Marta Baron-Milian
ORCID 0000-0002-5430-4339
University of Silesia in Katowice

# Worthless yet Priceless: The Truths and Economics of Poetry

**Abstract**

The essay tries to capture the epistemological status of poetry from the perspective of questions posed by the economy of literature. Selected theories of poetry – those of Jochen Hörisch, Viktor B. Shklovsky, Jean Baudrillard and Franco Berardi – can be regarded as a kind of "economics of poetry" due to their proposed treatment of the properties of the poetic medium from an economic perspective. In each of these theories, poetry is defined as uneconomical and useless, which, paradoxically, becomes its fundamental condition for existence as a place for breaking the linguistic circulation of signs, a point of resistance against conventionalized communication and automatization of perception, and thus a medium offering unique knowledge about reality.

**Keywords**: poetry, truth, economy of literature

"Confusion to the memory of Newton …
because he destroyed the poetry of the rainbow"
John Keats

"Cursed be the glare of apparition
That on the finer sense intrudes!"
Johann Wolfgang Goethe

Sometimes little can be seen – even though it might be illuminated, hidden in plain sight. A flash of light can be blinding, causing our eyes to narrow in the bright sunlight. Introducing readers into the sphere of disturbing oxymora and confronting a peculiar cognitive crisis, in the poem (or, rather, prose poetry) *Darkness*, Stanisław Barańczak wrote: "One needs the power of darkness to know more clearly" (Barańczak, 2007, p. 40). While both logic and knowledge point to a different outcome,

for Barańczak brightness is not enough to know clearly – here the condition of cognition is "the power of darkness." It is not about "seeing more clearly," however, even though the syntax and phraseology suggest it to be so, but more about "knowing more clearly," even if this seems to be a spelling mistake. If we take the path of truth to be the path of reference, confirming congruence between words and reality, the quote from *Darkness* erases all addresses that direct words to things, pointing rather to the devious cognitive paths of aporias, errors, and paradoxes. A fiasco from the point of view of logic and reference turns out to be a victory in a different space – that of figuration and contrasting perception. A supposed cognitive defeat, along with the affirmation of an erroneous trope, is, in some sense, a victory. The piled-up paradoxes found in Barańczak temporize with the truth, rhetorically repealing the necessity of verification and, at the same time, postponing accusations of falsehood. It is as if poetry had its own answer to a question from which even logic backs away: "One needs the power of darkness to know more clearly."

Further complicating the meanings of brightness and darkness in poetic cognition, let us begin by dispersing the light. It would be difficult to conjure up a better tale illuminating all the tensions outlined here than that of the scientific and poetic case of the rainbow[1]. Through experiments with the prism, Isaac Newton proved that white light splits into the full-color spectrum. Publishing his famous *Opticks* in 1704, Newton could not have imagined the gravity of his discovery for poets. To enlightened society, Newton's "untangling" of the threads of light became a fascinating scientific axiom that, in a sense, was poetic in itself, and, aided by metaphors, could additionally become sensual, dramatic and charming. "Did ever poet image ought so fair, dreaming in whispering groves, by the hoarse brook … How just, how beauteous the refractive law," wrote James Thomson in 1727 in the poem *To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton* (Abrams, 2012, p. 334). Yet this poetic fascination with science was only momentary, it waned at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, setting a permanent opposition between poetic truth that

[1] The following story of the Romantics' rainbows was inspired by the monograph *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* by M.H. Abrams (Abrams, 2003).

(fortunately) was impossible to verify and verifiable scientific judgment. And so began the poetic mourning of the rainbow, with John Keats' funeral verse: "There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:/ We know her woof, her texture; she is given/ In the dull catalogue of common things./ Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,/ Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,/ Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine —/ Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made/ The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade" (Abrams, p. 337). Poetic condemnation of scientific scrutiny will have no end...

Thus the arc of the rainbow binds together the problem of truth and poetry, but there still remains the final element of this essay: economics. Could it be considered a lucky coincidence that a leprechaun, made famous by Irish legends, hides his treasure – a big pot of gold – at the end of the rainbow?

## Brighter, darker...

"All poetry is misrepresentation"
Jeremy Bentham

To consider only the 20th century, literary work was not only a separate body from scientific work, but was often also in opposition to it. Danuta Ulicka enumerates such approaches by a number of scholars: "in 1926 by Richards, 1931 – Ingarden, 1942 – Wellek and Warren, in 1949 – by Kayser, 1957 – Frye, ... in 1972 by Genette and 1975 by Culler" (Ulicka, 2006, p. 10). Nevertheless, literary works continued to emit (peculiar) "cognitive toxins" (ibid.). These toxins turned out to be so mysterious and stimulated the artistic, literary and philosophical imagination to such an extent that they were scrutinized over and over again. Because of this, nowadays it is nearly impossible to briefly or selectively illustrate the history of reflection on the epistemological status, truths, wisdom or cognitive functions encapsulated in poetry, for these concepts are inextricably linked with a number of others that are related: mimesis, representation, reference, realism, etc...

