in the song is associated with rhythmic work, galleys, hard work, being forced to follow a repetitive cycle of actions associated with physical labor.

previous reflections; I often come back to them, because I have written about rhythm and the subject alone me alone. It keeps reminding me of rhythm. Thus, it works in the same way as Edward Pasewicz's beautiful poem *Sonata o rytmie* [Sonata about rhythm] which is essentially a treatise on rhythm.

To begin with, let us go back to the lyrics of Jones's song:

[Intro (Spoken): Ian McShane & *Grace Jones*]

Rhythm is both the song's manacle and its demonic charge. It is the original breath, it is the whisper of unremitting demand. "What do you still want from me?" says the singer. "What do you think you can still draw from my lips?" Exact presence that no fantasy can represent. Purveyor of the oldest secret, alive with the blood that boils again, and is pulsing where the rhythm is torn apart. How your singer's blood is incensed at the depth of sound. Lacerations echo in the mouth's open erotic sky where dance together the lost frenzies of rhythm and an imploring immobility. Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Grace Jones. Jones the Rhythm *Slave!*

[Chorus 1: Grace Jones]

Slave to the rhythm
Dance to the rhythm

[Verse 1: Grace Jones]

Axe to wood in ancient times
Man machine, production line
The fire burns, with heartbeats strong
Sing out loud, the chain gang song

[Pre-Chorus: Grace Jones]

Never stop the action
Keep it up, keep it up
Never stop the action
Keep it up, keep it up

[Chorus 1: Grace Jones]

Slave to the rhythm
Dance to the rhythm

[Post-Chorus: Grace Jones]

The master... never stop

[Bridge: Grace Jones]

Never stop the action, keep it up
Never stop the action
Keep it up, keep it up

[Chorus 2: Grace Jones]

Slave to the rhythm, work to the rhythm

Dance to the rhythm, live to the rhythm
 Slave to the rhythm
 Dance to the rhythm, live to the rhythm
 Slave to the rhythm, work...to the rhythm
 To the rhythm, work to the rhythm, to the rhythm

[Outro: Grace Jones]
 Slave, slave
 To the rhythm, to the rhythm, to the rhythm

[Outro (Spoken): Paul Cooke & Grace Jones]
Oh that's weird...
 Grace Jones, welcome
Thank you Paul. And if you're wondering what's wrong with my voice, I just choked on my saliva. So...
 Now obviously you're in the Bond movie-

This song describes rhythm – defines it in a unique way – it is actually a quasi-definition of rhythm. An image accompanies the lyrics: the video clip is in sync with the rhythm of the lyrics, music, and voice. Image, sound, and text enter into a unique kind of oscillation, vibration, which penetrate the viewing and listening subject. When it comes to the dominant theme, both the word and the image focus on the body, the body which vibrates to the rhythm, the body filled with rhythm, the image of the body, the body that is represented beautifully, reminding one of ancient sculptures. Rhythm is not only connected with art, but also with economy, because the lyrics mention work (production line, the monotonous rhythm of factory work, as presented by Chaplin in his famous film *Modern Times* from 1936). In order to enter the lyrics, one has to first allow the listening body to immerse itself in the rhythm. It all starts with the rhythm – even before it was named, before it is perceived, and before it enters the word.

If so, we should be reminded that in the introduction to the Harvard edition of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Typography*, Jacques Derrida recalls the German musician and composer Hans Guido von Bülow's famous saying: "In the beginning there was rhythm."² It is not only an effective rhetorical trick or an aphorism which has made its way into the critical tradition, but a statement of fundamental importance to contemporary theories of rhythm. The concept of rhythm, seemingly simple, has been traditionally associated with a set of formal poetic features, but many theories argue that subjectivity is closely related to rhythm as well. It is said that rhythm and the subject are interconnected in text – that rhythm "creates" the subject. In the same text, Derrida further observes that: "There is no subject without the signature of this rhythm, in us and before us, before any image, any discourse, before music itself."³ Rhythm, similarly to the Derridean *shibboleth*, makes it possible to cross the boundaries

² Jacques Derrida, 'Introduction: Desistence', in *Typography. Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, by Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe (Cambridge–Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 31.

³ Derrida, 31.

which divide these subjects. Rhythm also enables the move from body to body, a kind of *metempsychosis*, the transmutation of one body into another, body migration, physical reincarnation.⁴ The body that is immobilized in text comes alive thanks to rhythm. The body emits rhythms and signs; it is the source of life and immortality. Rhythm becomes an intermediary between the writing and reading body.⁵

The etymology of the term “rhythm” was researched and discussed years ago by Émile Benveniste.⁶ The term “rhythm” found its way into Western philosophical thought from Greek, through Latin. The Greek *rytmos* [ῥυθμός] was one of the key terms in the Ionian school of natural philosophy. *Rytmos* is a noun derived from the verb *rein* [rein], which meant “to flow.” Benveniste’s etymological analysis shows that *rytmos*, from the time it first appeared until the Attic period, did not mean “rhythm,” nor did it describe the regular movement of water; indeed, it referred to a distinctive form, a proportional figure, an arrangement. The concept of “rhythm” was specified by Plato, who still used rhythm in the sense of a distinctive form, arrangement, and proportion. What was innovative was that this concept was applied to the order of the human body in dance, in movement, and to the system of figures through which this movement was transformed. Plato made a connection between *rytmos* and *metron* and subjected this concept to the laws of numbers derived from music. The form was determined by measure and reduced to a sequence. It was Plato who ultimately defined the concept of rhythm (as related to repetition), which we still use today. The first philosopher to address the problem of the differences between rhythm and meter, albeit in music, was Aristotle’s student Aristoxenus. He wrote a treatise devoted to rhythm and meter. Only one part of it has survived – it is entitled *Elementa rhythmica*.

Benveniste’s analysis demonstrates how complex the etymology of the word “rhythm” is, the consequence of which was the emergence of a specific myth of “rhythm” as in the regular movement of the sea. However, the verb *rein*, which was the basis for the word *rytmos*, means “to flow,” and the sea does not flow. *Rein* was never used in reference to the sea, and *rytmos* was never used to describe the movement of waters. The etymology of the word “rhythm” had been misrepresented for so long that consequently all attempts to define this concept had been based on emphasizing regularity and repetition. Benveniste’s study, especially his take on meter and rhythm opposed, inspired Christopher F. Hasty to perform a thorough analysis in the field of music. The following statement was the starting point: “if we restrict musical rhythm to meter, pattern, and proportion, we feel that something essential has been left out of account.”⁷ Derek Attridge follows in Hasty’s footsteps in his textbook *Poetic Rhythm. An Introduction*, linking the concept of rhythm directly to the body, since the body produces rhythm and acts as its physical medium (“Rhythm is a patterning of energy simultaneously produced and perceived; a series of alternations of build-up and

⁴ Jean Derrida has recently revived the concept of metempsychosis (*métempsychose*) in his essay. See: Jean Derrida, *La naissance du corps: Plotin, Proclus, Damascius* (Paris: Galilée, 2010).

⁵ See, for example: Amittai F. Aviram, *Telling Rhythm. Body and Meaning in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

⁶ Émile Benveniste, ‘La notion de rythme dans son expression linguistique’, in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, by Émile Benveniste (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 327–35.

⁷ Christopher Francis Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

release, movement and counter-movement, tending toward regularity but complicated by constant variations and local inflections”).⁸

It is impossible to reduce rhythm to a pattern or proportion, because something essential is always lost as a result of such a simplification. If there is meter in the text, there is of course repetition and regularity, but alongside them there also appear various modulations and deviations. They are the most interesting object of analysis of rhythmic systems. This can be seen very clearly when one looks at various Polish and foreign works on rhythm. I refer to, for example, Józef Elsner's *Rozprawa o metryczności i rytmiczności języka polskiego, szczególnie o wierszach polskich we względzie muzycznym* [The treaty on meter and rhythm in the Polish language, in particularly in Polish poems in terms of music],⁹ in which subsequent analyses of “rhythmic metric” in poetry (Elsner's original concept) are closely related to music (rhythm as the basis for distinguishing poetry from prose, rhythm as “an array of tones and [...] their form in time,” rhythm is the duration of pronouncing sounds, meter in poetry is a measure in music).¹⁰ Elsner's treaty is supplemented by a commentary and Kazimierz Brodziński's “octameter” poems, as well as detailed metrical analyses of every poem (“the pleasant bondage of meter,” Brodziński writes, “awakens almost like Music, sustains and lifts the feeling”). In Ludwik Jenike's *O znaczeniu rytmu w poezji* [On the role of rhythm in poetry], rhythm is subordinated to nature and its regularities. It is openly connected with regularity: “We need a certain commensurability of movements and sounds of all kinds; we tend to arrange them in some permanent system. Such an approach seems to be innate to man.”¹¹ The same applies to Antoni Małecki's definition, which emphasizes “harmony” in poetry: “Rhythm is a sequence of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables, which, if repeated in a certain constant and consistent pattern, pleases the ear and creates poetical rhythm.”¹² Respectively, the definition of the word “rhythm” in Karłowicz's dictionary reads: “a harmonious succession of long and short syllables, or stressed and unstressed syllables, which endows the poem with musicality.”¹³ In his treaty *Wiersze polskie w ich dziejowym rozwoju* [Polish poetry and its historical development], Jan Nepomucen Łoś analyzes the rhythmical structure of Polish poems, beginning with the Middle Ages and ending with the early works of the poets associated with the Skamander group, and distinguishes between rhythm based on three principles: meter, stress and syllable. This notwithstanding, he constantly refers to regularity and repeatability, and also connects rhythm with music and dance, stating that: “Rhythm and rhyme – these are the two most

⁸ Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

⁹ Józef Elsner, *Rozprawa o metryczności i rytmiczności języka polskiego, szczególnie o wierszach polskich we względzie muzycznym* [The treaty on meter and rhythm in the Polish language, in particularly in Polish poems in terms of music] (Warsaw, 1818).

¹⁰ See: the beginning of Elsner's treaty.

¹¹ Ludwik Jenike, *O znaczeniu rytmu w poezji, a mianowicie o rytmiczności języka polskiego* [On the role of rhythm in poetry, i.e. on the rhythmicity of the Polish language] (Warsaw: Drukarnie Gazety Polskiej, 1865).

¹² Antoni Małecki, *Gramatyka języka polskiego szkolna* [Textbook of Polish grammar] (Lviv, 1906), 264. In his *Gramatyka języka polskiego większa* [Advanced textbook of Polish grammar] from 1863 Małecki writes: “[rhythm] is like walking to a beat; in Polish louder and softer steps are arranged in the following way: soft-soft-loud or soft-loud.”

¹³ Jan Karłowicz, Adam Antoni Kryński, and Władysław Niedźwiedzki, *Słownik języka polskiego* [Polish dictionary], vol. 5 (Warsaw, 1909), 798.

important features of the modern poem; the third feature is musicality and melodicty. Unfortunately, however, it is impossible to say what it really consists of: whether it is stylistic, or, as some say, whether it is a certain way of arranging sounds in a poem, some consonants but mainly vowels, as if they were musical elements.”¹⁴ Any deviations from rhythmic regularity are defined by Łoś as “rhythmic errors,” “broken rhythms,” “rhythmic defects,” “unmaintained rhythm,” “disturbed rhythm,” “arrhythmicity,” “a-rhythmicity,” “the most unruly rhythm.” All such instances, in his opinion, destroy rhythmic order and disturb the pleasure of reading. Respectively, according to Henryk Życzyński: “poetic rhythm, whether it manifests itself in beautiful prose or in poetry, is for the poet above all not a form of experiencing, but of shaping. What is before is a mood, a ferment, an indefinite impulse, and only *rhythm* is the creative *fiat* that brings beauty out of it. As such, it is compulsion, discipline, but at the same time the only condition that can endow an experience with an aesthetic value.”¹⁵ Życzyński repeatedly emphasizes regularity, but also mentions “shaded variety” (this term is somewhat unclear in his essay). Życzyński recognizes Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski as poets which tried to revolutionize Polish poetry and points out that innovations in their poetry are mainly limited to poetic style and representation, while rhythm is, in his opinion, neglected and not properly defined. He could not have been more wrong, but this became clear many years later.

The difference between rhythm and meter is particularly important in the theories proposed many years ago by Henri Meschonnic or Julia Kristeva.¹⁶ Meter was often equated with rhythm, the two overlapped, guided by the principles of regularity, equivalence, and symmetry. In traditional terms, meter points to poetry; it is a means of “de-automatizing” language (as pointed out by Russian formalists or the Prague school). If rhythm is seen as a subcategory of the phonological level of language, meter is subordinated to it. Meschonnic argues that rhythm itself is not metrical. Depending on historical and writerly circumstances, it

¹⁴Jan Łoś, *Wiersze polskie w ich dziejowym rozwoju [Polish poetry and its historical development]* (Warszawa: Gebethner & Wolff, 1920).

¹⁵Henryk Życzyński, *Problemy wersyfikacji polskiej [Problems of Polish versification]*, part I: *Rytm poetycki [Rhythm in poetry]* (Lublin: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1934), 32.

¹⁶See: Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974); Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme Anthropologie historique du langage* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1982); Henri Meschonnic, *La Rime et la vie* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1989); Henri Meschonnic, *Politique du rythme. Politique du sujet* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1995); I summarize the views of Kristeva and Meschonnic presented in these works. More extensive discussions of Meschonnic’s theory can be found in the following studies: Gérard Dessons, *La Théorie du rythme d’Henri Meschonnic. Introduction à la poétique. Approche des théories de la littérature* (Paris: Dunod, 1995); Sergio Capello, *Le réseau phonique et le sens. L’interaction phono-sémantique en poésie* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1990), 111–15; Lucie Bourassa, *Rythme et sens. Des processus rythmiques en poésie contemporaine* (Montréal: Balzac, 1993); Parick Suter, ‘Rythme et corporéité chez Claude Simon’, *Poétique*, no. 77 (1994) The last two works prove that Meschonnic’s theory is effective in the analysis of poetry (Bourassa) and prose (Suter); Gabriella Bedetti, ‘Henri Meschonnic: Rythm as Pure Historicity’, *New Literary History* 23, no. 2 (1992): 431–50; The practical application of Meschonnic’s theory and method of textual analysis were discussed at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries in: T.V.F. Brogan, ‘Rhythm’, in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. T.V.F. Brogan and Alex Preminger (Princeton, 1993), 1066–70; Aviram, *Telling Rhythm. Body and Meaning in Poetry*; Charles Bernstein, ed., *Close Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) – a collective study in which Charles Bernstein in his introduction places particular emphasis on the distinctiveness of meter and rhythm, and also emphasizes that prosody shapes rhythmic processes. The following authors also refer to Meschonnic’s works: Marjorie Perloff, ‘After Free Verse’, in *Close Listening*, ed. Charles Bernstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89–90; David Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea – Baudelaire – Rimbaud, Mallarmé* (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi, 2004).

can be metrical or non-metrical. Therefore, it may accidentally appear to be regular, which is a cultural and traditional condition. Rhythm moves beyond meter. Meter is predictable and meets our expectations, while rhythm is unpredictable. Meter is discontinuous and numerical, while rhythm is continuous and non-numerical.

For Meschonnic, rhythm does not require a meter, but if it appears in the text then it functions as a rhythmic feature, a sort of “accompaniment.” Meter in a poem may be described, just like other rhythmic features. Meschonnic does not define rhythm in formal terms but sees it as an “organization of meaning” in a literary text. Rhythm may be analyzed on two planes: on the syntagmatic plane (analysis of “juxtaposed rhythmic sequences”) and on the

paradigmatic plane (regularity of rhythmic sequences, series – prosodic chains, prosodic figures – reflections, alliteration; recurrences, which are arranged transversely in the text). According to some theories of poetry, sounds can be motivated – they can shape meaning. Meschonnic believes that in literary works, sounds form a kind of network connected by association. The process of association itself is transversal, translinear, and does not take place in sequential order (anagrammatic reading of texts was postulated by de Saussure: in his view, poetic language creates secondary meaning which is added to the original word; de Saussure inspired a paragrammatic theory of reading which also found inspiration in psychoanalysis – Kristeva, in which rhythm is pre-symbolic and prior to meaning, as well as Meschonnic’s “series” and “prosodic figures”). In Jones’s song, such anagrammatic arrangements can be found: as a phonetic anagram, the words “Jones the rhythm” presuppose the phrase “Join the rhythm.”

According to this associative theory of reading, one cannot ascribe value only to meaning, because value is related to how discourse functions in its entirety. Only such a theory of reading, based on a transversal and dynamic process of association, allows us to accept the phonic organization of the text as something that co-creates to rhythm.

The entire phonic sphere is extremely important for the rhythmic and meaningful functioning of the text. Contrary to conventional theories which reject the motivated nature of the sign and recognize that all phonemic phenomena are connected to pragmatics, the logic of discourse, and linguistics, one should replace language with discourse and focus on how it functions. If we adopt such an approach, the text ceases to be a static structure; it becomes a dynamic process and is subject to constant transformations. The phonetic systems combined with other levels of language form the system of the text.

Analysis should therefore trace contrasts and sequences as well as transversal phenomena, translinear recurrences of certain phonetic elements – the rhythm of the text is created by phonetic similarities which appear in the text in different places, hidden phonetic anagrams. The entire phonic sphere of the poetic or prose text produces the so-called *signifiante*. *Signifiante* is a process of producing meaning as well as the result of this process; in the latter case, meaning is quasi-synonymous with signification; literary theory borrowed this term from Lacanian psychoanalysis. *Signifiante* only refers to actions connected with *signifiants*, which never refer to *signifié*. It is shaped, among other things, by a series of recurring sounds, which

produce an effect of *différance* or consonant echoes.¹⁷ In subsequent repetitions, one word is referenced by another. In such an analysis, the frequency of occurrence, sequence, and position of sounds are taken into account in order to determine how *significance* works in a given text, which further relates to memory, orality, as well as a set of perceptive, emotional and cognitive abilities of the subject.

Such an approach to rhythm allows us to depart from the metaphorical descriptive approaches which focus on melody, musicality, etc. They are very close to the definitions of rhythm that appeared in the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which rhythm was synonymous with meter. In this perspective, rhythm is also directly connected with the body that produces it. In written texts, rhythm is a trace of the body.

If we follow Julia Kristeva or Henri Meschonnic, we are able to see rhythm as an exceptionally beautiful form of bondage, which we cannot escape. Rhythm surrounds us, but at the same time allows us to trace our own, unique, and exceptional identity. This applies to all forms of art, every artist, poet, novelist, painter, musician, sculptor, photographer, every creator. Jones refers to it in her song. Indeed, in the lyrics (or, as I put it, a *quasi-definition*), there are many words that are directly related to the theoretical concepts of rhythm found in philosophy,¹⁸ linguistics, musicology, and literary studies.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

¹⁷See: David I. Masson, 'Sound-Repetition Terms', in *Poetics. Poetyka*, ed. Donald Davie and Kazimierz Wyka, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1961), 189–99.

¹⁸See, for example: Pierre Sauvanet, *Le rythme grec, d'Héraclite à Aristote* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999); Pierre Sauvanet, *Le rythme et la raison*, vol. 1–2 (Paris: Editions Kimé, 2000).

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KEYWORDS

M E T R U M

Rhythm

b o d y

ABSTRACT:

This essay discusses different definitions of rhythm. The author thoroughly reviews the different definitions and approaches to rhythm in Polish and foreign-language (especially French and English) theoretical texts. He also refers to the texts of culture, including Grace Jones's famous song *Slave to the rhythm* or Edward Pasewicz's poem *Sonata o rytmie* [Sonata about rhythm].

DEFINITION

subject

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Adam Dziadek – professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice. His research interests include literary theory, comparative literature, men's studies, genetic criticism, and translation. He is the author of: *Rytm i podmiot w liryce Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza i Aleksandra Wata* [Rhythm and subject in the poetry of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Aleksander Wat] (Katowice 1999), *Obrazy i wiersze. Z Zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej* [Pictures and poems. Relations between art and contemporary Polish poetry] (Katowice 2004 and 2011), *Na marginesach lektury. Szkice teoretyczne* [On the margins of reading. Theoretical essays] (Katowice 2006), *Obrazy i teksty. Interferencje i interpretacje* [Images and texts. Interferences and interpretations] (Katowice 2007). He also published *Wybór wierszy* by Aleksander Wat in the Polish National Library series (Wrocław 2008). He has published his critical essays in *Pamiętnik Literacki*, *Teksty Drugie* and *Przestrzenie Teorii*. He has translated the works of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Marc Augé, Clifford Geertz, Raewyn Connell, and Daniel Ferrer. He also published a translation of Gérard Raulet's book *German Philosophy after 1945* (Warsaw 2013). In recent years, he has published *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* (Warsaw 2014) and *Somatic Criticism Project* (Frankfurt am Main 2018). Together with Jan Zieliński, he published Aleksander Wat's *Notatniki* for the first time (Warsaw 2015). He was the head of the Maestro 4 research grant *Męskość w literaturze i kulturze polskiej od XIX wieku do współczesności* [Masculinity in Polish literature and culture from the nineteenth century to the present day]. He is the editor of the *Studia o męskości* [Men's studies] series (IBL PAN). He was and is a supervisor in the NCN Fuga and Preludium projects. Since 2007, he has been on the editorial board of *Pamiętnik Literacki*. He is also a member of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Currently, he is the head of the NPRH project, module Universals 2.1, *Polish Men and Masculinities. Translation and publication in English of selected works from the Men's Studies* publishing series.

The Concepts of “Verse”, “Meter” and “Rhythm” in Russian Verse Theory*

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1.

My approach to the problem of meter and rhythm is not only theoretical, but also practical: together with my colleagues I research the problems of automated rhythmic and morpho-syntactic analysis of poetic texts and, in particular, the problems of automated recognition of verse meters and rhythmic forms¹. This is why we are interested in the issue of the interrelation between meter and rhythm. In fact, this is a core problem in the study of Russian prosody. Arguably the discovery of the dichotomy of meter and rhythm marked the beginning of verse studies in Russia.

In his *Introduction to Metrics: A Theory of Verse* (1925) Viktor Zhirmunsky wrote: “The basic problem of the theory of verse out of which the entire book grew, is the opposition between rhythm and meter — an opposition which A. Belyi was the first to formulate clearly for classical Russian poetry in his famous works on the iambic tetrameter (*Symvolizm*, 1910)”². Zhirmunsky was

¹ I.A. Pilszczikow and A.S. Starostin, ‘Problemy awtomatizacii bazowych procedur ritmiko-sintaksiczeskogo analiza siłlabo-toniczeskich tiekstow’, in *Nacjonalnyj korpus russkogo jazyka 2006–2008. Nowyje riezultaty i pierspiektivy*, ed. W.A. Phungian (Sankt-Pietierburg: Niestor-Istorija, 2009), 298–315; I.A. Pilszczikow and A.S. Starostin, ‘Problema awtomaticheskogo raspoznawaniya mietra: siłlabotonika, dolnik, taktowik’, in *Otieczestwiennoje stichowiedienije. 100-lietnije itogi i pierspiektivy razwitija. Matierialy Mieždunarodnoj naucznoj konfierenciji 25–27 nojabria 2010 g. Sankt-Pietierburg*, ed. S.I. Bogdanow and E.W. Chworost’janowa (Sankt-Pietierburg: Filologiczeskij fakultiet SPbGU, 2010), 397–406; I.A. Pilszczikow and A.S. Starostin, ‘Automated Analysis of Poetic Texts and the Problem of Verse Meter’. W: *Current Trends in Metrical Analysis*, ed. C. Küper, vol. 2 (Bern; Berlin [etc.]: Peter Lang, 2011), 133–40; I.A. Pilszczikow and A.S. Starostin, ‘Reconnaissance automatique des mètres des vers russes. Une approche statistique sur corpus’, trans. É. Delente, *Langages*, no. 199 (2015): 89–105.

² W.M. Żirmunskij, *Wwiedienije w mietriku. Tieorija sticha* (Leningrad: Academia, 1925).

convinced that meter draws a borderline between what should be regarded as verse and what as prose; however, this is not true because there also exist such phenomena as metrical prose as well as *vers libre*, i.e., free, ametrical verse. If indeed it was the presence of meter which enabled us to decide between what is verse and what is prose, then this would solve the problem of a constructive definition of verse, since every text containing meter would automatically be regarded as verse and any ametrical text would be regarded as prose (which we know is not the case). It should be noted at this point that the descriptive definition of verse is a theoretical description of the difference between verse and prose.³ Therefore, the dichotomy of “verse vs. prose” is more fundamental than the dichotomy of “meter vs. rhythm” and methodologically precedes it.

