

# Verse Forms as Bearers of Semantic Values

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**Abstract.** Verse forms may be employed as bearers of semantic values. The present paper intends to show the richness of this resource in literary texts. The semantic values of particular verse structures are interpreted here in terms of the semiotic categories introduced by C. S. Peirce: as symptoms, symbols, or iconic signs. The basis for this kind of reflection is earlier systematic study of various verse forms and their linguistic morphology conducted by a group of Polish and Slavic researchers (as part of the Comparative Slavic Metrics programme).

The semantic value can be attributed to the fact that verse forms function as filters of various linguistic units. It is why the metrical organisation of a text determines its stylistic characteristics. A verse form may be employed and interpreted in many different ways; for instance, to represent the social status of the speaker or to differentiate between various literary genres. Many metrical forms perform an iconic function. Some semantic values are derived from the intertextual relationships of a poem. Verse structure may also be seen as a kind of author's signature. It may also be employed to perform axiological functions.

**Keywords:** verse forms, metrics, versology, semiotics, semantic value, intertextual relationship, axiology

## 1. Introductory remarks

As is known, verse is a form of utterance where the text is doubly segmented as to syntax and verse/line, with the equivalent segments of a poem often being detached on the metrics principle: based on a fixed number of syllables, feet, or accents. This additional segmentation of text makes the difference between poem and prose, the latter being 'unfettered speech'.

Both segmentations, the syntactic and the verse (line)-related one, make use in 'spontaneous speech' of a set of prosodic signals of fragmentation. Segments are signalled by shorter or longer pauses, and the preceding 'fallings' or 'risings' of the voice (cadences and anti-cadences). Verse is a product of the archaic oral culture and, in spite of the expansion of writing, it has retained an association with its original oral form (the association that makes its presence

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felt even during silent reading, as one senses the rhythmical structure of a text in verse form). Here it becomes quite clear that verse makes use of particularly diversified, doubly motivated prosodic means, which indicate segmentations of a text into sentences/phrases and their parts, as well as lines of verse and rhythmical segments thereof.<sup>1</sup> A piece set in verse form features intonation segments isolable in line with the two corresponding segmentations, but the two segmentation rules may as well cross over each other: a sentence/phrase or a part of it may smoothly run over from one line into another (enjambment), or the sentence's/phrase's limits fall within a line, thus breaking its cohesive course. As a result, the double segmentation adds richer means of shaping the poem's utterance, which is decisive for the piece's stylistic uniqueness. Application of varied metrical rules and employment of other means which highlight the segments inside the text, such as rhymes or strophic arrangements of a specified sort, additionally enriches the repertoire of verse forms in use in a given literature.

A stylistic characterisation of various verse structures results from the fact that they create different conditions of 'filtering' the linguistic material. The verse segmentation rule, as assumed for a given metrical variety, is the reason why the language 'timber' is selected and matched in a specific manner; thus, the individual linguistic elements appear at a lesser or higher frequency. A poem which realises a certain rhythmical pattern admits, prefers, or obstructs words with a specified width or stretch and place of stress, certain parts of speech, or even certain specified types of sentence or phrase. Verse utterances representing diverse metrical arrangements form, therefore, a separate variety of texts. They differ as to the linguistic filling within the specific types of poem. Consequently, these stylistically diverse kinds of poem may become carriers of various sign-related functions.

Approaching the *oratio vincta* as a characterised fashion of speaking, encumbered with a certain meaning, is apparent already with the oldest uses of verse – those, in specific, where rhythm-bound utterances, imbued with parallelisms, became set against 'ordinary' everyday speaking. The simple, and conspicuous, rhythmising procedure based on repeating a certain structure, has a universal reach, to all appearance. It is discoverable in archaic sacred texts across cultures. Let us observe that the 'verse/prose' opposition, which overlaps with the contradistinction 'solemn speech'/'daily speech (colloquial language)', reflects the basic cultural opposition: the sacred/the profane, and valorises

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<sup>1</sup> In longer lines (verses), a constant word boundary also separates the caesural segment from the clause segment.

both poles, in parallel. Rhythmised form was applied with what expressed a divine order of the world, thus being deemed important, worthy of fixing – being part of the realm of common good. A shape of the sort was given to texts connected with religious rituals, mythological stories, or poems about heroes (or braves), as well as to hymns and other prayers as these directly addressed God (a god), or a deity. Other important texts, worthy of remembrance, were also expressed in verse form: those which solidified the ideas and concepts of the world/universe, and recommended certain forms of behaviour – one example being proverbs as manifestations of collective wisdom. Within the reach of prose remained what was ‘human’, earthly or mundane, of casual value, things related to everyday reality.

These oppositions in the use of verse forms, contrasted with prose, have, to a degree, remained viable today. Some cultures approach verse as solemn, inspired speech; hence, poetic pieces are delivered using a voice modulated in a special way.

