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"The Bitter Smell of Tulips" (The speculative bubble in literature)

Abstract: Zbigniew Herbert (one of the greatest poets in the twentieth century) graduated from Trade School (now the Cracow University of Economics). The fact can be seen in his work. In Herbert's essays we find not only a wide range of economic problems, but the real passion with which the author describes the economic base of any civilization. Essayist takes care of micro-and macroeconomics. From the economic point of view, one of the most interesting essays is dedicated to sketch the phenomenon of the speculative bubble in 17th century Holland („Tulips smell bitter volume"). This paper is a fragment of the work in print: Józef Maria Ruszar, *The Worn Profile of Roman Coins: Economy as a Literary Subject in the Works of Zbigniew Herbert* (*Wytarty profil rzymskich monet. Ekonomia jako temat literacki w twórczości Zbigniewa Herberta),* JMR Transatlantyk, Biblioteka Pana Cogito, Kraków 2016.

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Tulipanów gorzki zapach (Bańka popytowa w literaturze)

Streszczenie: Zbigniew Herbert, jeden z największych poetów XX wieku, ukończył Wyższą Szkołę Handlową (obecnie Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie). Ten fakt daje się zauważyć w jego twórczości. W esejach Herberta znajdujemy nie tylko szeroki wachlarz problemów ekonomicznych, ale także prawdziwą pasję, z jaką autor opisuje gospodarcze podstawy wszelkich cywilizacji. Eseista zajmuje się mikro- i makroekonomią. Z ekonomicznego punktu widzenia jednym z najciekawszych esejów jest poświęcony zjawisku „bańki popytowej" (*Tulipanów gorzki zapach*) w siedemnastowiecznej Holandii. Szkic jest fragmentem przygotowywanej do druku książki *Wytarty profil rzymskich monet. Ekonomia jako temat literacki w twórczości Zbigniewa Herberta),* JMR Transatlantyk, Biblioteka Pana Cogito, Kraków 2016.

Słowa kluczowe: Zbigniew Herbert, "Tulipanów gorzki zapach", bańka popytowa w literaturze, *Wytarty profil rzymskich monet. Ekonomia jako temat literacki w twórczości Zbigniewa Herberta*, bańka popytowa, bańka spekulacyjna, tulipomania, spekulacja ekonomiczna, giełda, tani kapitał, kryzys ekonomiczny, długotrwała stagnacja gospodarcza, globalny kryzys finansowy, The New Economic Criticism

> In earthly categories the matter looked as follows: the sellers took no account at all of the actual possibilities of the buyers, and what is worse the buyers seemed to have entirely lost the instinct of self-preservation. They were no longer aware of their own possibilities (Z. Herbert, "The Bitter Smell of Tulips", *Still Life with a Bridle*).[1]

Zbigniew Herbert was a poet, essayist and playwright, but we will read his essays like an economics student getting ready for an exam in economic history would read them.

Examination of the contents from this angle is indisputably legitimate, even though we are speaking of a literary text. In Herbert's essays, we find not only a wide range of economic problems, but also a real passion with which the author describes the economic basics of all civilisations. The essayist takes on micro- and macroeconomics, specific issues like the value of the daily wage of a labourer in the times of Pericles or the real income of a soldier in Julius Caesar's army. He wants to find out the earnings and forms of payment of the royalties to an architect building a Gothic cathedral in medieval France and, in another essay, the prices of paintings in 17th century Netherlands or the artwork trade system in 1960s Paris.

At the same time, he is fascinated by macroeconomic issues, such as the basis for the international standing of a currency, which was the Athenian drachma during the Achaean League, or the taxation and finance system of the great empire of the Romans, not to mention such issues as financial crises and stock market booms and busts. The essayist's inquisitiveness, and above all the complex calculations that aim to establish the actual state of affairs, is supported by a query in professional journals and publications dealing with the history of economy. And I must admit that Herbert's knowledge was impressive in this regard and was not limited to general and textbook approaches. Herbert graduated from the Trade School of Economics in Krakow (currently the Cracow University of Economics). The poet and essayist held a master's degree in economics.

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In the book of essays *Still Life with Bridle*, there is an essay dedicated to the "demand bubble" or "speculative bubbles."[2] The essay is titled "The Bitter Smell of Tulips."

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[1] Z. Herbert, "The Bitter Smell of Tulips" [in:] *Still Life with a Bridle*, transl. J. & B. Carpenter, Vintage Books, 1994, p. 52. (All quotations from this edition).