Russian verse theory at its late formalist stage came up with a theoretical definition of verse most clearly expressed in the ex-“junior formalist”⁴ Boris Bukhshtab’s formula of a “dual segmentation”: “Any text breaks up into subordinate syntactic segments; in the poetic text, however, this [...] is combined with the segmentation into lines of verse as well as verse entities which are larger or smaller than the line [...] the latter segmentation can either coincide with, or diverge from the former, thus creating innumerable possibilities of rhythmic-syntactic correlations”⁵.

If we follow Bukhshtab’s line of thought, Maksim Shapir argued in his article “*Versus vs. prosa*”, then it inevitably turns out that “the difference between verse and prose is the division into verses itself. [...]” This definition of poetic discourse was formulated independently by Maksim Kenigsberg (1923), Boris Tomashevsky (1923; 1928) and Yuri Tynianov (1924). The shortcoming of their definition is not its seemingly tautological character, but its insufficiency: we do not know what is the peculiarity of the poetic line as compared with any other [kind of line]. Tomashevsky believed the *specificum* of verse was its state of being divided into comparable and commensurable segments”⁶.

Mikhail Gasparov, who recalibrated many formalist concepts and gave them a classical form, endorsed Tomashevsky’s idea. In his entry on “Stikh” (“Verse”) in the *Concise Literary Encyclopedia*, Gasparov formulated the two main characteristics of the verse lines: their “comparability” (*sopostavimost’*) and their “commensurability” (*soizmerimost’*):

СТИХ [VERSE] (from the Greek στίχος — row, line) is an artistic speech, [which is] phon[et]ically divided into relatively short segments (each of which is also called “S[tikh]” [a verse-line]), [and] which are perceived as comparable and commensurable. The opposite notion is that of *prose* (see *Poetry and prose*). The prosaic speech is also divided into segments — *cola* [Sing. *colon*]; but, as compared to prose, the verse segmentation has two peculiarities: 1) in prose, text segmentation is determined only by syntactic pauses, [while] in verse, the dividing pauses may be not coincident

³ We call a definition descriptive (or theoretical) when it identifies the object by enumeration of its properties or functions. A constructive (or practical) definition is an explicit description of its arrangement. Applied sciences transform descriptive definitions into constructive definitions, while theoretical sciences transform constructive definitions into descriptive definitions: I.M. Jagłom, *Matematyczskie struktury i matematyczne modele* (Moskwa: Sowietsoje radio, 1980)..

⁴ A member of the group of Yuri Tynianov’s and Boris Eikhenbaum’s disciples known as *mladoformalisty*, i.e. “junior formalists”.

⁵ B.Ja Buchshtab, ‘Ob Osnowach i Tipach Russkogo Sticha’, *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* t. XVI (1973): 110–11.

⁶ M.I. Szapir, ‘«Versus» vs «prosa»: prostranstwo-wriemia poeticznego tieksta’, *Philologica*, t 2, no. 3/4 (1995): 49.

with syntactic pauses (enjambment); 2) in prose, segmentation by the dividing pauses is to a large extent arbitrary, [while] in verse, it is predeterminedly fixed⁷.

In the 1990s, Shapir challenged this definition arguing the following: if we take, say, a free iambus and *vers libre* as examples, we shall see that the verse lines [i] are **not comparable** in quantitative terms (they may have from 1 to 12 and more syllables), and [ii] they are **not commensurable** in qualitative terms, that is they do not always use one and the same *measure* (in a free iambus, a monosyllabic line may be rhymed with a monopodic line and a polypodic line: it is hard to consider a one-syllable line as an iambic *foot* which should contain *two* syllables).⁸ Thus, according to Shapir, verse cannot be described in terms of **comparability of the commensurable**, but rather as the **equation of the incommensurable**.⁹ Hence his own theoretical definition of verse:

Verse is the system of pervasive compulsory paradigmatic segmentations [...]. Verse segmentations are pervasive because they run through the entire work or fragment. Verse segmentations are compulsory because they are pre-ordained by the author's will which is objectively expressed and cannot be ignored by a recipient. Verse segmentations are paradigmatic: they form the rhythmic units belonging to the same level which are correlated with one another as variants of a single invariable¹⁰.

The last part of this definition was widely discussed, but this discussion is irrelevant for the context of the present paper. What matters for our purposes is that Shapir's **theoretical** definition of verse, as well as that of Gasparov, is hard to convert into a **constructive** definition, as Shapir himself once pointed out¹¹. To build computer programs we use constructive definitions. This means that today we are still not capable of developing an algorithm which would enable us to distinguish between prose and verse in general.

Boris Tomashevsky, who was educated as an engineer and represented the "empiricist" wing of Opoiaz (a Petersburg association of formalists) and the Moscow Linguistic Circle (a Moscow association of formalists), always used constructive categories in his thinking. In his *Russian Versification: Metrics* (1923) Tomashevsky wrote: "It is impossible to give an exact objective definition of verse, it is impossible to list the main properties which distinguish between verse and prose"¹².

⁷ M. L. Gasparow, 'Stich', in *Kratkaja litieraturnaja enciklopedija*, vol. 7 (Moskwa: Sowjetskaja enciklopedija, 1972), 197 author's italics; cf. M. L. Gasparow, *Russkij stich naczala XX wieku w kommentarijach*, *Izdaniye wtoroje (dop.)* (Moskwa: Fortuna Limited, 2001), 6; E. Klenin, 'M. L. Gasparov and the Definition of Verse', *The Slavic and East European Journal* 52, no. 2 (2008): 208–22; T.W. Skuławczewa, 'Mietody opriedielenija mietra w nieklassiczeskom stichie', *Izwestija Rossijskoj Akadiemiji nauk. Sierija litieratury i jazyka* 71, no. 2 (2012): 45–46. Here and henceforth, translations from Russian are mine unless otherwise stated.

⁸ In Gasparov's definition, "COMMENSURABILITY, in verse studies, is a property of all poetic lines of the [poetical] work to be measured (in the reader's consciousness) by one and the same conventional measure": Gasparow, 'Stich', 43.

⁹ The same point was earlier made by Yuri Lotman: "The rhythmicity of poetry is the cyclical repetition of different elements in identical positions with the aim of equating the unequal or revealing similarity in difference, or the repetition of the identical with the aim of revealing the false character of this identity, of establishing differences in similarity": Ju. M. Łotman, *Lekcyi po strukturalnoj poetikie, wyp. 1 (Wwiedienije, tieorija sticha)*, vol. 1 (Tartu: Tartuskij gos. uniwersitet, 1964), 67.

¹⁰ M.I. Szapir, 'O Priedielach Dliny Sticha w Wierlibrie (D. A. Prigow i Drugije)', *Philologica* 6, no. 14/16 (2000 1999): 138; M.I. Szapir, *Universum versus: jazyk — stich — smysl w russkoj poezii XVIII–XX wiekow*, vol. 2 (Moskwa: Jazyki russkoj kultury, 2015), 237.

¹¹ quoted in Pilszczikow and Starostin, 'Problemy awtomatizacji bazowych procedur ritmiko-sintaksicznego analiza siłabo-tonicznych tekstów', 300.

¹² B.W. Tomaszewskij, *Russkoje stichosłożenije. Mietrika* (Leningrad: Academia, 1923), 7.

A constructive definition of verse is unavailable, but we can constructively define versification systems and meters within each versification system. Therefore, the concept of "commensurability" introduced by Tomashevsky and Gasparov, enables us to define **meter**, rather than **verse**.

2.

Let us now consider the opposition of meter and rhythm. Verse rhythm is distinct from the rhythm of real speech: we are aware of different "expiratory power" of vowels in ictic and non-ictic positions (noted by Roman Jakobson in "Briusov's stichology"¹³, we know that so called "semi-stressed" words may be pronounced differently in ictic and non-ictic positions (as was discussed by Jakobson, Tomashevsky, Zhirmunsky and Gasparov, among others).¹⁴ In other words, meter only emerges against the background of rhythm, and rhythm emerges against the background of meter.

In 1921 Žirmunskij maintained: "Rhythm is the *actual alternation* of stresses in verse, resulting from the interaction between the inherent properties of the linguistic material and the ideal norm [Russian: *zadanie*, 'design, intention'] imposed by the meter"¹⁵. In 1925 he explained that "the actual phonetic shape of verse is determined by its metrical structure only in part and its poetic rhythm is always a compromise resulting from the resistance shown by the linguistic material to the rules of artistic composition"¹⁶. Tomashevsky objected that we should not speak of the resistance, but of the "arrangement of the linguistic capabilities"¹⁷. As Morris Halle pointed out, the main shortcoming of this conception is the "(mis)conception that there must be a one : one relationship between entities in the meter and phonetic entities in the line"¹⁸.

The dilemma of meter and rhythm can be solved in a different way. As Maksim Kenigsberg wrote in 1923, "Verse in its essence is not a physical, but a semiotic phenomenon"¹⁹. Verse is a sign, and, in the same way, meter and rhythm are signs (this was the position of the "phenomenological" wing of the Moscow Linguistic Circle: in particular, Kenigsberg, Nikolai Zhinkin and Grigorii Vinokur). Tynianov also gave eloquent examples of meter as a sign such as, for instance, incomplete or omitted lines²⁰.

¹³R.O. Jakobson, 'Briusovskaja stichologija i nauka o stichie'. W Akademičeskoj centr Narkomprosa. Naucznyje izwiestija, t. 2: Filosofija', in *Akademičeskoj centr Narkomprosa. Naucznyje izwiestija*, vol. 2: Filosofija. Litieratura. Iskustwo (Moskwa: GIZ, 1922), 229; S. Rudy, 'Jakobson's Inquiry into Verse and the Emergence of Structural Poetics'. W *Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Red*, in *Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle*, ed. L. Matejka, vol. 477–520 (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1976), 481.

¹⁴Poets have other ways of further disassociating verse rhythm and natural language rhythm ("prose" rhythm): column and "staircase" (Mayakovsky), font and punctuation (Tsvetaeva), special diacritics (Selvinsky).

¹⁵W.M. Žirmunskij, *Kompozicija liriceskich stichotworienij* (Pieterburg: Opojaz, 1921), 98; Žirmunskij, *Wwiedienije w metriku. Tieorija sticha*, 7.

¹⁶Žirmunskij, *Wwiedienije w metriku. Tieorija sticha*, 18.

¹⁷B.W. Tomaszewskij, *O stichie. Stat'ji* (Leningrad: Priboj, 1929), 49.

¹⁸M. Halle, 'Žirmunskij's Theory of Verse', *A Review Article*. *The Slavic and East European Journal*, t 12, no. 2 (1968): 214.

¹⁹M.M. Kienigsbiere, 'Iz stichologiczeskich etjudow. 1. Analiz poniatija «stich»', wstęp. stat'ja i primiecz', *M. I. Szapir, Philologica*, t 1, no. 1/2 (1994): 163.

²⁰Ju N. Tynianow, *Problema stichotwornogo jazyka* (Leningrad: Academia, 1924), 22; Ju N. Tynianow, 'O kompoziciji Jewgienija Oniegina [1921–1922]', in *Poetika. Istorija litieratury*. Kino, ed. Je.A. Toddes, A.P. Czudakow, and M.O. Czudakowa (Moskwa: Nauka, 1977), 60; cf. Ju. M. Lotman, *Struktura chudożestwiennogo tieksta* (Moskwa: Iskustwo, 1970), 66.

Semiotically speaking, any sign is “a material formation which is discernible against its background”²¹: meter is a sign against the background of rhythm; rhythm is a sign against the background of meter; they are both interrelated signs against the background of natural speech. This is the reason why the initial object of analysis for both a computer and a human analyst is the rhythm of natural speech. A rhythmic and metric model of verse can be thus based on automated accent-oriented morphological text analysis. This enables us to analyze poetic texts written in languages with variable stress, such as Russian²².

How is all this related to the processes of generation and reception of poetic speech? Let us look at how Tomashevsky envisaged this problem. His main idea was that the synthesis of verse proceeds from meter to rhythm, while the analysis proceeds from rhythm to meter:

When initially conceiving a poem, the poet adopts a metrical scheme which he feels to be a kind of rhythmical-melodical contour, a framework, into which words are “inserted”.

As it is realized in words, the rhythmical impulse finds expression in the actual rhythm of individual lines. [...]

The listener perceives the rhythm in inverse order. First he is confronted with the actual verse-line rhythm. Then, under the impression of the reiteration of rhythmical configurations, due to his perception of a sequence of verse-lines, the listener grasps the rhythmical impulse [...]. At a still higher degree of abstraction from the rhythmical pattern he grasps the metrical scheme which may be uncovered by scanning²³.

The concept of *rhythmical impulse* describes a stochastic, not deterministic, norm, as Miroslav Červenka pointed out in his discussion of this concept²⁴. From the poet’s point of view, the **rhythmical impulse** or “rhythmical design” (*zadanie*) is the same as the **rhythmic inertia** from the recipient’s point of view (Viktor Zhirmunsky). From the researcher’s point of view, the same phenomenon is defined as a **rhythmic tendency** or, in a particular aspect, the **stress profile** of a poem or a group of poems (Kiril Taranovsky) or, in yet another particular aspect, the **rhythmic profile of the meter** (Mikhail Gasparov) or else as an “**image of the meter**” (Andrei Kolmogorov).²⁵

²¹N.I. Žinkin, ‘Znaki i sistema jazyka’, in *Zeichen und System der Sprache. Veröffentlichung des 1. Internationalen Symposiums “Zeichen und System der Sprache” vom 28.9. bis 2.10.1959 in Erfurt*, vol. I (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), 159.

²²Pilczukow and Starostin, ‘Automated Analysis of Poetic Texts and the Problem of Verse Meter’. W: *Current Trends in Metrical Analysis*, 133; Pilczukow and Starostin, ‘Reconnaissance automatique des mètres des vers russes. Une approche statistique sur corpus’, 93–94.

²³Tomaszewskij, *Russkoje stichosloženije. Mietrika*, 83.

²⁴M. Červenka, ‘Rhythmical Impulse. Notes and Commentaries’, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 14 (1984): 30.

²⁵For further discussion see O.M. Brik, ‘Ritm i sintaksis (materijaly k izuceniju stichotwornoj rieczii)’. Wstupitielnaja zamietka, podgotowka tieksta i primieczanija M. W. Akimowa’, in *Slawianskij stich IX*, ed. A.W. Prochorow and T.W. Skulaczewa (Moskwa: Rukopisnyje pamiatniki drierwiej Rusi, 2012), 535–36 Marina Akimova’s note; M. L. Gasparow, ‘A. N. Kolmogorow w russkom stichowiedeniji’, in *Izbrannyje trudy*, vol. IV (Moskwa: Jazyki slawianskoj kultury, 2012), 505; S.E. Lapin and I.A. Pilczukow, ‘O trudach Mirosława Czerwenki po tieorii i istoriji sticha (K wychođu pierwowo russkogo izdanija jego rabot)’, *Izwestija Rossijskoj Akadiemiji nauk. Sierija literatury i jazyka* 72, no. 3 (2012): 433–35. Taranovsky’s and Gasparov’s “stressing (or rhythmic) profile” is also a statistical characteristic, but it is a generalization of the statistics of rhythmical forms and does not always reflect the differences between individual types or patterns of the meter A. Dobritsyn, ‘Rhythmic Entropy as a Measure of Rhythmic Diversity (The Example of the Russian Iambic Tetrameter)’, *Studia Metrica et Poetica*, t 3, no. 1 (2016): 35–38.

From a theoretical point of view, however, the question is not that simple. What is objectively given, and what is subjectively constructed? Is rhythm given initially? Then meter is a post-factum construction. Or, vice-versa, is meter a given entity and rhythm a mere construction?

Consider the definitions of meter and rhythm proposed by Russian scholars, starting from the prominent symbolist poet and verse theorist Andrei Belyi: "Under the rhythm of the poem we understand the symmetry of deviations from the meter [...]"²⁶. Later researchers pointed out the interrelation between meter and rhythm. This interrelation may be conceived as a "descent" from meter to rhythm (Tomahevsky, Zhirmunsky). In his 1923 treatise Tomahevsky wrote: "[...] meter is the principle of compatibility of verse lines". "Rhythm is a real sound form, the actual arrangement of qualitative relations of pronunciation for each separate verse-line". Meter is an "abstract scheme", while rhythm is a concrete individual form, a "real form" [Tomaševskij 1923: 44, 66]. Zhirmunsky added: "[...] meter is a general law of alternation of strong and weak sounds, [while] rhythm embraces concrete particular cases of application of this law, the variations of the main metric scheme"²⁷. In Yuri Lotman's structural poetics this thesis was later re-formulated in terms of linguistic and information theory dichotomies ("language vs. speech", "system/grammar vs. text", "code vs. message")²⁸.

The same interrelation may be conceived as an "ascent" from rhythm to meter, as in the above quoted passage from Tomahevsky or in the verse studies of the great Russian mathematician Andrei Kolmogorov, who wrote: "Under *meter* I understand a regularity of rhythm which is distinct enough to arouse: a) the expectancy of its confirmation in further lines, b) a specific experience of 'irregularity' when it is interrupted"²⁹.

Mikhail Lotman has introduced a useful distinction:

All approaches to meter can be divided into two main groups: I will call these respectively a priori and a posteriori. In accordance with the a priori approach meter precedes [...] poetical text. Meter is realized in a poem, the competent reader recognizes it, and the researcher describes it. [...] According to the a posteriori approach, meter does not precede text but is its immanent quality, the competent reader perceives it [...], the researcher makes it explicit³⁰.

In the last analysis, the difference between a-priori metrics and a-posteriori metrics may be reduced to the problem of interrelation between meter and rhythm, Mikhail Lotman argues. From the point of view of the a-priori approach, meter has a primary function, while rhythm is its realization; whereas for the a-posteriori approach, rhythm is the primary reality, while

²⁶A. Bielyj, *Kniga statiej* (Moskwa: Musaget, 1910), 396.

²⁷Zhirmunskij, *Wwiedienije w metriku. Teorija sticha*, 11.

²⁸Ju. M. Lotman, *Analiz poetičeskogo tekst. Struktura sticha* (Leningrad: Proswieszczenije, 1972), 46–59.

²⁹A.N. Kolmogorow, 'K izuczeniju ritmiki Majakowskogo', *Woprosy jazykoznanija*, no. 4 (1963): 64 original emphasis.

³⁰M. Lotman, 'Stanowlenije anticnych razmierow w russkom stichie. Aspiekty kognitiwnoj metriki'. W: *Russian Text (19th Century) and Antiquity / Russkij tekst (19 wiek) i anticznost'*, in *Russian Text (19th Century) and Antiquity / Russkij tekst (19 wiek) i anticznost*, ed. K. Kroó and P. Torop, vol. 24–53 (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2008), 32–33; M. Lotman, 'Metre. The Unknown', in *Frontiers in Comparative Metrics. In Memoriam Michail Gasparov. Conference Abstracts, November 21–23, 2008, Tallinn and Tartu, Estonia*, ed. M. Lotman and M.-K. Lotman (Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2008), 25.

meter is a secondary formation. This researcher suggests transferring this problem from the methodological sphere to the ontological sphere and to interpret the difference described above not as two different **approaches** to meter, but as two drastically different *types* of versification meters. If we deal with a well-known structures which are unequivocally interpreted by both the author and the readers, Lotman calls such meters **explicit**. If the structure is new, and is not unequivocally recognized, such meters are **implicit**:

Usually the difference between explicit and implicit meter is reflected already in their names. In the first case we are dealing with nomination (iambus, hexameter), in the second case with description; for instance, the “meter of Russian fairy tales”, the “bylina verse”, even such a splendid name like the “verse meter of Songs of the Westerns Slavs”, that is, the meter Pushkin used in his cycle Songs of the Westerns Slavs³¹.

3.

Maksim Shapir combined the a-priori and a-posteriori approaches. His conception of meter was developed in his article “Metrum et rhythmus sub specie semioticae”, where he proposed a revision of the linear hierarchy of meter and rhythm, that is the views of rhythm as a system of deviations from meter, or rhythm as a particular realization of the metric scheme. Shapir conceived of two processes which are opposite in direction to each other: “metrization” of rhythm and “rhythmization” of meter³².

For Andrej Belyi, Tomahevsky and Zhirmunsky meter was the law, while rhythm was a tendency; for Shapir, both rhythm and meter are tendencies, and they are not straightforwardly deductive from each other. Rhythm is not a particular case of meter because rhythm, being able to violate meter, can be autonomous from it.

Meter, in its turn, is not deductive from rhythm because rhythmically identical lines can be differently interpreted in different metrical contexts or, to put it another way, the rhythmic forms of different meters can be isomorphic. In this case, we are dealing with metrical ambiguity³³.

If the entire poem consists of such metrically ambiguous lines, it would be a heterometric text, as in Aleksandr Polezhaev's poem “Song of the Dying Swimmer”. Aleksandr Iliushin cites it is a “genuinely bimetric” poem (Iljušin 1988: 67) because its meter may be perceived as 2-foot trochee (trochaic dimeter) —' —'() or as 1-foot anapest (anapestic monometer) ' —'():

³¹ Lotman, ‘Stanowlenije anticznich razmierow w russkom stichie. Aspiekty kognitiwnoj mietriki’. W: Russian Text (19th Century) and Antiquity / Russkij tekst (19 wiek) i anticznost’, 33; Lotman, ‘Metre. The Unknown’, 28.

³² M.I. Szapir, ‘Metrum et rhythmus sub specie semioticae’, *Daugawa*, no. 10 (1990): 91–128.

³³ Jakobson, ‘Briusowskaja stichologija i nauka o stichie’. W Akademieskij centr Narkomprosa. Naucznyje izwiestija, t. 2: Filosofija, 229; Tomaszewskij, *O stichie. Stat’ji*, 15 sq; G.A. Szengieli, *Tiechnika sticha. Prakticzeskoje stichowiedienije* (Moskwa: Sowjetskij pisatel, 1940), 79–80; S.P. Bobrow, ‘K woprosu o podlinnom stichotwornom razmiere puszkinskich «Piesien zapadnych slawian»’, „Russkaja litieratura”, no. 3 (1964): 123.

Вот мрачѣтся
 Свод лазурный!
 Вот крутится
 Вѣтер бурный!
 [...]
 На равнинах
 Вод зеркальных,
 На пучинах
 Погребальных
 Я скользил [...]³⁴

These are two ways of “metricizing” the same rhythm. Other examples of “metrization” are logaoedic verses, especially non-classical logaoedic meters, such as Osip Mandelstam’s “To-day is a bad day...” (*Сегóдня дурнóй дéнь*), where a particular rhythmic pattern $\text{—} \text{—} \text{—}$ is reiterated throughout the poem and thus becomes its metrical scheme $\text{—} \text{—} \text{—}$.

The opposite transformation may be called the “rhythmization” of meter. For instance, in Joseph Brodsky’s “Strophes” of 1968, the meter of the initial line (*На прощáнье – ни звѣ́ка*) is 2-foot anapest $\text{—} \text{—} \text{—}$ (—), as is the meter of the entire poem: $\text{—} \text{—} \text{—}$ (—) — (—). However, the meter of a rhythmically identical and phonetically similar initial line of his “Strophes” of 1978 (*Наподóбие стакáна*) is not 2-foot anapest but the 3-ictus *dolnik* $\text{—} \text{—} \text{—}$ (—) because the entire poem is written using this meter: (—) — (—) — (—) — (—) — (—).³⁵ However, not only this line, but many other lines of 3-ictus *dolnik* in this poem are isomorphic to 2-ictus *dolnik* and in particular to its rhythmical form which is isomorphic to 2-foot anapest. It is interesting to note that the 1978 “Strophes” contain a whole stanza, **all** the lines of which are isomorphic to the 2-foot anapest:

Неумѣстней, чем ящер
 в филармóнии, вѣд
 нас вдвоём в настоящем.
 Тём вернѣй удивѣт
 обитáтелей зáвтра
 разведѣнная здѣсь
 сѣльных чѣвств динозáвра
 и кириллицы смѣсь.

³⁴ Vladislav Kholshevnikov did not consider this bimetrical and defined its meter as 2-foot trochee: W. Je Kholshevnikov, *Mysl, vooruzennaja rifmami. Poeticheskaja antologija po istoriji russkogo sticha* (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1987), 180. As a genuinely bimetrical poem he cited Ivan Miatlev’s “Fantastic Tale” (Таракáн / Как в стакáн...): Kholshevnikov, 202.

³⁵ The only line that violates the meter is *котóрогó нѣ нѣрѣкрѣчатъ*: it features an interval of six unstressed syllables, whereas a maximum of only five is allowed by the metrical scheme.

This is a **rhythmic quotation** which, however, refers to a **metrical** precedent (Brotsky's own poem which was written ten years earlier and which is referred to in the title and the initial line of the later poem: *Нѣ прѣцѣнѣ – нѣ звѣкѣ* → *Нѣ ѿдѣбѣ стѣкѣнѣ*)³⁶.