## 2. Systematic studies on the semantic aspects of verse forms

Semantic potencies residing in various forms of verse have become the subject of systematic investigation – cf. Kiril F. Taranovsky (Taranovsky 1963), Mikhail L. Gasparov (Gasparov 1973), Jurij I. Levin (Levin 1982), Mihhail Y. Lotman (Lotman 1988), Marina Tarlinskaja (Tarlinskaja 1989). Since the late 1960s – early 1970s these studies also had been started in Poland; they were stimulated by the development of the science of signs and sign systems, that is, semiotics, which in the Polish milieu was bred by structuralism and developed in strict interrelation with the achievements of the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School. Intense research on verse, including with regards to the sign functions, has been carried out for almost forty years at the Institute of Literary Research, by a team of Polish scholars, in association with some outstanding verse researchers from other Slavic countries.<sup>2</sup> As part of the Slavonic Comparative Metrics programme, coordinated by Lucylla Pszczołowska and Zdzisława Kopczyńska (till 1982), the uses of linguistic material in individual forms of verse have been analysed, alongside the function performed by these forms in various Slavic literatures; investigated has been the verse form,

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<sup>2</sup> The research project was joined by: Miroslav Červenka, Svetozar Petrović, Mikhail L. Gasparov, Kveta Sgallová, Raja Kuncheva, Nina Chamata, Miriana Stefanović, Tatiana V. Skulacheva, Aleksander Bjelčević, Mihhail Y. Lotman.

with the distinguishment of the genres, and ways in which verse structure is projected in translation. The outcomes of this systematic research of verse have been published in a nine-volume study (the series *Słowiańska Metryka Porównawcza* ['Slavonic Comparative Metrics']: Kopczyńska, Pszczołowska 1978, 1984; Pszczołowska 1988; Pszczołowska, Urbańska 1992, 1993, 1998, 2004; Červenka, Pszczołowska, Urbańska 1995, Pszczołowska, Lotman 2011), with the first two collections deserving special attention, as they show the tendencies in linguistic realisation of the most popular formats in different Slavic literatures, thereby disclosing the reasons for the stylistic peculiarity of metrical structures used in other literatures.

The all-Slavonic comparative research project in question, unique internationally in its design, has been accompanied by systematic studies on Polish verse, conducted by Zdzisława Kopczyńska, Maria-Renata Mayenowa and Lucylla Pszczołowska (Mayenowa 1969; Kopczyńska, Pszczołowska 1969, 1971, 1986; Kopczyńska 1970; Pszczołowska 1981, 2002; Kopczyńska et al. 2007). In the subsequent years, these issues were taken up by Teresa Dobrzyńska (Dobrzyńska, Kopczyńska 1974) and Dorota Urbańska (Urbańska 1995).

Interest in the semantic aspects of use of verse forms influenced the third volume of the abovementioned project edition, entitled *Semantyka form wierszowych* ['The semantics of verse forms'], as well as in a few other studies presented by the aforementioned group of students of verse. Of key importance for this project was the concept of the 'meta-metrical' function of verse, as proposed by Svetozar Petrović (Petrović 1968), which concerns the sign function of a given format. This manifests in a whole group of texts of similar rhythmic organisation where the metrical pattern itself becomes the carrier of meaning. This function ought to be seen as different from local semantic effects which occur in a given text resulting from a specific coupling of rhythmic phenomena with other textual components. Maria Dłuska has described local semantic effects of this type as 'particular' or 'instantaneous expression' (Dłuska 1980: 64). These effects must be taken into account while interpreting individual pieces written in verse form.

Although research in semantic value of verse forms has a rich tradition in Poland, so far the studies have focused primarily on identifying the characterised (marked) rhythmic patterns and determining the scope of individual phenomena. The sign-creation processes taking place in verse would call for more detailed analysis in terms of their semiotic aspect.

### 3. Verse forms as indexes, iconic or symbolic signs

The aforementioned rhythmical phenomena used as a distinguishing feature of sacred texts or solemn style could be described in terms of the semiotic typology proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce (Buczyńska-Garewicz 1975; Komendziński 1996; Mayenowa 2000:120), then, in search of the sources of semantisation of foot-bound speech, and of the origins of utterance of this type, one would point out the association between verse and rhythmical behaviours in humans: the rhythmical/measured movement(s) people make when dancing, marching, or parading in a religious procession; or, slow and even breathing disclosing one's inner peace, as opposed to irregular hasty breathing being, a symptom of animation or anxiety (Taranovsky 1939). Orderly behaviours, different than irregular or casual behaviours, assume an indexal value: they are corporal heralds of composure, calm, self-control – the states that represent the first segment of the Cosmos/Chaos opposition and (as the demanded ones) are positively evaluated. The indexal marking of a rhythmic order is liable to further cultural 'processing'.

Texts of metrical structure exhibit regularity, and so the Cosmos/Chaos opposition extends to them: they represent the pole of order and carry the related positive connotations. As part of the general category of rhythmised speech, various specialised varieties subsequently appear, which function in various ethnic circles and in various times as conventional rhythmical formations of individual genres from the sphere of sacrum. Thus, signs emerge within this sphere which Peirce would categorise as symbols. In antiquity, such sign value is added to hexameter as the widely adopted and recommended rhythmic form of a mythological story, epos.