In his most famous lecture, about placing poetics within the linguistic model, which is connected with the problem of the arbitrary nature of the sign as described by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson subordinated the poetic function to the

referential function, but also warned that "Any attempt to reduce the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification" (Jakobson, 2006, p. 247). And so, researchers began using literary terms as if literature were akin to scientific knowledge, never really attempting to determine the original character of literary cognition. Since defining it was an impossible task, metaphors were mainly used when trying to express the cognitive function of literature. That is why the archive of metaphors used in an attempt to grasp the relationship between a literary text and reality, literary fiction and truth, or between the word and the thing being represented by it, is extremely vast. We are condemned to wandering the treacherous corridors of this archive because once we choose a certain key to unlock one of the infinite doors, we quickly realize that we have been led astray and are walking the archive's corridors in circles again. The extent of the problem (and the trouble with the keys) is shown even by just a few of the paradoxes found in reflection on the relationship between literature and the world. As Antoine Compagnon aptly but ironically points out: "In Plato's *Republic*, mimesis is subversive, it threatens the social bond and poets must be banished from the City ... . At the other extreme, for Barthes, mimesis is repressive, it consolidates the social bond because it is allied with ideology (the *doxa*), which it serves as an instrument. Is mimesis subversive or repressive? Since it can take on such disparate qualifiers, it is probably not the same notion; from Plato to Barthes, it has been thoroughly reversed, but between the two, from Aristotle to Auerbach, it was not seen as anything harmful" (Compagnon, 2004, p. 70).

It is not surprising that this whole collection of metaphors from literature and literary studies, attempting to capture the epistemological status of a literary work, was described by Rita Felski as "a chronicle of outgrown errors" (Felski, 2016, p. 92). In this collection of metaphors, we shall find, above all else, probabilities and fictions, appearances and shadows, illusions and delusions, fakes and counterfeits, imitations and copies, deformations and distortions, substitutes and equivalents. From the point of view of the critique of literature as not respecting the truth, which goes back as far as Plato, a literary work is "a sham, a shameless un-truth, this failure of knowledge drawing all kinds of calamitous consequences in its wake" (ibid., p. 87). And yet,

another sphere of metaphors disperses the darkness of the metaphor archive: metaphors in which literature is perceived as light or a lamp[2] revealing, thanks to its unique quality, what has yet not been seen, illuminating and exposing the real or different nature of things. Nevertheless, the power of literature is at times compared to that befitting "second nature," i.e. presenting the literary work as a microcosm governed by its own laws or, more often, a "heterocosm" in which the poet's potential is equaled to God the creator (Abrams, 2012, p. 298). The darkness of the metaphor archive will also be illuminated by the cognitive optimism of several other well-known glass objects, such as a mirror reflecting reality, or a window through which one can look at the world outside. Both metaphors have been criticized, however, for the same reason as the whole theory of reflection (as developed, for example, by György Lukács): for the illusion of transparency; transparency that ignores the specifics of linguistic mediation, or, as Michel Foucault puts it in *Words and Things*, for the utopian belief that things can be named without any interference (Foucault, 2005, p. 133). In the meantime, what we are used to referring to as reality, in literature appears only as the "reality effect" (Barthes, 1999, p. 118) or the "code of representation" (ibid.), which in turn only exists as a "perspective of quotations" (ibid. p. 55). At this point, reference is being replaced by intertextuality. However, once we dig further into the archive, we arrive at the map section, illustrating researchers' love for visual analogies, showing cartography to be still in fashion, as in the cognitive mapping of Frederic Jameson (Jameson, 2009), the maps and graphs of Franco Moretti (Moretti, 2016), to cite just a few examples. Further, we find a room where texts can be recognized as symptoms, and some researchers (e.g. following Althusser) agree that literature, while unable to convey true knowledge, "can attain a critical distance from the everyday work of ideology by rendering it in aesthetic form, thereby exposing its repressed or excluded meanings" (Felski, p. 90). The relationship between reality and art is no longer derived from the notion of similarity but is seen through the prism of suppressed causality,

[2] Among many other sources, the most complete and interesting analysis of these metaphors is to be found in the aforementioned monograph by Abrams (Abrams, 2003). An example of a synthetic approach to the problem in Polish literary studies can be found in Anna Krajewska's essay, "Light as an Epistemological Metaphor" (Krajewska, 2006).

referring to social conditions. But following the tropes of subsequent metaphors, one cannot overlook the tropes themselves, for literature is at times perceived as a trail or trope of reality (Nycz, 2001), or a space of unexpected epiphanies (ibid.). Finally, the archive of metaphors (guiding us toward the truth of literature) draws attention to the very concept of metaphor as an essential tool of literary cognition[3]. And so, a metaphor does not falsify nor verify, but changes our point of view and way of looking at things, allowing us to scrutinize them more intently, obscuring the general picture so we might "know more clearly." This rather long list serves not as an attempt to exhaust the resources of key tropes that appear in reflection on literary cognition. Rather, as is the case with all enumerations, it attempts to showcase a small but most representative part instead of the overwhelming whole[4].