Shapir's "metrization of rhythm" and "rhythmization of meter" partly correspond to the less known concepts of *logaedizacija* ("logaoedization") and *verlibrizacija* ("vers-libre-ization") introduced by Vadim Rudnev³⁷. Indeed, the transformation of rhythm into meter is a transformation in the direction of the logaoed, while the transformation of meter into rhythm is a transformation in the direction of the *vers libre*. In the Brodsky example, *dolnik* is a more *libre* meter than anapest because it tolerates a wider variation of inter-ictic intervals³⁸. On the contrary, 100% of one and the same rhythmic form in an "iambic" poem will turn this iambus into logaoedic or paeanic verse.

Therefore, contemporary Russian verse theory proposes the theoretical representation of meter as "tendency" or "potentiality". Since meter is usually not preconceived (at least from the reader's point of view) and we are not dealing with a given meter but with the metrization of rhythm, it follows from this that every poetic line is, *in potentia*, heterometric. In the context of the entire poem such metrical ambiguity may be either disambiguated (remaining, however, a factor of rhythm), or realized as a metric tendency (as in the so called "transitional metrical forms" or TMF³⁹) or even the metrical law (in genuine heterometric texts).

4.

Considering all of the above, we can offer the following constructive definition of the meter of the Russian verse line:

(1) Meter is a design of strong and weak positions (*temps forts* and *temps faibles*) in a line of verse.

³⁶Roman Jakobson called the poet's use of a meter, which closely associated with a particular text or group of texts, "a kind of metrical quotation": R.O. Jakobson, 'K Popisu Máchova Verše', in *Torso a Tajemství Máchova Díla: Sborník Pojednání Pražského Lingvistického Kroužku*, ed. J. Mukařovský (Praga: Fr. Borový, 1938), 246; R.O. Jakobson, 'Toward a Description of Mácha's Verse', in *Selected Writings, t. V: On Verse, Its Masters and Explorers*, trans. P. Steiner and W. Steiner (Paris – New York: The Hague, 1979), 465; Rudy, 'Jakobson's Inquiry into Verse and the Emergence of Structural Poetics'. *W Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Red'*, 506.

³⁷Vadim Rudnev understands these terms in a wider culturological sense; I prefer to remain in the realm of metrics: W.P. Rudniew, 'Istorija ruskoj metriki XIX — naczala XX ww. w swietie problemy "litieratura i kulturologija"', in *Uczebnyj matierial po tieorii litieratury. Litieraturnyj process i razwitiye ruskoj kultury XVIII–XX ww.*, ed. T.M. Kotniuch (Tallinn: Tallinskij gos. pedagogiczeskij institut im. Eduarda Vilde, 1982), 91–93; W.P. Rudniew, 'Stich i kultura', in *Tynianowskij sbornik. Wtoryje Tynianowskije cztienija*, ed. M.O. Czudakowa (Riga: Zinātne, 1986), 227–39; W.P. Rudniew, *Słowa' kultury XX wieka* (Moskwa: Agra, 1997).

³⁸Compare Pilszczikow and Starostin, 'Problema awtomatycznego rozpoznawania mietra: siłabotonika, dolnik, taktowik', 404–5; Skulaczewa, 'Metody opriedielenija mietra w nieklassiczeskom stichie', 48.

³⁹"TMF is such a construction of a verse meter, in which a certain amount of violations of one of the principal features of a particular poetic form is present. Moreover, these sporadic irregularities [...] do not yet change the *quality* of verse of a given kind. The main task in describing a TMF is to define the 'threshold', after which quantity is transformed into quality": P. A. Rudniew, 'Metriczeskij Riepiertuar A. Błoka', in *Błokowski Sbornik, II. Trudy Wtoroj Naucznoj Konfierenciji, Poswiaszczennoj Izuczeniju Žizni i Tworczestwa A. A. Błoka*, ed. Z. G. Minc (Tartu: Tartuskij gos. uniwersitet, 1972), 227 emphasis in original.

(2) Strong positions, or ictuses, are such positions in the design of any meter, on which the word stresses **can** fall if these words have a length of $i+1$ or more syllables where $i \in \mathbf{N}_0$ (i being the number of syllables in a constant or maximum inter-ictic interval, on which see below).

(3) Weak positions, or inter-ictic intervals, are such positions in the design of any meter on which the word stresses **cannot** fall if these words have a length of $i+1$ or more syllables.

(4) If the line fits more than one meter, preference is given to the one with less variation (v) in the volume of inter-ictic intervals (i).

(5) Rule 4 can be applied to a particular line only if it also applies to all other lines of the poem at the same time.

It is a constructive definition, and therefore describes meter in its relationship to rhythm. Rule 1 defines the conditions for generating the rhythm of schematic word stresses; Rule 2 defines the conditions for generating the rhythm of word boundaries; Rule 3 defines the conditions for generating the rhythm of extra-schematic word stresses; Rule 4 epitomizes the idea of metrical hierarchy;⁴⁰ and Rule 5 asserts the insufficiency of a “horizontal” analysis of verse structure, which must always be corrected by a “vertical” analysis of the metrical context.

The latter rule also applies to the issue of metrically ambivalent lines, **both** metrical interpretations of which imply the **same** variation (v) of the volume of inter-ictic intervals (i). Thus, some rhythmic forms of binary meters are isomorphic to the rhythmic forms of ternary meters. Both binary and ternary meters have zero variation in the volume of inter-ictal intervals ($v = 0$). The metrical ambivalence of this type of verse in a homometric context is considered a rhythmic characteristic of verse rather than its metrical characteristic.

If the metrical repertory includes iambic, trochaic, dactylic, amphibrachic, anapestic, paeanic, *dolnik* and *taktovik* meters, then $1 \leq i \leq 3$. If we replenish the repertory with the meters based on a pentasyllabic foot (hyper-paeon) and a hexasyllabic foot (hexon), then $1 \leq i \leq 5$. If we then add non-classical logaoedic meters of the “*Todáy is a bád dáy*” type, then $0 \leq i \leq 5$. As regards “pure” tonic verse (also referred to as “accentual verse”), the question remains of a maximum volume of its inter-ictic interval. For the sake of simplicity, we will consider this interval theoretically unrestricted ($i \in \mathbf{N}_0$), although it has an empirical limit⁴¹ (in the examples examined by Kolmogorov, Zhirmunsky and Gasparov, the unstressed interval varies from 0 to 8 syllables⁴²).

⁴⁰Gasparov wrote that “each stricter meter on the steps of this staircase is inevitably an individual rhythm of a freer meter”: M. L. Gasparov, *Sovremennyy russkij stich : metrika i ritmika* (Moskwa: Nauka, 1974), 308. An hierarchized multilevel list of metrical patterns is found in: Pilszczikow and Starostin, ‘Problema awtomatizieskogo raspoznawaniya mietra: siłabotonika, dolnik, taktowik’.

⁴¹M. Lotman, ‘Russkij stich. Osnownyje razmiery, wchodiaszczije w jewropiejskij mietriczeskij fond’, in *Słowiańska metryka porównawcza. VI. Europejskie wzorce metryczne w literaturach słowiańskich*, ed. L. Pszczołowska and D. Urbańska, vol. VI: Europejskie wzorce metryczne w literaturach słowiańskich (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1995), 330, 324, fn. 75.

⁴²cf. W.M. Żirmunskij, ‘Stichosłożenije Majakowskogo’, *Russkaja litieratura*, no. 4 (1964): 12.

The proposed constructive definition applies to various systems of versification used in Russian poetic tradition. They differ from each other in the type of *metrical period* (the syllabic distance from one ictus to another, that is the series of syllables consisting of the ictus and the inter-ictic interval).⁴³ In syllabic-accentual (syllabotonic) verse, the **metrical period** (traditionally referred to as “foot”) has a fixed and constant volume of inter-ictic intervals (it is the same in different feet). In logaoedic verse, the metrical period has a fixed but not constant volume of inter-ictic intervals (it is different in different feet). In *dolniks* and *taktoviks*, the metrical period has a variable, but a limitedly varying volume of inter-ictic intervals (each particular meter has a minimum and maximum volume, within which the inter-ictic interval varies). In accentual verse, the metrical period has a variable and unlimitedly varying volume of inter-ictic intervals.

It follows from rules 2 and 3 that extra-schematic stresses (i.e., stresses on weak positions in words whose syllabic length $\leq i$)⁴⁴ and skipped schematic stresses on the ictuses⁴⁵ are possible in all of these meters.

Gasparov considered *dolniks* and *taktoviks* “transitional” meters on the way from syllabic-accentual verse to “pure” accentual verse⁴⁶. I would suggest that they are a separate type of verse (Mikhail Lotman calls it accentual-syllabic, as opposed to syllabic-accentual or syllabotonic⁴⁷) and abandon the idea of “transitional” systems altogether. But whether or not to separate *dolniks* and *taktoviks* into a special system of versification depends on the definition of what a “versification system” is an issue beyond the scope of this article.

⁴³I introduce this term by analogy with Tomashevsky’s term “*accentual period*”, i.e. the syllabic distance from one stress to another”Tomaszewskij, *Russkoje stichosloženie. Metrika*, 14 original emphasis. A caveat, with which the author of the original term would agree: what we should take into consideration is a syllabic distance from one *metrical (schematic)* stress to another, i.e. from one ictus to another.

⁴⁴This rule is known as “the Jakobson-Tomashevsky thesis about the impossibility of shifting the accent in Russian [poetry] within a word”: V. Erlich, *Russian Formalism. History — Doctrine*, 2., popr (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 220. Compare Jakobson: “[...] a stressed syllable can realize a *temps faible* [...] and, vice versa, a stressed syllable [can realize] a *temps fort* [...] provided that these syllables do not belong to the same word [...]. To put it another way, the word cannot be rhythmically trans-accentuated”: R.O. Jakobson, *O czeszkom stichie priemuszczestwienno w sopostawlenii s russkim* (Berlin: Opojaz — MLK, 1923), 29. According to Tomashevsky, “a word with an additional [i.e. extra-schematic. — IP] stress should be shorter than a foot period” (M.L.K. 1919, ‘Archiw Instytutu russkiego języka imieni W. W. Winogradowa RAN (Moskwa). F. 20. Jed. chr. 2.II: Protokoły zasiedanij Moskowskiego lingwistycznego kręgu za 1919 god.’, 1919.): in Russian syllabic-accentual (syllabotonic) verse, “non-metrical stress can fall on words that fit within a metrically unstressed interval and do not extend to the metrically stressed syllables. To put it another way, in classical [Russian] verse non-metrical stresses are only allowed on monosyllabic words in iamb and trochee, whereas in dactyl, anapaest and amphibrach, they are allowed on both monosyllabic and disyllabic words”: Tomaszewskij, *Russkoje stichosloženie. Metrika*, 62; Gasparow, *Sovremennij russkij stich : metrika i ritmika*, 4. For more details see I. A. Pilshchikov, ‘Zasiedanie Moskowskiego lingwistycznego kręgu 1 iunija 1919 goda i zaroždenije stichowiedczeskich koncepcij O. Briki, B. Tomaszewskogo i R. Jakobsona’, *Revue des études slaves*, t LXXXVIII, no. 1/2 (2017): 51–56; I.A. Pilshchikov and A.B. Ustinow, ‘Moskowskij Lingwistickij Kręg i stanovlenie russkogo stichowiedienija (1919–1920)’, in *Unacknowledged Legislators. Studies in Russian Literary History and Poetics in Honor of Michael Wachtel*, ed. L. Fleishman, D.M. Bethea, and I. Vinitsky, vol. 50 (Berlin [etc.]: Peter Lang, 2020), 393–94.

⁴⁵We can often hear that it is impossible to skip schematic stresses in pure tonic verse. This is prejudice or oversimplification: Lotman, ‘Russkij stich. Osnovnyje razmiery, wchodiaszczije w jewropejskij metrickij fond’, 332; M. Lotman, ‘O sistemach stichosloženia (priemuszczestwienno na materiale estonskogo i russkogo sticha)’, *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* 26 (1998): 224; compare Gasparow, *Sovremennij russkij stich : metrika i ritmika*, 428; J. Bailey, ‘The Accentual Verse of Majakovskij’s “Razgovor s fininspiektorom o poëzii”’, in *Slavic Poetics: Essays in Honor of Kiril Taranovsky*, red, ed. R. Jakobson, C.H. Van Schooneveld, and D.S. Worth (Paris: Mouton, 1973), 29–31; Dž Bešli, *Izbrannije stat’ji po russkomu literaturnomu stichu* (Moskwa: Jazyki slawianskoj kultury, 2004), 285–88.

⁴⁶Gasparow, *Sovremennij russkij stich : metrika i ritmika*, 16, 220–21, 306, 308; Gasparow, *Russkij stich naczala XX wieka w komentarijach, Izdanije wtoroje (dop.)*, 130, 133, 135.

⁴⁷Lotman, ‘O sistemach stichosloženia (priemuszczestwienno na materiale estonskogo i russkogo sticha)’, 237.

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KEYWORDS

verse

verse theory

METER

metrization

ABSTRACT:

A definition is called descriptive (or theoretical) when it identifies the object by enumeration of its properties or functions. A constructive (or practical) definition is an explicit description of its arrangement. Russian verse theorists proposed several *theoretical* definitions of verse (as opposed to prose), which are not, however, convertible into a *constructive* definition (a list of formal differences between verse and prose). To date, we are still not capable of developing an algorithm which would enable us to distinguish between prose and verse in general, but leading prosodists have produced both theoretical and constructive definitions of versification systems, verse meters, verse rhythm, and particular rhythmic types of individual meters.

This article examines definitions of verse and descriptions of the relationships between meter and rhythm proposed by scholars of Russian poetry. Building on their observations, the author devises a constructive definition of the concept of “meter” as a system of permissions and prohibitions that govern the distribution of word stresses and word boundaries in a verse line. The article also formulates constructive definitions for the versification systems used in Russian poetry (such as syllabotonic verse, logaoedic verse, *dolnik* and *taktovik*, and pure accentual verse).

rhythmical impulse

VERSIFICATION SYSTEM

RHYTHM

rhythmization

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To Describe Fire:

On the Benefits of H.U. Gumbrecht's Project of Non-hermeneutic Verse Studies

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“Those great scholars who seem to know everything; who counted the vertebrae in vertebrates and syllables in Archiloch's poems cannot, however, demonstrate sets people's minds and actions into motion; they analyse art but are blind to what lies at the heart of that art; they study fire but can only describe ashes”.¹

Josef Brodski liked to repeat after Eugenio Montale that poetry is a hopelessly semantic art. I am fascinated by that adverb “hopelessly”, which refers to the semantic potential of poetic art as something both inevitable and undesirable; like a disease for which there is no cure. The opposite of such approach would be a utopian vision of poetry free from semantic obligations; yet neither Brodski nor Montale dreamt of it. In fact, the term “hopelessly” denotes something more basic here: poetry's resistance to semantics and its unwillingness to be nothing but information transfer. The incurably semantic poetry opposes the requirements of communication in order to become art. It surrenders to, as it has to, semantics because language is its building material.

I begin with what is hopeless, quite as a cautionary tale for myself. For my aim is to address Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's project for humanities, best described in his book *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey* (2009) – a project frequently described as non-hermeneutical, although the Stanford scholar does not postulate abolishing hermeneutics altogether. *Production of Presence* has a different goal: “it makes a pledge against the tendency in contemporary culture

¹ Adam Zagajewski, ‘Nietzsche w Krakowie [Nietzsche in Cracow]’, in *Obrona żarliwości [The defence of passion]* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2002), 57.

to abandon and even forget the possibility of a presence-based relationship to the world” and “challenge[s] a broadly institutionalised tradition according to which interpretation (...) is the core practice (...) of the humanities”². In the end, however, it “argues for (...) a relation to the things of the world that could oscillate between presence effects and meaning effects”³. Reducing Gumbrecht’s approach to my main subject of interest, i.e., issues of versology, I also make a pledge that it is not my intention to discredit the hermeneutic direction of studies in poetry, because I consider such direction to be inevitable. Rather, I would like to propose broadening these studies to include the issue of presence (and to presence itself). I am thus reminded of the semantic hopelessness of poetry so as not to lose sight of the hermeneutic horizon, even though my primary aim is (metaphorically speaking, although not quite) indefinitely closer.

Gumbrecht, who was direct about “meaning effects” primacy in the reading of a literary text (which is different to listening to music, dominated by presence), would undoubtedly agree with Montale’s and Brodski’s diagnosis. He would add, however (as poets know all too well) that the incurable semantic disease does not deprive poetry of hope because “literary texts also have their ways of including the dimension of presence”⁴. There is nonhermeneutic, presence-oriented potential in material, sensually accessible aspects of poetic structure which are embodied by versification (the latter engaging both sound effects, and typography). That potential can also be found in accidental properties of the medium, through which poetry can reach us. This can be a rough page of a book, smelling of dust, a computer screen, giving off cold light, a pleasant sound of a poetess’ voice, recorded on a CD, or even a barely audible inner murmurando, replaying a half-forgotten stanza. Importantly, “presence effects” are not complementary to “meaning effects”, although they are not mutually exclusive. “[...] presence and meaning always come together and there is always tension between them”⁵.

What is presence? As an ingredient of an aesthetic experience, it depends on an “intrinsic feeling of intensity”,⁶ related to a sensual perception of the object (e.g., a poem). This intensity is predominantly quantitative and unrelated to any specific aesthetic quality. Presence is not experienced continually, as a long-term and stable phenomenon, but as “moments of intensity”, essentially different from the events of the everyday world, which makes them so fascinating. Moments like these occur in isolation, in an “island”-type situational framing, as Gumbrecht calls it following Bakhtin. This happens in one of two possible ways: either in the “modality of being captured in »imposed relevance«”⁷ (Alfred Schuetz’s and Thomas Luckman’s *auferlegte Relevanz*) or in the mode of “composure” (Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*, i.e., “the ability to leave things as they are”⁸), in which the recipient’s openness and focus make it possible to lose themselves in the subject of an aesthetic experience. Presence is not experi-

² Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 24 (Page numbers provided in the following footnotes refer to the Polish translation by K. Hoffmann, W. Szwebs, Poznań 2016, quoted in the original, i.e., Polish, version of this article).

³ Gumbrecht, 25.

⁴ Gumbrecht, 124.

⁵ Gumbrecht, 120.

⁶ Gumbrecht, 112.

⁷ Gumbrecht, 118.

⁸ Gumbrecht, 90.

enced directly but only as ephemeral “presence effects”, forever “marked by absence” and “surrounded by, wrapped into and perhaps even mediated by clouds and cushions of meaning”⁹. These elusive “presence effects”, which remain in constant tension with or oscillate between “the effects of meaning”, manifest themselves not unlike epiphanies: they seem to come from nowhere (from beyond culture, beyond the world¹⁰), occupy a place in space (or at least they pretend to do so), and operate as unpredictable and momentary events¹¹.

Production of presence devotes much space to the existential aspect of the aesthetic experience – to how the “moments of intensity” influence our life. “It is surely possible to develop an addiction to a certain type of text (not only for its semantic layers) and suffer from it”¹², the author remarks jokingly, admitting to his prolonged fascination with Federic Garcia Lorca’s *Poeta en Nueva York* cycle or Gottfried Benn’s *Astern*. The risk of addiction, losing oneself, loss of control has its source in violence, which is inseparable from the aesthetic experience and understood (unlike in Foucault) not as the tool of power but as occupying space by a substance and exerting physical pressure, blocking a body¹³. One of the more intimate moments of *Production of presence* is the one when Gumbrecht is trying to convey the sensual dimension of his aesthetic experiences, e.g., his listening to *Don Giovanni*: “[...] the almost excessive, exuberant sweetness that sometimes overwhelms me when a Mozart aria grows into polyphonic complexity and when I indeed believe that I can hear the tones of the oboe on my skin”¹⁴. Such intense, somatic experiences are also familiar to readers of poetry, and, while they are occasionally addressed by literary scholars, they tend to remain marginal to their interests. In the meaning-oriented world of academic study, they are not typically deemed worthy of systematic research.

Ultimately, the existential dimension of an aesthetic experience proves to be a spiritual dimension; of course, neither in the sense of a commonly understood religiously mystic experiences (even though *Production of Presence* also touches upon the theological perspective) nor in the moral sense. Gumbrecht clearly separates aesthetics from ethics and reiterates that there is “nothing edifying (...) nothing we could really learn” from such “moments of intensity”¹⁵. He also emphasises that these moments can “prevent us from completely losing a feeling or a remembrance of the physical dimension in our lives”. It is worth recalling Viktor Shklovsky’s similar intuition, who quotes Tolstoy’s diary entry from February 28th, 1897, in his «Искусство как нудём» [*Art as a device*] (“I was dusting the room and walking around I approached the couch but could not remember if I had already dusted it. [...] So if I had dusted

⁹ Gumbrecht, 121.

¹⁰ Gumbrecht, 89 and 91 (on Heidegger’s “the nothing” as a dimension in which “all cultural distinctions are absent”).

¹¹ Gumbrecht, 126–27.

¹² Gumbrecht, 130.

¹³ Gumbrecht, 113 An intriguingly similar understanding of violence can be found in Susan Sontag’s considerations on photography. In an extensive interview she gave in the late 1970s she expressed her opposition to an exclusively pejorative understanding of aggression, explaining that “You’re involved in aggressions on all levels when you move around the world, you’re occupying a space (...) So I think there are particular forms of heightenings of a certain kind of characteristically modern forms of aggressiveness that are represented in the use of camera” (*Thinking is a form of feeling. Susan Sontag in conversation with Jonathan Cott*). I remark on this similarity as one of a deeper, in my opinion, intellectual affinity between Gumbrecht and the author of *Against interpretation*.

¹⁴ Gumbrecht, 113.

¹⁵ Gumbrecht, 114.

it and forgot, that means I was operating unconsciously, as if that had never happened”). He added that “This is how life vanishes, becoming nothingness. Automation eats things, clothes, furniture, wife and fear of war”. He goes on to say:

[Art] exists [so] that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make an object “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important*¹⁶.

The expressions “recover the sensation of life”, “to make one feel things”, to make stone stony” or “to impart a sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known” seem close to Gumbrecht’s vision. This is visible, for instance, when he writes that “we sometimes seem to connect with a layer of our existence that simply wants the things of the world close to our skin”¹⁷, or that “experiencing the things of the world in their pre-conceptual thingness will reactivate a feeling for the bodily and for the spatial dimension of our existence”¹⁸, Or, when he describes the aesthetic disposition and the existential state of *Gelassenheit* as “being in touch with the things of the world”¹⁹.

It is not a coincidence that I emphasise similarities with Russian formalism, without insisting on any affiliations between the two. The author of *Production of Presence* does not feel affiliated with the formal-structural tradition; rather, he recalls other sources of theoretical inspiration. I would like to point out, however, that it is in that segment of traditional literary studies one can find support for a versology which opens itself to presence. This enterprise seems particularly worthwhile, as it was the structural-formal paradigm that became the foundation for modern versology, and it was within that paradigm that important and still relevant publications on the theory and history of the poem were created. It is worth considering then how to merge this body of work with contemporary humanities. For obvious reasons in what follows I will focus on the Polish line of this tradition, which does not mean I believe it is exceptional. The example of Shklovsky can be taken to be a *pars pro toto* for a more general diagnosis. I have no doubt that similar affinities are traceable not only beyond formal-structural literary studies, but also beyond literary studies in general, especially in aesthetics (apart from Susan Sontag, the author of *On Photography*, recalled in the footnote, I would also mention, e.g., Arnold Berleant’s works). *Production of Presence* devotes an entire chapter to this issue. Out of a number of names the author lists I would like to, somewhat paradoxically, recall one – that of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who in 2000 uttered the following words, regarding the reading of poetry:

¹⁶Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Sztuka jako chwyt [Art as a device]’, in *Teorie literatury XX wieku. Antologia [Theories of 20th c. literature. An anthology]*, ed. Anna Burzyńska and Michał Paweł Markowski, trans. Ryszard Łużny (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2006), 100.

¹⁷Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey*, 121.

¹⁸Gumbrecht, 130.

¹⁹Gumbrecht, 132.

But can we really assume that reading such texts is a reading exclusively concentrated on meaning? Do we not sing these texts? [*Ist es nicht ein Singen*]? Should the process in which a poem speaks only be carried by a meaning intention? Is there not, at the same time, a truth that lies in its performance? (*eine Vollzugswarheit*) This, I think, is the task with which the poem confronts us²⁰.