As the research of Maria Dłuska (Dłuska 1980: 68, 112) and Maria-Renata Mayenowa (Mayenowa 1969) has shown, the possibility of attributing the various forms of verse to the notional categories of relevance for social life has been confirmed in the monuments of Old-Polish literature from the mid-sixteenth century: Mikołaj Rej's *Żywot Józefa* [Life of Joseph] and Marcin Bielski's *Komedia Justyna i Konstancji* [Comedy of Justin and Constance]. There, the opposition of 'man'/'woman' is the point, in its correlation with the values such as 'important'/'unimportant'. This opposition is expressed through contrasting sizes of syllabic verse: long lines (13/14/15-syllable verse), with a caesura, and much shorter, internally indivisible eight-syllable lines. Research into the verse structure of both aforementioned plays has revealed that the opposition of these syllabic formats has been used for contrasting the speech of people occupying specified places in the social hierarchy (as holders of higher social status, men speak through a verse of considerable syllabic span, whilst

women, positioned lower in the social hierarchy, classed alongside servants, speak using octosyllables).

The different treatment of the aforementioned sizes is stylistically justified, as it stems from the differences in linguistic filling of the lines. Research done on thirteen- and eight-syllable Polish verse forms (cf. Kopczyńska, Pszczołowska 1978) have unveiled the differing tendencies as far as the use of rhythmic glossary and of certain syntactic structures in both formats is concerned. Thirteen-syllable Polish verse appears predestined to express utterances, being that they are more sophisticated in terms of syntactic structure, and thus capable of actualising a narrative technique of consideration, and shaping their oratorical genres. As a result, use of thirteen-syllable verse allows (albeit not without exception) for situating a given piece in the high register. The linguistic filling of eight-syllable lines predetermines this Polish format to express intellectually uncomplicated speech, kept in the colloquial style; owing to the historical-cultural circumstances of the Old-Polish period, this was transposed to the 'folk' category. These connotations are confirmed by examples of use of eight-syllable verse in Jan Kochanowski's *Pieśń świętojańska o Sobótce* [Song for Saint John Eve festivity 'Sobotka']; moreover, the octosyllable is related to didactics, speech targeted for children. In all the hitherto evoked situations, verse appears to be a peculiar stylistic register of speech; its sign functions are shaped as stemming from indexal signs – from the speaking style used by specific groups. A colloquial style depicted in a literary piece is an iconic projection of a real phenomenon; its correlation with the eight-syllable format of verse results from operational convention.

The reasons for a different characterisation for both formats rest not only in their different spread and the possibilities of 'filtering' the linguistic material. Any cultural phenomenon, including the forms of *oratio vincta*, may be viewed against their previous uses and are subject to valorisation owing to their earlier affiliation to some contexts. With this aspect in view, the octosyllable is diametrically different in Polish literature from thirteen-syllable verse. Whilst the 'eight' is a native, and thus 'ordinary' form, the 'thirteen' was borrowed from Latin hymns, which gives it a value of 'peculiarity', 'significance' or 'loftiness'. Intertextual influences of this sort imbue verse structures with connotations, and thereby, certain forms of verse become carriers of meanings.

Another interesting interdependence becomes observable by noting the co-occurrence of specified formations of verse with the subject-matter of pieces expressed by means of them and the type of speaking 'I' they embraced. Namely, the connotations of the syllabic eight-syllable Polish format that were referred – that is, primarily, 'ordinariness' and 'simplicity', get transferred to the forms of verse that have evolved from the eight-syllable size in the later ages of

development of Polish literature: to the trochaic tetrameter, introduced in the nineteenth century (as e.g. in the colloquial/chatty style of the fable on 'Janek who sewed boots for dogs' from Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*); or, to three-stress tonic verse (oscillating around eight-syllable size) used as a carrier of quiet colloquial speech, bearing no oratorical features (as e.g. in Jan Kasprówic's *Księga ubogich* [The book of the poor]).<sup>3</sup>

Referring to the above-specified semantic phenomena, one more thing should be taken into account: the format of verse can be taken advantage of to express certain derivative meanings situated within a notion's connotation field. For instance, Polish octosyllable, when used as a verse determining the status of a piece's protagonist or literary subject, is not necessarily a symptom of a simple background of the speaking individual, but can indicate simplicity as a positive feature of personality, as well as an element that marks the person's restraint, his or her quitting the use of high style and the saturation of speech with rhetorical figures. With this function in mind, as a determinant of a terse and reserved style, the syllabic octosyllable was used in Juliusz Słowacki's poem *Sowiński w okopach Woli* [Sowinsky in Wola trenches] where it emphasises the heroic virtue of the dying general.

## 4. Several examples of the semantic potency of verse forms

### 4. 1. Generic identity of the poem and its rhythmical shape

Back with syllabic thirteen-syllable verse, which has been one of the most frequently employed verse forms across several centuries of the development of Polish literature, a sign-related potential, hidden in the way the format is internally shaped, is identifiable. Jan Kochanowski pointed out to this potential by using, in two of his songs (Kochanowski 1960 [1586]: 298–300), some diametrically different stylistic varieties of this particular verse size. What this

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<sup>3</sup> The stylistic features of three-stress tonic verse are described in the monograph on tonism (i.e. Dobrzyńska, Kopczyńska 1979: 41-42): "[...] Three-stress verse – no caesura, short, as if easier to produce; residing at its root was the octosyllable, deemed a not-quite-high-ranking verse: in spite of a certain expressiveness, it could build a simple, i.e. un-artful form. It mainly served basic personal utterances, afterthoughts often avoiding top sophistication, being at times rather commonplace, everyday – thus, in general, such shapes of speaking which were marked by a kind of simplicity and ordinariness. The choice of a tonic form meant, however, that for the speaking individual, these matters have also been important, if not very important at times – whereas their significance remained, as it were, within the privacy sphere, never being exposed to public use."

author did on this occasion was he made use of the primary characteristic of verse-formatted text: the fact that it is shaped based on a fusion of the syntactic and the metrical arrangement.