Criticism of poetry through its cognitive function reached its peak in positivism, where recognition of the fact that a poetic work does not generate knowledge became the basis for speaking about it in terms of uselessness. Jeremy Bentham judges poetry extremely harshly, posing two simple (and "lethal") questions: "Is it useful?" and "Is it true to reality?" (Abrams, 2012, p. 329). John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* leaves no shadow of a doubt as to the answer, stating that both poetry and gambling "which usually go together, are alike in this too, that they seldom bring any advantage but to those who have nothing else to live on" (Abrams, 2012, p. 329). To positivists, poetry was only useful so far as it offered the possibility of pleasure and entertainment. In a cognitive sense, it was often considered not only useless but also harmful – falsifying reality.

---

[3] Not only in the literary sense, of course, but also the philosophical. The most famous lectures can be found in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 1993), Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 2002) and Hans Blumenberg (Blumenberg, 2017).

[4] An important synthetic and analytical approach to the problem of the "truth of poetry" can be found in the book *Truth in Literature* (edited by Andrzej Tyszczyk, Jarosław Borowski and Ireneusz Piekarski). Especially vital to the problem would be, among other examples, Janusz Misiewicz's essay "The Truth of Poetry," Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska's "About Lyricism and the 'Truth of Life'," and Witold Sadowski's "Tone and Truth in Works Written in Verse." A series of important reflections on the epistemological status of poetry is also brought by essays collected in the book *Literature and Knowledge* (edited by Włodzimierz Bolecki and Elżbieta Dąbrowska), to which I refer in this essay a number of times.

Although it can be said that these qualities mark literature and art in general, it is poetry that was denied economic functionality to the greatest extent due to, among other things, its extremely confused relationship with truth and reality. From a scientific point of view, poetry (much more than other literary genres) appears to be useless, and from an economic standpoint – superfluous and unnecessary and, therefore, simply uneconomical. Since poetic words cannot be simply exchanged for wares, and all referential functions are highly problematic, the losses definitely outweigh the cognitive profits that one could gain from a search for "poetic truth." Cognitive worthlessness and the logic of unprofitability surrounding poetry situates it at the outskirts of what we could call the economics of communication, representation, and knowledge. While the above seems like a debate over an issue already resolved (at least since the 19th century), it does draw attention to the peculiar relationship between thinking about poetry in economic terms[5] and discovering or differently understanding its cognitive potential. This kind of poetic uselessness and lack of economy can be treated not as the offensive diagnosis of superficiality, but as a peculiar kind of pricelessness, establishing poetry's unique position in the market of signs.

It is exactly this combination of worthlessness and pricelessness that forms the basis of a number of theories of poetry, developed in different contexts (philosophical, artistic, historical, political, etc.). Tracing various theories of poetry, as it turns out, we still encounter new ones developed and described in the rather unfavorable language of economics. Oftentimes theories of poetry, poetic program manifestos, and meta-artistic statements formulated by both literary scholars, philosophers, and artists, whether of a literary or historical or critical nature, reveal a unique tendency to conceptualize poetry and characterize the poetic medium in economic terms, using economic concepts, metaphors and theories. These theories take the worthlessness or uneconomical character of the poetic form and turn it around to show that through this apparent loss, poetry offers the possibility of unique profits of a cognitive and critical nature.

[5] One of the most interesting examples of such thinking is given by Richard Sieburth in his analysis of Ezra Pound's work, calling Pound's oeuvre "economics of poetry," "poetry of economics" or "poetics of money" (Sieburth, 1995).

It seems, however, that this important issue (combining numerous theories of poetry) does not find much attention within the economy of literature[6] or in what we could call economic literary criticism[7]. The economy of literature began to develop dynamically in the 1980s, dispersing in very different directions, yet in its majority focusing on the study of narrative genres, with the novel playing a key role. Therefore, we are dealing with the marginalization of poetry in studies on literary cognitive function, specific literary knowledge, literature as social practice or the area at the intersection of various external political, economic and social determining factors – all being fields from the economy of literature. This omission seems significant, denying poetic texts not only cognitive value and the role of purveyors of knowledge about reality, but also transferring them to the sphere of utopian autonomy, detached from such texts' heteronomous nature. Thus, not only poetry's cognitive and critical possibilities are questioned, but also its potential for political influence and, consequently, its social significance. Meanwhile, asked from the point of view of economics, questions about the transaction between poems and the world seem to open not only the possibility of a different approach to the problem of poetic cognition but a different placement of the theory of poetry as well.