The final words about the truth found in performance refer to the concept of “loudness” (*Volumen*), which describes a different dimension of a poem than its semantics; one which remains with the poem in relation to simultaneity. As one can see, intuitions very close to Gumbrecht’s nonhermeneutic idea may appear even in *sensu stricte* hermeneutics. They are therefore even more to be expected in studies devoted to the structure of the linguistic matter of a poetic text. I cannot fail to mention Gumbrecht’s disregard for the works of versologists. This critical *passus* can be found in his *Production of Presence*:

Poetry is perhaps the most powerful example of the simultaneity of presence effects and meanings effects – for even the most overpowering institutional dominance of the hermeneutic dimension could never fully repress the presence effects characteristic of rhyme, alliteration, of verse and stanza. It is telling, however, that literary criticism has never been able to react to the emphasis that poetry gives to such formal aspects – except for the establishment of long, boring and intellectually pointless “repertoires” that list, in chronological order, the different poetic forms within different national literatures, and except for the so-called “theory of over-determination”, which claims against all immediate evidence that poetic forms will always double and reinforce already existing meaning structures²¹.

“Long, boring and intellectually pointless” – these are the words Gumbrecht uses to describe the most important works on the poetics of verse forms. Of course, the author of *Production of presence* is not the only one expressing such views. Similar distaste for versologists’ meticulousness can be heard from different angles; it is clearly expressed in the words I have chosen to be the motto of these considerations, i.e., in the remark about scholars who “counted the vertebrae in vertebrates and syllables in Archiloch’s poems” and “study fire but can only describe ashes”. In this criticism of “those great scholars” Adam Zagajewski was paraphrasing Friedrich Nietzsche, so his charges have a double source: philosophical and poetic. They combine the perspectives of metareflection with that of an artist-practitioner and perhaps this makes them so convincing. Critical voices can be heard from within versology itself too: in his *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [*Somatic criticism project*] (2014) Adam Dziadek approvingly quotes Henry Meschonnic’s harsh judgement, expressed in *Critique du rythme* (1982): “*la métrique est la théorie du rythme des imbéciles*”²².

Gumbrecht, similarly to other critics of versification, points to the futility of a science which cannot show the poem in action but only focuses on its fossilised forms, replacing fire with ashes. The metaphor of fire seems adequate for “moments of intensity” with their ephemeral flickering and unpredictable violence, typical of epiphany (in *Production of Presence* the

²⁰H.-G. Gadamer, *Hermeneutik, Ästhetik, Praktische Philosophie*, as quoted in Gumbrecht, 84.

²¹Gumbrecht, 43.

²²As quoted in: Adam Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [*The Somatic Criticism Project*] (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2014), 25.

concept of “capturing in imposed relevance” is illustrated by the images of lightning and the glaring sunlight). Gumbrecht is interested in the role that poetic substance plays in those epiphanies. Meanwhile, “repertoires” of syllabic formats or metrical feet are usually indifferent to the aesthetic (let alone epiphanic!) potential of the poem. In Poland these effects of long-term studies by generations of highly competent researchers are represented in the multi-volume series *Poetyka. Zarys encyklopedyczny* (*Poetics. An encyclopedic sketch*). Browsing through quotations which illustrate individual entries, one cannot fail to notice the editors’ indifference to the aesthetics of a poem: many of these quotations originate from second- or even third-rate poetry. But even if such publications deal with outstanding poetic work, they tend to focus on verse form, leaving aside the issue of aesthetic impact. It is difficult to expect such studies to account for the readers’ “moments of intensity”.

This goal is also hard to achieve when studies in versology are specifically oriented towards semantics, i.e., when their aim is no longer just a description of versification systems, or poem forms or individual poems-works (or their groups within individual historical poetries), but also an outline of the semantic potential of versification. Such studies, currently mainstream in versology, have had a long tradition in Poland. Semantics of poems constituted a cognitive framework for scholars from Lucylla Pszczołowska’s circle²³, but it needs to be emphasised that the leader of Slavic Comparative Metrics was very careful in matters of the meaning of semantics. In her programmatic *Semantyka form wierszowych* [*Semantics of verse forms*] (1981) she was meticulous about separating strictly versological, i.e., systemic issues from analyses of “specific possibilities of expression, enabled by the verse form of the utterance”. She adds that, while “such interpretations are obviously necessary,” at times they lead to “exaggerating the role of verse structure – especially when it comes to the semantics of the text”²⁴. She identified such “hypersemantisation” or even “semantic pathos”²⁵ in the works of Ivan Fónagy and Juri Lotman. The scholar also emphasised that “unlike words or phrases, system of versification or the size or type of stanzas or rhymes do not have semantics which could emerge as a basic concept in a semantic dictionary”²⁶. By “semantics of verse poem” one should thus understand a group of associations or connotations ascribed to verse forms. Moreover, Pszczołowska was convinced that not all forms of a poem can be assigned such connotations of meaning; some of them are “exclusively prosodic and general-aesthetic in nature”²⁷ and should be described as asemanic. What she

²³In a posthumously published essay Pszczołowska described the collection *Semantyka form wierszowych* [*Semantics of poetic forms*] (1988) as “groundbreaking” for the work of Slavic Comparative Metrics team and “something close to revolution” with regard to topics and methodology (Lucylla Pszczołowska, ‘Słowiańska Metryka Porównawcza. Ewolucja celów i metod badawczych [Slavic Comparative Metrics. Evolution of aims and research methods]’, in *Strukturalizm w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. Wizje i rewizje* [*Structuralism in Central and Eastern Europe. Visions and revisions*], ed. Danuta Ulicka and Włodzimierz Bolecki (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2012), 166).

²⁴Lucylla Pszczołowska, ‘Semantyka form wierszowych [Semantics of poetic forms]’, in *Wiersz – styl – poetyka. Studia wybrane* [*Poem – style – poetics. Selected studies*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2002), 268.

²⁵Pszczołowska, 269.

²⁶Lucylla Pszczołowska, ‘Badania nad wierszem [Studies in poems]’, in *Wiedza o literaturze i edukacja. Księga referatów Zjazdu Polonistów, Warszawa 1995* [*The science of literature and education. Papers from the Congress of Polish philologists, Warsaw 1995*], ed. Teresa Michałowska, Zbigniew Goliński, and Zbigniew Jarosiński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, 1996), 588.

²⁷Lucylla Pszczołowska, ‘Powtórzenia w prozie Gombrowicza [Repetitions in Gombrowicz’s prose]’, in *Wiersz – styl – poetyka. Studia wybrane* [*Poem – style – poetics. Selected studies*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2002), 229.

meant by that were reiterations, like choral parts in songs, or verse repetitions in a pantoum, a triolet or a vilanelle.

In more recent versology studies Pszczółowska's conservative, careful approach, has been replaced with approaches which take a more daring approach to exploring the semantics of a poem (we will return to these later). Generally, they are variants of the "theory of over-determination", whose explanatory power was equated by Gumbrecht with the effects of "long, boring and intellectually pointless" versology studies. While I cannot concur with such an unequivocally negative assessment of interpretative findings of versology (I would attribute this unnuanced approach to Gumbrecht's polemic attitude; I am convinced he would have appreciated the achievements of many a verse specialist²⁸), I can well understand Gumbrecht's impatience for the persistent ignorance of and lack of appreciation for verse matter. The "repertoire" strand idealised it, whereas the "semantic" one saw it as a carrier of sense, usually subservient to lexicon (if not in theory, then in interpretative practices). Even if the point of departure for research methods are poetic texts, then sign substance of such texts is treated very selectively.

For versological "repertoires" what matters is the systemic part, whereas interpretations of verse works only consider semantically loaded elements (against theoretical assumptions they are not often all the components of versification). Gumbrecht probably does not mind initial analyses themselves; ultimately, they are a form of direct contact with the material of verse. Regardless of the research purpose, be it recognising the form or capturing semantic potential, any attempt at following the rhythm of a poem cannot occur without activating sensual perception. What is problematic is the inevitability of a leap from material to conceptual sphere (versological concepts, the outline of the work), and reducing a poem's aesthetics either to historical conventions (selected, rejected, restituted, creatively reshaped, etc.) or to something like a resonator of meaning.

The dominance of the hermeneutic approach leads to neglecting phenomena of presence in humanities or to encompassing them to under another type of meaning (the structuralist concept of "poetic information"²⁹ is a good example of this perspective bias). On the other hand, "presence effects" are inherent to our aesthetic experiences (also professional ones), which seems to be reason enough to consider these phenomena more closely. The question remains; what is it that we should consider more closely? "Presence effects" have a tendency to remove themselves right after they have appeared and then the omnipresent meaning takes their place. Gumbrecht says that "It is extremely difficult – if not impossible – for us not to 'read', not to try and attribute meaning"³⁰. This remark is particularly poignant with reference to poetry, which is a hopelessly semantic form of art. What is meant by that is not the automatic assignment of meanings to words used in a poetic work, but also the compulsion to "read" the form, including the form of versification. Let us, for example, try not to read the versification of the following poem:

²⁸Cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology. Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

²⁹Janusz Sławiński, 'Wokół teorii języka poetyckiego [On a theory of poetic language]', in *Dzieło – język – tradycja [Work – language – tradition]* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), 82.

³⁰Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey*, 121.

Panny nieroztropne

Wiatr w środku powieści zarządza gimnastykę
 starym skręconym dębom, które sypią wszystko,
 co im zostało: liście, resztkę żołądki,
 by znów się wypłacić, lecz już się nie wykręca.
 Bo wiatr jest nieugięty, wiatr jest entuzjastą-
 -komisarzem, nagina miękkie, łamie twarde.
 Obłoki go kochają i zawsze ma rację.
 Opisy irytują go, więc wrywa kartki.
 A właśnie mamy przestój. Dom jest taki pusty,
 jakby z niego latami wysiedlano ludność
 na stepy Azji. I sam nie mogę się znaleźć
 w żadnym pokoju, schowku, pudełku, rozdziale.
 Dom jest tak bardzo pusty, że go nie ma w domu.
 Jak papierowy lampion, z którego zwiął płomyk³¹.

A literal translation of the poem into English would be:

Foolish virgins

The wind orders exercise in the middle of a poem
 To the old, twisted oak trees, which are losing everything
 That they have left; leaves, remnants of acorns
 To pay off their debt, but they will not wriggle out of it
 For the wind is adamant, the wind is an enthusiast-
 Commissar, it bends what is soft, it breaks what is hard;
 The clouds love it and it is always right.
 Descriptions annoy him so he tears out the pages.
 And we are in standstill. The house is so empty
 As if for years on end people were displaced from it
 To the Asian steppes. And I cannot find myself
 In any room, cupboard, box or chapter.
 The house is so empty that it is not at home.
 Like a paper lantern, whose flame has been blown away.

Even if I try to deal only with the verse form of Tomasz Różycki's work – focusing my attention appropriately and opening myself up to the dynamic shape of the sound and the architecture of its record, what occurs between the initial *wiatr* 'wind' and the final *płomyk* 'flame' I see as oneness. Obviously, whenever I reflect upon my own reading, I can differentiate between a gradual understanding of the first verse of *Panny nieroztropne* and the perception of that verse's rhythm with two initial syllables, uttered S | Ss, after which two trisyllabic prosodic words with symmetrical peaks occur: sSs | sSs, followed by the final proparoxyton, with its stress on the antepenultimate

³¹Tomasz Różycki, 'Panny nieroztropne [Foolish virgins]', *Czas Literatury*, no. 4 (2020): 9.

syllable: sSss. Initially I intend to read it with a falling intonation, but correct myself because, lacking a period or comma, the intonation is uncertain and then rises, along with the coda of the word and verse. There is a pause after the thirteenth syllable. But then, when my reading is little more than an aesthetic experience (upon reading *Panny nieroztropne* I find it hard not to be experiencing what Gumbrecht called “being lost in focused intensity³²”), prosodic-phonetic-graphic “presence effects” blend with lexical-semantic “meaning effects”.

I am thus under the impression, that the entire first verse is semantically and rhythmically moved, first with a sudden uprising, which causes the pages of a novel to flutter, and then an unexpected heigh-ho!, and something like a reverse movement, where the word stress falls on a different syllable than I expected. It is the wind that “orders the exercise”, lifting up a clause from the verse and throwing it onto the following line, in the midst of the alliterative “stare skrecone dęby które sypią” (‘old twisted oaks which drop’) that what will not suffice anyway (leaves, acorns – 12 syllables in the Polish version), just to “pay off” their debt. But – here this long and conclusive utterance makes a final loop – “they will not wriggle out of it”. That same wind in the fifth line reminds me about the obligatory daily exercise, half-rhyming *gimnastyka* (‘exercise’) with *entuzjasta* (‘enthusiast’) (word stress accentuates the same group of phonemes – “ast”, only this time it is paroxytonic – it hops one syllable forward and lands on the penultimate one). Carrying a hyphen over from line five to six, it shows that the “enthusiast” is also a stern “commissar” (Pol. *komisarz*)... and so on and so forth.

It can be said that the rhythm of this poem echoes semantics or that the rhythm confirms what words and sentences are saying. One can, however, reverse this dependence and state that prosody, phonetics and graphics advance their own agenda, to which words and sentences attempt to sensibly adjust. After all, in Różycki’s lyric, rhythmic movements and corners significantly precede the verbalisation of a profound lack and uneasy expectation (the proper topic of the poem is only revealed in the words *A właśnie mamy przestój* ‘And we are in a standstill’, although somehow it is possible to sense even earlier in the poem an almost physical imbalance between the lyrical world and the “I” speaking). Professional versological readings usually adopt the former perspective, granting semantics primacy over the poem. The consequence of this is perceiving versification as something “readable” and interpretable. A versological “reading” of a poem can thus occur in two ways. The first one can be termed historical semantics of verse forms, as it focuses on recognising the poem’s form, whose meaning is derived from literary convention.

In the fourteen lines of Tomasz Różycki’s poem a well-trained eye and ear will have no trouble recognising a sonnet, despite a lack of division into stanzas. Any syntactic delimitation roughly coincides with divisions into hypothetical stanzas, which is particularly evident in the first quatrain, containing a complex utterance. The poem lacks regular rhymes (most clauses feature an even, partial consonance, some of which only concern the stressed vowel; there are also numerous alliterations, paronomasia and other sound figures, occurring both within and between verses³³). The syllabic meter of the Polish alexandrine is executed here with many deviations from the (7+6) scheme (these concern verse length, the position and

³²Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey*, 119. Here Gumbrecht quotes Olympic swimming gold medalist Pablo Morales.

³³I adapt the term introduced to Polish versological terminology by Adam Dziadek (cf. Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [*The Somatic Criticism Project*]).

visibility of breaks between verses, stress type in cesuras and verses). An interpretation of this “play with the traditional, sophisticated form³⁴”, which one can notice in *Panny roztropne* would require establishing to what extent Różycki’s poem takes over cultural associations and the intrinsic worldview of a sonnet, and to what - at the same time - it questions these very norms by rejecting senses and values associated with a sonnet to build its own senses and values. A still different issue is semantic motivation for selecting a stichic form. This decision seems to be poignant given that in his earlier works, like in the 77 sonnets from the book of poetry *Kolonie* [*Colonies*], the poet followed the pattern of French stanzaic segmentation (4+ 4 + 4 + 2).

Another way of “reading” versification depends on the assumption that all elements of a poetic structure are semantically functional, so each of them can be assigned more or less definitive meanings (connotations). This approach stems from the structuralist theory of poetic language. A well-known dogma of this theory was the claim that all, even the smallest linguistic elements, are semantically autonomous; meanings of lower degree units are not fully absorbed by the meanings of higher units, but they permeate from underneath them³⁵. Janusz Sławiński wrote about the emergence of big semantic figures, like the lyrical “I”, in the following manner:

The carriers of meaning, which create the lyrical subject in the course of a work, are not only lexical elements and their syntactic arrangements but also elements like verses (or even their parts), verse groups, intonation groups etc., in general: all identifiable and thus meaningful, fragments of utterances. Of course, only words and sentences can name the “I” (...) But a direct naming of an object may not be possible at all. The information, as it emerges, can be carried by specific stylistic or versification devices, characteristic for the accepted manner of speaking³⁶.

The lyrical mood of the first eight verses of Różycki’s *Panny roztropne* seems to be, as mentioned above, construed in this indirect manner. It is easier to sense this intuitively, however, than to present direct textual evidence, supporting this interpretation. For example, is not the proparoxytonic clause in the first verse an iconic sign of the emotional agitation of the “I” speaking? As already noted, such interpretations met with resistance in the past – we remember Pszczołowska’s critical remarks on “hypersemantisation” and “semantic pathos”. I have also mentioned that semantic ascetism was more or less abandoned by the younger generations of versologists. A relatively “restrained”, in his own words, method of interpretation was selected by Witold Sadowski in his book *Wiersz wolny jako wiersz graficzny* [*The free verse poem as a graphic poem*] (2004). In the chapter *Semantyka w wierszu wolnym* [*Semantics in the free verse poem*] he defended Grzegorz Gazda’s and Jacek Łukasiewicz’s “very bold” interpretations against the charges of hypersemantisation, by claiming:

³⁴Lucylla Pszczołowska, *Wiersz polski. Zarys historyczny* [*The Polish poem. A historical sketch*] (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 2001), 390.

³⁵Cf. Janusz Sławiński, ‘Semantyka wypowiedzi narracyjnej [Semantics of a narrative]’, in *Dzieło – język – tradycja* [*Work – language – tradition*] (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), 114.

³⁶Janusz Sławiński, ‘O kategorii podmiotu lirycznego [On the category of the lyrical “I”]’, in *Dzieło – język – tradycja* [*Work – language – tradition*] (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), 71.

In both interpretations the semantics assigned to the graphic structure was reinforced by the semantics of the text, and Gazda stated clearly that “the graphic structure reinforces the contents of the text”, rather than builds its meanings from scratch. The poem’s graphic form belonged to a general semantic direction, whereas adopted research methods did not discover its semantic autonomy³⁷.

Cautious conclusions of the versologist from Warsaw, afforded the interpreters considerable wiggle room:

The meaning of the graphic structure of individual verses can thus be deduced on the basis of their lexical context. One can assume that every line, in a sense, “will spill the beans” about its semantic motivation (...) Of course, we will not find answers to questions concerning specific meanings of each verse, but we will know which semantic circles are allowed by the text (...) As for versification, one cannot be entirely successful here, because versification is not equivalent to the lexical layer. Graphic structure of the text cannot become a total substitute for words; it cannot encroach upon syntactic positions and implement the inflectional paradigm. What it can do, undoubtedly, is have a semantic impact within the limits of understatement or indeterminacy, which opens up the context³⁸.

Following that mild interpretative optimism was Sadowski’s “overview of interpretative capabilities of a free verse poem”³⁹, based on a corpus of seven and a half thousand verses, both individual lines and longer compositions. This modestly entitled “overview” is, in fact, an attempt at creating a paradigm of verse graphics’ semantic potential. This is an impressive attempt, and an encouragement to create similar “lexicons” (they are not really stable, dictionary entries; rather - associations) for other poetic devices and versification systems. It remains to be seen, however, how useful this would be for the interpretation of other works; after all, the ultimate criterion is always the lexical context. For example, if Różycki had decided to follow a stanzaic division in his *Panny nieroztropne*, the second division would fall just before the verse “The house is so empty/ that it is not at home”. In addition, the interpreter would have been able to notice that the delimitation of the third stanza visually encapsulates the “I” speaking in a quadrangle (“a room, a cupboard, a box, a chapter”). The space between the first and second stanzas would not have had such meanings, however, and yet again - the lexical context, projecting onto the graphic form, would have governed the semantics. Does it not follow from this that the semantic potential of versification can in a way (how?) depend on some form of absorbency, an ability to adopt meanings emerging on the level of lexicon and syntax? In any case, *Panny nieroztropne* was not written in stanzaic form and yet this does not seem to be a problem for semantics.

Let us now return to versology, in which the prevalent view is that interpretation is the proper and ultimate aim of research. As proof of this prevalence, one may quote nearly ritual complaints about a lack of hermeneutic investment in (traditional) studies in poetry. “The

³⁷Witold Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny [The free verse poem as a graphic poem]* (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), 59.

³⁸Sadowski, 59–60.

³⁹Sadowski, 61.

richness of concepts about the nature of poem is in stark contrast with a meagre interest in its meaning, visible in Polish versology”, as Jan Potkański wrote in his introduction to the book *Sens nowoczesnego wiersza* [*The meaning of a modern poem*].

We do not really know the purpose of writing in verse; studies up to date have assigned semantics to selected meters or verses, but these tend to be marginal phenomena. Only some forms of the verse are semanticised, mostly by means of intertextual references (which, as a matter of fact, cannot explain the sense of the meter in the exemplar-hypotext, but only in imitation) or iconicity (like in Miłosz’s *Walc* [Waltz]). Similarly, within specific works only a few verses receive meaningful motivation in its own right – also iconic [...] or related to polysemies, generated by a double delimitation”⁴⁰.

There is no doubt that for Podkański the answer to the question concerning the purpose of writing in verse is perfectly obvious, hence the surprise: “Marginalisation of semantics in versificational analysis is, in theory, something of an oddity; it seems obvious that, being a linguistic phenomenon, a poem should first and foremost signify⁴¹”. A similar conviction is implicitly expressed by Paweł Bukowiec, who complains in *Metronom* [*The metronome*] (2015) that “too rarely are the findings and tools of versology used for the purposes for which they were created, i.e., as aids in various hermeneutics of versed literary works⁴²”. Adam Dziadek, in turn, says definitively that “when disconnected from interpretation, analyses of meters or just versification systems (...) are simply boring and cognitively useless”⁴³.

Semantics governs ways of thinking about the poem, without leaving much room for other types of explanations; from a pansemantic perspective one can only see that a poem means or is supposed to mean something. The latter concerns an area problematic for modern versology, i.e., numerical poetry (even though it is the free verse poem that remains the official theoretical challenge). A more or less open dislike for regular numericity and for meter (as opposed to rhythm) remains the common theme of many versological publications from the last quarter century. Studies on metricality also come under a lot of criticism (take Meschonnic’s remark, quoted in *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*, that metrics as a theory of rhythm was created by idiots). Apparently, the cause of this resentment (apart from the desire to support the free verse poem as an emblem of modernity and postmodernity) is the claim promoted by structuralists that strictly regular structures are semantically eroded. Sławiński called it “the paradox of order”.

When we are dealing with a verse work, governed by the principle of complete metric regularity (e.g., of the accentual-syllabic type) it seems as if the contours of words and sentences were blurred. Meanings lose their clarity, melted in a monotonous “melody”. This monotony, born out

⁴⁰Jan Potkański, *Sens nowoczesnego wiersza. Wersyfikacja Białoszewskiego, Przybosa, Miłosa i Herberta* [*The meaning of a modern poem. The versification of Białoszewski, Przyboś, Miłosz and Herbert*] (Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2004), 10.

⁴¹Potkański, 11.

⁴²Paweł Bukowiec, *Metronom. O jednostkowości poezji nazbyt metrycznej* [*The metronome. On the unitarity of ‘hyper-metric’ poetry*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2015), 31.

⁴³Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [*The Somatic Criticism Project*], 52.

of dividing the utterance into exactly equivalent parts (i.e., metrical feet, pre- and post-cesura segments, syllabic verses), “obliterates” the semantics and stylistics of the work, as it were, but also redirects our attention towards inertia, showing no necessary resistance. A well-organised metric structure (there are plenty examples of it in Polish post-Romantic poetry) not only blurs all verse-external information, but by aligning with the reader’s “pattern of expectations” and eliminating the element of surprise, its structure becomes itself invisible, thus losing its poetic value⁴⁴.

In order to prevent this loss of informativeness, the scholar explained, the poem has to “play both sides”, as it were:

Towards codification and its contradiction. Deviation from the norm as important as norm confirmation. A norm does not become a norm until it is questioned. The symmetry of parallelisms becomes conspicuous when confronted with the asymmetry of disturbances. The contiguity of signs is discernible against the background of their mutual rebuttal, and vice versa. Metrical structure, as Siedlecki wrote, demands confirmation by means of “meter break”. This pattern is made visible in its variations. (...) The most important thing is the tension between rigour and freedom; a tension which releases *conspicuous elements* in the text, centers of determination – poetic information. On the reader’s side an equivalent to this tension is the dynamics of “expectations” and “fulfillments”⁴⁵.

The primacy of semantics in studies on poetry validates those types of versification which support “freedom”, i.e., the free verse poem and – in the case of a numeric poem – forms which are “variations on” rather than implementations of patterns, abounding in “expressive spaces”, “heterodoxies”, “disturbances”, “meter breaks”, which trigger “disappointed expectations”. Two examples of a versological description based on such preferences can be found in *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*. The first one concerns the works of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki: “These poems do not want to be arranged in sonnets; they do not want to, and they cannot be arranged into conventionalised forms”⁴⁶. The other quote is a fragment describing the poetry of Edward Pasewicz:

Pasewicz has no problem doing without a regular meter; the regularity of numbers is totally unnecessary here. Numbers hunt for meaning, as Meschonnic rightly puts it; they also hunt for the subject, the discourse and their history. This hunt usually ends with entrapment and limitation; with obscuring the subject, simplifying the rhythm and blurring uniqueness⁴⁷.

