

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

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On May 14th, 2021, at the Planty Park in Mikołów one was able to witness the opening of the art installation “Wojaczek’s stairs” by Robert Gilarski. The work features a poem by Rafał Wojaczek, whose verses were written on the steps of a stairway<sup>1</sup>. This unusual, artistic event commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the poet’s death and was inspired by the Rafał Wojaczek Institute in Mikołów, Wojaczek’s hometown, where he spent many years of his life<sup>2</sup>. Maciej Melecki, head of the Institute, chose the poem *Sezon* [*The Season*] to feature in this street art visualisation. The poem opened Wojaczek’s first book of poetry and was the first among his works published in a book edition<sup>3</sup>. Ever since it was first published, *Sezon* has attracted both critics’ and scholars’ attention, encouraging new interpretations. It has been referenced in a number of articles and essays; it would therefore seem like an obvious choice for an art installation, although other factors may have played a role too. *Sezon* opens with the words

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

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

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



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

“Jest poręcz / ale nie ma schodów”<sup>4</sup> (“There is a handrail/ but there are no stairs”). Written on a well-maintained, broad stone staircase, equipped with two sturdy handrails, this message collides with a passerby’s perception. It appears to be absurd, yet intriguing, drawing the reader into a game of meanings. A leisurely climb up the stairs becomes a journey through the text; a pilgrimage to its subsequent verses. Does this reading of urban spaces hide a return to the original idea of writing, as mentioned by Derrida<sup>5</sup>?

The poem, typographically inscribed onto the stairs in Mikołów, opened Wojaczek’s debut book of poems entitled *Sezon*, published by Wydawnictwo Literackie in Cracow in 1969. The same work opens an entire cycle entitled *Martwy sezon* [A dead season]. Wojaczek wrote *Sezon* as a free verse poem<sup>6</sup> along the lines of Różewicz, which evoke, as Sławiński would have it, a rhetoric of helplessness. This form of the poem, deliberately chosen by the poet from Mikołów, determines its semantics.

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

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

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

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

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

Jest ciemno  
jest ciemno jak najciemniej  
mnie nie ma

Nie ma spać  
Nie ma oddychać  
Żyć nie ma

Tylko drzewa się ruszają  
niepospolite ruszenie drzew

rodzą czarnego kota  
który przebiega wszystkie drogi

The following is a literal translation from Polish:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The words of Rafał Wojaczek's *Sezon* are definitely one of the most recognisable poetic formulae, created by the author of *Inna bajka* [*A different fairy tale*]. The words "There is I / but there is no me" summarize an identity crisis, experienced by the "lyrical I". One can discern this theme in between the lines of all of the works of the Wrocław poet<sup>7</sup>.

*Sezon* is testimony to the break-up of personality, a sense of disintegration, alienation and non-identity. It grows out of fear, loneliness, and a conviction that, as Barańczak wrote "one's own existence appears to be uncertain"<sup>8</sup>. As indicated by Paweł Dybel, "in abandoning the unlivable world, a world which leaves him helpless [the poet] finds a new beginning" - the refuge of his own poetry<sup>9</sup>.

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

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

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

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

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

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





Photo 2. Installation of “Wojaczek’s stairs” by Robert Gilarski. Author’s private photo.

*Sezon’s* words “there is I/ but there is no me” are indicative of a split into the “I” and the “I” of poetry; a (truly impossible) separation of life and creativity, existence and artistic creation<sup>11</sup>. “The lyrical “I”, as Tadeusz Komendant wrote, “turns out to be the only one that is truly alive<sup>12</sup>”. This paradox “stems from a total rejection of conventionality and the cessation of an average existence, identifiable with death”<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, Andrzej Niewiadomski wrote that “the “I” becomes an arbitrary construct, corresponding to the autonomous status of the lyrical “I”, whereas “me” denotes the actual marginalised person, complete with a tangible corporality, and protective of its intimacy and uniqueness<sup>14</sup>”. Tomasz Kunz recognised Wojaczek’s intention for what it was: the execution of a transgressive poetic project, aimed at refuting the