## Disrupted circulation of words

"Who wants to be Linnaeus at the heart of the sun"
Andrzej Sosnowski

Perhaps it is no coincidence that one of the most coherent projects combining the problems of truth and economics of poetry, authored by German historian of literature and philosopher Jochen Hörisch[8], was based primarily on an analysis of

[6] This concept appears in the canon for this research area, Marc Shell's *The Economy of Literature* (Shell, 1979).

[7] American research on the economics of literature was conducted under the project name of New Economic Criticism in the 1990s. The name was also used as the title of their monograph: *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Interface of Literature and Economics* (Osteen, Woodmansee, Eds., 1999).

[8] Hörisch has not been very popular in Polish literary studies thus far. Paweł Tomczok, in his monograph *Literary Capitalism* (Tomczok, 2018, pp. 67–76), comments more broadly on the theory of media developed by Hörisch.

the work of the great researcher, admirer and "theoretician" of the rainbow – Johann Wolfgang Goethe. With dedication comparable only to his work on *Faust*, Goethe devoted years to his *Theory of Colors*, published in 1810. Experimenting with a prism, Goethe distanced himself from Newton's theory of the splitting of white light. In his peculiar and romantic "phenomenology" or "psychology" of colors, he tried to show that they have their source in the interaction of light and darkness. Although Hörisch's interest in *Faust* is more concerned with metaphors related to money rather than rainbows, in the Polish translation of Goethe's drama we find a fragment in which both these poetic delusions, monetary and rainbow-colored, are combined, and are maybe equally important: "Cursed be the glare of [rainbow] apparition/ That on the finer sense intrudes! ... Cursed Mammon be, when he with treasures/ To restless action spurs our fate!" (Goethe, 2018, p. 38). This commonly recognized quality of poetry and economics became the starting point for Hörisch, author of the famous trilogy dealing with media history and theory (of which *Heads or Tails: The Poetics of Money* is a part).

Hörisch's approach should be presented here first, for it directly combines economics of poetry with the problem of literary *episteme*. He places this relationship at the center of his reflection, giving the poetic form historical character and an important social function, directly resulting from the cognitive and ontosemiological values of the poetic medium. Furthermore, the basis for the concept presented in *The Poetics of Money* is recognizing that literature, especially poetry, is functionally unnecessary and useless. Hörisch turns the subject around, showing that this superfluity neither eliminates the cognitive possibilities of literature nor results from them, but is an essential condition for the production of specifically literary knowledge. As we read in *The Poetics of Money*:

> Belles lettres is always surrounded by the suspicion of being functionally superfluous – 'I am that spendthrift, poetry.' That which is superfluous lives on excess and can therefore afford what others must renounce. Literature began to perceive itself early, and has continued to do so with increasing intensity since the sixteenth century, as the medium that does *not* require cover and is therefore all the more qualified to observe these problems. Literature, after all, does not even claim to validate its statements. Literature is fiction, which means, precisely, that it does not have to be covered by actual events or realities (Hörisch, 2000, p. 17).

The lack of coverage and confirmation of literary statements in reality gives literature the opportunity to present alternative ways of perception. It thus provides "alternative versions and interpretations" of reality (ibid.). As Hörisch notes, literature as an ontosemiological medium enables social synthesis, giving rise to "a sociocultural tapestry that provides every individual event with an orienting framework" (ibid., p. 23). Literature, being a luxury, can afford unwanted commentary that other discourses cannot: "… literature interferes … literature irritates accepted codes, literature interrupts and disturbs communications and common figures of speech" (ibid., p. 27). Such a disruption of communications, found especially in poetry, is the main, underappreciated competence of literature, inextricably linked to its cognitive function. This quality is fully evident in the perception of the history of literature as a history of problems, in which the literary medium is a peculiar resource of knowledge unavailable to the discourses of other knowledge systems, as it focuses on differences in presenting certain factual issues. Hörisch defines this peculiar form of literary knowledge after Walter Benjamin, to whom its indicator would be the intertwining of a given work's philosophical content and its truth.

Hörisch's literary history project thus enhances the cognitive potential of poetry by displaying the heteronomous nature of art, at the same time situating itself on the outskirts of thinking in terms of textual autonomy. In order to capture the nature of poetic transactions with the world (being at the same time an argument for poetry's combination of worthlessness/pricelessness analyzed in this essay), it is undoubtedly necessary to shift to the level of signs.

