Anna WARZOCHA
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2351-8286
Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

The Practice of Intermedia Literature in Early School Education. Revealing Symbols – Exemplification

Abstract

The article discusses the issue of literary education in primary school in the context of cultural change brought about by new media. The concept of intermedial plays a key role here – understood as the *in-between space* of art and life, encompassing both the functioning of a media society, cultural phenomena, and the individual experience of a person in a mediated world. Literary texts, especially those addressed to young readers, are increasingly characterized by narrative heterogeneity, and fit into the media competencies of contemporary children, who use a "navigational" way of reading. At the same time, the sketch emphasizes the need to develop symbolic interpretation skills, which are important in the context of losing contact with the symbolic language in the era of visual overload. An example of the practical implementation of the concept of intermedia literature in early school education is the interpretation of the book *Zgubiona dusza* by Olga Tokarczuk and Joanna Concejo. The symbolic nature of the work enables such early school literature practice, which through conversation and analysis of metaphors, supports the process of understanding symbols, symbolic thinking, and the language capabilities of the student. Intermedia literature also provides a space for reflection on human existence and humanity, and a way to slow down life in a world dominated by acceleration.

Keywords: intermediality, symbolic literature, semiotic code, early school education, symbol, reflection, dialogue withliterature, conversation in school reading.

Introduction

Awareness of the change that has taken place in the cultural and civilizational space over the last fifty years due to new media has led to scientific reflections on specific phenomena occurring within the arts: literature and media[1]. The actions taken by literary scholars involved evaluating individual fields, designating their individual *status quo*, but simultaneously revealed mutual influences, defined relationships, multilaterally illuminated the connections that occur between heterogeneous communication structures of both types of speech, and led to certain normative determinations for the latest literature (Hejmej, 2022; Hopfinger, 2010; Bodzioch-Bryła, 2011; Regiewicz, 2021)[2], also directed at a juvenile reader (Warzocha 2020, 2018 a, b).

At the same time, the instrumentarium of literary texts poetics has been expanded, which, according to Andrzej Hejmej, is now treated as a transdisciplinary discipline, capable of describing polysemantic and multi-media phenomena (Hejmej, 2016, p. 13-14), and for which the current audiovisual culture becomes the background (Hopfinger, 1997). It is the audiovisual nature that rearranges the communicative hierarchy, which has highlighted the need to verify literary works for adult and child readers through an analysis of the *action* of images and sound in various media environments, while considering current scientific findings regarding the perceptual capabilities of contemporary audiences.

Such a reality evokes definitions well-known from the repertoire of social and humanistic concepts, which are essential for further argumentation: media society and intermediality (Hejmej, 2014; Goban-Klas 2025)[3]. First, in the broad-

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[1] I accept the definition of media as an art by Ryszard W. Kluszczynski, who wrote: "The concept of media art, or media art, refers in the most direct and most reasonable way to the complex of artistic phenomena that use media, i.e. mechanical or electronic techniques of recording, producing and transmitting audio and visual information, as a means of expression. In this sense, media arts should include, for example, photography, film, video, diorama, radio art, television art, computer animation" (Kluszczyński, 2000, pp. 167, all translations into English of the original texts are the author's own translations). In short, media (technical: audiovisual, digital) can be treated as art, because they have their own language, influence the recipient and shape his aesthetic sensitivity.

[2] It would be remiss not to mention one of the most important Polish authors of works inquiring into the correspondence between the arts of literature and media, Maryla Hopfinger. Her numerous articles, but above all her monograph *Literatura i media*, have, as we know, become an inspiration for many researchers of the subject. (Hopfinger, 1985, 1992, 1997, 2010; Bodzioch- Bryła, 2011; Regiewicz, 2021).

[3] "In today's scientific reflection – wrote A. Hejmej in 2014 – the issue of the media society is most often addressed, which is completely understandable, from the perspective of media studies, the science of mass communication, sociology, there has been a kind of 'appropriation' of the issue of media (mediality) by social communication theorists" (Hejmej, 2024, pp. 244–245). And for example, according to Tomasz Goban-Klas, a media society is a society in which

est sense, it defines the current social state in which, with unprecedented force, there is a dependence of man on media mechanisms. To the extent that, because of mediatization, the social system is under media compulsion and begins to be guided by logic as such, but media logic (Michalczyk, 2008, pp. 8). Therefore, it describes an individual/child as *a media entity* (Hejmej, 2022, pp. 28), articulated by audiovisual cultural experiences (Hopfinger, 2003). These, in turn, cause anthropological changes, redefining human possibilities, needs, and expectations, which determine the transformations of culture and, further, the conversion of its texts, including literary ones (Hopfinger, 2010; Bodzioch-Bryła, Pietruszewska-Kobiela, Regiewicz, 2015; Regiewicz 2021 a, b).

