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.

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[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.

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[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 wnd 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 wszytkim 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 cóż

   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 zapałek. Matki wołają dzieci.
Zwierzęta płoną żywcem.
   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 słychać 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 Szabłowski, *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)tologia neolingwizmu* [*Gada !zabić?:* pan(n)theology 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 Tynyanov[12] 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] Yury 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.

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[14] Jewgienij 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.

[16] Maria 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.

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

[21] Siedlecki.

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

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[22]Maria 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.

[23]Maria 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.

[24]Dłuska, 25–28.

[25]Dłuska, 43–45.

[26]Dłuska, 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 udałym Walgierzu* [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.

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[27]Apart 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, Klasycy 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.

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

[29]Dłuska, 48.

[30]Maria 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, Klasycy 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

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

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

[33]Kulawik, 229.

[34]Szymon Domagała-Jakuć, „Ulica Zarzewska" [Zarzewska Street], in *Zebrało 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

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[35]Kulawik, *Wersologia*, 46.

[36]Kulawik, 225.

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

[38]Sadowski, 181.

[39]Sadowski, 8–9.

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

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

[42]Sadowski, 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-

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[43]Sadowski, 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 note[44] (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 entirety[46]), 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

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

[45] Artur 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.

[46] On 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.

[47] Extreme 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 świecie[49].

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

[49]Jakub 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

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[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 Kozioł (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 reinstatement. This absence seems to be the result of the following assumptions: looking for a precise 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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