Thinking in terms of exchange and the "market of signs" is a kind of "ground zero" in understanding literature and poetry in economic terms, in close connection with their cognitive function. The key belief here is that all semiotic theories based on the notions of equivalence, value, or sign exchange, have their common genealogy in the economic discourse. Reflecting on the relations between economics and representation, Michał Paweł Markowski notes: "Just as there is no pre-monetary economics, there is no pre-sign semantics, which means that meaning, just like monetary value, is created only because that which is individual can be exchanged for what is general. This process of exchange can be defined in various ways: as generalization,

abstraction, or symbolization, and it would be right to introduce the category of representation here as an integrative category" (Markowski, 2004, pp. 12–13). However, not only economics and semiotics are combined in the simplest definition of representation, "something exchanged for something else," but also thinking itself, based on the transition "from sensual contact with what is individual to abstract knowledge, using mediatizing categories" (Markowski, 2004, p. 13). Rhetoric, epistemology, and economics come together on the horizon of representation, understood as equivalence. Markowski also justifies this shared genealogy etymologically: *repraesentatio* can be a concept in the mind as well as "hard cash" that can be paid immediately (Markowski, 2004, p. 13).

Just as money is exchanged for commodities because of its shared value, so are words exchanged for things they stand for through common meaning. If we take the economics of communication as the starting point, then the perfect implementation of this kind of (rather reductionist) economics of literature would be realism. Realism maintains its own illusion of reference: the illusion of adequately exchanging things for words, being a medium of the transparent, pre-linguistic character of reality whose proper representation is used by people aware of themselves and the world around them. Markowski uses this example as a starting point for his project on modern literature as being uneconomical, defying economics (Markowski, 2007, p. 60), with modern poetry as an absolute model of "non-exchangeable speech" (ibid., p. 97). Modern literature manifests the opacity of its own medium and recognizes itself as a place of poetic resistance to everyday language ruled by the principles of the economics of communication. According to Markowski, this is the point where the critical potential of modern literature is revealed – dealing with the crisis of representation, undermining the traditional definitions of mimesis, realism, references, truth and fiction, medium and representation. Poetry is paradigmatic for this economics-related relationship between realism and modern literature, with critics thinking of it as non-exchangeable[9].

[9] One of the examples for Markowski is the critical discussion between Ignacy Fik and Stefan Napierski about Bruno Schulz's prose, in which they identify ostentatiously poetic and uneconomical qualities, making claims to literary truth and representation, and accuse his prose of abnormality, perversity, horrors and, especially, uselessness.

Although similar thinking in terms of communicative exchange and poetic non-exchangeability could be traced back to antiquity, it is in 20th-century theories of poetry that this approach makes a significant impact, Viktor B. Shklovsky's formalist dissertation *Art as Technique* being a primary example defining the functions of poetry using the language of economics. Shklovsky begins with a challenging concept of economy: "Poetry is a special way of thinking; it is, precisely, a way of thinking in images, a way which permits what is generally called 'economy of mental effort' ... Aesthetic feeling is the result of this economy" (Szkłowski, 1986, p. 13). Following various theoretical tropes, Shklovsky presents the "general law of saving spiritual strength" or "the principle of the economy of creative effort" (ibid.) – principles on which the economics of poetry is based, in the opinion of researchers mentioned in this essay. Shklovsky's goal is to show the misunderstanding lying at the heart of this perception of the economics of poetry, i.e. based on the principle of economy, which is a solid principle for communication/practical language, but when extended to poetic language serves as evidence of complete ignorance of its laws. Instead of economy then, we should talk about "the laws of expenditure and economy in poetic language not on the basis of an analogy with prose, but on the basis of the laws of poetic language" (ibid, p. 14). What would ensure the greatest economy would be algebraization or automation, something completely alien to poetry which is supposed to deliver us from the automatism of perception.

For Shklovsky, poetic language as such poses only difficulties (ibid., p. 26), profoundly extending the process of perception, opposing the principle of language's economy. The nature of poetic language indicates that it is, in a sense, a foreign language. It is confusing, bizarre, improper, creates communication barriers, and, as such, it is programmatically uneconomical, retarding – cultivating the principle of expenditure, not economy. From the point of view of economics, therefore, what Shklovsky considers to be appropriate for poetry and Markowski for modern literature – is the very same thing.

The economic categories used by the formalists are, above all, based on thinking in terms of colloquial language as a simple exchange which causes the word in circulation to be consumed, conventionalized, automatized, thus losing its autonomy, and, in the end, perceptual properties. This pessimistic diagnosis, which

leads Shklovsky to a vision of "extinct words" and a "language cemetery," allows nonetheless for a longed-for alternative, which is to be embodied in poetry, saving language from conventionalization and automatization of perception. If everyday communication is governed by exchange, with the currency of words in constant circulation, then poetry will be the point at which this cycle is interrupted and the currency falls out of circulation, regaining autonomy relative to communicative coercion.

