

# 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.

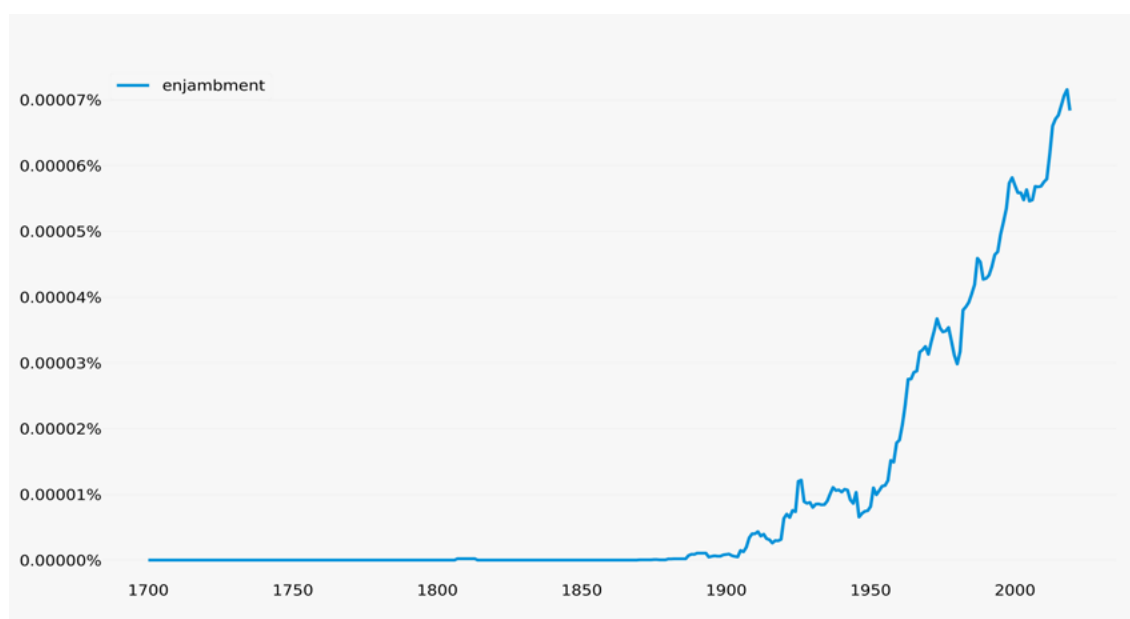
Her name is enjambment.

In theory, enjambment has always been common in poetry and most versifications<sup>1</sup>. 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 texts<sup>2</sup>. 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 19<sup>th</sup> century, but mostly in the 20<sup>th</sup> 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]



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

<sup>2</sup> 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)<sup>3</sup>.

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*<sup>4</sup> [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 once<sup>5</sup>. Dłuska’s text on versification in Mickiewicz (published in the same year as Mayenowa’s) mentions enjambment 18 times<sup>6</sup>. 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)<sup>7</sup>. In turn, Dłuska’s 1954 paper on the melic verse mentions enjambment only four times, but the context is rather obvious<sup>8</sup> (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 1978<sup>9</sup>), 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 times<sup>10</sup>, and in *Przyczynek do opisu współczesnej wersyfikacji*

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>10</sup> 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 times<sup>11</sup>. 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”<sup>12</sup>. 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**”<sup>13</sup>, 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)<sup>14</sup>. 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**”<sup>15</sup>.

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 verses<sup>16</sup>). This peripheral role of enjambment can be easily observed in the universe of versological metareflection also in a 1955 text by Mayenowa:

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

<sup>12</sup>Lucylla 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).

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

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

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

<sup>16</sup>See 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 doubts<sup>17</sup>.

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”**<sup>18</sup> or that pseudo-classicism **“decisively proscribes enjambments and rhyme extravagances”**<sup>19</sup>, 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 nature<sup>20</sup>, 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 form<sup>21</sup>.

In turn, in her text on Romantic drama, Pszczołowska states way more frequently that there are “no enjambments”<sup>22</sup>, the verse is free from enjambments<sup>23</sup>, or that someone **resorted to enjambment only several times**<sup>24</sup>, for “it was a strong means of expression used with **great caution by very few**”<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>Mayenowa, “Jeszcze o sprawie polskiego sylabotonizmu”, 477.

<sup>18</sup>Dłuska, “Wiersz”, 195.

<sup>19</sup>Dłuska, 197.

<sup>20</sup>Dłuska, “Wiersz meliczny”, 475.

<sup>21</sup>Dłuska, 474.

<sup>22</sup>Pszczołowska, O wierszu dramatu..., 537.

<sup>23</sup>Pszczołowska, 541, 547.