If informativeness is taken to be the most important function of a poem, then of course, the regularity of meter is nothing desirable. Accepting, even if for a moment, the opposite perspective, in which the poem has primacy over semantics – “Rhythm first, words second”, as Leśmian put it – removes this certainty. Then comes the suspicion that perhaps the fading out of semantics – which happens not only in the copycat post-Romantic poetry – is in the poem’s own interest.

⁴⁴Sławiński, ‘Wokół teorii języka poetyckiego [On a theory of poetic language]’, 87–88.

⁴⁵Sławiński, 88.

⁴⁶Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [*The Somatic Criticism Project*], 97.

⁴⁷Dziadek, 133.

This is a recurrent theme in structuralist publications, even if only mentioned in passing or featuring in attempts at theorising about phenomena not well-understood, like the “paradox of order”, noticed by Sławiński. I have already mentioned asemantic ingredients of versification, to which Pszczołowska assigned a purely aesthetic function⁴⁸. Sławiński went even further, taking the whole “model of a metrical order” as an “extreme example of utterance codification; a pattern of verbal communication, whose “unnecessary” structure pushes it to the extremity of poeticity”⁴⁹. Following from this, one could assume that non-metric structures are removed from that extremity, even though they gravitate to it. Poeticity, as noticed by the author of *Wokół teorii języka poetyckiego*, “seems to lead to a reification of the message; to limiting its role as a carrier of experiences, things or commands and emphasising its role as a new “thing”, whose existence would be an aim in itself”⁵⁰.

The word “seems” reflects Sławiński’s hesitation: he was not entirely sure if poetic over-organisation frees the utterance from its semantic obligations or perhaps helps to meet those obligations by preventing information dispersal. Sławiński did emphasise that the “limiting its role as a carrier” can be only mentioned “in categories of aspirations rather than actual situations”, but then – as we remember – he actually did introduce a real situation, referring to the experiences of readers of a metrically regular poem and claiming that in such a work “meanings lose their clarity, melted in a monotonous melody”. One can try to resolve these contradictions by accepting the fact that too much order is a threat to semantics (and poetics itself, which is “information” too). But how much is too much? Is Staff’s *Deszcz Jesienny* [*Autumn rain*] too metric or is it still a poem, which, as Sławiński put it, “works both ways”, maintaining “tension between rigour and freedom”? To return to our leading example: do the versification irregularities of Różycki’s *Panny nieroztropne* situate this poem on the (semantically) safe side of poetic over-organisation? Or maybe, especially when read against the background of contemporary free verse poems, a thirteen-verse sonnet “obliterates” (I repeat Sławiński’s scare quotes) its meanings and begins to be “an aim in itself”?

Another moment of Sławiński’s uncertainty concerns the materiality of the message-thing. Let me recall the original wording: “(...) seems to lead to a reification” – the italics (and quotation marks in “as a new “thing”) in connection with “seems” and “peculiar” remove the literal sense of “reification”. A bit further on, referring to Tadeusz Peiper’s opposition of the naming prose and pseudonymising poetry, Sławiński wrote:

The author of *Tędy* [*This way*] was very aware of the fact that a linguistic sign, which outside of poetry – in various instances of social practices and cognition – is a carrier of information about things and experiences, in poetry becomes the main piece of information. This information concerns its relation

⁴⁸Of course, aesthetics in structuralism had a meaning distinct from the one accepted commonly in literary studies. Cf. Potkański’s remarks about traditional metric versification, whose “redundance makes one search for non-semantic causes of metricality: folk-musical (looking for pleasure in the very sound of the text) or socio-cultural (using an expressive and traditional form in order to join the current and historical community of poets, following the doctrine of imitation)”, Potkański, *Sens nowoczesnego wiersza. Wersyfikacja Białoszewskiego, Przybosa, Miłosza i Herberta* [*The meaning of a modern poem. The versification of Białoszewski, Przyboś, Miłosz and Herbert*], 11.

⁴⁹Sławiński, ‘Wokół teorii języka poetyckiego [On a theory of poetic language]’, 87.

⁵⁰Sławiński, 80.

to other signs. (...) Poetic pseudonym is a sign of its own structure. It is checked only with reference to itself. To be precise, it has a tendency to turn into a non-semiotic category, because it loses the “transparency” proper to signs; it becomes “impenetrable”, like all things are. It is noteworthy that a similar conclusion was reached by Irzykowski - the fiercest opponent of the avant garde – when he wrote in a posthumously published essay *Materia poetica*: » Words [in poetry] are not just the message but the thing itself«⁵¹.

Sławiński creatively betrayed the original sense of Irzykowski’s words (*materia poetica* was for the critic not, as one might suppose, the linguistic material of poetry but a material of ideas, provided by literature⁵²), but himself did not seem to treat literally the reification of a poetically organised message. The key issue was, after all, Peiper’s pseudonym, i.e., replacing one elocution with another (poetic sign for dictionary sign). The pseudonym becomes “impenetrable” like an object, when poetic over-organisation makes it so conspicuous that it obscures the proper, non-poetic name, which it is supposed to replace, and by doing so it hides the thing itself. “Iteration” occurs to a bigger or lesser degree, depending on the intensity of poetic power: there are works which are almost “transparent” semantically or those, like Peiper’s *Noga* [*The leg*] which at first glance seems to be a nonsensical collection of words. The loss of naming ability is compensated by the reinforcement of interlexical relations (connotation displaces denotation). This is my understanding of the statement that poetic sign-pseudonym “has a tendency to transform into a non-semiotic category”. If one were to apply this line of reasoning to the structure of a poem, it would appear that the more unified the prosodic structure (the density of the meter framework etc. is the equivalent of connotational relations between words in a poetic pseudonym), the greater the loss of linguistic functionality of prosody (the ability of stress to emphasise words and intonation – to delimit and logically divide sentences). This is the source of the phenomenon described by Sławiński as a melting of meanings in the melody of a regularly metric poem. In this context the scholar’s questioning of the poetic materiality of “things” is no longer valid: metrical regularity literally “reifies” the poetic text and deprives it of its sign-value (even though this phenomenon is gradable and rarely reaches its extreme version). On the other hand, rhythm – a phenomenon typically affiliated with poems – is somewhere between the literal and non-literal reification: rhyming exposes the sound-based materiality of words, but also reinforces their connotational potential.

Finally, the third question is this: is “reification” something beneficial? Sławiński claims it depends on whether the “thing” maintains any sign potential. The “impenetrability” of a poetic pseudonym is not questionable (the game of connotations intensifies through a metaphor, even though the ability of naming is suspended to some degree) but a regular accentual-syllabic verse – which is supposed to be a prosody devoid of semantic function, a mere melody – is depicted somewhat unfavourably (and with much exaggeration). This perspective is a consequence of the assumption that a poetic work is a special kind of message; a linguistic piece

⁵¹Sławiński, 83.

⁵²Writing that words are the thing itself, Irzykowski meant that they “trigger an appropriate emotion”: “Lyrics teaches us, e.g., how we are supposed to love – our lover, our motherland, our mother – and verbalises that state for us (...) let us describe it with a trivial comparison: not so much prescription but medicine, the pharmacy. (Karol Irzykowski, ‘Materia poetica’, in *Alchemia ciała i inne szkice oraz aforyzmy* [*The alchemy of body and other sketches and aphorisms*], ed. Wojciech Głowala [Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Wrocławskiej Polonistyki, 1996], 146).

of information, and nothing more. So then if its communicativeness is somehow limited, this cannot be a positive thing. It is probably for this reason that Gumbrecht believes that talking about “production of meaning” and “production of presence” requires two separate concepts of sign. This does not seem so obvious to me; I have just pointed to a continuum of “reification”, extending from a semantic thing-clue to a thing-formed (prosodic and graphic) substance. On the other hand, perceiving the poetic “thing” as an imperfect linguistic sign causes difficulty in noticing its non-linguistic potential.

It causes difficulty, but does not make it impossible, as evidenced by the research of versologist Teresa Dobrzyńska on poetic ways of arresting time. Her analysis of versification patterns, based on reiteration, led to the following conclusions:

It is possible to say that the very principle of repeating elements, compiling similarly built rows – which are related, yet different – has consequences for the temporal structure of the work. The text develops in time, expanding and acquiring new pieces of information, but at the same time it keeps coming back, taking the roads already travelled, repeating the same structural elements. This is well exemplified by metrical structures, which organise long texts and, through recurrent returns, they are updated from the beginning to the end of the work or in large fragments.

So, then the principle of parallelism introduces periodic repetition to the text, resulting in a paradoxical fusion of linearity and circularity. As a consequence, the text can be used both as a sign replaying the consecutivity of time, and as an exponent of cyclicity. Returns to the starting point and reiteration of the road already travelled lead to a “loop”, turning a linear movement into rotational one⁵³.

Dobrzyńska’s model is not dissimilar to Gumbrecht’s conception, who in his essay: *How to Approach “Poetry as a Mode of Attention?”* (2015) expressed a very similar idea:

The mediation of this seeming contradiction between movement (as property of time objects) and the stability of form comes with reiteration. If the expanding and contracting movements of the circle, after a certain time, come back to perform and repeat the same sequence of movements that they originally went through over and over again, then we will say that this movement has a “rhythm”, and through its reiteration the – moving – circle recuperates an identity that we can call the identity of a “dynamic form.” Such reiteration, however, breaks and freezes the irreversible flux of everyday time. Now, continuing to speak metaphorically, we can say that the flux of time interrupted and frozen does function like a zone, more precisely like a window, through which moments and things from the past (and in principle also from the future) can become present and as if “tangible” for us. This mechanism explains why charms, brief texts that are used to conjure up things and situations from the past, are almost exclusively cast in prosodic (rhythmic) language. For such language interrupts the progression of everyday time and makes it possible for objects and phenomena from the past (and the future) to come into the present⁵⁴.

⁵³Teresa Dobrzyńska, *Tekst poetycki i jego konteksty. Zbiór studiów [The poetic text and its contexts. A collection of studies]* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2015), 89.

⁵⁴Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, ‘How to Approach “Poetry as a Mode of Attention?”’, trans. Joanna Krajewska, *Forum Poetyki*, no. winter (2016): 46, quoted in the original version of this paper from J. Krajewska’s translation.

Gumbrecht's example of a "dynamic form" (i.e., one which develops in time – here, as a contracting and expanding circle) shows that the arresting of time does not require the participation of semantics at all; it only happens thanks to sequential reiterations (the rhythm). The same mechanism operates in a poem; surely, more so in a free verse poem than in a regular metric form (but even the latter involves some form of reiteration, like the visual rhythm of subsequent lines). This is then the function of poetic reiterations; even the ones which seem to be "a goal in itself", as Sławiński put it, or those which are asemantic and aesthetic, as Pszczołowska wanted. Creating a "zone" of frozen time, i.e., a time loop (in Dobrzyńska's metaphor) or a "window" (according to Gumbrecht). Freezing the time in the course of a poem-thing allows the verse substance to make its presence here and now. This requires a recreation of the poem, so then entering into a direct (sensual, somatic) contact with its sound and record and recognising its iterativity – the more the better. This need not be metrical reiteration; syntactic parallelisms or phonic devices also perform this function. I suspect that metaphor and other semantic tropes, which the structuralist theory of poetic language also treats as equivalence devices, function in a similar manner, even though their substantive "iteration" can be less perceptible.

If this replaying is accompanied by "reading" (e.g., deriving the lyrical mood from the rhythm of the poem), it is then limited (as the author of *Production of presence* says, following Karl Heinz Bohrer) to something analogous to reading facial expressions⁵⁵ and occurs by way of following the dynamics of the verse's movements forward and its returns. As we remember, an intense contact with the poetic substance does not teach us anything but reminds us of what it is like to "be in one rhythm with things in the world" (a poem can be such a thing). In his essay on "poetry as a mode of attention" Gumbrecht describes this synchronisation as Luhmann's "unproductive coupling" (as opposed to second order couplings, which are "productive", as they lead to an increase of knowledge in societies) and brings it down to the coordination between the body of the recipient and the rhythm of a poem⁵⁶. It lasts as long as the interpreter's consciousness is not activated. In my reading of *Panny nieroztropne* this moment of initiating "the production of sense" occurs, for example, when I realise I do not really know what "Wiatr w środku powieści" ("The wind in the middle of a novel") means: it can be the middle of a novel or the middle of a book – the latter in the literal sense, between the pages or metaphorically, in the narrative setting. When I stop to consider this multiplicity of meanings, I no longer follow the rhythm of the poem and its substance appears to be pulling back from me.

The question remains; how can the reification of the verse substance initiate the agency of poetry (Gumbrecht is quite serious about listing poetry alongside prayers and magic incantations), so that "moments and things from the past (and in principle also from the future) can become present and "as if tangible" for us"? According to the author of *Production of presence* this is predicated on the affinity of rhythm and imagination: they are both substantive, which is why they are closer to the body than concepts. Rhythmical reiterations operate regressively;

⁵⁵Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey*, 78.

⁵⁶This coordinative corporeality is studied in Adam Dziadek's *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*, already mentioned here. His concept is in many ways close to a presence-oriented versology.

they uphold the substantiality of the utterance, which is why they prevent the conceptualisation of poetry. As far as contents are concerned, poetry remains close to somatic-sensual imagination⁵⁷ (it was Shklovsky's idea that the "defamiliarisation", i.e., de-automation of form and approach to the subject is a way "to make one feel things, to make the stone stony"). Gumbrecht believes that this is where the impression of poetic intensity comes from.

Is it possible to describe this intensity with the language of versology? It is not easy to answer this question. Thanks to the versological apparatus, developed by generations of scholars, it is possible to hear and see many things in a poem, so it is worth returning to it and improving it. This means that there is still demand for theoretical and historical studies on the poem, including the semantics of verse forms, and graphic forms, which Sadowski postulated. Such studies should be complemented (as is they already are) by systematic investigations into the performative potential of the poem (cf. Piotr Bogalecki's inspiring book on "poems-as-scores"⁵⁸). One need not be concerned about the development of idiographic-interpretative versology as long as the hermeneutic approach dominates in the humanities. Such works, albeit of varied quality (it seems that they benefit from self-imposed rigour), have been and will continue to be published. It would be, however, a good thing if these were counterbalanced with studies oriented towards the "substantive", aesthetic, presence-oriented aspect of the poem. Still awaiting recognition is Lucy Alford's brilliant monograph on poetic attention⁵⁹, (it was announced by Gumbrecht in his article tackling that very problem). The typology of transitive (and intransitive) forms of attention can potentially fill the conceptual gap for something that could in the future exist as the poetics of presence.

On the other hand, one cannot forget that conceptualisation always removes us from presence phenomena: as the poet had it – it changes fire into ashes. It is inevitable. One *can*, however (and this is what Gumbrecht encourages us to in his *Production of presence*) limit the "loquacity of literary discourse and be quiet for a moment". One reason for this silence could be so that the beautiful 13-syllable phrase concluding *Panny nieroztropne* (*Jak papierowy lam-pion, z którego zwiął płomyk* ('Like a paper lantern, whose flicker has been blown away') does not become a commentary on our clumsy versological activities but can be uttered and, as Gumbrecht says, make its presence, occupy a spot in space, touch us from within⁶⁰.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

⁵⁷Gumbrecht, 'How to Approach "Poetry as a Mode of Attention?", 49.

⁵⁸See. Piotr Bogalecki, *Wiersze-partytury w poezji polskiej neoawangardy. Białoszewski – Czycz – Drahan – Grześczak – Partum – Wirpsza* [*Poems-scores in the poetry of Polish neo-avant-garde. Białoszewski – Czycz – Drahan – Grześczak – Partum – Wirpsza*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020).

⁵⁹Lucy Alford, *Forms of Poetic Attention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁶⁰The words on touching from within are Gumbrecht's paraphrase of a quote from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

The article is a proposal for opening verse studies to the problem of presence, on the basis of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's project of a nonhermeneutic humanities. The author presents the limitations of a semantically oriented versology, simultaneously pointing to the possibility of a continuation of formal-structural tradition of studies on verse, following non-semantic threads in the works of Polish theorists: Janusz Sławiński, Lucylla Pszczołowska i Teresa Dobrzyńska. Tomasz Różycki's poem *Panny nieroztropne* [*Foolish virgins*] become an exemplum for the ensuing considerations, while two intuitions of contemporary poets inspire theoretical considerations. One is Eugenio Montale's perverse thesis on the hopeless semanticity of poetry and Adam Zagajewski's Nietzschean claim that versologists take care of fire rather than ashes, i.e., investigate living, aesthetically influential verse forms.

EUGENIO MONTALE

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

RHYTHM

verse semantics

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Małgorzata Gorczyńska – (1977) literary theorist, specialising in Polish and Bohemian studies, assistant professor in the School of Polish Philology at the University of Wrocław. She teaches poetics of verse and creative poetry writing. She is the author of *Miejsca Leśmiana. Topika recepcji krytycznoliterackiej* (2011) [*Leśmian's places. Topics in critical literary receptions*] and project member in Witold Sadowski's *Wiersz litanijny w kulturze regionów Europy* [The litany in cultures of European regions]; she publishes in Polish and international journals (e.g., "Pamiętnik Literacki", "Česká literatura"). Her recent scholarly interests focus on the aesthetics of a poetic work, considered from the nonhermeneutic perspective of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. She is currently working on a book devoted to the dynamics of poetic forms in the works of Tomasz Różycki and translating Lucy Alford's monograph *Forms of Poetic Attention*. |

Verse and Poem as Street Art. On Rafał Wojaczek's *Sezon* [*The Season*]

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On May 14th, 2021, at the Planty Park in Mikołów one was able to witness the opening of the art installation "Wojaczek's stairs" by Robert Gilarski. The work features a poem by Rafał Wojaczek, whose verses were written on the steps of a stairway¹. This unusual, artistic event commemorated the 50th anniversary of the poet's death and was inspired by the Rafał Wojaczek Institute in Mikołów, Wojaczek's hometown, where he spent many years of his life². Maciej Melecki, head of the Institute, chose the poem *Sezon* [*The Season*] to feature in this street art visualisation. The poem opened Wojaczek's first book of poetry and was the first among his works published in a book edition³. Ever since it was first published, *Sezon* has attracted both critics' and scholars' attention, encouraging new interpretations. It has been referenced in a number of articles and essays; it would therefore seem like an obvious choice for an art installation, although other factors may have played a role too. *Sezon* opens with the words

¹ Photos from the opening of Robert Gilarski's "Wojaczek's stairs" installation can be seen in the gallery on the website of Rafał Wojaczek Institute in Mikołów at www.institutmikolowski.pl: <http://www.institutmikolowski.pl/galeria-institutu#gallery-649699-13> Apart from "Wojaczek's stairs" also a mural of Wojaczek, likewise authored by Robert Gilarski was revealed: <http://www.institutmikolowski.pl/galeria-institutu#gallery-716510-10>

² A number of facts related to the Mikołajów period of Wojaczek's life are referenced in Konrad Wojtyła's "Biografia Wojaczka i śląski genius loci" [*Wojaczek's biography and the Silesian genius loci*], in: *Anty-antychryst? Wojaczek religijny* [*Anti-Antichrist? The religious Wojaczek*] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2021), 65-103.

³ Wojaczek's *Sezon* was first published in February 1966 in the monthly "Odra". Its text varies slightly from the version published in his book of poetry. In a copy of "Odra" which belonged to Wojaczek, underneath the poem there is a handwritten date of the poem's creation: "April 1965". I would like to thank Maciej Melecki for granting me access to source materials.



Photo 1. Installation of “Wojaczek’s stairs” by Robert Gilarski. Author’s private photo.

“Jest poręcz / ale nie ma schodów”⁴ (*There is a handrail/ but there are no stairs*). Written on a well-maintained, broad stone staircase, equipped with two sturdy handrails, this message collides with a passerby’s perception. It appears to be absurd, yet intriguing, drawing the reader into a game of meanings. A leisurely climb up the stairs becomes a journey through the text; a pilgrimage to its subsequent verses. Does this reading of urban spaces hide a return to the original idea of writing, as mentioned by Derrida⁵?

The poem, typographically inscribed onto the stairs in Mikołów, opened Wojaczek’s debut book of poems entitled *Sezon*, published by Wydawnictwo Literackie in Cracow in 1969. The same work opens an entire cycle entitled *Martwy sezon* [A dead season]. Wojaczek wrote *Sezon* as a free verse poem⁶ along the lines of Różewicz, which evoke, as Sławiński would have it, a rhetoric of helplessness. This form of the poem, deliberately chosen by the poet from Mikołów, determines its semantics.

⁴ Rafał Wojaczek, “Sezon”, in *Wiersze*, wybrał i posłowiem opatrzył Tadeusz Pióro (Warszawa: PIW, 2004), 41. [Poems. Selected by Tadeusz Pióro, with his afterword] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PIW, 2004), 9. All quotations have been taken from this edition.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *O gramatologii* [On grammarology], transl. Bogdan Banasiak (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Officyna, 2011), 359-374

⁶ It is worth emphasising that free verse poems are not particularly common in Wojaczek’s works. As pointed out by Romuald Cudak, the dominant type of verse in his poetry the regular stanzaic poem. See: Romuald Cudak, “Studium o wierszu Rafała Wojaczka” [A study on Rafał Wojaczek’s poem], in: *Inne bajki. W kręgu liryki Rafała Wojaczka* [Other fairy tales. In the circle of Rafał Wojaczek’s lyric poetry] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004), 136-182.

Jest poręcz
ale nie ma schodów
Jest ja
ale mnie nie ma
Jest zimno
ale nie ma ciepłych skór zwierząt
niedźwiedzich futer lisich kit

Od czasu kiedy jest mokro
jest bardzo mokro
ja kocha mokro
na placu, bez parasola

Jest ciemno
jest ciemno jak najciemniej
mnie nie ma

Nie ma spać
Nie ma oddychać
Życ nie ma

Tylko drzewa się ruszają
niepospolite ruszenie drzew

rodzą czarnego kota
który przebiega wszystkie drogi

The following is a literal translation from Polish:

There is a handrail
but there are no stairs
there is I
but there is no me
There is cold
But there are no warm skins of animals
bear furs fox tails

Ever since it's been wet
It's been very wet
I loves the wet
in the square, without an umbrella

It is dark
it is dark, as dark as possible
there is no me

there is no to sleep
there is no to breathe
there is no to live

Only the trees are moving
a mass-less mobilisation of trees
they give birth to a black cat
which runs across all roads

In a 2011 paper outlining the scope of the poetic work of the author of *Którego nie było* [*The one that was not*], Grzegorz Pertek emphasised the significance of *Sezon*:

The words of Rafał Wojaczek's *Sezon* are definitely one of the most recognisable poetic formulae, created by the author of *Inna bajka* [*A different fairy tale*]. The words "There is I / but there is no me" summarize an identity crisis, experienced by the "lyrical I". One can discern this theme in between the lines of all of the works of the Wrocław poet⁷.

Sezon is testimony to the break-up of personality, a sense of disintegration, alienation and non-identity. It grows out of fear, loneliness, and a conviction that, as Barańczak wrote "one's own existence appears to be uncertain"⁸. As indicated by Paweł Dybel, "in abandoning the unlivable world, a world which leaves him helpless [the poet] finds a new beginning" - the refuge of his own poetry⁹.

Jacek Łukasiewicz pointed to the dissociation between the "I" of life and the "I" of poetry, present in Wojaczek's work. He explained this phenomenon in the following manner:

"He [Wojaczek] was primarily interested in the ontology of the lyrical subject, which he took to be the subject of all his poems, of the entirety of his works. He did not intend for the subject to be a role (...) or a mask, from behind which the real Wojaczek would speak (...) Rather, it was supposed to become an alter ego, the other, better "I" - created on purpose."¹⁰

⁷ Grzegorz Pertek, "«Jest ja, ale mnie nie ma» – granica poetyckiego szaleństwa Rafała Wojaczka", [*There is I but there is no me' – the limit of Rafał Wojaczek's poetic madness*], *Przestrzenie Teorii*, issue 16 (2011): 205.

⁸ Stanisław Barańczak, "Rafał Wojaczek. Metafizyka zagrożenia" [*Rafał Wojaczek. The metaphysics of danger*], in: *Który jest. Rafał Wojaczek w oczach przyjaciół, krytyków i badaczy* [*The one that is. Rafał Wojaczek in the eyes of friends, critics and scholars*] (Katowice-Mikołów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Instytut Mikołowski, 2001), 100.