Jean Baudrillard starts from a similar catastrophic vision of a great language garbage heap where all metaphors conventionalized in everyday communication end up. He formulates one of the most interesting descriptions of how the economics of poetry operates, combining the structural concept of the sign with the mechanisms of political economics (Baudrillard, 2006). Baudrillard makes semiotics the starting point in his argument (starting from de Saussure through Jakobson and Kristeva), showing the "subversive influence of poetic form on linguistics" (Baudrillard, 2007, p. 280) and the fact that semiotics is essentially heading towards "more or less subtle suppression of the radical character of poetic language" (ibid.), where poetic language, according to Baudrillard, is definitely subversive. As Michał Kłosiński notes, Baudrillard "throws a revolutionary torch at the spot where it causes the greatest havoc – on the pile of poetry, hence the chilling title of his dissertation: *The Poetic as the Extermination of Value*" (Kłosiński, 2015, p. 66). Poetic language in this approach resists the economic mechanisms to which, like the financial system, the system of language signs is subjected. Poetics should, therefore, be understood not in terms of economic exchange, but as a form of symbolic exchange. In this sense, Kłosiński concludes that for Baudrillard, "poetic language establishes an enclave of symbolic exchange, it defies the law of values in which the stake is the accumulation of meaning, without which it is impossible to play a speculative game with signs that are detached from reality. Baudrillard ... tries to save poetic language from the ruthless economic policy of the sign" (ibid., p. 69). He notes that poetic language will not be thus subjected to the laws of signs-to-things exchange, but will remain a unique gift offered by a text as part of symbolic exchange. The most mysterious here, however, is the vision of the "self-immolation" of the sign, described as "an attempt to be saved from the threatening inflation of meaning" (ibid, p. 73) finding its end in the complete conventionalization

of metaphors, a "wearing-out" of language, rather like an old coin remaining in circulation for too long. In the sphere of poetic language, signs are therefore not exchanged like money and goods, but like gifts, similarly to primitive societies. The purpose of this exchange is not profit but the negation of practical value which is fulfilled by the demonstrative destruction of what is given[10].

Baudrillard's theory, presenting poetry as a space for symbolic exchange, an alternative to the political economy of the sign, became one of the most important inspirations for the Italian theoretician of culture and philosopher, representative of the Italian Theory, Franco "Bifo" Berardi. His vision of the "economics of poetry" is based on belief in its critical and emancipatory potential. In such an approach, poetry would re-create itself as a territory subjected to the mechanisms – once again – of another, alternative economics, becoming the point of resistance against the oppression of various types of systems. Berardi develops his entire project on the economics of poetry around this premise. In his book *The Uprising. On Poetry and Finance*, he analyzes how capitalism, with its oppressive economic discourse, leads to the subordination and automation of language and the subjugation of affective potential. Berardi thus shows the subversive possibilities of poetry, accompanied by a unique project of uneconomicality and sensitivity, exhibiting critical and emancipatory properties at the same time.

One of the keywords of Berardi's theory is a kind of state of "bankruptcy," i.e. "insolvency," which he sees as being synonymous with becoming independent of the hierarchy of values and the list of priorities connected with the capitalist system and neoliberal conformism. According to Berardi, from a linguistic point of view, insolvency would set a possible escape route from the reduction of language to exchange (Berardi, 2012, pp. 16–17). By showing the social organism as one that entails a network of "techno-linguistic" automatism and describing processes that contribute to language automation, Berardi depicts poetry as "an excess of language" (ibid., p. 22), whose basic property is

[10] The theory of the anagram, being an alternative to structural poetics, and two laws described by Ferdinand de Saussure – the law of the word-theme and the coupling – are crucial for Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2006, p. 320; Dziadek, 2001; Kłosiński, 2018, p. 78).

non-exchangeability, creating conditions for de-automatization (ibid., p. 20). Poetry creates new, alternative worlds that can form the basis for a community of thinking and understanding. It is shown as the vibration of a single voice, endowed with the possibility of resonating, and while it resonates, it can generate a space for the community.

In Berardi's approach, poetry transcends the boundaries set by ideological linguistic exchange, showing the possibility of a new codification of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, both in a nonrecurring, unique voice and through a nonrecurring, unique listener. Following Giorgio Agamben's reflection on the voice being the meeting point of body and meaning, Berardi states that poetry is "the voice of language" (ibid., pp. 20–21). In this perspective, the metaphor of insolvency reveals its extraordinary potential. The right to insolvency is not only a figure of social or civic resistance to the market entanglements of entities, a refusal to participate in repayment of a real and metaphorical financial debt. It is, above all, a refusal to subordinate living potential to the domination of a formalized, politically legitimized economic code allied with mechanisms of biopower. The capitalist, neoliberal, ideologized form of thinking and language is therefore not only a set of economic rules. It is also a variety of different internalized borders beyond which our imagination should not venture, and which are, at the same time, the framework of linguistic automatism – easy to subjugate and control.

As Berardi claims, we have to think of a different theory dealing with the perception of reality, one beyond the fixed ideological dictionary (ibid., p. 147). We should try to imagine the liberation of potential from the power of neoliberal forms of organization governing our reality experience, from automation ruling everyday life by means of linguistic form. For Berardi, all of this could be achieved by poetry – all that is poetic is a form of linguistic insolvency, enabling this gesture of resistance and rejection. This "insolvency" being the basic property of poetic language would mean, among other things, "the rejection of the economic code of capitalism" (ibid., p. 149) that keeps real life and social potential locked within form.