[2] Terms: "demand bubble" or "speculative bubbles" are similar. Herbert in his essay generally uses "speculative bubbles," but "Tulipomania" in English is usually call "speculative bubbles"

Herbert starts his story with epic flair, beginning like Homer or Virgil, but he does this jokingly. He perversely announces that there will be no „historical haemorrhaging," because the drama presented is devoid of pathos, and its heroes will not be honoured with monuments of bronze. He then presents the heroes. There are two of them. The first is the modest, thrifty, "unheroic" merchant nation of the Dutch, which, due to the scarcity of the land, was doomed to tiny gardens, which resulted in its love of flowers.

The second presentation, concerning tulips, took on the form of an expanded description of an Ambrosius Bosschaert painting. It presents the history of the flower's arrival to Europe, takes into account its place in Oriental culture and in the 17th century European courts. Attempting to more closely examine the economic and psychological phenomenon, the author compares it to the catastrophe that is an epidemic:

> Its beginnings are unclear and difficult to establish precisely, both in terms of time and of space. With the plague the matter is much simpler: One day a ship from the East puts in at a harbor. Part of the crew has a high fever; some are delirious, and tumors can be seen on their bodies. They go ashore and are put in hospitals, houses, and inns; the first deaths occur, and the number of fatal illnesses rapidly grows. The entire city, the entire region, the entire country is swept by plague. Princes and beggars, saints and freethinkers, criminals and innocent children all die. Since the time of Thucydides this pandemonium of death has been described many times and in detail.
>
> On the other hand, tulipomania is a mental phenomenon, and here the troubles begin. In other words, it is a social psychosis like other psychoses, whether associated with religion, war, revolution, or the economy – for instance, gold fever or the crash of the American stock market in 1929. Despite numerous, striking analogies, it cannot of course be explained in terms of infectious diseases (but what a pity!). We lack instruments that would allow us to measure quantitatively the range of the epidemic, its degree of "infectiousness," the number with an acute or mild sickness, "the temperature curve" of affected individuals. The only method left is to enter into the spirit of the events, a cautious description that notes both the extreme and characteristic cases. ("The Bitter Smell of Tulips," *Still Life with a Bridle*, p. 47).

As we know, the first pan-European financial crisis took place after the Thirty Years' War in the Holy Roman Empire,[3] and tulipomania was the second. The latter takes the forefront, however, since it was the first crash caused by the speculation bubble. Scourges of this kind plague us even today. The

(R.J. Shiller, *Irrational Exuberance*, Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 247–248).

[3] This took place in 1618–1623 (the crisis reached its apogee in February 1622). Citedafter, *Kryzysy finansowe, wybrane zagadnienia*, ed. K. Piech, Warsaw 2010, p. 3.

psychological mechanism in both cases is the same – the investor believes that the goods being purchased will gain value rapidly and can be sold back at a significant profit. Because these types of purchases generate increased demand, prices rise by leaps and bounds, which further assures investors that they have made the right choice.[4] The essayist calls attention to this strictly economic mechanism, although earlier he described it metaphorically as an "infectious disease," emphasising the aesthetic or even ludic elements of the phenomenon:

> (…) tulipomania was a very complex phenomenon. It seems the most decisive and important aspect of the problem was economic; in other words, the order of the stock market was introduced into the order of nature. The tulip began to lose the properties and charms of a flower: it grew pale, lost its colors and shapes, became an abstraction, a name, a symbol interchangeable with a certain amount of money. Complicated tables existed on which individual varieties were arranged according to the changing market prices like valuable papers or money rates ("The Bitter Smell of Tulips," *Still Life with a Bridle*, p. 50).

Herbert's message is very clear – despite the presence of other, secondary characteristics accompanying speculation, the object of speculation itself – no matter how beautiful – does not matter at all. The only thing that matters is the psychological mechanism, which is identical no matter whether we play by investing in tulip bulbs, modern technologies or shares on the stock exchange. The intensity of speculation does not depend on its object, but on the hope for profit, and it is this potential rate of return that is the mainspring of the whole mechanism. Almost the entire nation takes part in tulipomania, and it would be difficult to collectively consider it to be an organisation of aesthetes or even gardeners, since among the investors are weavers from Haarlem, tax collectors, night watchmen and even preachers. To emphasise the essence of speculation, Herbert describes the beauty of the most expensive flower, the *Semper augustus*, only to immediately "invalidate" the value of the accurate ekphrasis with a conscious statement about the incongruence of the price to the goods:

> It is an exceptionally nice specimen, but the price reached by [*Semper augustus*], 5,000 florins (the equivalent of a house with a large garden), causes a shiver of anxiety. The dikes of common sense had broken. From now on we will move on the slippery terrain of unhealthy fantasy, feverish desire for profit, insane illusions, and bitter disappointments.