Czego chcesz od nas, Panie, za twe hojne dary?  
 Czego za dobrodziejstwa, którym nie masz miary?  
 Kościół Cię nie ogarnie, wszędy pełno Ciebie,  
 I w otchłaniach, i w morzu, na ziemi, na niebie.  
 [...]

(Jan Kochanowski, *Pieśń XXV*, *Księgi wtóre* [Song XXV, Second Book of Songs], a fragment)

Niezwykłym i nie leda piórem opatrzoney  
 Polecę precz, poeta, ze dwojej złożony  
 Natury: ani ja już przebywać na ziemi  
 Więcej będę; a większy nad zazdrość, ludnemi

Miasty wzgardzę. On, w równym szczęściu urodzony,  
 On ja, jako mię zowiesz, wielce ulubiony  
 Mój Myszkowski, nie umrę ani mię czarnymi  
 Styks niewesoła zamknie odnogami swymi.  
 [...]

(Jan Kochanowski, *Pieśń XXIV*, *Księgi wtóre* [Song XXIV, Second Book of Songs]<sup>4</sup>, a fragment)

The first of these examples expressively exposes its rhythm, accurately harmonising the (in-)line and the syntactic segmentations. This produces a text meeting the needs of choral singing: an elevated and dignified text whose course is distinctly rhythmical, appropriate to community prayer described in genre terms as hymn. The second text, although written in syllabic thirteen-syllable verse, makes an unrestrained course of utterance overlapped with the rhythmic pattern of the poem. A number of enjambments have been used, appearing also between the stanzas, the lines cut off by the borderlines of syntactic segments. The content of the second quoted poem suggests that it is a poetic epistle to Piotr Myszkowski, the poet's patron and friend. When set in unofficial register, the epistle becomes stylistically close to a free conversation,

<sup>4</sup> For the English version see Appendix II.



and is shaped into prose, as a general rule. Hence, what we find in Kochanowski is a genuine bundle of traits juxtaposed in an oppositional manner and proving of relevance to cultural models, whilst expressed by means of formal oppositions within a single verse measure. Let me add that the artistry Kochanowski displayed in his poetic letter is astonishing. At the time when a regular syllabic verse was just being hatched, this poet proved capable of using it in its most unrestrained form, quitting to a considerable extent the rhythmising influence of the balanced syntactic segments.

The stylisations into community prayer and letter, applied in the respective examples above, redirect our attention on the extensive sphere of applications of verse as a means that shapes various genres of utterance which form a repertoire of petrified communication forms within a culture. Verse evidences its capability as a carrier of genres used in a variety of stylistic registers as well as contexts: in everyday life, religious rituals, official communications, or literature.

Let us now take a look at another case in point (Mickiewicz 1952 [1832]: 275):

DUCHY NOCNE:

Puch czarny, puch miękki pod głowę podłużmy,  
Śpiewajmy, a cicho – nie trwóźmy, nie trwóźmy.

DUCH Z LEWEJ STRONY:

Noc smutna w więzieniu, tam w mieście wesele,  
U stołów tam muzyki huczają;  
Przy pełnych kielichach śpiewają minstrele,  
Tam nocą komety się włóczą:  
Komety z oczkami i jasnym warkoczem.  
(*więzień usypia*)  
Kto po nich kieruje łódź w biegu,  
Ten zaśnie na fali, w marzeniu uroczem,  
Na naszym przebudzi się brzegu.  
[...]

(Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady* [*Forefathers' eve*], Part III, a fragment<sup>5</sup>)

A fragment of a larger whole, the text being referred to is isolable through its form from a greater polymetric composition. The locally utilised amphibrachic rhythm forms a monotonous course, while the verbal message enables one to guess that the fragment quoted above works as a lullaby – a devilish one, to be sure.

<sup>5</sup> For the English version see Appendix III.

We are dealing here with an instance of a cultural text being re-coded from one system of signs into another. A musical or verbal-and-musical piece, such as the song, is imitated in this particular case in a rhythmic course of the language. In parallel, the function of the genre of speech used therein has been modified with respect to the peculiar performers of the text and their evil intents; hence, what we deal with is a mutation of an original genre form, with a new variant of lullaby, encumbered with daemonic connotations.

The amphibrachic course of this piece has a special structure and it embosses the banality of amphibrachic metre constructed with paroxyton words dominating within the Polish language. Delivering the individual metrical feet with the complete accentual unit<sup>6</sup> heightens the monotony of the text, rendering it particularly expressive in its assumed stylisation. The steady, soothing rhythm of this lullaby is numbing in order to undermine the young prisoner's vigilance.