Meanwhile, intermediality, introduced as a scientific horizon in 1965 by Dick Higgins as the so-called *inter-space* connecting various forms of expression in avant-garde art (Chmielecki, 2008; Chmielecki, 2007), has now decisively expanded onto-logical boundaries and is currently situated in virtually every dimension of technol-ogy-driven reality. It is a sign of current social communication and a feature of the realization of today's art and media hybrids (Hejmej, 2022). Intermediality is becoming a symbol of current culture, with strongly expansive media increasingly shaping the expectations of their participants, changing the meaning order that has been in place for years. They subject areas of reality and human attitudes to semiotics.

> In fact, writes Andrzej Hejmej, it would be necessary to state that in the contemporary world, three dimensions of intermediality inevitably overlap: the first is related to the f u n c t i o n i n g   o f   t h e   m o d e r n   s o c i e t y (the "postmodern", "in-formational", "network", "media" "society", etc.), which is characterized by networks of communication and their interactions in the sphere of ideology, politics, science, and other areas; the second, in this case, is rightly referred to as a r t i s t i c   i n t e r -m e d i a l l t y – with contemporary art […]; the third – with existence or, as some researchers propose, e x i s t e n c e *inter-esse* (individual experience conditioned by the situation of mediatization, being in a media and mediated reality)" (Hejmej, 2022, pp. 42).

In other words, the phenomenon of intermediality takes on another form from this perspective. He builds an *inter-space* not only in art, but also in the life of every human being. In a world dominated by media, the existence at the intersection of the real and virtual environments, which expands experiences, becomes an important issue. As Umberto Eco said in *Dzieło otwarte*, this is one of the ways of shaping one's worldview (Eco, 2008). Therefore, the way a media society participant interprets reality differs from the way a person who does not know or use the Internet interprets it. Human-technological symbiosis expands

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"interpersonal contacts and relationships are predominantly of an intermediated, media na-ture; a society in which the media create (produce) a specific virtual reality, media culture; a society in which the media infrastructure, and in particular telecommunications, is the basis of information networks and circuits of various scales (from local to global), essential for effective individual and organizational actions and contacts in all spheres of life […]" (Goban-Klas, 2015).

the possibilities of perception and reception of the representative of *homo-irre-titus*, while proposing a new way of receiving the art of the word.

The interpretive approach to the latest children's literature involves a dimension of intermediality that encompasses all topics and issues related to interartistic and intermedia relations. This is therefore intermediality, which, in the opinion of Adam Regiewicz (Regiewicz, Warzocha, 2023, p. 15):

> It does not so much analyze the way in which "media substitution" or "intermedial transposition" occurs in a literary text, the circumstances under which a given text adapts another medium, or the way in which the text functions as a hybrid – a variant of intermedial literature, but rather focuses on all kinds of intermedial transformations: recycling strategies, collages, montages, borrowings, adaptations, remediations, transpositions, convergence phenomena, *etc.* However, the most important thing is the awareness that in the center of attention remains the human being in the contemporary media reality (Regiewicz, Warzocha, 2023, pp. 15).

We are dealing with a comparative phenomenon that, by addressing issues related to the latest readings in relation to new media, highlights the heterogeneity of the message in the literary test, which consists of compositional elements of different generic origin – literary and audiovisual (Regiewicz, Warzocha, 2023, pp. 133). As a result, the recipient receives a polymorphic, audiovisual work.

Looking at contemporary reading dedicated to the immature reader, it is impossible not to notice that intermediality and audiovisuality are becoming more and more visible in it. This is due to the various artistic means used to create the literary world, which include both traditional literary devices, such as evoking a musical narrative through onomatopoeia, phonetic instrumentation, and rhythmic speech, as well as new techniques and schemes symptomatic of the poetics of audiovisual/digital productions (film, advertising, music videos, the internet, etc.) (Szczęsna, 2018; Szczęsna, 2007). Heterogeneous narrative can be found more and more clearly in texts proposed to children, which weaves the literary world through intersemiotic mechanisms.