⁹ Paweł Dybel, *Ziemscy, słowni, cielesni. Eseje o polskich poetach współczesnych*. [*Earthly, verbal, corporeal. Essays on Polish contemporary poets.*] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2019), 364.

¹⁰ Jacek Łukasiewicz, "Liryka Rafała Wojaczka" [*Rafał Wojaczek's lyric poetry*], in: *Który jest. Rafał Wojaczek w oczach przyjaciół, krytyków i badaczy* (Katowice-Mikołów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Instytut Mikołowski, 2001), 162.

¹⁴ Andrzej Niewiadomski, "Wojaczek: nieuchwytna cielesność, nieuchwytnie ciało poezji" ["Wojaczek: the elusive carnality, the elusive body of poetry"], *Kresy*, issue 4 (2007): 75.

reality of the world and one's own identity and making the poetic work the only possible space for an authentic and autonomous existence¹⁵. In *Sezon* "the break between 'I' and 'me', which is the core of all awareness, reveals a deep ,identity crisis, a state of estrangement from identity¹⁶".

Sezon, through its title, makes reference to the cycle *Martwy sezon*, from which the poem in question originates. Most importantly, however, the poem's title indicates an intertextual relationship with Arthur Rimbaud's *Season in hell*. From early on, the French poet, included among *poètes maudits*, was viewed as Wojacek's literary patron¹⁷. The author of *Nieskończona krucjata* [*Unfinished crusade*] was even dubbed "the Rimbaud of Wrocław"¹⁸. In a well-known note, published by Tymoteusz Karpowicz in 1965 in *Poezja* [*Poetry*], he wrote that "Wojacek's poems and the atmosphere in which they are born are reminiscent of Rimbaud¹⁹". Likewise, in his introduction to Wojacek's *Utwory zebrane* [*Collected works*] he wrote:

"As for specific, literary affinities, the choice of Rimbaud as a poetic patron and *façon d'être* was an obvious choice. Wojacek's *Sezon* makes a conscious reference to *Une Saison en enfer* (...) While Rimbaud has his season in hell (...) Wojacek has his season from a place on Earth²⁰."

Jan Błoński noticed "a truly terrifying mood" in Wojacek's poetry, pondering "a desperate account of internal experiences²¹". Referring to *Sezon*, he pointed to the "estrangement, experienced at the most corporal, most deeply personal level²²". He recalled Rimbaud's famous line from his letter to George Izambard: "I is somebody else" (*JE est un autre*²³). It is worth quoting a longer fragment from that letter: "It is wrong to say 'I think'. One should be saying 'I am being thought.' Pardon my wordplay. I is the other²⁴".

¹⁵Tomasz Kunz, "Więcej niż słowa. «Nie skończona krucjata» Rafała Wojaczka", ["More than words. Rafał Wojacek's '<<Unfinished crusade>>'"], in: *Interpretować dalej. Najważniejsze polskie książki poetyckie lat 1945-1989*, [To go on interpreting. The most important Polish poetic books of 1945-1989], ed. by Anna Kałuża, Alina Świeściak (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2011), 288.

¹⁶Tomasz Kunz, "Liryka Rafała Wojaczka: przemiany podmiotu poetyckiego" ["Rafał Wojacek's lyric poetry: transformations of the poetic subject"], in: *Który jest. Rafał Wojacek w oczach przyjaciół, krytyków i badaczy* (Katowice-Mikołów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Instytut Mikołowski, 2001), 222.

¹⁷Wojacek wrote a poem (not published in his lifetime) *Rimbaud*, which begins from "I had a dream about Rimbaud". Cf. Rafał Wojacek, "Rimbaud", w *Reszta krwi* [*The remainder of blood*], ed. by Maciej Melecki (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 1999), 37.

¹⁸Cudak, *Inne bajki. W kręgu liryki Rafała Wojaczka*, 30.

¹⁹Tymoteusz Karpowicz, "Debiuty. Rafał Wojacek" ["Debuts. Rafał Wojacek"], *Poezja*, issue 1 (1965): 65.

²⁰Tymoteusz Karpowicz, "Sezon na ziemi" ["Season on Earth"], in *Który jest. Rafał Wojacek w oczach przyjaciół, krytyków i badaczy* (Katowice-Mikołów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Instytut Mikołowski, 2001), 131, 135.

²¹Jan Błoński, "Inne lęki, inne bajki" ["Different fears, different fairytales"], in: *Który jest. Rafał Wojacek w oczach przyjaciół, krytyków i badaczy* (Katowice-Mikołów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Instytut Mikołowski, 2001), 87.

²²Błoński

²³Arthur Rimbaud, "List do Jerzego Izambarda, Charleville, 13 maja 1871 r." ["A letter to Georges Izambard, Charleville, May 13th 1871"], transl. Julia Hartwig, Artur Międzyrżeczki, in: *Wiersze. Sezon w piekle. Iluminacje. Listy* [*Poems. A season in hell. Illuminations. Letters*], selected and edited by Artur Międzyrżeczki, with his afterword (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1993), 301.

²⁴Rimbaud.

Jean-Pierre Richard interpreted these words in the following manner:

“For if I is the OTHER, that means that ‘I’ gave birth to that other; yet at the same time, it could not have given birth to it because the other is precisely that: the *other*; an entirely new and foreign creature. ‘I am being thought’, writes Rimbaud, but *being* is also ‘I’. This thought is still mine and it is more mine than it has ever been. This is the paradox of the new *cogito* - I am being thought therefore I become - this is the key to Rimbaud’s adventure²⁵.”

This tragic and paradoxical sense of non-identity and split was shared by Rimbaud and Wojacek. The latter would eventually write “There is ‘I’/ but there is no ‘me’²⁶. Evidence of this psychological and creative state can also be found in different parts of the *Season in hell*, which was diligently studied by the author of *Sezon*. Rimbaud would write, for instance, I have no more “‘me’ in the world²⁷”, “Real life is absent. There is no us in the world²⁸”.

Season in hell is a novel type of cycle, written in poetic prose, occasionally interspersed with short, regular poems. Visionary states, reminiscences, profane impressions and memories were created in “the imagination of a deeply suffering human being”, as pointed out by Krystyna Wojtynek-Musik²⁹. It is possible that Wojacek’s *Sezon* had a similar genesis. Błoński wrote that “The syntax falls apart, because the integrating sense of personality is likewise falling apart³⁰”. This breakdown and incoherence of the “I”, balancing on the boundary of “I” and “me”, could only be rendered through a free verse poem of the Różewicz-type, still a novelty in the 1960s. From this point of view *Sezon* can be identified with a Peircean diagram.

The diagrammaticity of this type of poetry”, as explained by Zofia Mitosek, “depends on the analogy between the mood of the lyrical ‘I’ and the division of the text into verses, stanzas and the use of punctuation. One could thus say that a verse poem is an icon of relation (...), its metrical structure would then be a derivative of semantics³¹.”

Like any free verse poem, *Sezon*’s interpretation calls for considering its graphic structure³². The poem consists of six parts with differing numbers of verses, grouped 7, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2. The decreasing number of verses in subsequent strophes creates an ever-growing sense of depersonalisation, confusion, and loss of one’s sense of identity. Progressively shorter verses

²⁵Jean-Pierre Richard, *Poezja i głębia* [*Poetry and depth*], transl. by Tomasz Swoboda (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2008), 140.

²⁶The difference between Rimbaud’s “I- the other” and Wojacek’s “I and me” is analysed by Pertek in “«Jest ja, ale mnie nie ma» – granica poetyckiego szaleństwa Rafała Wojaczka”, 221-226. See also Niewiadomski, “Wojacek: nieuchwytna cielesność, nieuchwytnie ciało poezji”, 76.

²⁷Arthur Rimbaud, “Sezon w piekle” [“A season in hell”], transl. by Artur Międzyrzeczki, in: *Wiersze. Sezon w piekle. Iluminacje. Listy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1993), 169.

²⁸Rimbaud, p. 173.

²⁹Krystyna Wojtynek-Musik, *Terra rhetorica w poezji Rimbauda* [*Terra rhetorica in Rimbaud’s poetry*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), 83.

³⁰Błoński, “Inne lęki, inne bajki”, 88.

³¹Zofia Mitosek, *Mimesis. Zjawisko i problem* [*Mimesis. The phenomenon and the problem*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997), s. 39.

³²Witold Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny* [*Free verse poem as a graphic text*] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2004).

in subsequent strophes seem to be filled by a lack: a silence, triggered by a growing fear and a sense of danger, as well as - ultimately - the terror of a discovered fate. The dialectics of the subject's hesitation results from an interplay of repetitions, parallelisms and, simultaneously, their contradictions and deconstructions.

The first strophe consists of sentences listing paradoxical contradictions expressed through the pattern *jest/ ale nie ma* ('there is/ but there is not'):

There is a handrail
but there are no stairs
there is I
but there is no me
There is cold
But there are no warm skins of animals
bear furs fox tails

This parallelism of recurring structures which underscore glaring contradictions, evokes a sense of uncertainty in the reader. Confusion, introduced in the very first statement in the poem, escalates in the words *Jest ja/ ale mnie nie ma* ('There is I / but there is no me'). The entire initial strophe is indicative of a state of suspension, alienation and estrangement. The reader is left with a sense of confusion and uncertainty because the second and third strophes are structured differently; they focus on describing the experience of the "I".

Ever since it's been wet
It's been very wet
I loves the wet
in the square, without an umbrella

It is dark
it is dark, as dark as possible
there is no me

The non-identity of the speaking "I" and the poetic "I" (*ja kocha mokro* ('I loves wet'), *mnie nie ma* ('there is no me')) is clearly emphasised. The pronoun "I" - as Błoński wrote - governs the third person, as if to prove that it is possible to feel oneself as an object or, rather, that one can materialise outside of oneself³³.

The above-quoted fragment of *Sezon* has been interpreted both from psychoanalytical and biblical perspectives. Repetitions, tautologies, ostensible ungrammaticality, recurring in the language of the lyrical "I" seem to indicate an aphatic aura. For Barańczak this language was stylized on child speech - an effect achieved through a regressive, psychoanalytical motivation encroaching on the psyche of a child³⁴. That same psychoanalytical angle was picked up by Komendant, who added:

³³Błoński, "Inne lęki, inne bajki", 87.

³⁴Barańczak, "Rafał Wojaczek. Metafizyka zagrożenia", 94-96.

³⁸Mircea Eliade writes that “immersion in the waters symbolises a regression into the pre-formal, reintegration into the undifferentiated form of pre-existence [...] while immersion is equivalent to the dissolution of forms”. See Mircea Eliade, *Obrazy i symbole. Szkice o symbolice magiczno-religijnej* [Images and symbols. Studies in religious symbolism], transl. by M. and P. Rodak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia, 2009), 209-210.

then turns into an expression of a deep existential fear. Such a state is affirmed in the words “there is no me”, which conclude the strophe. These words repeat the phrase from the first part of *Sexon*. The resulting powerful coda underlines the non-existence of “me”. The coda also announces another strophe, perhaps the most tragic one from the perspective of the “I” speaking:

there is no to sleep
there is no to breathe
there is no to live

The use of infinitives solidifies the non-identity of the “I” and reaffirms the words of the subject “there is no me”. Additionally, as noted by Kunz, it brings into focus the “extremely de-personalised, impersonal character of one’s experience³⁹”. Anaphoric construction, blatantly broken down in the final verse accentuates the word *żyć* ‘to live’, if only to declare that *żyć nie ma* ‘there is no to live’. Consequently, the ever-growing sense of the state of death in life or maybe life in death is reaffirmed. In yet another poem from the poetry book *Sezon* Wojaczek writes: “Through dreams, through you/ I carry myself/ to your death⁴⁰”.

Two final couplets of *Sezon* contain an intertextual reference to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

Only the trees are moving
an un-mass mobilisation of trees
they give birth to a black cat
which runs across all roads

Macbeth opens with a scene featuring three Witches, who will be the perpetrators of misfortunes to come. One of them is accompanied by a cat⁴¹ (“I come, graymalkin!”, she says to the animal). The Witches are mediators between the world of darkness and magic and the world on Earth. They are the messengers of Hekate, making sure that Macbeth’s fate is fulfilled⁴². His death was announced by the Birnam wood, approaching the walls of the Dunsinane castle (The messenger declared: “the wood began to move⁴³”). Macbeth’s destiny, marked by Fate, had to be fulfilled.

In Wojaczek’s *Sezon* the fact that “I” is “in the square” on a rainy night allows it to glimpse the portents of a tragic future. The subject’s words: “the trees are moving”, “an un-mass mobilisation of trees” and the sight of the “black cat”, which is related to darkness and death⁴⁴, and a symbol of misfortunes, becomes, like Macbeth’s tragedy, a symbol of the poet’s misfortune

³⁹Kunz, “Więcej niż słowa. «Nie skończona krucjata» Rafała Wojaczka”, 289.

⁴⁰Rafał Wojaczek, “Umiem być ciszą” [“I know how to be silence”], in: *Wiersze*, wybrał i posłowiem opatrzył Tadeusz Pióro (Warszawa: PIW, 2004), 41.

⁴¹William Shakespeare, *The tragedy of Macbeth* (1632).

⁴²In the presence of the Weird Sisters and Hecate the Third Apparition foretells Macbeth’s fate: “Be lion-mettled [...] until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against [you]”; see Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 4, scene 1.

⁴³Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, scene 5

⁴⁴Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *Słownik symboli [A dictionary of symbols]*, transl. by Ireneusz Kania (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2000), 199-200.

and doom. The tragic fate and the approaching death are, in “I”’s premonition, its destiny. In addition, the black cat “runs across all roads”, emphasising the inevitability of that existential state. “My fate has been sealed” - wrote Wojacek in his early *Poemat* [*Poem*], dated to 1964⁴⁵. The poet, as noticed by Wojtyła, “who cannot escape his destiny, makes life unlivable⁴⁶”. His awareness of a tragic future, written into his debut book of poetry, accompanied Wojacek for the rest of his life. The collection *Którego nie było* contains the following couplet:

Musi być ktoś, kogo nie znam, ale kto zawładnął
Mną, moim życiem, śmiercią; tą kartką⁴⁷

There must be someone I haven’t met but who governs
Me, my life, death, this piece of paper

Macbeth might well utter these words at the end of Shakespeare’s play.

Cudak writes that “poetic imagination of *Sezon*’s author is first and foremost a linguistic imagination, for which the world exists not through objects but through semantic events⁴⁸ symbolising these objects.” This is the case with the poem *Sezon*, in which reality, envisaged as a square with trees, is a reference to intertextual meanings, which reveal the psychosphere of the lyrical “I”. What will happen when the poem in its installation form is read from the stairs in a park, in the company of cats running around? How does the perception of Wojacek’s text change in the Planty Park of Mikołów?

In the installation, the verses of *Sezon* were written on the stairs in the park. One can read subsequent verses while climbing the stairs⁴⁹. The graphic form, initially created by Wojacek and printed on the page of his book of poetry was thus transposed onto the landscape, onto stairs which can be ascended. Each verse is now a step, a bulge in the terrain. This reveals the relationship between the poem and the original meaning of ‘writing’. The verse - ‘versus’ - is a Latin word. For centuries the word ‘verse’ referred both to the line of the text and the entire poem⁵⁰. In 1912 Kazimierz Wójcicki, writing about poems, actually meant verses (“the medial

⁴⁵Rafał Wojacek, “Poemat” [“A poem”], *Nie te czasy. Utwory nieznanne* [Different times. Unknown works] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2016), 7. Specific interpretation of Wojacek’s *Poemat* was proposed by Konrad Wojtyła, “«Wyrok na mnie już zapadł»”, [“My fate has been sealed”] in: *Anty-antychryst? Wojacek religijny*, 260-292.

⁴⁶Konrad Wojtyła, *Anty-antychryst? Wojacek religijny*, 231.

⁴⁷Rafał Wojacek, “Musi być ktoś” [“There must be someone”], in: *Wiersze, wybrał i posłowiem opatrzył Tadeusz Pióro* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PIW, 2004), 262.

⁴⁸Cudak, *Inne bajki. W kręgu liryki Rafała Wojaczka*, 82.

⁴⁹Topographic inscription of Wojacek’s *Sezon* on the stairs of the park in Mikołów should not be linked with the formal-graphic concept of “step-like” poems (e.g. Mayakovsky’s), which break up verses into a few graphic lines, written on different levels. Wojacek’s poem in the installation recreates the layout of the printed form, which does not feature a “step-like” break of the verse. On this “step-like” versification see Lucylla Pszczółowska, “Wers” [“Verse”], in *Wiersz. Podstawowe kategorie opisu. Cz. 1. Rytmika* [The poem. Basic descriptive categories. Part 1: Rhythmics], ed. by Jerzy Woronczak (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo PAN, 1963), 84-85; Witold Sadowski, “Schodki” [“Step-like verses”], in: *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2004), 148-151.

⁵⁰Wioletta Bojda, Aleksander Nawarecki, “Wiersz” [“Poem”], in: *Ilustrowany słownik terminów literackich. Historia, anegdota, etymologia* [An illustrated dictionary of literary terms. History, anecdote, etymology], ed. by Zbigniew Kałużek, Beata Mytych-Forajter, Aleksander Nawarecki (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2018), 507-511.

partition of verses, called caesura”, he noted⁵¹). In versification studies from the second half of the 20th c., it was accepted that “the verse is the basic structural unit of a poem⁵²”, as Lucylla Pszczołowska wrote. In more recent studies, based on the theory of prosody, the verse, as Adam Kulawik has it, is “a segment of text in between subsequent verse pauses, which are its constitutive elements⁵³”.

The Latin word *versūs* signifies a line, a furrow, a row, whereas the verb *versō* means “to turn frequently, turn back, topple”⁵⁴. Derrida derives the origin of the poem in linear form from agrarian culture:

“The furrow [*sillon*] is a line, the trace left by the farmer: it’s a road - *via rupta* - broken by the plow. The agrarian burrow opens up towards the nature and culture. We also know that writing is born with agriculture, which, in turn, cannot exist without settlement⁵⁵.”

The installation, presenting Wojacek’s poem on the steps of a stairway on a park hill is reminiscent of the original relation of linear writing to furrows, arranged into even rows of a plowed field. “Wojacek’s stairs” refer to the universal relationship with tradition; they recall it as a context for contemporary culture. The verse of the poem is thus inscribed into a plot of land. Rows of steps, delineating the verses, reflect the original inscription of speech.

Robert Gilarski, in his artistic vision of the poem made sure that the visualisation replays the author’s version of *Sezon*, including the layout of the poem as it is presented on the page of Wojacek’s poetry book. He maintained pauses in between the strophes; thanks to these empty lines⁵⁶ the poem was not turned into a stychic verse. The typographic version, printed in the book, was replaced by a pictorial version, on the steps in the park. The difference here is that it became the central element of the installation. This change proved to be beneficial for visual effects and for the reception of the poem, as it amasses words along the route of the walk. On reading the textual visualisation, while climbing the stairs, we are faced with delineational pauses, moments of temporary suspension of the text and thought process. Just like in the course of reading a poem published in a book, also in the public space of the park, the “event of reading⁵⁷” takes place. Writing about typographic actuation, Artur Grabowski noticed that “From one verse to another the process of reading continually begins and ends, just as the poem begins and ends⁵⁸.” To paraphrase, one can say that in the installation of Mikołów, from one step-verse to another step-verse the reading process continually begins and ends, and so does the poem.

⁵¹Kazimierz Wóycicki, *Forma dźwiękowa prozy polskiej i wiersza polskiego* [*The sound form of Polish prose and verse*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN, 1960), 69.

⁵²Pszczołowska, “Wers”, 82.

⁵³Adam Kulawik, *Wersologia. Studium wiersza, metru i kompozycji wersyfikacyjnej* [*Versology. Studies on poems, meter and versification structure*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Antykwa, 1999), 55.

⁵⁴*Słownik łacińsko-polski* [*Latin-Polish dictionary*], ed. by Kazimierz Kumaniecki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN, 2001), 452-453. The verb *versō* can also mean: ‘to explicate, to explain; think over, consider; hesitate, worry, bother, torment, torture’, which one can take to be likewise related to a poem.

⁵⁵Derrida, *O gramatologii* [*On grammatology*], 366-367.

⁵⁶On empty lines see Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*, 109-113.

⁵⁷Artur Grabowski, *Wiersz. Forma i sens* [*The poem. Form and meaning*] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 1999), 84.

⁵⁸Grabowski, 44.



Photo 4. Installation of “Wojaczek’s stairs” by Robert Gilarski. Author’s private photo.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that the stairs, embedded in the vast space of the Planty Park vary in size. Some of them are closely grouped together, others are more of a wide stair. Ascending the steps is likewise a variable experience, which influences the reading of the text. The architecture of the stairs generates reading, elongating some of the intrastanzaic pauses. For example, the following parts of the text:

It is dark
it is dark, as dark as possible
there is no me

there is no to sleep
there is no to breathe
there is no to live

are written on broad steps, which increases the distance between steps-verses. This impacts the reception of the text, as it contributes to a more in-depth consideration of each individual line. Each of the verses takes longer to process and extends the duration of emotions. The words of the subject, discovered on the steps, thus become even more dramatic and tragic.

Ascending the stairs while reading *Sezon* leads straight to a mural of Wojaczek, as intended by Gilarski, making that reading contextualised in the poet's biography⁵⁹.

The verses of *Sezon*, added to one another both while perusing a book and climbing the stairs become an interconnected row of lines, furrows, contextualising the text. But for each of these activities the semiotic plane of the poem is shaped differently. Book-based reading is quicker; pauses are hardly noticeable while skimming the printed lines. A walk up the broad stairs at the Planty Park slows down the reading, allows time for reflecting upon the poem, provides more independence to the verses, emphasises emotional *foci* in the poem. In a traditional book reading the inter-verse space is filled with what Grabowski referred to as "semantic tension between subsequent verses", where new, "third" meanings of the poem are born⁶⁰. The artistic installation, featuring the poem, and irregular distances between steps-verses expand the inter-verse space. As a result, one's encounter with the next verse is delayed, which allows for a more intense and varied semantic play. In this way, the intertwining of *Sezon's* perception with the landscape of the Mikołów park may reveal not only "third" but also "fourth" meanings.

The perception of a free verse poem, represented in its graphic format on the pages of a book requires a top-bottom reading. This requirement is thus explained by Grabowski:

"Insofar as in numeric poetry versification effects were visible at the level of the verse, i.e. horizontally, the free verse poem achieved openness (connectivity) at the cost of coherence (and in-textual independence), which allowed for versification effects in between verses, i.e. often vertically. A **vertical** reading of the text-poem is now a prerequisite for understanding. The ubiquity of this phenomenon has made it a norm for the contemporary awareness of the poem⁶¹".

In line with this awareness we read the printed version of Wojaczek's *Sezon* vertically, experiencing the contents of subsequent verses, grouped into strophes. We read the text downwards, focusing on phrases expressing emotional concentration, so typical for a Różewicz-type of poetry. "Short verses of this poem", as written by Grabowski, "attract our attention vertically; we are following some sort of a process⁶²". In *Sezon* we get to know the psychotic situation of the "I", its sense of non-identity, the desire of non-existence, finally - fear resulting from discovering its doom. A vertical reading, reinforced by repetition, parallelism and anaphorae, reveals signs of the subject's psychological destabilisation, as if he were following a downward path to hell. Meanwhile, the poem's visualisation on the stairs of Mikołów forces an upward vertical reading, determined by the landscape. We read the text 'upwardly', raising our gaze as we climb the stairs. This difference in reading the text is of utmost importance to the interpretation of Wojaczek's text. A change in the vertical "upwards" reading to a "downwards" reading is determined by symbolic references, influencing the meaning of the text. Read on a page, the poem recalls intertextually *A season in hell*; it creates the impression of the

⁵⁹This biographical context is further emphasised by the fact that the mural of Rafał Wojaczek can be seen near the school which the poet attended. The seat of Rafał Wojaczek Institute in Mikołów is also nearby.

⁶⁰Grabowski, *Wiersz. Forma i sens*, 78

⁶¹Grabowski, 45.

⁶²Grabowski, 77.



Photo 5. Installation of “Wojaczek’s stairs” by Robert Gilarski. Author’s private photo.

subject’s internal collapse, their movement downwards, towards death. That death becomes inevitable because it was meant to happen and was foretold with signs. Thus, there is no hope but a black, mortally marked future. Visualising the poem on the stairs in a park, triggering an “upwards” reading, up to the horizon of the hill, is reminiscent of “stairways to heaven”. It opens the poem up to issues of transcendence. As Wojtyła wrote, “God is one of the main figures in Wojaczek’s poetry and religious issues are key to understanding the totality of his work and its hidden senses⁶³”. *Sezon*, as a young work, opening Wojaczek’s debut book of poetry, introduced the reader to a crucial topos of the poet’s work, i.e., death. The installation in Mikołów introduces two additional topoi of theology and eschatology. Wojtyła wrote that “Death is the central figure in Rafał Wojaczek’s works. The other one, related to the first one, is God.” The author of *Anty-Antychryst?* emphasised that “Wojaczek was a ‘religious poet’, so his works could - or even should - be interpreted as religious ones⁶⁴.” This interpretative perspective is suggested in the visualisation of *Sezon*, although it cannot be discerned in its printed version.