<sup>11</sup> Many critics and researchers highlighted the relationship of Wojaczek’s art with his life, others emphasised the textual character of his poetic project. Konrad Wojtyła, analysing pronouncements on Wojaczek’s works underlines the importance of the poet’s biography, rejecting the idea of a purely literary creation of the poetic “I”. See: Konrad Wojtyła, “Autobiograficzny tryb lektury twórczości Wojaczka” [“Autobiographic reading of Wojaczek’s works”], in: *Anty-antychryst? Wojaczek religijny* (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2021), 48-56

<sup>12</sup>Tadeusz Komendant, “Przywracanie symetrii. O poezji Rafała Wojaczka”, [“Restoring symmetry. On Rafał Wojaczek’s poetry”], in: *Który jest. Rafał Wojaczek w oczach przyjaciół, krytyków i badaczy* (Katowice-Mikołów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Instytut Mikołowski, 2001), 104.

<sup>13</sup>Komendant, 104-105.

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

reality of the world and one's own identity and making the poetic work the only possible space for an authentic and autonomous existence<sup>15</sup>. In *Sezon* "the break between 'I' and 'me', which is the core of all awareness, reveals a deep ,identity crisis, a state of estrangement from identity<sup>16</sup>".

*Sezon*, through its title, makes reference to the cycle *Martwy sezon*, from which the poem in question originates. Most importantly, however, the poem's title indicates an intertextual relationship with Arthur Rimbaud's *Season in hell*. From early on, the French poet, included among *poètes maudits*, was viewed as Wojacek's literary patron<sup>17</sup>. The author of *Nieskończona krucjata* [*Unfinished crusade*] was even dubbed "the Rimbaud of Wrocław"<sup>18</sup>. In a well-known note, published by Tymoteusz Karpowicz in 1965 in *Poezja* [*Poetry*], he wrote that "Wojacek's poems and the atmosphere in which they are born are reminiscent of Rimbaud<sup>19</sup>". Likewise, in his introduction to Wojacek's *Utwory zebrane* [*Collected works*] he wrote:

"As for specific, literary affinities, the choice of Rimbaud as a poetic patron and *façon d'être* was an obvious choice. Wojacek's *Sezon* makes a conscious reference to *Une Saison en enfer* (...) While Rimbaud has his season in hell (...) Wojacek has his season from a place on Earth<sup>20</sup>."

Jan Błoński noticed "a truly terrifying mood" in Wojacek's poetry, pondering "a desparate account of internal experiences<sup>21</sup>". Referring to *Sezon*, he pointed to the "estrangement, experienced at the most corporal, most deeply personal level<sup>22</sup>". He recalled Rimbaud's famous line from his letter to George Izambard: "I is somebody else" (*JE est un autre*<sup>23</sup>). It is worth quoting a longer fragment from that letter: "It is wrong to say 'I think'. One should be saying 'I am being thought.' Pardon my wordplay. I is the other<sup>24</sup>".

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

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

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

<sup>18</sup>Cudak, *Inne bajki. W kręgu liryki Rafała Wojaczka*, 30.

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

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

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

<sup>22</sup>Błoński

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

<sup>24</sup>Rimbaud.

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

“For if I is the OTHER, that means that ‘I’ gave birth to that other; yet at the same time, it could not have given birth to it because the other is precisely that: the *other*; an entirely new and foreign creature. ‘I am being thought’, writes Rimbaud, but *being* is also ‘I’. This thought is still mine and it is more mine than it has ever been. This is the paradox of the new *cogito* - I am being thought therefore I become - this is the key to Rimbaud’s adventure<sup>25</sup>.”

This tragic and paradoxical sense of non-identity and split was shared by Rimbaud and Wojacek. The latter would eventually write “There is ‘I’/ but there is no ‘me’<sup>26</sup>. Evidence of this psychological and creative state can also be found in different parts of the *Season in hell*, which was diligently studied by the author of *Sezon*. Rimbaud would write, for instance, I have no more “me’ in the world<sup>27</sup>”, “Real life is absent. There is no us in the world<sup>28</sup>”.