Thus, a lullaby expressed through a verse form takes on itself many of the implications that could have been triggered by its archetype: lullaby crooned to a baby or child. With its words and melody, it is designed to soothe – and to distract one's attention from the external situation. Lulling somebody to sleep causes, moreover, numbing them into a false sense of security. Lullaby is connected with the night-time, and thus may imply the symbolic values which in our culture are represented by night. The point made in *Dziady* [*Forefathers' eve*] is that night is, primarily, the time when evil spirits act – and it is they who are singing to the prisoner.

The example above has implied interesting consequences as far as the uses of verse forms are concerned. A monotony that puts one's rational thinking and vigilance to sleep, and the daemonic characteristics of an easy-to-deliver rhythm have deprived the amphibrachic four-foot lines an opportunity to expand unrestrainedly. Mickiewicz penetratingly noted that tempting lilt of this metrical device, and its disturbing connotations.

The semantic marking of amphibrach, which we have observed in the above example, is echoed in the later uses of this rhythm. For instance, a disturbing daemonic characterisation is contributed by a monotonous amphibrachic rhythm imitating the rhythm of a waltz in a New Year's Eve ball described in Czesław Miłosz's poem *Walc* [Waltz] (Miłosz 2013 [1945]: 26–29)<sup>7</sup>. Dancing

<sup>6</sup> Accentual unit is a prosodic entirety formed of a single notional word, or such a word together with a clitic (e.g. 'give me', 'go home', 'and he stayed', and the like).

<sup>7</sup> Zdzisława Kopczyńska has proposed an excellent analysis of the rhythmic structure and the composition of this piece (Kopczyńska 1981; Kopczyńska et al. 2007: 20–49).

is shown in this poem in an ambivalent manner, which, after all, is a frequent trait in actualisations of the motif of dance as withering in a whirling movement. Submission to the rhythm and charms of amusement has a concealed danger of detachment from real life and historical order of reality. The waltz becomes a serpent-tempter: “walc pełza tam liśćmi złotymi zduszony” [there, the waltz’s creeping, strangled with golden leaves]. Its hypnotic influence incites the poem’s (female) character to forget about the threats borne by the historical reality, and revealed to her in the vision of Siberia and the lamentable fate of her future son.

#### 4. 2. Verse form as an iconic sign

Let us stick to the type of semantisation of verse form which was visible in the last quoted examples: the amphibrachic lullabies as well as the pieces inheriting the daemonic connotations of these monotonous forms. The regularity of the rhythm of a poem, which appears particularly clearly in syllabotonic pieces, is quite often taken advantage of as an iconic sign that reproduces some extralingual phenomenon. One has to notice, however, that the rhythm of a verse does not in itself offer sufficient potential for precise expression of a specified phenomenon. A given rhythmic structure may imitate things as different as falling rain or snow, horse riding, dance, etc. The only shared element is the representation of a rhythm, regular movement, the iconic function being concretised as influenced by the meanings expressed in the text with the use of verbal means. This is an important issue in terms of recognising the semantic potential of verse as a form of utterance: in most cases, the sign function belongs to poetic pieces in their verbal-and-rhythmic form.

The iconic function, interconnected with other sign values, is fulfilled by the verse form in a not-too-well known sonnet *Lodokół „Bajkał”* (Birkenmajer 1927):

Z komina /sypnęły się /iskry // – furcząc / na wietrze / rozwiła się / flaga;  
Kapitan / coś krzyknął / przez tubę // – i pokład / w jednej się / chwili /zaludni;  
Z hurkotem / wbiegli / majtkowie // – jak małpy / zwinni, / krępawi / i brudni,  
Do wind / się wzięli, / do putków, // wszędy / robota / zawzięta / się wzmaga.

Warknęły / liny / i koła // – kocioł / parowy / głucho / zadudni,  
Pierś / okrętu / dygoce // w prężnym / wysiłku, / w kurczowym / wstrząsie;  
Zgrzytają / lodów / zębiska, // w zjadliwym / śmiechu / się szczyrzą / i skrzą się...  
Zrywa się / okręt / z uwięzi // – poleci! – / zatrzymać / coraz go / trudniej!...

Wszystkie / siły / wyteżył // – aż kłębem / pary / się zdyszał / i zziajał,  
 Słupem / wody / modrawym, // jak klingą / stalową, / wymachnął / naokół,

Pod jego / gorącym / tchnieniem // jak piana / mydlana / roztajał 6 stresses (!)  
 Pancierz / lodowy, / którym // olbrzym/-Bajkał / pierś swoją / okuł... 7 stresses (?)

Ruszył / po krach / – krach opornych // – rycerz / stalowy: / groźny / lodokół –  
 I szklane / tafle / jeziora, // niby / diamentem, / ostrogą / krajał.

(Józef Birkenmajer, *Lodokół „Bajkał”* [*Icebreaker “Baikal”*]<sup>8</sup>)

This poem represents a measure that proves unique to Polish poetry: a seven-stress tonic verse (3+4)<sup>9</sup>. It is a large-span pattern, unique in itself as well as against the sonnet tradition. The long size of tonic lines has in this case a function similar to long syllabic formats, such as those appearing in pieces of ‘significant and serious’ content.