[4] It is worth nothing that an additional element has appeared lately, which may stimulate this time of behaviour – low interest rates. They mean that safe investments do not bring the expected rate of return, which causes capital investments in more profitable, but more risky, forms.

> Transactions were often made in kind. These allow us to measure the dimensions of the madness even better. For a bulb of the [*Viceroy*] tulip (it was worth half the value of [*Semper augustus*]), the following was paid in the form of farm products:
> 2 carts of wheat
> 4 carts of rye
> 4 fat oxen
> 8 fat pigs
> 12 fat sheep
> 2 barrels of wine
> 4 barrels of the foremost beer
> 1,000 pounds of cheese
> A bed, clothes, and a silver chalice were added to this drink, food, and fatness.
> In the initial phase of tulipomania, prices went constantly up. As stockbrokers would say, the trend on the "flower stock market" was at first "friendly," then "lively," all the way to "very lively," to pass in the end to a state of euphoria completely uncontrolled by common sense.
>
> A greater and greater gap opened between the real value of the plants sold and the price paid for them. It was paid willingly, with joy, as if expecting the smile of fate. Most of those touched by tulipomania counted on a boom; they were convinced the rising trend would continue forever (don't they resemble the progressives?), and that a bulb bought today would double its value tomorrow or at the latest the day after tomorrow. If one treats these fantastic speculations seriously and without irony (because "seniority" in history does not entitle one to it), we can see something more profound – for instance, the old myth of humanity about miraculous multiplication ("The Bitter Smell of Tulips," *Still Life with a Bridle*, pp. 51–52).

The author emphasises just how important the element of gambling is in the phenomenon of the speculation bubble – speculation is nothing more than gambling, after all. What is important in the above citation is the combination of purely economic (the nomenclature is straight from a stock exchange) and psychological elements. The myth of the miraculous multiplication of bread is nothing more than the hope of stock exchange players for a constant boom. Herbert also draws attention to the abandonment of cardinal virtues of economy, compliance with which protects from manias, such as the tulip fever. He is speaking about prudence and moderation, which control the desire for profit. The conclusion arises immediately: if we follow the ethical norms and rules of common sense, we will not be vulnerable to economic madness, which may lead to tragedy. Additionally, it is worth paying attention to the role played in the quoted passage by payments in kind – this is a method, described earlier, of approximating the true value to the reader, which is not possible by simply quoting the prices in the currency of the times.

Another portion of the essay demonstrates a deep knowledge of the subject, because it speaks of the mechanisms which are not noticeable to non--experts: about pumping up the bubbles with cheap capital:

> In the period of euphoria the profits of the speculators were huge; however, they were not always expressed in negotiable currency or liquid money, but in credit. The owner of the variety [*Semper augustus*] was universally considered to be a wealthy man; consequently he could borrow large amounts, and this is what he did most of the time. The crazy turnover of the market became more and more abstract. What was sold was no longer the bulbs (their value was absolutely arbitrary, further and further removed from reality and common sense), but the names of bulbs. Like shares, they often changed owners ten times a day.
>
> Prices rose. It was expected that they would grow endlessly, because such is the logic of mania. A large number of the wary accumulated "values" in order to throw them on the market at the most propitious moment. It was precisely these cautious ones – as usually happens with greedy people entangled in the nets of gambling – who suffered the most painful defeat. Faith in the bright future of tulipomania broke down already in 1636. The edifice of trust and rampant illusions caved in. The supply of tulips was larger and larger, the demand frightfully diminishing; at the end everyone wanted to sell, but there were no bold risk takers any longer ("The Bitter Smell of Tulips," *Still Life with a Bridle*, pp. 61–62).