*Season in hell* is a novel type of cycle, written in poetic prose, occasionally interspersed with short, regular poems. Visionary states, reminiscences, profane impressions and memories were created in “the imagination of a deeply suffering human being”, as pointed out by Krystyna Wojtynek-Musik<sup>29</sup>. It is possible that Wojacek’s *Sezon* had a similar genesis. Błoński wrote that “The syntax falls apart, because the integrating sense of personality is likewise falling apart<sup>30</sup>”. This breakdown and incoherence of the “I”, balancing on the boundary of “I” and “me”, could only be rendered through a free verse poem of the Różewicz-type, still a novelty in the 1960s. From this point of view *Sezon* can be identified with a Peircean diagram.

The diagrammaticity of this type of poetry”, as explained by Zofia Mitosek, “depends on the analogy between the mood of the lyrical ‘I’ and the division of the text into verses, stanzas and the use of punctuation. One could thus say that a verse poem is an icon of relation (...), its metrical structure would then be a derivative of semantics<sup>31</sup>.”

Like any free verse poem, *Sezon*’s interpretation calls for considering its graphic structure<sup>32</sup>. The poem consists of six parts with differing numbers of verses, grouped 7, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2. The decreasing number of verses in subsequent strophes creates an ever-growing sense of de-personalisation, confusion, and loss of one’s sense of identity. Progressively shorter verses

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

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

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

<sup>28</sup>Rimbaud, p. 173.

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

<sup>30</sup>Błoński, “Inne lęki, inne bajki”, 88.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The non-identity of the speaking "I" and the poetic "I" (*ja kocha mokro* ('I loves wet'), *mnie nie ma* ('there is no me')) is clearly emphasised. The pronoun "I" - as Błoński wrote - governs the third person, as if to prove that it is possible to feel oneself as an object or, rather, that one can materialise outside of oneself<sup>33</sup>.

The above-quoted fragment of *Sezon* has been interpreted both from psychoanalytical and biblical perspectives. Repetitions, tautologies, ostensible ungrammaticality, recurring in the language of the lyrical "I" seem to indicate an aphatic aura. For Barańczak this language was stylized on child speech - an effect achieved through a regressive, psychoanalytical motivation encroaching on the psyche of a child<sup>34</sup>. That same psychoanalytical angle was picked up by Komendant, who added:

<sup>33</sup>Błoński, "Inne lęki, inne bajki", 87.

<sup>34</sup>Barańczak, "Rafał Wojaczek. Metafizyka zagrożenia", 94-96.





Photo 3. Installation of “Wojaczek’s stairs” by Robert Gilarski. Author’s private photo.

“A retreat into childishness (...) is then a naive attempt at turning the clock back to the beginning, to the state of primal harmony and happiness, typical for a child. (...) Through a refusal to agree to the terms of the world it proves, however, to be a denial of “I” (“There is no me”), yet another utopia of the Golden Age, to which there is no return. The exile is irreversible<sup>35</sup>.”

From the psychoanalytical perspective the motifs of water (*jest mokro* ‘there is wet’<sup>36</sup>) and darkness (*jest ciemno* ‘there is dark’) could be interpreted as a desire to return to the mother’s womb. It is a Genesis-inspired dream of returning to the pre-Creation stage, when “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters<sup>37</sup>”. In both cases one desires existence before life, before birth, a not-yet-life or perhaps quite directly a non-existence<sup>38</sup>. This desire

<sup>35</sup>Komendant, “Przywracanie symetrii”, 104.

<sup>36</sup>As for water, it is worth mentioning Wojaczek’s swimming and sailing preoccupations, which, as researchers have emphasised, inspired aquatic motifs in his poetry. See, e.g. Bogusław Bogusław Kierc, *Rafał Wojaczek. Prawdziwe życie bohatera [Rafał Wojaczek. aThe real life of a hero]* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B, 2007), 26; Konrad Wojtyła, “«Pływałem po rzekach, jeziorach i po wielkiej wodzie także»” [“<I sailed the rivers, the lakes and the great water too>”], in: *Anty-antychryst? Wojaczek religijny* (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2021), 81-83.