Telling a story of an icebreaker, the poem is kept in a pathetic tone, its emphatic accentual course seeming to imitate the effort of the people and machines collaborating in breaking the ice on a lake. A systemic property of the tonic metre used in this particular piece is its ability to highlight the accents. The speech, saturated with stresses, becomes emphatic and capable of expressing the concentration of will, which constitutes one of the functions of tonic verse in Polish literature (Dobrzyńska, Kopczyńska 1974: 101). In this way, the hard labour of the icebreaker is imaged in the poem’s rhythm, dealt with as an iconic sign. Let us add that numerous onomatopoeias contribute in this poem to the image of ice crushing (e.g. “warknęły (liny)”, “w kurczowym wstrząsie”, “zgrzytają (...), szczerzą i skrzą się”, “się zdyszał i zziajał”, “Ruszył po krach – krach opornych – rycerz (...) groźny”, “ostrogą krajał”) as well as to the image of spirting water (“wody modrawym (...) wymachnął”).

Similarly as in the previous cases, the meaning or sense of the sign is clarified only after the content of the verbal message is taken into account. A polyvalent sign, encompassing the lexical layer (setting the subject-matter), phonetic construction and the rhythm of the poem, is the carrier of meaning, in this case.

<sup>8</sup> The content of this poem is built with a series of onomatopoeias that is why the word-for-word translation would not represent it in a suitable way and the result would be rather ludicrous. In that case a discussion of the poem serve better our ends.

<sup>9</sup> There are some irregularities in the rhythmical structure of this poem. The 11<sup>th</sup> verse is irregular with its 6 stresses. A regular caesura after 3 accentual units is less obvious but possible in the 12<sup>th</sup> verse.

What this example shows, in parallel, is that expressing evaluations is feasible with the use of verse form: the poem is, in fact, a *sui generis* paean in honour of modernist projects to tame nature. The piece's extreme format emphasises the uniqueness of the work of the engineers exploring difficult-to-access Asian territories. The verse form in this sonnet would serve as a peculiar imitation of the scale of this effort; thus, we are faced with a diagram, as a variety of iconic sign.

#### 4. 3. Verse form as bearer of axiological value

An instance of negative and grotesque representation of an object with the use of verse form is Zbigniew Herbert's poem *Mona Lisa* (Herbert 1995 [1961]: 25–27):

przez siedem gór granicznych	(three-foot iamb – as in a song)
kolczaste druty rzek	- „ -
i rozstrzelane lasy	- „ -
i powieszony mosty	- „ -
szedłem –	
przez wodospady schodów	- „ -
wiry morskich skrzydeł	
i barokowe niebo	- „ -
całe w bąblach aniołów	
– do ciebie	
Jeruzalem w ramach	
stoję	
w gęstej pokrzywie	
wycieczki	
na brzegu purpurowego sznura	
i oczu	
no i jestem	(syntagmatic free verse in Różewicz's style)
widzisz jestem	- „ -
nie miałem nadziei	- „ -
ale jestem	- „ -
pracowicie uśmiechnięta	
smolista niema i wypukła	(four-foot iamb)
jakby z soczewek zbudowana	- „ -
na tle wklęsłego krajobrazu	- „ -
między czarnymi jej plecami	- „ -

które są jakby księżyc w chmurze - „ -  
 a pierwszym drzewem okolicy - „ -  
 jest wielka próżnia piany światła - „ -  
 no i jestem (syntagmatic free verse in Różewicz's style)  
 czasem było - „ -  
 czasem wydawało się - „ -  
 nie warto wspominać - „ -

tyka jej regularny uśmiech (four-foot iamb)  
 głowa wahadło nieruchome - „ -  
 oczy jej marzą nieskończoność - „ -  
 ale w spojrzeniach śpią ślimaki - „ -

no i jestem (syntagmatic free verse in Różewicz's style)  
 mieli przyjść wszyscy - „ -  
 jestem sam - „ -  
 kiedy już - „ -  
 nie mógł głową ruszać - „ -  
 powiedział - „ -  
 jak to się skończy - „ -  
 pojedę do Paryża - „ -  
 między drugim a trzecim palcem - „ -  
 prawej ręki - „ -  
 przerwa - „ -  
 wkładam w tę bruzdę - „ -  
 puste łuski losów - „ -  
 no i jestem - „ -  
 to ja jestem - „ -  
 wparty w posadzkę - „ -  
 żywymi piętami - „ -  
 tłusta i niezbyt ładna Włoszka (four-foot iamb)  
 na suche skały włos rozpuszcza - „ -  
 od mięsa życia odrąbana - „ -  
 porwana z domu i historii - „ -  
 o przeraźliwych uszach z wosku - „ -  
 szarfą żywicy uduszona - „ -  
 jej puste ciała woluminy - „ -  
 są osadzone na diamentach - „ -  
 między czarnymi jej plecami - „ -  
 a pierwszym drzewem mego życia - „ -

miecz leży  
wytopiona przepaść

(Zbigniew Herbert, *Mona Liza* [*Mona Lisa*]<sup>10</sup>)

Among other means, this polymetric poem uses iamb – in the fragments where Gioconda is portrayed. The impetuous rhythm of the four-foot iamb, known in Polish literary tradition by its frequent polemical uses, is employed here in order to emphasise the dehumanisation of the title character. Her degradation is brought about, among other factors, through the metaphor showing Mona Lisa's famous smile as a ticking clock, which is rendered clear through a 'clocklike' use of iamb. Expressed by the poem's rhythm, the iconic sign grows concrete thanks to the verbal stratum and the metaphor therein used.