Herbert calls attention to what the author, unfamiliar with "financial leverages," especially one writing in a socialist country devoid of a stock exchange, private capital and ways of moving it around, probably would not have noticed: one of the pillars of all kinds of price bubbles is cheap credit. Today's reader may know, especially since Polish society, for the first time since the Fall of Communism has experienced a financial crisis on a global scale, that excessive financial leverage in the form of cheap capital comes from various sources. At the beginning of the 21st century, the largest speculation bubbles were created by subprime credits, securitisation, Internet mania and even by central banks (such as the Fed). Today's readers, even if they do not understand these concepts, have already had the chance to encounter them through the media, which reported on the stages of the crisis and attempted to explain its causes.

This mechanism was much simpler in 17th century Netherlands. The owner of an expensive variety could take out high credit with the bulbs as collateral, thanks to which his operations could be many times higher and, consequently, bring much higher profit. Of course, the risk was also multiplied. This is nothing else but a description of a simple financial leverage. Speculation of this kind is related to the lowering of credit standards – easy money at preferential conditions reaches people who are unprepared to repay their debts, which almost always means problems in the future. The fragment concerning the question of trust is also very important – the bubble can grow as long as investors believe that the prices will grow. At the moment of the collapse of confidence, these “prudent” individuals are left with the proverbial hot potato, which no one wants to take from them.

> On the third of January 1637, four months before the decree of the Estates General, an Amsterdam gardener bought a precious tulip bulb for a bargain price of 1,250 florins. At first happy, he soon found that he could not sell it for even half or even one-tenth of his own cost. For a sharp drop had now begun, and the game was not to make money but lose as little as possible. The entire story of this unfortunate affair extends between two poles – a long, desperate assault upon fortune, and a sudden wild panic (“The Bitter Smell of Tulips,” *Still Life with a Bridle*, p. 62).

The above fragment connects ethics and economics. What can save us from the catastrophic effects of decisions made under the influence of emotions is a “stoic nature” (here understood metaphorically as resistance to greed), and therefore such virtues as dutifulness, moral discipline and the ability to think rationally in any situation. The above-average rates of return and the ability to quickly gain profit in the final stages of the bubble inflation attract investors like a magnet. The increase in the number of transactions – trading volume skyrockets, the investors’ greed and fear of missing out on the opportunity everyone is talking about – reaches its apogee just before the bubble spectacularly bursts. In moments like this, forced rationalisation of one’s behaviour is standard. And what are the effects? As far as tulipomaniais concerned, Józef Kuliszer, an economics historian, whose work Herbert undoubtedly read, believes that the effect of a crash is long-term economic stagnation.[5]

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Most speculation bubbles are only noticeable from the perspective of time. To emphasise the expertise of the essayist, I have indicated – perhaps with too much emphasis – the topicality of the described mechanisms. Herbert – rightly so – warns against looking down on speculators from 300 years ago and calls attention to the sobriety and rationality of a society that “lost its mind.” In speculation bubbles, group or individual rationality is not an option, much like age, experience or the habit of rational behaviours. The newest proof of this is the enormous and irrational increase in the value of Internet-based company shares. During the first bubble, their value was estimated not based on a logical business model, but on such factors as the number of potential users visiting the page.

[5] J. Kuliszer, *Powszechna historia gospodarcza średniowiecza i czasów nowożytnych*, Warsaw 1961.

Has anything changed then, and could a poet with an education in economics add something to the analysis presented half a century ago? Unfortunately, yes. It would be an addition made in the conservative spirit, i.e. with the full conviction that the world is sliding down a slippery slope and that it can only get worse from here on out. This is about the responsibility for a disaster:

> (…) the outcome was without any doubt tragic: thousands of ruined estates, tens of thousands of people without work and, in addition, threatened by trials. [Insolvency] was punished, as a rule, with severe prison sentences ("The Bitter Smell of Tulips," *Still Life with a Bridle*, p. 63).

This is the way things were in the 17th century – I think we all understand the difference. The question here is not just about scale, because the innocent victims on a global scale could not be counted in the thousands, but about the assessment, which is not unanimous. The proponents of liberalism in economics believe that the perpetrators of the recent global financial crisis, who wound up the trade spiral with debts impossible to repay, not only did not answer in the criminal system for their dishonest practices (subprime lending), but also received huge bailouts so they would not go bankrupt. Out of fear of an economic crash, democratic governments – especially the USA and the United Kingdom – reached for the taxpayers' money to save the gamblers. It is difficult to conclude (especially for someone who deals in literature) whether it is better that "cleansing" bankruptcies did not take place, or whether it is better that "social-financial engineering" took place, as some have accused.[6]