By not taking part in the exchange of things for words according to matching codes, poetry disarms the transparent relationships of consent, allowing us to embrace the undefined and

attempt to redefine the world. As such, it is a space for shaping the sensitivity of the community and a chance for a different perception of reality.

There is no doubt that Bernardi's concept of language de-automatization was borrowed from Shklovsky (Berardi, 2012, pp. 149–150) who, in a similar vein, recognized the potential of poetry as being related to "removing objects from the automatism of perception" (Shklovsky, p. 16). In turn, the very concept of verbal "insolvency" is closely related to Baudrillard's vision: symbolic exchange in which the rules of political economy are compromised. In Berardi's project, two theories of poetic language are intertwined, crucial from the point of view of the economics of poetry. They become the starting point of a political project where the social significance of the poem is at stake.

In each of the selected but only briefly illustrated theoretical approaches, the contradictory diagnoses are surprisingly harmonized within the perspective of the economics of poetry, based every time around the concept of poetic language being uneconomical, which is usually due to the interruption, or even suspension, of the circulation of words. The uneconomical nature of poetry becomes vital every time for recognizing its exceptional value which, at the same time, has nothing to do with situating it in a role resembling a priceless but useless jewel. In the case of each of the several approaches outlined here, all of them different but still engaged in a dynamic dialogue, poetry can be defined as a movement of resistance to conventionalized communication and automation of perception, a medium offering unique knowledge about reality, a possible space for language's emancipation from the rules of economics as well as communicative coercion. Poetry remains a space that unites the community of symbolic exchange and, finally, it is a projected area of subversion that helps liberate our experience of reality from neoliberal forms of organization and offers a different mode of perception.

Following Aristotle in diagnosing the unique properties of metaphor, Jacques Derrida once again takes us to an unattainable treasure at the end of the rainbow: "In nature, everyone has his nature. ... If the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor, some have the gift of metaphor, know better than others how to perceive resemblances and uncover the truth of nature. A capacity not within our grasp" (Derrida, 2002, p. 304). Sounds like invaluable usefulness!

* * *

In this way, the economics of poetry seems to shed light on the cognitive potential of the poetic medium. It also seems to open the possibility of a new definition of specifically poetic knowledge about reality, urging us to rethink traditionally understood duality of form and content that isolates a text from its historical context, placing poetic work and the aesthetic impact of poetry outside the area of social practices. It might offer a chance to prevail over approaches in which form becomes a non-exchangeable residue, breaking its connection to reality, declining participation, involvement and responsibility for its shape – against the vision of the cognitive, critical, social and political uselessness and helplessness of poetry. Studies on the economics of poetry create the possibility of introducing a heteronomous poetic form in which poetry at the same time becomes a medium that deposits a specific type of knowledge; a place of articulation of individual and communal experience inextricably linked to the poetic form, invoking different images of the past, at the same time becoming a prism through which both the present and alternative projections of the future can be seen.

To conclude – a word about a colorful, almost rainbow-like bouquet of flowers. We find it in Banksy's mural depicting a masked man; he looks like an assailant, his pose that of someone preparing to throw a grenade or Molotov cocktail. The only difference is that instead of a potential tool of crime or destruction he is holding a bouquet of colorful flowers. Of course, this mention of *Flower Bomber*, as the mural is usually referred to, is not random. In an interview with Grzegorz Jankowicz, *Niewielki odwet na „prawdziwym" życiu* [Small Revenge on "Real" Life], Andrzej Sosnowski admits that Banksy's mural would be great for the cover of his volume of poetry. Is this, then, how the poet sees the role and functioning of poetry? He explains to his interlocutor: "Revolutions imagined in poetry can only be bloodless. The uselessness of the most interesting pieces has always seemed to me their naturally priceless side. Flowers, poetic tropes – they are almost like synonyms of awkwardness and ineffectiveness throughout the times" (Sosnowski, Jankowicz, 2010, p. 191). Sosnowski equates the uselessness and pricelessness of poetry which, being deprived of practical and exchange worth, cannot be exchanged or valuated, and that is exactly why it can

operate outside economic rules. Poetry's paradox lies in the fact that once degraded to being useless and ineffective, it does not become worthless – but priceless.

Translated by Marta Gorgula

## References


Abrams, M.H. (2012). *Zwierciadło i lampa. Romantyczna teoria poezji a tradycja krytycznoliteracka* (Polish edition of *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, transl. M.B. Fedewicz). Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.

Barańczak, S. (2007). *Wiersze zebrane* [Collected Poems]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5.

Barthes, R. (1999). *S/Z*, transl. M.P. Markowski, M. Gołębiowska. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR.