Herbert's is a complex rhythmic composition and conceals another singularity. The lyrical character's utterances are formatted as brief, concise phrases or elliptical sentences which sharply stand out against the surrounding parts of the poem, and especially against the vigorous iambic rhythm, which is used with a polemical purpose in mind. They assume the shape of syntagmatic free verse (Urbańska 1995: 39–47) and evoke a certain known stylistic register. Such course of versifying and style of poetic speech was introduced in Polish poetry after the Second World War by Tadeusz Różewicz. His softened, short-formatted poems, featuring no rhetorical traits, have remained extremely genuine in their simplicity and emotionally muffled diction, and become an indexal sign of the behaviours of man, whom through experiencing war has been deprived of enthusiasm.. The way of speaking being evoked is simple, substantive, and reliable. Różewicz's verse becomes a carrier of axiological connotations, as it underwrites the veracity of what is pronounced (Dobrzyńska 2012).

Let us compare Herbert's stylisations with their archetype (Różewicz 1994 [1947]):

Mam dwadzieścia cztery lata  
ocalałem  
prowadzony na rzeź.  
[...]  
Szukam nauczyciela i mistrza  
niech przywróci mi wzrok słuch i mowę  
niech jeszcze raz nazwie rzeczy i pojęcia

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this poem see Dobrzyńska 2003: 163–177. For the English version see Appendix IV.

niech oddzieli światło od ciemności.  
 Mam dwadzieścia cztery lata  
 ocalałem  
 prowadzony na rzeź.

(Tadeusz Różewicz, *Ocalony* [*Survivor*], from the collection *Niepokój* [*Trouble*]<sup>11</sup>)

#### 4. 4. Verse form as an index revealing the author

Quite an interesting situation motivated by intertextual relations occurs where a poem's rhythmic form turns it into its author's signature, an indexal sign indicative of the author. The prison scene in Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [*Forefathers' eve*] (Mickiewicz 1952 [1832]: 282) is a case in point. The songs sung by the prisoners form a sort of triptych, Konrad being the last to sing:

KONRAD  
 (*śpiewa*) [sings]  
 Pieśń ma była już w grobie, już chłodna –  
     Krew poczuła – spod ziemi wygląda –  
 I jak upiór powstaje krwi głodna:  
     I krwi żąda, krwi żąda, krwi żąda.  
     Tak! Zemsta, zemsta, zemsta na wroga,  
     Z Bogiem i choćby mimo Boga!

(*chór powtarza*) [repeat Chorus]  
 I Pieśń mówi: ja pójdę wieczorem,  
     Naprzód braci rodaków gryźć muszę,  
 Komu tylko zapuszczę kły w duszę,  
     Ten jak ja musi zostać upiorem.  
     Tak! Zemsta, zemsta, *etc. etc.*  
 [...]

(Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady* [*Forefathers' eve*]. Part III, a fragment<sup>12</sup>)

Konrad's song excels in its boisterous and dynamic rhythm, which is masterly harmonised with, and attuned to its rebellious content. Mickiewicz has

<sup>11</sup> For the English version see Appendix V.

<sup>12</sup> For the English version see Appendix VI.



obtained its vehement tone through the use of a syllabotonic rhythm, three-foot anapaestic hypercatalectic verse (i.e. featuring feminine rhyme). Apart from imitating a state of emotional tension (which is connected with the iconic function of the rhythm being used), the fragment under analysis offers certain other identifiable sign functions. Konrad's song is contrasted against the traditional verse structure of the songs of Feliks and Jankowski, his two colleagues. Both of these pieces have used syllabic forms and compositional forms known from the Polish song tradition. Konrad, for a change, uses a syllabotonic verse, an absolute novelty to Polish literature at the time. The use of this novel rhythm carries an indexal piece of information: here comes an innovative poet, a unique creative artist.

This is how this use of an innovative rhythm, enhanced by a metrical contrast of the patterns applied, can be interpreted in the three songs. Still, researchers specialising in the history of Polish verse can discover an even deeper semantic level. Konrad uses in his song a verse rhythm that has only been taken up by one Polish poet: three years before he wrote Part III of *Dziady* [*Forefathers' eve*], Mickiewicz used nearly the same anapaestic patterns in his ballads *Trzech Budrysów* [*Three Budryses*] and *Czaty* [*Keeping a lookout*]<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the rhythm of the anapaestic song gains a particular indexal value, as a *sui generis* identification mark of Mickiewicz the poet. A signature of this sort brings the piece's character closer to the one who has authored it. The unique rhythm (by the standards of the time) seems to imply an identity of the work and its author. Such identification is part of the Romanticist canon, whereby lyric poetry is approached as expression of sentiments not only of the lyrical subject ('I') but also of the author himself.

## 5. Conclusions

As revealed by these analyses, the sign value of various forms of verse is founded upon their stylisation-founded relation of verse-formatted texts to different varieties of discourse, stylistic registers and genres of utterance functioning in social life, as well as to conventions prevalent in literature. Repartition of verse forms confirms that 'fettered speech' reflects, to an extent, the segments of oppositions functioning in a given culture – recoded into various semiotic systems and expressed through various cultural texts. A poem's rhythmic structure enables us to use it as iconic sign which imitates certain phenomena in its own peculiar manner. This form may also become a carrier of axiological

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<sup>13</sup> In the two ballads mentioned here the 4-feet and 3-feet anapaestic verses alternate.

values. Intertextual associations indicated by the metrical form also produce the possibility of treating this form as an indicator of a relation with a given author in case a unique verse rhythm functions as his (her) signature.