⁶³Wojtyła, *Anty-antychryst? Wojaczek religijny*, 107. Wojtyła points out that “the Silesian poet appears to be a successor or theological tradition, which he continues and by which he is inspired, creatively and often blasphemously recontextualising and distorting it. He evokes a sacred way of thinking, simultaneously “re-writing” tradition by means of profane themes. The restitution of *sacrum* takes place mainly through negation” (p. 11)

⁶⁴Wojtyła

Displaying *Sezon* on the stairs of the Planty Park in Mikołów introduces additional meanings to the poem and, as Grabowski would say, it triggers a semiotisation of context⁶⁵. “The form of a work of art – he explains – moves outside, dematerializing in the very semiotic space, which thus acquires an unprecedented creative power⁶⁶”. The semiotic space for the artistic visualisation of Wojacek’s poem was created by the trees and stairs in the park of Mikołów. Interestingly enough, perhaps a prototype of the poem’s stairs (which, in fact, do not exist for only the handrail is there) can be seen at the Clinic of Psychiatry of Wrocław Medical University. In the couplet “There is a handrail/ but there are no stairs” Pertej sees a reference to the prose poem *Sanatorium*, whose protagonist, believed to be Wojacek’s alter ego (the poet’s living “I”), talks about non-existent stairs:

They were supposed to make a new entrance through the wall in this part of the building. It was supposed to be used for moving the dead to the morgue in a separate building nearby. Here was a freshly knocked out opening in the wall and two iron bars were set in so as to provide support for the stairs (...) but in the midst of these works the management changed (...) the hole was bricked up. The bars were left protruding from the walls because they were in nobody’s way. In fact, they even proved useful for beating the carpets⁶⁷.

It is not relevant for the interpretation of *The Season* whether there really was an archetype of the nonexistent stairs in Wrocław. The interesting part is how the semiotisation of context occurs. Even if the lyrical context originated from the experiences of the Clinic of Psychiatry, the Mikołów installation in a way takes possession of the world of *Sezon*. The words “There is a handrail/ but there are no stairs”, “in the square”, “Only the trees are moving”, “a black cat/ which runs across all roads” become topographically inscribed onto the landscape of the Planty Park. In this way *Sezon* becomes the property of Mikołów; it was localised in Wojacek’s home town, reminding the citizens about the tragic poet.

The material presence of “Wojacek’s stairs” in the park, typographically visualising the verses “There is a rail/ but there are no stairs” can be definitively read as artistic provocation. It interferes not only with the perception of the text but also with the normal experience of reading a poem. Encounters with *Sezon* on the park stairs are an invitation to an intersemiotic reading; one which is open to the context of the city, incorporating local topography into connoted meanings. At the same time, it does not disrupt the process of reading and acquainting oneself with the literary work, its form and inner architecture. Stairway furrows encroach on expectations towards the verse; they disrupt the text’s graphemic structure. Finally, “The Stairs” reverse the traditional order of succession (foll. Ingarden), typical in the reception of a literary work. The ascent of the stairs, itself analogous to the act of reading, turns into a metanoia.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

⁶⁵Grabowski, *Wiersz. Forma i sens*, 60.

⁶⁶Grabowski, 59.

⁶⁷Rafał Wojacek, *Sanatorium* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2010), 75-76.

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KEYWORDS

Rafał Wojaczek

Sezon

FREE VERSE

ABSTRACT:

This paper refers to a street art installation by Robert Gilarski, now in the Planty Park in Mikołów. The installation “schody Wojaczka”, which visualizes Rafał Wojaczek’s poem *Sezon*, represents the work of the poet written on the steps of a stairway. The author of this paper interprets the poem and considers the difference between the semantics of *Sezon*’s form as appearing in print and the one which can be read from the street art project. She points to the influence of topography and analyses the transposition of the poem’s form into a pictorial inscription, where steps-verses play a major role. The most radical change is the one concerning the vertical reading mode, governed by the direction of upward climb on the stairs-verses. A change in expectations towards versification is not meaningless for the interpretation of the work. This reversed order of reading the poem in the installation bears signs of an artistic provocation and presents itself as a metanoia.

grotesque

verse

installation

street art

POEM VISUALISATION

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Awareness of the Line*

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In order to reexamine the question of creative and critical self-awareness in the Polish humanities, it is important not only to identify, map, and interpret meta-reflexivity in contemporary literature, but also to engage in discussions with scholars and artists. This conversation is intended to expand the reflection on the definitions and functions of self-referentiality in the humanities, which cannot be reduced to an objective analysis. The present interview with dr hab. prof. UŁ Kacper Bartczak, an Americanist, poet, and translator, may be the first step towards opening up this new perspective.

Agnieszka Waligóra: Let's start with the basics. What is creative (self)awareness?

Kacper Bartczak: I think that this term can be defined in two ways: there is the classic definition and, let's say, the processual definition. By the classic definition, I mean the artist's growing awareness of their accomplishments, of what they managed to shape over the years, of the problems they have encountered and the solutions they have come up with, and how these solutions – and therefore also individual works which are these solutions – have influenced their self and personality. In this understanding, we are also dealing with the broadest perspective, the perspective of creative life: the artist who has lived their life creatively and their work (series of works) which has intertwined with what is now called their life (their biography); both have fused. In this case, creative awareness is synonymous with life. In this matter, my guide is Alexander Nehamas, the author of studies devoted to, broadly speaking, self-fashioning and self-creation. This question dates back to American Romanticism and was creatively processed by American pragmatists: William James, James Dewey, Richard Rorty, Richard Shusterman, as well as Nehamas, although his links with pragmatism are rather weak (Nehamas is much closer to Nietzsche than to Dewey and James).¹

These philosophers differ in their approaches, but they are all interested in reflexive praxis in the material world and, and this differentiates them from the entire school of Deleuzian approaches, the emerging subject. The subject conceived as somehow separate from the world, an outline which, thanks to this separation, can enter into other – new, more interesting, and richer – interactions with the world. Creative life, life in and through art, is thus a form of self-fashioning and self-creation. Still, we do not want to favor this type of creative self-fashioning and self-creation in any way (such a gesture would be hopelessly romantic).

In the other understanding of creative (self)awareness, which I have described above, is seen in a single work. A single work is a site and space of praxis that will eventually develop its own self-awareness; this will be the awareness of a work of art as an event, as a certain singularity and ambiguity existing in the world in spite of conventions and laws (it is a deconstructive approach, consistent with Derrida's understanding of literature as a strange institution that constantly undermines its own institutionality).² However, I find that it is still alive today, for example in the works of Charles Bernstein, which I have recently translated, for whom it is a sign of the lasting influence of Edgar Allan Poe and his artistic philosophy.³ The fact that this ambiguity was conceptualized by Jacques Derrida only shows that deconstruction was, and still is, something much more interesting and broader than an ephemeral academic trend).

¹ I refer to two books by Aleksander Nehamas: Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1985) and Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: the Place of Beauty in the World of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

² Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature" (an Interview with Jacques Derrida), in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 33-75.

³ Charles Bernstein, "The Pataquerical Imagination: Midrashic Antinomianism and the Promise of Bent Studies", in *Pitch of Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 299-344. The poet based his lecture which he delivered at the University of Łódź in November 2014 on this text.

One may ask: but what is the content of this awareness? What meanings does it involve? Is it a set of meanings created once and for all? My answer would be: it is an awareness created in the process of reading a given work of art (by different readers); on yet another level, it is a kind of aesthetic and cognitive space that has been designed by the author and as such it belongs to them, but it is not entirely synonymous with their usual empirical identity. Perhaps what I am trying to say here will be a little clearer if I remind you that the reader is often able to come up with new interpretations – they are different, maybe even more interesting, from those that the author was aware of when they created a given work of art, object, etc. Or, in other words, the author will be confronted with different interpretations of the “meaning” of a given work.

Summing up, this processual self-awareness is a set of tendencies, projections (following the Romantic and pragmatic approach, Charles Olson wrote about projective verse⁴), and various kinds of tensions which arise in the creative act and which the work will try to resolve, stimulating this creative space. Jackson Pollock went down in history not only because the mainstream media became interested in him (in 1949 *Life* interviewed the painter, and made a photo session documenting his artistic process) and not only because an outstanding critic, Clement Greenberg, became interested in him, but because he managed to bring to an end, summarize, concentrate, and thereby lead onto a new path the tradition of thinking about intention in the creative act which dates back to Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his “organic form.” This tradition tries to combine intention with intuition, and in the twentieth century it effectively takes the form of an experiment which is meant to express the intricate relationship between the self and the world. One could therefore say that – at a micro level, within the space of a single work of art – this self-awareness is a kind of spontaneously emerging and sustained open intentionality (i.e., where intention and intuition work together), which relishes its own vitality and openness. Thus, the space of a work of art is constantly evolving and, as such, it reinforces this spontaneity; it creates a favorable environment. Perhaps we will elaborate on this point further below.

Indeed, I talk about poetic self-awareness with a person who is active both in the artistic field – poetry, translation – and in research and criticism. Do the writer and the scholar understand creative awareness differently? Here, I refer to your latest academic study *Materia i autokreacja. Dociekania w poetyce wielościowej* [Matter and Self-Creation. Investigations in the poetics of plenitude],⁵ in which you investigate the question of the self. You discuss literature from a personal perspective (especially in the autobiographical introduction and the final explication of your poems), combining this point of view with an academic, objective, approach. You are a translator, a poet, and a scholar – or maybe you draw a line between your roles as an academic and a poet?

⁴ Charles Olson, *Projective verse* (New York: Totem Press, 1959).

⁵ Kacper Bartczak, *Materia i autokreacja. Dociekania w poetyce wielościowej* [Matter and Self-Creation. Investigations in the poetics of plenitude] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2019).

I like the fact that you start with “scholarly creative awareness.” The corporate humanities relegate the fact that it is difficult to pursue the humanities without engaging with creative psychology on the periphery. A literary scholar is also an artist – sensitivity, perceptivity, and creativity play the same role in their work as reliability, verifiability, and logic. The corporatization of the humanities removes the creative element because it turns the humanist into a “typewriter.” And creativity is non-mechanical; creating is not producing. Production requires a certain set of material conditions, and creativity does not. In other words, the conditions which govern a creative act cannot be fully predicted, calculated, or arranged. Moreover, in the long run, the “obligation to write” renders our creative faculties sterile (and that includes research).

This is not to say that research is exactly the same as artistic practice, creating a work of art. That would be an overstatement. Research is subject to different requirements than creative work; both are governed by their own rules, but artistic creativity probably differs from research insofar as it is the freedom of finding one’s own rules. However, research must contain a creative element; it should not be entirely “mechanical” (as explained above).

I have been a researcher and an academic for many years. I am also a poet. And I have also become a translator. And for many years I did not think this. Probably because youth does not have to wonder about such things as one’s many different commitments. But let me get to the point: it would probably be completely crazy to treat those commitments, found in one person, as separate. I think it is about creating adjacent and related fields; they are functionally and institutionally different, but psychologically and cognitively similar; they stimulate one another. Of course, some kind of risk is involved, maybe even a compromise, but that is part and parcel of life. After all, perhaps all this energy could be focused in one field? But I couldn’t do it. At one point, I realized that it would be like a forced amputation. Forced and unnecessary. And I think it’s not about compromising, it’s about the very nature of understanding the world. In my poetry and criticism, similar questions and problems clash ... Only they develop differently, at different speeds, with different dynamics ... Literary and creative space is all about accelerations, condensations, projections, insights into the future that leave me, as a researcher, behind. At least I hope so. But I am sure of one thing: these different fields stimulate one another. I don’t fully understand the mechanisms and channels of these recharges, but maybe I don’t have to understand them.

Let me give you a specific example: I have realized that I really enjoy reading philosophical works. I believe that I understand philosophical texts quite well in the normative and academic sense (not to argue with philosophers, but to use their concepts in an orderly, valid, and verifiable manner). However, later I noticed in various philosophical texts a certain “surplus.” Sometimes, I could read them the way one reads a novel, or as if a philosophical argument was a musical composition that could lead us somewhere (I don’t know if philosophers would like that idea ...). American literature has made this connection: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery, Rae Armantrout, to name but a few. And I found it fascinating. It is interesting that James, Rorty, and Nehamas are also aware of these trans-actions. I might add that in Poland, I found this reciprocity of (literary and philosophical) fields in the works of Tadeusz Ślawek and Agata Bielik-Robson.

And does the creative understanding of the line differ from the academic one? How does one think about verse when writing (and reading) a poem as a poet and as an academic? Are these two conceptualizations different? This issue seems to be particularly interesting considering that you are associated with artistic intellectualism, which, in a simplified approach, removes affective categories, negating the freedom of lyrical subjectivism and, to paraphrase the title of Olga Tokarczuk's collection of essays, renders the narrator "tender-less." We may ask whether intellectualism, if you identify with this position at all, is at least to some extent the result of analytical habits to which you have been exposed in your work as an academic. After all, as you have mentioned, academic work and research requires a certain critical distance to literature, which is usually not expected of the poet.

"Intellectualism" is an empty concept, an artificial target, a fallacy. There is such a thing as the accumulation of creative tendencies and their implementation – either in research or in art. The point is not to bore others. I do not write poetry that is a boring lecture. My poetry is not a monster that can only be read with footnotes that refer to history and philosophy, etc. It just doesn't work that way. The intellectual tradition that I consider relevant tried to eliminate the division between intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic cognition. Will (Emerson), acting in the world whose substance is plastic and which enters into certain situational relations with the human body (Dewey, James, Rorty), language (Rorty), structure of thought that is not cognitive but affective and "rooted" in the body (Shusterman) – where is there room for "pure" intellect? The connection between cognition, emotions, and linguistic formulas – William James has discussed these concepts in his *Principles of Psychology* (giving rise to the modernist "stream of consciousness"), and then in his brilliant writings on pragmatism and pluralism.⁶ This tradition means that, at least for me, the "linguistic turn" has never involved losing contact with the body: the body is involved in meaning-making, affect regulation, interacting with reality. "Language" makes sense only as a certain ability of the body to co-react with the world (and let me add: such a world is not a solid mass, but a living environment).

The embodied self endowed with linguistic imagination and agency, which manages to recognize its limits and networks of dependencies with the surrounding living environment (with what Tadeusz Ślawek, drawing on Thoreau, calls "the community of the world" – although newer philosophical traditions, which see the individual in a different light, probably have a different approach to the category of the environment⁷), is the best "tender narrator." And in their interactions with poems, it is enough for the reader to assume the role of such an active, mobile linguistic embodied self that thinks, feels, and for which the use of language does not lead to false divisions such as "thought," intellect, language, sensitivity, emotion and affect.

⁶ These include: William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1955); William James, "What Pragmatism Means. Lecture 2", in: *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975), 43-84; William James, "The One and the Many. Lecture 4", in: *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975), 127-164.

⁷ Tadeusz Ślawek, *Ujmować. Henry David Thoreau i wspólnota świata* [Grasping. Henry David Thoreau and the Community of the World] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2009).

So, I do not think that I am on the side of intellectualism. I identify with some form of linguistic-affective holism.

Now that we have outlined the background, let's move on to more specific questions. Traditionally, Polish versification studies have shown great interest in versification systems and their typologies. In the twentieth century, once metrical systems were dethroned by free verse, Polish literary studies searched for different regularities – this is how, for example, the categories of Peiper's, Przyboś's, Czechowicz's or Różewicz's poems were created, which are still taught at Polish universities.⁸ On the other hand, the times of the neo-avant-garde brought more and more freedom in the field of poetic forms and scholars dived into "minimum poetic requirements." For Adam Kulawik or Dorota Urbańska, the key "minimum requirement" was the arbitrary nature of division into lines.⁹ The discrepancy between syntactic delimitation and the limits of the line had the strongest formal potential to "defamiliarize" the work, endowing it with ambiguity (i.e., poetic effect). What is more, the division into lines in a poem was seen as fundamentally different from the "traditional" page layout.

Critics further searched for possible "sources" of non-systemic poetry in other components of the text and at various levels of literary communication: for Artur Grabowski the poem was a way of creating and understanding a text, which was later developed by Adam Dziadek, who analyzed this problem in a wider anthropological and aesthetic context.¹⁰ For Witold Sadowski the poem in free verse was a graphic "image" – a unique, verbal-visual figure whose idiomatic shape was determined by the arrangement of lines.¹¹ This thesis was supported by Paweł Bukowiec, who also stressed the importance of rhythm and sound in the free verse poem as its constitutive elements.¹² Joanna Orska has recently come up with one more theory. She has critically summarized previous reflections in Polish versification studies and proposed a rhetorical approach to (especially the avant-garde) verse, emphasizing the textual disposition to act.¹³ Basically, however, none of these propositions has completely challenged the delimitation theory based on the division into and the arrangement of lines; in other words, the line is still seen as a condition for the existence of the poem.

⁸ Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, "Wiersz awangardowy dwudziestolecia międzywojennego" [The avant-garde poem of the interwar period], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 56, no. 2 (1965): 425-446; Michał Głowiński, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński, *Zarys teorii literatury* [Outline of the theory of literature] edition 6 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1991): 203-210.

⁹ Adam Kulawik, *Teoria wiersza* [The theory of the poem] (Kraków: Antykwa, 1995): 32-63; Dorota Urbańska, *Wiersz wolny: próba charakterystyki systemowej* [Free verse: Attempt at systemis characterization] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1995): 14-25.

¹⁰ Artur Grabowski, *Wiersz: forma i sens* [Poem: Form and meaning] (Kraków: Universitas, 1999): 124-154.

¹¹ Adam Dziadek, "Wersologia polska – kontr(o)wersje" [Polish versology – contr(o)verses], in *Strukturalizm w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej: wizje i rewizje* [Structuralism in Central and Eastern Europe: visions and revisions], ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki and Danuta Ulicka (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, 2012): 370-390.

¹² Paweł Bukowiec, *Metronom: o jednostkowości poezji "nazbyt" rytmicznej* [Metronome: the singularity of "too" rhythmic poetry] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2015): 15.

¹³ Joanna Orska, *How Does Free Verse "Work"? On the Syntax of the Avant Garde*, *Forum of Poetics*, no. 10 (2019): 110-131.

This short overview is but a starting point for further detailed considerations, including a question that is fundamental not only in the face of the presented relations between the line and the poem, but also in the face of your strong attachment to the very category of poetry (for example, considering the absolutely fundamental nature of this concept in *Materia i autokreacja!*). Where exactly does this attachment come from – and does it also mean that you stay true to the line and see it as a fundamental poetic category?

Maybe I'll start with the fact that all the concepts presented above are conceptualizations of praxis. They can be very useful in research and serve many purposes, be it interpretative or taxonomical. But the poet does not think in such terms. The poet has a kind of intuition and will at their disposal: an intuition of what is about to happen in the poem, and a will to make it happen. Of course, there will be poets who will see the line in a way that can be described using one of the concepts and theories outlined above.

My approach, as a poet, is probably eclectic. I think that the very arrangement of the poem on the page "says" something: the visual-graphic form is the first filter; division into lines, as a "decision" that is immediately visible, is another filter, just as the decision to fill the page with regular lines of text, for example in prose. I'm not saying that the layout of the poem should visually resemble something – concrete poetry goes, for me, too far in the direction of fusing the poem with the image; and text is text and not image. While, of course, such intermedial transitions and transactions are interesting, I tend to focus on how "visibility" becomes a certain conceptual construct, something secondary to the textual language game, and I mean visibility in general: the visibility of the world, objects, etc. The visibility of the poem on the page is also important: it is the first impulse that suggests something to the not fully aware reading apparatus, preparing the reader for the event of the poem.

As regards this general visibility, seeing the world, perhaps the poem must first act in the cognitive realm – or, more generally speaking, in the conceptual realm – just to become visible. Here I refer to the combined perspectives of Stevens and American pragmatism (especially Rorty and his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* but also *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*¹⁴): the empiricists were wrong – sense experience is not the origin of all knowledge; rather, knowledge is the end product of the complex process in which culture, language, the affective and the volitional operate. The modernist poem embraces all these spheres, sheds light on them, and thus discovers how specific conceptual maps determine our constructs of visibility.

Let me return for a moment to the issue of the visibility of the poem itself: I am talking about something very basic, about the original morphology of a work of art, about the length and the arrangement of lines which may be more or less regular on the page, and how it immediately communicates to the reader (to this reading apparatus which I have mentioned above) what expectations it creates. For example, the long line, resembling prose, will create a completely different first impression than minimalist verse. It is therefore about the initial

¹⁴Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979); Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980).

modeling of the act of reading (because perhaps we should talk about the act of reading itself, about the processing of information which, in the poem, consists of many factors at the same time; and this is what the “reading apparatus” does). In any case, the poet should feel the line. And it is because of this postulate that I accept the fact that various approaches to the line are more or less arbitrary – it all depends on the situation at hand.

The length of the line and how it works together with syntax opens up a whole range of possibilities, which will modulate the tone and the voice.

I also like to talk and think about the line as an active entity. Although for me the basic unit is the whole poem as a certain environment, the line itself is a very important part of this space. I like to think about the sensitivity of the line or, to put it differently, its “innervation,” which in turn stems from thinking about the poem not as a description which is external to the event, but as its environment and research apparatus. I like to think of the poem as a research probe that ventures into a certain area and explores it, transforming itself in the process ... Well, I understand that might be a bit vague, but it is hard for me to talk about what is essentially an amalgam of different traditions... such as William Carlos Williams, the Objectivists and their successors, and as far as Polish poetry is concerned, definitely Miron Białoszewski and Witold Wirpsza.

In any case, what it means in practice is that we pay attention to where the line is to be broken. A certain decision must be made. It is a decisive moment; the line break embodies the fusion of musicality, rhetoric, figurativeness and, ultimately, meaning. This decision will affect the reading, the musicality, the category of fluidity or a kind of roughness or dullness of the text (it is obvious that the line is analyzed in the wider context of lexis and syntax).

American poets thought about the line in such terms, which is close to me, including Williams, Robert Creeley, George Oppen and Charles Olson (especially Olson – he is not well-known in Poland; people in the West, not only in the States, still read his poetry), with various later varieties. Peter Gizzi, whom I have translated twice, is such a variation; some Language poets, such as Rae Armantrout and Bernstein, also think in such terms. There was a time when the poets and critics associated with experimental American modernism spoke only about the musicality, based on a line break... The meaning has always been derived from the sound and such considerations. I consider such an approach to be generally consistent with the broadly understood rhetoric: because the “innervated” structure of the line (i.e., a structure that is constantly “rediscovering itself”) becomes, after all, a part of the figurative layer, i.e., rhetoric, and therefore action. A line break points to the active nature of the line and the entire poem.

I use the metaphor of the innervation of the line (and ultimately: of the poem) to remind us that in the poem, language is the carrier of conceptual, intellectual, and cultural, as well as emotional and affective content, thus evoking the fact that our emotions are embodied, or the fact that the body takes part in the cognitive processes. Pragmatistic poetics, which I tried to outline both in *Świat nie scalony* [Un-merged world] and *Materia i autokreacja*,¹⁵ was supposed

¹⁵Kacper Bartczak, *Świat nie scalony* [Un-merged world] (Wrocław, Biuro Literackie: 2007); Bartczak, *Materia i autokreacja. Rozważania w poetyce wielościowej*.

to be a generalized lesson or a certain synthesis of pragmatist philosophy and some (not only American) poetic movements and voices, which simply show the complexity of our being in the world: the constant transactions between language, concept (abstraction), material detail, the body, affect and emotion. Frank O'Hara says in his partially ironic manifesto *Personism*: "you just go on your nerve."¹⁶ So, the form of the poem is shaped instinctively. But the inner-vation metaphor is not accidental: it is a trace of all those American aesthetic ideas that root all aesthetics in interaction with the environment, the interaction in which man is involved as a bodily linguistic entity.

Or let's put it differently, let's put it simply: we have senses because we feel the world. I am interested in a poem whose very structure reminds us of this dynamism, sensitivity, and perception of the material world.