Tulipomania as a "purely economic" curiosity – i.e. one seen in the categories of losses and gains – is of course not entirely understandable. This type of phenomena has always gone beyond rational calculations, despite being based on the reckoning of potential profits, and the risk – even a great one – is not an element from beyond economic imagination. On the contrary, trade has always been connected with the market. The modern attitude towards the gambling element in economy is quite complicated and, to some extent, de-

[6] "In the liminal financial crisis, the world turns upside down. Financial profits vanish or drop precipitously. The US Congress suspends its oversight powers, passing unpopular and incompletely specified emergency legislation drafted by the Treasury, when confronted by the threat of financial apocalypse. The government makes huge transfer payments to banks, in the name of helping people. Wall Street executives, who had justified their exorbitant compensation on the grounds of exceptional competence and hard work, confess to having been incapable of foreseeing collapse. Legislators who had dismantled government regulation hasten to increase and strengthen regulatory regimes" (M.D. Jacobs, *Financial Crises as Symbols and Rituals* [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of The Sociology of Finance*, ed. K.K. Cetina, A. Preda, Oxford University Press 2012, p. 384).

pendent upon its possible use in argumentation for or against the interference of the authorities.[7] Currently, in the new context – i.e. after the crisis from the beginning of the 21st century – Herbert's essay takes on additional colour and may be read taking into account the latest trends in economic theory itself. The expression of the new approach to economics, which accents the social form of financial phenomena and their dependence upon linguistic, psychological, moral, religious and – generally – anthropological factors, is *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Finance*[8], which takes on such questions as, for example, the symbolic meaning and rituals connected with great financial crises:

> Financial crises are also symbolic and ritual events. Markets are embedded, among other ways, in the cultural processes and arrangements that ground them. Financial crises strain the metaphors that construct the cognitive framing of economic life. Those crises invalidate the existing "maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience" that guide economic behaviour (Geertz).[9] They depress the moods and motivations that economists as "animal spirits." They disorient the social time, space, and identities that mediate economic action. They undermine social solidarity. They disrupt the interplay of structure and anti-structure. They blur the classificatory boundaries believed to protect against the dangers of impurity. They highlight the dark side of economic life – the corruption and bad faith, the impulsive gambling, the suffering, the injustice, and death of corporate actors – that foregrounds urgent problems of meaning. All these destructive dimensions of financial crisis involve cultural processes, and they elicit powerful ritual and symbolic responses.[10]

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[7] Economists treat the phenomenon of the "demand bubble" ambiguously and particularly have a different attitude towards gambling. On the one hand, tulipomania may serve as a canonical example of the irrationality of the market and justification for state intervention and control over the financial market (e.g. Ch.P. Kindleberger, R. Aliber, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes. A History of Financial Crises*, Wiley Investment Classics, 2005), but others believe that risk and speculation are phenomena that drive the economy (R. Brenner, G.A. Brenner, *Gambling and Speculation. A Theory, a History, and a Future of some Human Decisions*, Cambridge University Press, 1990). Yet another approach is demonstrated by British historian Niall Ferguson, who shows that the world of finance is the lifeblood of civilisation. It also deals with – of course – crises, and by presenting the various stages of the demand bubble, it draws attention to an important element – knowledge of the so-called "insiders": "In the four hundred years since shares were first bought and sold, there has been a succession of financial bubbles. Time and again, share prices have soared to unsustainable heights only to crash downwards again. Time and again, this process has been accompanied by skulduggery, as unscrupulous insiders have sought to profit at the expense of naïve neophytes" (N. Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money. A financial History of the World*, The Penguin Press, 2008, p. 121.).

[8] *The Oxford Handbook of The Sociology of Finance*, op. cit.

[9] C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973, p. 220.

[10] M.D. Jacobs, *Financial Crises as Symbols and Rituals* [in:] *The Oxford Handbook…*, p. 376.

Modern economists are even ready to follow in Durkheim's footsteps (Jacobs has *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* [1912] in mind)[11] and consider and note the desire for some kind of expiation (or a demand for expiation) as an answer for causing the economic crash, despite the fact that modern Western societies are oriented more towards individual rather than communal responsibility. At this point, the quoted academic consciously stipulates that as far as accountability is concerned, it is increasingly difficult to enforce in a no-fault society.