<sup>37</sup>New King James Version (1982), ed. by Thomas Nelson

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

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

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

The use of infinitives solidifies the non-identity of the “I” and reaffirms the words of the subject “there is no me”. Additionally, as noted by Kunz, it brings into focus the “extremely de-personalised, impersonal character of one’s experience<sup>39</sup>”. Anaphoric construction, blatantly broken down in the final verse accentuates the word *żyć* ‘to live’, if only to declare that *żyć nie ma* ‘there is no to live’. Consequently, the ever-growing sense of the state of death in life or maybe life in death is reaffirmed. In yet another poem from the poetry book *Sezon Wojaczek* writes: “Through dreams, through you/ I carry myself/ to your death<sup>40</sup>”.

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

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

*Macbeth* opens with a scene featuring three Witches, who will be the perpetrators of misfortunes to come. One of them is accompanied by a cat<sup>41</sup> (“I come, graymalkin!”, she says to the animal). The Witches are mediators between the world of darkness and magic and the world on Earth. They are the messengers of Hekate, making sure that Macbeth’s fate is fulfilled<sup>42</sup>. His death was announced by the Birnam wood, approaching the walls of the Dunsinane castle (The messenger declared: “the wood began to move<sup>43</sup>”). Macbeth’s destiny, marked by Fate, had to be fulfilled.

In Wojaczek’s *Sezon* the fact that “I” is “in the square” on a rainy night allows it to glimpse the portents of a tragic future. The subject’s words: “the trees are moving”, “an un-mass mobilisation of trees” and the sight of the “black cat”, which is related to darkness and death<sup>44</sup>, and a symbol of misfortunes, becomes, like Macbeth’s tragedy, a symbol of the poet’s misfortune

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

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

<sup>41</sup>William Shakespeare, *The tragedy of Macbeth* (1632).

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

<sup>43</sup>Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, scene 5

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

and doom. The tragic fate and the approaching death are, in “I”’s premonition, its destiny. In addition, the black cat “runs across all roads”, emphasising the inevitability of that existential state. “My fate has been sealed” - wrote Wojacek in his early *Poemat* [*Poem*], dated to 1964<sup>45</sup>. The poet, as noticed by Wojtyła, “who cannot escape his destiny, makes life unlivable<sup>46</sup>”. His awareness of a tragic future, written into his debut book of poetry, accompanied Wojacek for the rest of his life. The collection *Którego nie było* contains the following couplet:

Musi być ktoś, kogo nie znam, ale kto zawładnął  
Mną, moim życiem, śmiercią; tą kartką<sup>47</sup>

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

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

Cudak writes that “poetic imagination of *Sezon*'s author is first and foremost a linguistic imagination, for which the world exists not through objects but through semantic events<sup>48</sup> symbolising these objects.” This is the case with the poem *Sezon*, in which reality, envisaged as a square with trees, is a reference to intertextual meanings, which reveal the psychosphere of the lyrical “I”. What will happen when the poem in its installation form is read from the stairs in a park, in the company of cats running around? How does the perception of Wojacek's text change in the Planty Park of Mikołów?

In the installation, the verses of *Sezon* were written on the stairs in the park. One can read subsequent verses while climbing the stairs<sup>49</sup>. The graphic form, initially created by Wojacek and printed on the page of his book of poetry was thus transposed onto the landscape, onto stairs which can be ascended. Each verse is now a step, a bulge in the terrain. This reveals the relationship between the poem and the original meaning of ‘writing’. The verse - ‘versus’ - is a Latin word. For centuries the word ‘verse’ referred both to the line of the text and the entire poem<sup>50</sup>. In 1912 Kazimierz Wójcicki, writing about poems, actually meant verses (“the medial

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

<sup>46</sup>Konrad Wojtyła, *Anty-antychryst? Wojacek religijny*, 231.