One of your books of poems presents us with a unique vision of the poem already in the title. I refer to *Wiersze organiczne* [Organic Poems], published in 2015: let's try to read this volume in relation to the self-referential, because it enters into an interesting discussion with the previously mentioned analytical approaches. For if we treat the poem as a certain organic, or, in the words of Anna Kałuża, hybrid,¹⁷ whole, we may wonder if the concept of the line as a compositional unit does not stand in opposition to the "organic," which in itself implies a certain integrity of the text. After all, the aforementioned literary critics drew attention to the "arbitrariness," and therefore the "defamiliarization" of line breaks, which is not related to any metrical system, governing its structure and form.¹⁸ There is no obligatory repetition in the free verse poem, and therefore no predictability: we can thus advance a maximalist thesis that the free verse poem depends on the author.

We will discuss the relations between the poem and the subject below. Before we get there, however, let us address the intriguing question of, if we were to slightly modify the title of your volume, "organic line" or "organicity" of the line. Is line in your poetry something "natural" or "arbitrary"? If the changes that I have made in the title of your book were justified, your vision of poetry and its form would contradict the indicated theoretical contexts, perhaps also the observations of Krzysztof Skibski. Although Skibski argued that the line as a unit "is not a result of dividing a larger whole,"¹⁹ he does not treat the poem as an organic whole composed of interconnected lines but assigns "potential independence"²⁰ to each line. Thus, the line is, metaphorically speaking, primarily "in-itself" or "for itself," and not "in-the poem"

¹⁶Frank O'Hara, *Personism: A manifesto*, in: *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 48.

¹⁷Anna Kałuża, "Biologiczne i polityczne" [The biological and the political], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, May 9, 2016, online: <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/biologiczne-i-polityczne-33687>, date of access: May 20, 2021.

¹⁸Bukowiec, *Metronom: o jednostkowości poezji "nazbyt" rytmicznej*, 20.

¹⁹Krzysztof Skibski, *Poezja jako literatura. Relacje między elementami języka poetyckiego w wierszu wolnym* [Poetry as literature. Relations between elements of poetic language in free verse] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2018): 55.

²⁰Skibski, 54.

or “for the poem” (after all, Skibski also writes about complex, surprising relationships between lines within the same text²¹).

As far as the line as a “unit” is concerned, yes, but for the reasons I have discussed above, that is, in the context of dynamic versification, understood as a continuous search for a more holistic textual whole. Each line should be a work of art on its own, but, ultimately, for me the poem works as a sequence of dynamic events. So, after all, at least as far as my poems are concerned, it is ultimately the “line-in-the poem,” but that does not mean that the line cannot be independent. A clever move in a game is a single move (you can isolate it, watch it in replay, or rewind it), and at the same time it translates into the entire text. When I write, I always think about each line, but “this line” makes sense because of the other lines, and ultimately the entire poem.

And if we were to think of the poem as a body, as an entity? What role does the line play in it? Is it the frame? Is it the “head”?

It’s more like a limb, a probe. Or to put it differently: once (in *Świat nie-scalony*) I thought of the poem as a “speaking organism:” from this point of view, the line is more like part of the locomotor system, or a device that enables movement. Bohdan Zadura once wrote a brilliant essay on the “poetry of conjunctions,” in which he comments on John Ashbery’s work and writes about conjunctions as joints which enable movement (in fact, not only Ashbery, but also, and perhaps above all, Gertrude Stein, is associated with such an approach).²²

Zadura (after Stein) draws attention to the importance of the secondary parts of speech. For me, however, this mobility should characterize the entire poem, but it must result from the “movement” and the dynamic of individual lines.

Let us talk about the specific ways in which the line works. And I refer to the line as both a compositional unit, a part of its architecture, and as a syntactic structure, i.e., a set of specific relations between words. Let’s focus on *Pokarm suweren* [The Sovereign Food] from 2017. If we were to read this book in a self-referential optics and assume that it is about poetry and that the titular “food” may be language, which you describe in one of the poems as nutritious “zdaniowy torf” [sentence peat],²³ we come across an interesting trope. If language is “matter,” can we then say that the line is its sovereign, i.e., something which organizes this matter at different levels? Let’s talk about it in the context of the title poem *Pokarm suweren*, in which language feeds and the line integrates, creating strategic multiple meanings:²⁴

²¹Skibski, 55.

²²Bohdan Zadura, “John Asbhery i ja. Poezja spójników?” [John Ashbery and me. The poetry of conjunctions?] in: *Szkice, recenzje, felietony* [Sketches, reviews, essays], vol. 1 (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie 2007), 359-366.

²³Kacper Bartczak, *Pokarm suweren* [The Food Sovereign] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2017): 5.

²⁴Bartczak, *Pokarm suweren*, 28.

**Sycę morfologie
torfemy zdaniowe**

**parametr nukleiny we mnie
trwa rekonstrukcja stacji glebowej**

**obecny kultem upojny
puszczam grudeczki w fałdę**

**koduję kult kodeks
tablet morfem morał**

**morfologie są mi nad wyraz
ikonostatyczne**

**hoduję wersje szczepów w nie
ślę osoby miłe mi wasze**

**mieszczę was w albumie pola
kultywuję zryw łamanie szef**

**szwem wersu stos ikon płonie
aż wyjdiesz z rzezi na przodku**

**kolebkę przerażenia otworzysz
w skryptorium mięs zagrają**

**osoby hodowlane wasze w nich
moja miłość kamień inteligibilia²⁵**

Well, in this collection, I approached “sovereignty” not as a formal but as a philosophical, political, or actually psycho-political concept. I wrote the poems in this collection at a time of great political upheaval in Poland, when history returned to the stage, or perhaps rather dark ways of understanding history returned to the stage. At that time, I finished my insightful, psycho-political reading of Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz’s poems, and even read them together with Stevens. I was writing with a general idea in mind, namely that a certain supra-individual psycho-political energy is “sovereign.” It is a powerful force: the beliefs and views held by a given group of people suddenly thicken, accelerate. They are a form of movement,

²⁵As noted above, due to its linguistic and syntactic complexity, this poem is virtually untranslatable. Transcribed in English, which does not convey the full meaning of the original, it reads: “I feed morphologies/ sentence peat// a parameter of nucleic acid in me/ the reconstruction of the soil station is underway// present intoxicated obsessed/ I put small balls in the fold// I code cult codex/ tablet morpheme moral// morphologies are extremely/ iconostatic to me// I grow seedlings in them/ I send people who are dear to me your// I put you in an album I cultivate/ fields spurt break seem/ seam line stack of icons on fire/ until you come out of the slaughter// you will open the cradle of terror/ they will play in the flesh scriptorium// cultivated people yours in them/ my love stone intelligibilia” (Translator’s note).

or action, but also constitute a loop, a closed whole. I thought about these totally irrational currents which, from time to time, invade and shape our political reality. And in some poems, I tried to come up with a language and a form that would reach these layers, expose them, and maybe even fuse with them, which is of course very risky. The only “sovereign” I had in mind at the time was this thickening energy – I wanted to give it a voice, I wanted the real demon of psychopolitics to speak.²⁶

In order to construct a model of this psychopolitical energy, apart from a specific language – a language that pointed to decay processes, fertility which results from crushing organic substances (peat) – I also employed an “active poetic formula” that I have mentioned earlier. I wanted to show how active this demonic psychological energy that suddenly took over Poles is.²⁷

So, the above poem is a process – this energy moves through the respective lines with a hiss.

I also thought about everyday, public language, about language in and through which a given community cultivates its beliefs and ways of understanding politics and history, and in which – like in the layers of peat – the processes of destruction and dark “fertility” intertwine. In this language, a certain type of worldview is “cultivated,” that is, individuals are controlled or influenced.

I also thought (and wrote about in my essays on Rae Armantrout) that, after all, modern tools of social manipulation are also like a “poem” – they are a rhetorical composition used to manipulate society. Ultimately, it all boils down to the understanding that we are writing poems that explore that larger, more sinister poem that someone imposes on us.

Michel Foucault greatly informed our understanding of the irrationality of power. My poems in *Pokarm suweren* were supposed to imitate this irrationality in order to challenge it in other poems in the volume. But the form is similar – in *Pokarm suweren* I wanted to show how mysterious, and yet efficient and vital, this energy is; it propels certain structures of reality and determines what is sacred, influencing the masses. It was like transforming Foucault’s biopolitics (this powerful energy, of course, also controls our bodies) and the broadly understood notion of psychopolitics into poetry.

The reference to Foucault provides a segue into the question about the creative and textual “I”. In *Materia i autokreacja*, you argue that subjectivity in poetry can be constituted precisely by means of form – the subject is composed in and through the poem, and “becoming a subject” involves establishing one’s boundaries. Thus, a text

²⁶The term psychopolitics comes from Bernard Stiegler’s essays. He analyzed how in today’s world politics develops in accordance with the rhythm of crises affecting the psyche of entire societies; but in Polish poetry, precisely in Rymkiewicz’s poems, I found a similar concept – history and the politics it contains – is a psychological phenomenon, related to the notion of “repetition compulsion.” But the two understandings of the term come together: the mentality, or rather a certain psycho-historical and psycho-political complexity, which I found in Rymkiewicz can be seen as a constant drive to repeat crises and catastrophes.

²⁷Such as spontaneous marches against immigrants which took place in Poland in December 2015, without any immigrants around... or people who wanted to hang some MEPs ...

is not only a constituent of the author's (auto)biography, but also a mechanism behind this (auto)biography. You write: "życie to zawsze już skonfigurowana praca polegająca na samozwrotnym i autointerpretatywnym zyskiwaniu kształtu [life is a configured work of self-reflexive and self-interpretative shaping].²⁸ So is the poem indispensable for (creative) consciousness? In other words, if the arrangement of the lines makes a poem, which is a kind of laboratory of subjectivity, then do the lines also make the subject?

I have already talked about Nehamas. For Nehamas, a work of art is a continuous act of interpretation and re-interpretation. When they enter the work, the artist transforms the environment, transforms the building materials, but at the same time they also transform and constitute the subjectivity of this situation, subjectivity in which they participate. In a word, they also create themselves, and this newly created self is open, aware of its environmental dependencies, and able to distance itself from romantic solipsism. I also argue that in today's psycho-political conditions, when we examine this sinister "external poem" that is out there waiting for us, the constitution of the subject may (must?) go through a phase of atrophy: such atrophy or evasion, a temporary disappearance, is perhaps a strategic move in the psycho-political game with the "external poem." I first thought about this when I realized that the concept of the poem as a linguistic organism is in fact a form of opening (itself/oneself) to the world. And although it is an opening to the material world, some American contemporary poets have convinced me that matter is no longer an innocent sphere – it has been colonized by various ideologies; it has been mediated. Perhaps this strategic "disappearance" of the subject points to the subject's artificiality, how and through which it is mediated, which, in turn, creates the conditions for the return of the subject.

I also meant something else: creative movement and dynamics which give rise to form is actually a form of life. In a way, I thus questioned Agamben's notion of "bare life." I think that there is no "bare life" in art. Form, its movement, its dynamics, its drive towards transforming matter and the environment – this is life. Therefore, I concentrated on the reciprocal relationship between form and life: rhetorical movement means the ability to move away from the *status quo* and that, in turn, means more life. At the most basic level, it is realized in versification – the well-innervated versification that harmonizes with rhythm, syntax, and lexis. Ultimately, then, and in a not so obvious way, I agree with you: especially in psycho-political conditions, the subject, in order to emerge and persevere, must be "shaped" well – it must "write" itself well.

Movement, shape, life – all these notions are closely related to the concept of work that has been mentioned in the above quote. You use it often, both in poetry and in your criticism. You see a poem as a certain mechanism which, through how it arranges space, simultaneously and reciprocally creates itself and its environment, including the aforementioned creative "I." In *Materia i autokreacja*, you explain this concept by referring to Wallace Stevens's poetry, where text allows us to reach a space that has not yet been "marked" in any semiotic way, allowing us to create a world

²⁸Bartczak, *Materia i autokreacja: dociekania w poetyce wielościowej*, 88.

that is positively devoid of meaning.²⁹ This leads you to the conclusion that figurativeness precedes both concepts and “constellations of matter,” as if the form operated before the content appeared.³⁰ Perhaps, it marks a return to hylomorphism or its variation in literary studies, insofar as we distinguish between form and its semantic content. Does this individual work which the poem mean that the poem is a separate, independent (not-completely-dependent) actor, endowed with an autonomous body made of lines? Or perhaps it is something still different? You write about the poem as an “environment.” This concept is broader than the understanding of the actor or the body.

Work – because neither the subject nor its environment are given in advance. And if they were, we would have to think carefully about whether we accept them as such.

I borrowed this from James – I have never moved beyond his ethical-metaphysical conception of Meliorism, based on the belief that the world is based on the constant pursuit of truth, knowledge, social order, etc., while still recognizing our great responsibility for the world. In James’s pragmatic understanding of Meliorism, it has no one stable moral form (as implied in definitive declarations such as “the world is good” or “the world is bad”), because its moral condition depends on us (and here we enter into James’s understanding of the post-secular).

I believe that Stevens wants to recreate the ability to rhetorically reconfigure the environment, which gives the community the tools to act and produce change (although this turn is more evident in the works of other poets, such as Williams). I write in the introduction that what I call “the poetics of plenitude” has its hardcore version. Its modernist version is hardcore: both Stevens and Williams believe that the poem activates consciousness, gaining access to the very foundation of the real, the actual, even what is barred by trauma (the Lacanian “real;” this movement actually seeks to eliminate the boundary between the aesthetic, the poem itself, conceptualizations of reality – for example, cognitive mapping, and ontology – ontology opens itself up to be rewritten). I also explain later that this hardcore modernist version of how the poem works changes in the works of later poets: Sosnowski, Ashbery, Gizzi, Armantrout. Modernists wanted to reach the very core of reality, the deep unity of matter and mind – and this was what the poem was supposed to do. They believed that some unmediated level, pure creative agency, may be reached. Postmodernists questioned this: wherever you turn, you will find the trace of the “greater poem” that was there before your poem. But this does not invalidate the imperative of work, it only changes its nature.

As far as the work of the poem and the subject are concerned, I can only repeat: a working poem will produce its own forms of subjectivity. It will be them. In some variety of this poetics, subjectivity will be clearly defined, it will be endowed with agency, it will point to the points of contact between the psyche, thought, emotion and matter. The form of the poem will emphasize these layers: in this sense, the poem will recreate, recall the embodied nature of our interactions – our “work” – with and in the world. The poem works – it examines the

²⁹Bartczak, *Dociekania w poetyce wielościowej*, 133-165.

³⁰Bartczak, *Dociekania w poetyce wielościowej*, 160.

environment and examines itself at the same time – establishing the conditions for its being separate from the environment, and this being separate does not mean that it is not a part of this environment. Just like a man who, if he wants to be part of a community, will not lose his autonomy in this community.

Let us talk about dynamics some more, but this time let us focus on literary consciousness. Has your understanding of the poem (and the line) changed over time? Or maybe you have always shared the vision we have just discussed? In *Widoki wymazy* [Views swabs], you sometimes abandon verse and write poetic prose; respectively, in your poems, you work with rhymes and pay particular attention to words and sounds which appear in final positions. You worked with similar poetic tools in *Noworadiowa* [Noworadiowa - a neologism] (2019). However, when we compare them with your earlier works, we see that your poetics has changed. *Przenicacy* [Przenicacy - a neologism] is a collection of poems that are formally diverse in terms of punctuation, creating the impression of “a line-within-a line” (by imposing multiple syntactic divisions onto the visual divisions). We can also notice in your poems a specific dialectics within the lines, which is especially distinct at the end – when read together, the respective lines often create contradictions. As, for example, in the poem *Teoria poezji dla początkujących* [Theory of Poetry for Beginners]:

To jest poczekalnia do której wkracza się by w niej
 niknąć Niknięcie może się zmniejszyć
 lub zwiększyć Może nie mieć nic wspólnego z
 Wszystko może³¹

***Widoki wymazy* is endowed with an intriguing, almost rap-like dynamics, the lines run loose and often engage with the titular “views.” For example, in *Mieszanka widokowa* [Viewing Mix]:**

paliwa i wirusy
 w powietrzu w szarościach
 domki gniecie w czasie
 mieszanka tej wartości

kompas białkowy
 śpiewa mi w głowie
 mknę chyży widmowy
 jakbym informował

biel cynkową kobalt

³¹Kacper Bartczak, *Przenicacy* [Przenicacy – a neologism] (Poznań: Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna i Centrum Kultury w Poznaniu, 2013): 19. As noted above, linguistic and syntactic complexity renders this poem virtually untranslatable. Its transcript in English, which does not convey the full meaning of the original, reads: “This is a waiting room which you enter to/ fade away Fading away may decrease/ or increase It may not have anything to do with/ It may everything” (Translator’s note).

**kadm gęsty w czaszy
dawne miejsca twarze
miałą się w czasie**

**sejsmika wspomnień
spakowanych magnetycznie
oddech je notuje
w mgnieniu bitumicznym**

**spasuję z powietrzem
zdjęcia w szarościach gęstych
wszystko spamiętam zarażony
miłością zdjęty³²**

Yes, I believe that my understanding of the line has evolved greatly. At first, I played freely with an extended sentence which effectively acts as a counterpoint to the line – the line and the sentence seek one another, and I decided not to use punctuation marks to emphasize the fluency of this reciprocal dynamics (it seems significant to me; it is a trick that tells a lot about the author's formal intentions). Then, I wanted to move away from this symbiosis towards discontinuities, breaks. *Przenicacy* is probably such a transitional collection. Next, I tried to come up some kind of hybrid approach. Perhaps it is most effective in *Noworadiowa*?

Two or three versification systems clash in *Przenicacy*. In *Teoria poezji dla początkujących*, the line is governed by the same formal experiments I employed in some of my earlier collections – the fluency of movement, a sentence that transforms into and moves through the line so that it makes its way to the next line. Although syntax and meaning do indeed fall apart in the above-quoted ending. This poem was a manifestation of the autonomy of the poetic imagination ... But in this collection, there are also poems based on much more radical breaks (*RozPeKaPedygot* [Neologism] or *Ciało mowa trawa* [Body speech grass]), or on a deliberate and more mechanical equivalence between the line and the sentence, and sometimes I also work with mechanical repetition (*Wiersz wolny przybliżony...* [Free verse poem: Approximation], *Kaspar Hauser mówi w godzinie lunchu...* [Kaspar Hauser says at lunchtime...]).

Mieszanka widokowa... At first, right after writing this poem – which was influenced by Annie Lennox singing her own version of Henry Purcell's aria – I was convinced that it was a very classicist poem, in which regular syntax (except for the first stanza, the poem is rather regular) contrasts with versified poems in the first part of the collection (for example, the disjunctive *Wymazy z krajobrazów* [Landscape swabs] or *Wiersz skraju* [Edge poem]). However, now, guided by your question, I notice that these poems try to maintain some grammatical balance;

³²Kacper Bartczak, *Widoki wymazy* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2021): 9. As noted above, linguistic and syntactic complexity renders this poem virtually untranslatable. Its transcript in English, which does not convey the full meaning of the original, reads: "fuel and viruses/ in the air in the grey/ a mixture of this value/ crumples houses in time// protein compass/ it sings in my head/ I move fast ghostly/ as if I were informing// zinc white cobalt/ cadmium dense in a bowl/ old places faces/ grind in time// seismic activity of memories/ magnetically packed/ breath records them/ in a bituminous blink// I give up with the air/ photos in dense gray/ I will remember everything infected/ down with love" (Translator's note).

they move towards enjambment, a breaking point, but do not always reach it. Or they move towards some other syntactic continuation – just when it would seem that the line or the phrase have exhausted their grammatical potential.

Perhaps, then, I have more or less consciously stabilized my approach to the line. I am aware of the fact that the line may break at any time, even if everything appears to look smooth and effortless on the surface.

Let's talk about American poetry, which is so important for you. In *Język jest grą, planszówką bez planszy* [Language is a game, a board game without a board], published by Biuro Literackie, you write about your love for experiments, especially syntactic experiments, which, as you point out, would “nurture the contour” of the poem.³³ Should Polish poetry learn such a lesson from American poetry? In other words: what can Polish poetry learn about the line from American poetry?

It's about music. At the level of the word, then the line, then versification. American poetry, at its most vital and uncompromising, challenging what Charles Bernstein calls “official verse culture,” always wants to be listened to. Breaking the line engages or otherwise interacts with a syntactic, logical, or semantic break, embracing musicality at all levels. I have recently re-read Charles Bernstein's interview with Robert Creeley:³⁴ both men can talk for hours about the verse “and what it does” in Williams or Olson. Which in turn also leads them to an in-depth reflection on oral performance, for example to the question of whether the ends of the lines could, or should, be emphasized in oral performance in any way. Creeley tries to understand his own method of “reading” the end of the line, which is actually an interpretation of the so-called “triadic-line verse,” which is a result of his reflection concerning the modernist experiment and its responses to the challenges of tradition.

We also have to talk about Ezra Pound: the most important *cantos* always seek their own meter, a dynamic metrical foot, so that the text transforms into a musical score. Metrical and versification experiments, whose goal was always to find a unique meter, unit of measure, led to the, sometimes radical, experiments of the Objectivists (Zukowsky), Language poets (which can be seen in my translations of Armantrout and Bernstein) and Peter Gizzi, who combines many traditions in order to find his own poetic “voice.” At the same time, this “voice” is actually the subjectivity created by the poem, which I talked about earlier.

Since you have mentioned some of the poets you have translated, let us talk about the often-marginalized translation awareness, the translator's self-reflection. The simplest question could be how, and into what, the verse translates. However, let's dig a little deeper. In your opinion, does the translator somehow engage with the text on a more personal level? In other words, does the translator's subjectivity en-

³³Kacper Bartczak, “Język jest grą, planszówką bez planszy” [Language is a game, a board game without a board], online: <https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/debaty/jezyk-jest-gra-planszowka-bez-planszy/>, Date of access: May 20, 2021.

³⁴The interview can be found in: Robert Creeley, *Just in time: poems, 1984-1994* (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 2001).

gage with the original text or is translation an act of rearranging the environment of the original work? Since we have already mentioned Wallace Stevens, we can talk about your translations of his works.

The translator of poetry comes face to face with the question: what is the most vital, the most essential, most interesting, poetic layer of the text? Or: how does this text work? Of course, very often the answer will involve a number of things. And the translator should try to identify, save, transfer, and signal the “core” of the poem. I have not translated a lot of Stevens’ works. However, he has taught me a lot as a poet – I borrowed from him his abstractions, which still come back to the real, organizing for us what we see in the so-called world; I was inspired by his ability to use sophisticated style in such a way that it does appear hieratic. But when it comes to feeling the line, Armantrout was much more important to me. She is a poet of incredible condensing power; like Emily Dickinson before her, Armantrout condenses and compresses meanings – not through metaphor but through juxtaposing minimalist versification with the language of public discourse. Armantrout turns phrases and words that are widely used in the public space into an ascetic, minimalist poem. The language is cleansed, sometimes discredited, but most often recovered to serve some new purpose. It would be interesting to compare Armantrout’s ascetic poetics with the ascetic poetics of Louise Glück. Armantrout follows in the footsteps of the imagists: she wants precision derived from brilliancy. Glück wants solemnity, hieratic form, and clear meaning – because they “sell” better on the poetry market. Recently, Armantrout sent me her new collection, *Conjure*, and the very first poem stopped me in my tracks, because I realized that I probably wouldn’t be able to reproduce in Polish the condensation of meanings that she achieves in her minimalist couplet. My reading was impeded. The title poem begins with the following words: “How did the synthesis / cross the abyss?” and the word “synthesis” acquires a religious connotation in the following parts of the text.

I also learned a lot from reading and translating Gizzi: this has perhaps strengthened my confidence in a fragmentary composition the most, in which the point is to loosen the relationship between corresponding syntactic units or sentences.

Let’s end our conversation with an open question – a question that is open to the future. What is the future of the line, both in practice and in theory? Do you see in contemporary literature particularly interesting ways of working with the line, and, ultimately, does the line still work?

I think a lot about the possibilities of poetic prose – a poetic essay written in grammatically and syntactically sensitive prose. Poetic prose does not obliterate versification but carries (the specters and memories of) old and new meanings – it is located in-between poems, in-between past lines and future poems.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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KEYWORDS

KACPER BARTCZAK

vesification studies

s e l f - a w e r n e s s

ABSTRACT:

In this interview, Kacper Bartczak, professor at the University of Łódź, Americanist, poet, and translator, talks about creative self-awareness in the broader context of versification studies. The question of meta-reflexivity and its role in the works of literary scholars and poets is discussed first. More specific questions follow, including the conceptualization of the line in poetry and research, the role of the line in organic poetry and translation. Pragmatism (James, Dewey, Rorty, Shusterman, Nehamas), so important for Bartczak, and the role it plays in creative self-awareness is also discussed. Bartczak also comments on American literary theory and twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon poets (Coleridge, Stevens, Williams, Olson, O'Hara, Gizzi, Armantrout).

modernism

p r a g m a t i s m

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