Recognition of this semantic potential of forms of verse discloses the sphere of signs that enrich a given culture – and forms an indispensable element in interpreting a poetic text.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This article is due to be published in a slightly revised version in Polish, as part of the collection *Znakowe wartości kultury [Semiotic values of the culture]*, Z. Kloch et al. (eds.), forthcoming. The paper was translated into English by Tristan Korecki.

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## Appendix

## I.

What wilt Thou from us, Lord, for Thy bounteous gifts,  
 what for Thy goodness which is measureless?  
 The Church will not contain Thee; everything is full of Thee:  
 Limbo and Sea and Earth and Heaven.  
 [...]

(Jan Kochanowski, *Second Book of Songs*, XXV; Weintraub 1952: 412)

## II.

Endowed with a pinion that is mighty and rare,  
 A poet of two forms, I will take to the air:  
 I will not remain on this earth any longer,  
 But, above envy, I will look with disfavor

At crowded cities. Not I, the one lowly-born,  
 Not I, whom you call your friend, by Death shall be borne,  
 Dear Myszkowski, nor will I be held prisoner  
 By the black arms of the mournful Stygian water.  
 [...]

(Jan Kochanowski, *Second Book of Songs*, XXIV; Mikoś 1995: 171)

## III.

## SPIRITS OF NIGHT:

Lay him on eider down, shadow his brows,  
 Sing to him, whisper him, let him not rouse.

## SPIRIT FROM THE LEFT SIDE:

Here it is prison gloom, out in the town  
 Music and dancing and light;  
 Goblets are foaming, all sorrow to drown,  
 Comets are ranging the night;  
 Their tresses are trailing, their pretty eyes beam;  
 [ THE PRISONER *sleeps.* ]

Who steers by their guidance to land,  
 Falling asleep in a ravishing dream,  
 Will waken upon our strand.

(Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers' Eve*, part III (a fragment); Mickiewicz 1944: 252)

## IV.

Through seven mountain frontiers  
barbed wire of rivers  
and executed forests  
and hanged bridges  
I kept going –  
through waterfalls of stairways  
whirlings of sea wings  
and baroque heaven  
all bubbly with angels  
– to you  
Jerusalem in a frame

I stand  
in the dense nettle patch  
of a cook's tour  
on a shore of crimson rope  
and eyes

so I'm here  
you see I'm here

I hadn't a hope  
but I'm here

laboriously smiling on  
resin-colored mute convex

as if constructed out of lenses  
concave landscape for a background

between the blackness of her back  
which is like a moon in clouds

and the first tree of the surroundings  
is a great void froth of light

so I'm here  
sometimes it was  
sometimes it seemed that  
don't even think about it

only her regulated smile  
her head a pendulum at rest

her eyes dream infinity  
but in her glances snails are asleep

so I'm here  
they were all going to come  
I'm alone

when already  
he could no longer move his head  
he said  
as soon as all his is over  
I'm going to Paris

between the second and the third finger  
of the right hand  
a space  
I put in his furrow  
the empty shells of fates

so I'm here  
it's me here  
pressed into the floor  
with living heels

fat and not too nice signora  
loosens her hair upon dry rocks

hewed off from the meat of life  
abducted from home and history

with horrifying ears of wax  
smothered with a scarf of glaze

the empty volumes of her flesh  
are set in diamonds



between the blackness of her back  
 and the first tree of my life  
 lies a sword  
 a melted precipice

(Zbigniew Herbert, *Mona Lisa*; Herbert 2007: 170–172)

V.

I am twenty-four  
 led to slaughter  
 I survived.

...

I seek a teacher and a master  
 may he restore my sight hearing and speech  
 may he again name objects and ideas  
 may he separate darkness from light.

I am twenty-four  
 led to slaughter  
 I survived.

(Tadeusz Różewicz, *The Survivor*, a fragment; Różewicz 1994: 7)

VI.

KONRAD [*Sings.*]

Song lay cold within the grave;  
     It scented blood – from underground  
 It rose as vampires rise that crave  
     The blood of corpses scattered round.  
     Then vengeance, vengeance on the foe,  
     God upon our side or no!

[*The chorus repeats the refrain.*]

Then up spoke Song: “I’ll walk by night  
     And first I’ll gnaw each brother worm;  
 When he feels my serpent bite  
     He shall rise in vampire form.”  
     Aye, vengeance, vengeance on the foe,  
     God upon our side or no!

Then we'll seek the foe at last,  
    Suck his blood from him, and hew  
His body fine and nail it fast  
    Let he rise a vampire too.  
Then his soul to hell we'll snatch  
    Squeeze its immorality  
From it. We will gnaw and scretch  
    While it yet feels agony.  
    Then vengeance, vengeance on the foe,  
    God upon our side or no!

(Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers' eve*, part III; a fragment; Mickiewicz 1944: 268–269)