<sup>24</sup>Pszczołowska, 563.

<sup>25</sup>Pszczołowska.

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**<sup>26</sup>.

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 impressive<sup>27</sup>:

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

<sup>26</sup>Pszczołowska, "Przyczynek...", 16.

<sup>27</sup>Bogusław 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 here<sup>28</sup>.

### 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)<sup>29</sup>, and, first and foremost, in his 1985 *Idea of Prose*<sup>30</sup>. 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 appear<sup>31</sup>. 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”<sup>32</sup> 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”<sup>33</sup>. And when defining versification, he states that enjambment is its necessary and sufficient condition<sup>34</sup>. 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 rules<sup>35</sup>. If the possibil-

<sup>28</sup>It 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).

<sup>29</sup>Both 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)

<sup>30</sup>Giorgio 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).

<sup>31</sup>Sporadically 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.

<sup>32</sup>Agamben, *Idea prozy*, 23

<sup>33</sup>Agamben, 23.

<sup>34</sup>Agamben, 25.

<sup>35</sup>Agamben, 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”<sup>36</sup>. 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 incomplete<sup>37</sup>. This split between meaning and sound is typical and natural (in fact, necessary) for verse<sup>38</sup>, 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”<sup>39</sup>. Next, following Dante<sup>40</sup>, he considers the difference between a *canzona* (defined as a unit of meaning) and a *stanza* (defined as a metrical unit<sup>41</sup>), 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 form<sup>42</sup>. 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 stanza<sup>43</sup>. 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 works<sup>44</sup>. It is the opposition of the metrical and the semantic<sup>45</sup> 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 poem<sup>46</sup>. 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)<sup>47</sup>, 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*:

<sup>36</sup>Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 109.

<sup>37</sup>Agamben, 25.

<sup>38</sup>Agamben.

<sup>39</sup>Agamben, 110.

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

<sup>41</sup>Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 111.

<sup>42</sup>Agamben, 110-111.

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

<sup>44</sup>Interestingly, he does not mention enjambment between two stanzas.

<sup>45</sup>Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 112.

<sup>46</sup>Agamben, 113.

<sup>47</sup>Agamben, 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.”<sup>48</sup>

As observed by William Watkin, this opposition goes beyond Agamben’s literary meaning<sup>49</sup>. 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 19<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps even later, whereas its foundations were shaped along with the development of versification (and 20<sup>th</sup>-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 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>, but also in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 exception<sup>50</sup>, 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 elsewhere<sup>51</sup>, 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]

<sup>48</sup>Giorgio 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](https://1000littlehammers.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/agamben-difference_repetition_debord.pdf)

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

<sup>50</sup>See 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.

<sup>51</sup>For 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)<sup>52</sup> 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”<sup>53</sup>, whose essence is “the rigor of rhythmical constants comprising regularity and linguistic rhythm”<sup>54</sup>. Based on this foundation he defines free (contemporary) versification as free from such rigors<sup>55</sup>, with external displays of traditional verse – its graphic representation – as its essence<sup>56</sup>. 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 here<sup>57</sup>. 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”<sup>58</sup>. 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 directives<sup>59</sup>. 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-text<sup>60</sup>, 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 to<sup>61</sup>. Classification of verse becomes simple: it can be either syntactic or asyntactic, and both types can take a metrical or non-metrical form<sup>62</sup>; the notions of verse and meter are thus separated<sup>63</sup>.

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

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

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

<sup>54</sup>Kulawik, 13.

<sup>55</sup>Kulawik.

<sup>56</sup>Kulawik, 14.

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

<sup>58</sup>Kulawik, 9, 19.

<sup>59</sup>Kulawik, 9-10.

<sup>60</sup>Kulawik, s.18.

<sup>61</sup>Kulawik, 19-21.

<sup>62</sup>Kulawik, s. 23.

<sup>63</sup>Kulawik, 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 comment<sup>64</sup>, 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 rejected<sup>65</sup>.

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)<sup>66</sup>, 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 verse<sup>67</sup>.

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

<sup>65</sup>Adam Kulawik, 56.

<sup>66</sup>Giorgio Agamben, *Corn*, 34.

<sup>67</sup>See 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.

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Adam Ważyk saw enjambment as an “emanation of anxiety, negation of order, divergence, disagreement, disharmony”<sup>68</sup>. Pszczołowska wrote about: “expressing anxiety and fear”, “dissonance”, “a welter of overlapping images fighting one another”<sup>69</sup>. 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 darkness<sup>70</sup>. 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 studies<sup>71</sup>) 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

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

<sup>69</sup>Pszczołowska, „Przyczynek...”, 27-31

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

<sup>71</sup>See: 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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