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

<sup>48</sup>Cudak, *Inne bajki. W kręgu liryki Rafała Wojaczka*, 82.

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

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

partition of verses, called caesura”, he noted<sup>51</sup>). In versification studies from the second half of the 20th c., it was accepted that “the verse is the basic structural unit of a poem<sup>52</sup>”, as Lucylla Pszczołowska wrote. In more recent studies, based on the theory of prosody, the verse, as Adam Kulawik has it, is “a segment of text in between subsequent verse pauses, which are its constitutive elements<sup>53</sup>”.

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

“The furrow [*sillon*] is a line, the trace left by the farmer: it’s a road - *via rupta* - broken by the plow. The agrarian burrow opens up towards the nature and culture. We also know that writing is born with agriculture, which, in turn, cannot exist without settlement<sup>55</sup>.”

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

Robert Gilarski, in his artistic vision of the poem made sure that the visualisation replays the author’s version of *Sezon*, including the layout of the poem as it is presented on the page of Wojacek’s poetry book. He maintained pauses in between the strophes; thanks to these empty lines<sup>56</sup> the poem was not turned into a stychic verse. The typographic version, printed in the book, was replaced by a pictorial version, on the steps in the park. The difference here is that it became the central element of the installation. This change proved to be beneficial for visual effects and for the reception of the poem, as it amasses words along the route of the walk. On reading the textual visualisation, while climbing the stairs, we are faced with delineational pauses, moments of temporary suspension of the text and thought process. Just like in the course of reading a poem published in a book, also in the public space of the park, the “event of reading<sup>57</sup>” takes place. Writing about typographic actuation, Artur Grabowski noticed that “From one verse to another the process of reading continually begins and ends, just as the poem begins and ends<sup>58</sup>.” To paraphrase, one can say that in the installation of Mikołów, from one step-verse to another step-verse the reading process continually begins and ends, and so does the poem.

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

<sup>52</sup>Pszczołowska, “Wers”, 82.

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

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

<sup>55</sup>Derrida, *O gramatologii* [*On grammarology*], 366-367.

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

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

<sup>58</sup>Grabowski, 44.





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

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

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

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

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

Ascending the stairs while reading *Sezon* leads straight to a mural of Wojaczek, as intended by Gilarski, making that reading contextualised in the poet's biography<sup>59</sup>.

The verses of *Sezon*, added to one another both while perusing a book and climbing the stairs become an interconnected row of lines, furrows, contextualising the text. But for each of these activities the semiotic plane of the poem is shaped differently. Book-based reading is quicker; pauses are hardly noticeable while skimming the printed lines. A walk up the broad stairs at the Planty Park slows down the reading, allows time for reflecting upon the poem, provides more independence to the verses, emphasises emotional *foci* in the poem. In a traditional book reading the inter-verse space is filled with what Grabowski referred to as "semantic tension between subsequent verses", where new, "third" meanings of the poem are born<sup>60</sup>. The artistic installation, featuring the poem, and irregular distances between steps-verses expand the inter-verse space. As a result, one's encounter with the next verse is delayed, which allows for a more intense and varied semantic play. In this way, the intertwining of *Sezon's* perception with the landscape of the Mikołów park may reveal not only "third" but also "fourth" meanings.

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

"Insofar as in numeric poetry versification effects were visible at the level of the verse, i.e. horizontally, the free verse poem achieved openness (connectivity) at the cost of coherence (and in-textual independence), which allowed for versification effects in between verses, i.e. often vertically. A **vertical** reading of the text-poem is now a prerequisite for understanding. The ubiquity of this phenomenon has made it a norm for the contemporary awareness of the poem<sup>61</sup>".

