

# 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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> Joanna Orska, on the other hand, draws attention to *figurae per detractionem*, and their role in the additive-tautological poetical strategy.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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*.

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Skibski, 54-55.

<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

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.”<sup>13</sup>

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.”<sup>14</sup> 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

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

<sup>10</sup> Jaskuła.

<sup>11</sup> Jaskuła, 74.

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

<sup>13</sup> Karpowicz, 251.

<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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],<sup>16</sup> or Piotr Śniedziewski 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].<sup>17</sup> 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

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

<sup>16</sup>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.

<sup>17</sup>Piotr Śniedziewski, *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.<sup>18</sup>

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) verbal.

As explained by Marta Ewa Rogowska in her analysis of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [On the freedom of the word],<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>20</sup>Janusz 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.<sup>21</sup>

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!<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

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

<sup>21</sup>Kaczorowski, 84.

<sup>22</sup>Cyprian 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](https://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/113/113_brajerska_mazur.pdf)).

<sup>23</sup>Śniedziwski, 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!<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Stanisław 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,<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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.

<sup>25</sup>See: 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).

<sup>26</sup>Beata Śniecikowska, *Dźwięk a typografia w awangardzie (futuryzm)* [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-futuryzm-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?
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Gdzie są moje granice? <sup>27</sup>	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 <sup>28</sup>	what a subject he chose
	he's trying to be eccentric

<sup>27</sup>Miron Białoszewski, *Autoportret odczuwany*. In: *Sprawdzone sobą. Wiersze wybrane* [Selected poems] (Warsaw: PIW, 2008), 81. English translation by Peter Harris and Danuta Loposzko: *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.

<sup>28</sup>Zbigniew Herbert, *Różowe ucho*. In: *Wiersze* [Poems] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1971), 120-121. Quote after: Jaskuła, p. 74. English translation by Czesła 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.<sup>29</sup>

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 *Psalmy* [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” –<sup>30</sup>

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 ecopoetics<sup>31</sup> and giving voice to creatures that have not been “heard,” and in connection with Fiedorczuk’s most recent

<sup>29</sup>Jaskuła, 74.

<sup>30</sup>Julia Fiedorczuk. *Psalm I* [Psalm I. In: *Psalmy* [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” –.

<sup>31</sup>See: 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.<sup>32</sup> 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 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

<sup>32</sup>See: 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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