Baudrillard, J. (2007). *Wymiana symboliczna i śmierć* (Polish edition of *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, transl. S. Królak). Warszawa: Sic!

Berardi, F. (2012). *The Uprising. On Poetry and Finance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Blumenberg, H. (2017). *Paradygmaty dla metaforologii* (Polish edition of *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, transl. B. Baran). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia.

Compagnon, A. (2004). *Literature, Theory and Common Sense*, transl. C. Cosman. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Derrida, J. (2002). Biała mitologia. Metafora w tekście filozoficznym (Polish edition of *La mythologie blanche: (la métaphore dans le texte philosophique)*, transl. J. Margański). In: J. Derrida, *Marginesy filozofii* (Polish edition of *Marges de la philosophie*, transl. A. Dziadek, J. Margański, P. Pieniążek) (pp. 261–336). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR.

Dziadek, A. (2001). Anagramy Ferdinanda de Saussure'a – historia pewnej rewolucji [Ferdinand de Saussure's anagrams: The history of a revolution]. *Teksty Drugie*, No. 6.

Felski, R. (2016). *Literatura w użyciu* (Polish edition of *Uses of Literature*, transl. J. Borkowska et al.). Poznań: Wydawnictwo PSP.

Foucault, M. (2005). *Słowa i rzeczy. Archeologia nauk humanistycznych* (Polish edition of *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, transl. T. Komendant). Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.

Hörisch, J. (2000). *Heads or Tails: The Poetics of Money*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Jakobson, R. (2006). Poetyka w świetle językoznawstwa (Polish edition of Linguistics and Poetics, transl. K. Pomorska). In: A. Burzyńska, M.P. Markowski (Eds.), *Teorie literatury XX wieku. Antologia* [Literary Theories of the 20th Century. An Anthology]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.

Jameson, F. (2009). Mapowanie poznawcze (Polish edition of Cognitive Mapping, transl. B. Kuźniarz). *Krytyka Polityczna*, No. 16/17, 232–240.

Kłosiński, M. (2015). *Ratunkiem jest tylko poezja. Baudrillard – Teoria – Literatura* [The Only Hope Is Poetry. Baudrillard – Theory – Literature]. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN.

Markowski, M.P. (2004). Reprezentacja i ekonomia [Representation and economics] (pp. 11–27). *Teksty Drugie*, No. 4.

Markowski, M.P. (2007). *Polska literatura nowoczesna. Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy* [Polish Modern Literature: Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy]. Kraków: Universitas.

Moretti, F. (2016). *Wykresy, mapy, drzewa. Abstrakcyjne modele na potrzeby historii literatury* (Polish edition of *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History,* transl. T. Bilczewski, A. Kowalcze-Pawlik). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

Nietzsche, F. (1993). *O prawdzie i kłamstwie w pozamoralnym sensie* (Polish edition of *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*, transl. B. Baran). In: F. Nietzsche, *Pisma pozostałe 1862–1875* [Other Works 1862–1875]. Kraków: Inter Esse.

Nycz, R. (2001). *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* [Literature as a Trope of Reality. Poetics of Epiphany in Modern Polish Literature]. Kraków: Universitas.

Shell, M. (1978). *The Economy of Literature.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sieburth, R. (1995). Ezra Pound: Ekonomia poezji/ poezja ekonomii (Polish edition of In Pound We Trust: The Economy of Poetry/The Poetry of Economics]. *Literatura na Świecie*, No. 1–2.

Sosnowski, A., Jankowicz, G. (2010). Niewielki odwet na „prawdziwym" życiu [Small Revenge on 'Real' Life]. In: G. Jankowicz (Ed.), *Trop w trop. Rozmowy z Andrzejem Sosnowskim* [Trope after Trope. Conversations with Andrzej Sosnowski] (pp. 173–192). Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.

Szkłowski, W.B. (1986). Sztuka jako chwyt (Polish edition of Shklovsky, V.B., *Iskusstvo kak priyom*, transl. R. Łużny). In: S. Skwarczyńska (Ed.), *Teoria badań literackich za granicą. Antologia* [Theory of Literary Studies in Other Countries. An Anthology], vol. 2 (pp. 10–28). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

Tomczok, P. (2018). *Literacki kapitalizm. Obrazy abstrakcji ekonomicznych w literaturze polskiej II połowy XIX wieku* [Literary Capitalism. Images of Economic Abstractions in Polish Literature of the Second Half of the 19th Century]. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

Ulicka, D. (2006). O funkcji poznawczej literatury i wiedzy o literaturze (tezy do przyszłej antropologii literaturoznawstwa) [On the cognitive function of literature and literary knowledge (theses for a future anthropology of literary studies)]. In: W. Bolecki, E. Dąbrowska (Eds.), *Literatura i wiedza* [Literature and Knowledge] (pp. 9–32). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN.

Woodmansee, M., Osteen, M. (Eds.) (1999). *The New Economic Criticism. Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics.* London: Routledge.