In line with this awareness we read the printed version of Wojaczek's *Sezon* vertically, experiencing the contents of subsequent verses, grouped into strophes. We read the text downwards, focusing on phrases expressing emotional concentration, so typical for a Różewicz-type of poetry. "Short verses of this poem", as written by Grabowski, "attract our attention vertically; we are following some sort of a process<sup>62</sup>". In *Sezon* we get to know the psychotic situation of the "I", its sense of non-identity, the desire of non-existence, finally - fear resulting from discovering its doom. A vertical reading, reinforced by repetition, parallelism and anaphorae, reveals signs of the subject's psychological destabilisation, as if he were following a downward path to hell. Meanwhile, the poem's visualisation on the stairs of Mikołów forces an upward vertical reading, determined by the landscape. We read the text 'upwardly', raising our gaze as we climb the stairs. This difference in reading the text is of utmost importance to the interpretation of Wojaczek's text. A change in the vertical "upwards" reading to a "downwards" reading is determined by symbolic references, influencing the meaning of the text. Read on a page, the poem recalls intertextually *A season in hell*; it creates the impression of the

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

<sup>60</sup>Grabowski, *Wiersz. Forma i sens*, 78

<sup>61</sup>Grabowski, 45.

<sup>62</sup>Grabowski, 77.





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

subject’s internal collapse, their movement downwards, towards death. That death becomes inevitable because it was meant to happen and was foretold with signs. Thus, there is no hope but a black, mortally marked future. Visualising the poem on the stairs in a park, triggering an “upwards” reading, up to the horizon of the hill, is reminiscent of “stairways to heaven”. It opens the poem up to issues of transcendence. As Wojtyła wrote, “God is one of the main figures in Wojaczek’s poetry and religious issues are key to understanding the totality of his work and its hidden senses<sup>63</sup>”. *Sezon*, as a young work, opening Wojaczek’s debut book of poetry, introduced the reader to a crucial topos of the poet’s work, i.e., death. The installation in Mikołów introduces two additional topoi of theology and eschatology. Wojtyła wrote that “Death is the central figure in Rafał Wojaczek’s works. The other one, related to the first one, is God.” The author of *Anty-Antychryst?* emphasised that “Wojaczek was a ‘religious poet’, so his works could - or even should - be interpreted as religious ones<sup>64</sup>.” This interpretative perspective is suggested in the visualisation of *Sezon*, although it cannot be discerned in its printed version.

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

<sup>64</sup>Wojtyła

Displaying *Sezon* on the stairs of the Planty Park in Mikołów introduces additional meanings to the poem and, as Grabowski would say, it triggers a semiotisation of context<sup>65</sup>. “The form of a work of art – he explains – moves outside, dematerializing in the very semiotic space, which thus acquires an unprecedented creative power<sup>66</sup>”. The semiotic space for the artistic visualisation of Wojaczek’s poem was created by the trees and stairs in the park of Mikołów. Interestingly enough, perhaps a prototype of the poem’s stairs (which, in fact, do not exist for only the handrail is there) can be seen at the Clinic of Psychiatry of Wrocław Medical University. In the couplet “There is a handrail/ but there are no stairs” Pertej sees a reference to the prose poem *Sanatorium*, whose protagonist, believed to be Wojaczek’s alter ego (the poet’s living “I”), talks about non-existent stairs:

They were supposed to make a new entrance through the wall in this part of the building. It was supposed to be used for moving the dead to the morgue in a separate building nearby. Here was a freshly knocked out opening in the wall and two iron bars were set in so as to provide support for the stairs (...) but in the midst of these works the management changed (...) the hole was bricked up. The bars were left protruding from the walls because they were in nobody’s way. In fact, they even proved useful for beating the carpets<sup>67</sup>.

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

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

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

<sup>65</sup>Grabowski, *Wiersz. Forma i sens*, 60.

<sup>66</sup>Grabowski, 59.

<sup>67</sup>Rafał Wojaczek, *Sanatorium* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2010), 75-76.



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# KEYWORDS

*Rafał Wojaczek*

*Sezon*

FREE VERSE

**ABSTRACT:**

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

grotesque

verse

installation

street art

## POEM VISUALISATION

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