Mark Jacobs notes a major difference between the description of the Great Depression of the 1930s, which was understood and described in "natural" categories, since the economic meltdown was symbolically seen as a phenomenon of nature and its periodical "self-correcting" mechanisms in business. Meanwhile, the economic downturn in 1980s America was seen as a "disease" of the economic and social "machinery" and "engineering." More so, the recent crisis in 2008, particularly the unclear, complicated and multi-layered financial instruments, was understood as an economic gamble organised by the banks ("shadow" or "stealth" banking), and the entire financial structure as a "big casino" on Wall Street.

The socio-economic analyses of Mark D. Jacobs are interesting from the standpoint of the meaning of Herbert's essays, because – unintentionally, of course – they situate the essays in the great tradition of the Anglo-Saxon literary trend that accompanies the development of capitalism. The New Economic Criticism, in its Anglo-Saxon, and especially British, edition, has made a serious study of the contents of English literature from the standpoint of description of economic phenomena and changes, which appear in the works of Shakespeare,[12] in 18th and 19th century novels[13] or even in the experimental narratives of the 20th century – e.g. in James Joyce's *Ulysses.*[14] The fact that Anglo-Saxon literature, out of a mimetic necessity, built dramatic economic processes into its tissue was not noted by literary theories alone. Mark Jacobs writes explicitly that even if we take for granted the existing financial system

[11] É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* [1912], Polish translation: *Elementarne formy życia religijnego. System totemiczny w Australii,* trans. A. Zadrożyńska, Warsaw 1990.

[12] *Money and the Age of Shakespeare. Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. L. Woodbridge, Palgrave Macmillan 2004; D. Hawkes, *Shakespeare and Economic Theory*, Bloomsbury Publishing 2015.

[13] C. Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England. A Culture of Paper Credit*, Cambridge, New York 1998; C. Nicholson, *Writing and the Rise of Finance. Capital Satires of the Early Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, New York 1994; S. Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century. Accounting for Defoe*, Cambridge, New York 1996; J. Thompson, *Models of Value. Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel,* Durham, London 1996.

[14] M. Osteen, *The Economy of Ulysses. Making Both Ends Meet*, Syracuse University Press, 1995; P. Brantlinger, *Fictions of State. Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694–1994*, Ithaca, 1996; D. S. Lynch, *The Economy of Character. Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning,* Chicago, London 1998.

and its institutions, this was not always so. On the contrary, they met with public resistance or scepticism. The taming of economics occurred through literature, says the sociologising economist, citing the research of a colleague:

> If today we take for granted both the logic and the legitimacy of the financial system, that is only because of a long cyclical historical process, punctuated by crises, of "naturalizing" a set of institutions that once did not even exist and were initially greeted witch public skepticism. As Mary Poovey[15] documents, the three "genres of the credit economy" in Britain – paper currency and other financial instruments, journalistic and novelistic fiction dealing with financial topics, and "scientific" theories of the credit economy – were all cultural inventions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which developed in symbiotic contradictions to one another. It took centuries for each to establish its validity and value, by overcoming its own "problematic of representation." Financial manias and panics played a large role in these inventions and their development.[16]

It appears that it is time to note Herbert's significant role in this area in the history of Polish literature. Especially since it is a rare case, moreover undertaken in times when an ordinary experience of capitalism and its problems was completely inaccessible in Poland. It was Anglo-Saxon literature – in contrast to Polish literature – that accompanied the great questions of capitalism, such as the rush on the shares of the South Sea Company (which ended in the Bubble Act of 1720) or the financial crises of the 19th century. As Alex Preda says, the organising principle of the finance-oriented viewpoint is the belief that there is a tension between financial activity rooted in, on the one hand, expert knowledge and, on the other, in the unpredictable vital force of oneself and others. Financial speculation requires knowledge, skills and anticipation, but also a vitality, which one either has or does not.[17]

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[15] M. Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*, University of Chicago Press, 2008.

[16] M.D. Jacobs, *Financial Crises as Symbols and Rituals* [in:] *The Oxford Handbook…,* op. cit., p. 379. Also more on this subject: pp. 376–392. Also B. Harrington, *The Sociology of Financial Fraud*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook…,* op. cit., pp. 393–412.

[17] A. Preda, *Framing Finance. The Boundaries of Markets and Modern Capitalism*, Chicago University Press 2009, p. 202. The concept of "vital force" was proposed in 1936 by J.M. Keynes in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money.*

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