It is a response to the *media skills* of the young person caused by the development of digital technology (Carr, 2021), who reads cultural texts with audiovisuality, can decode meanings in the way of internet navigation, and for whom hyperlink literature, at least due to his immersion in new media that induce habits, seems more friendly than a traditional, linear work (Warzocha, 2020).

On the other hand, there is a need today in early education to carefully develop students' ability to understand symbols, because, as Manfred Lurker wrote, in times of visual overfeeding through television and film, the person living today has little contact with the symbolic language. Symbols, according to the German researcher, are phenomena that transcend tangible reality, and their exploration serves to seek a sense of meaning in human life lost due to *civilization sickness* (Lurker, 2011).

Symbols are found in dreams, myths, or fairy tales. They accompany a person throughout their life, and this is why there is a need for teaching activities that will gradually reveal them to the student in the school process.

For a younger student, who, as Wiesława Limont notes, "can find very distant, yet close and apt metaphorical expressions for the presented drawings […]" (Limont, 1996, pp. 58), and also, as Ewa Guttmejer reports, is in a breakthrough phase when it comes to the symbolic interpretation of literary works (Guttmejer, 1982, pp. 151), and considering the situation of a child of a media society and their activity marked by visual and audiovisual characteristics, a joint, school reading of intermedia texts marked by symbolism will allow for the preservation and development of their natural abilities (Żuchowska, 2017; Kłakówna, 2016).

Exemplification

The practice of interdisciplinary literature in primary education. Olga Tokarczuk and Joanna Concejo's *Zgubiona dusza.*

To illustrate the discussed issues, which in translation to early school practice may mean respecting the above-mentioned assumptions and ideas of literature practice designated by literature teachers, let us consider an individual example that corresponds to the assumed concepts.

Reflection on the potential of symbolic intermedial texts in the process of literary education of children in the early school age leads once again to the analysis of a work in which form and content create an inseparable whole. In this context, Olga Tokarczuk's book *Zgubiona dusza* with the iconic text by Joanna Concejo (Tokarczuk, Concejo, 2017) takes on special significance.

This is a different work from the rest of the Nobel laureate oeuvre, which has so far been associated primarily with adult literature. This time, the text is addressed to a reader sensitive to the coexistence of words, images, and sensory experiences in a cultural text. He should be willing to discuss fundamental topics related to questions about human beings, time, interpersonal relationships, happiness, or loneliness. The recipient can be either an adult or a child. It is important that he is ready to meet literature filled with symbols, which proposes their deciphering and combining into one via a hybrid code composed of verbal, iconic, and tactile signs. It also becomes significant to access another way of reading, because the work, looking at the cover itself, consistently leads the reader to decoding the typography of the text, characterized by changes in the size of the interline used, with places covered by print, but with emptiness on the pages of the book. On the one hand, such typography builds upon the con-

tent, and on the other hand, it gives the reader a chance to reflect on what they have read, to start an internal dialogue.

At the same time, an integral part of the narrative in *Zgubiona dusza*, whose material dimension recalls an old photo album, is the dual type of paper. The presence of parchment emphasizes the impression of holding a collection of photos with translucent inserts. Also introducing an additional layer of meaning into the text: it can also be interpreted as a symbol of the human soul, memory, transience, or the passage of time.

The narrative of the piece is created in parallel through the thoughtful and consistent use of colors. Joanna Concejo proposes illustrations that simulate photographs, which gain color as the action develops, but also proportionally to the emotional barometer of the main character. It is a young, contemporary man who, in the pursuit of duties, success, and the pace of life, *loses* his own soul. The monochromatic colors of the invocation, which presents the world before the era of accelerated culture in images, evoking a state of security, peace, silence, and human closeness, emphasize the intimacy and contemplative mood of the book. With the appearance of verbal text, which depicts a man entangled in his thoughts, they mean something completely different. They are a reference to Jan's emptiness, alienation, misfortune, and fear. The gradually appearing palette of colors symbolizes the process of the hero's slow transformation, the time of seeking peace, finding oneself, one's identity, and the harmony of life.

This intermedial story becomes a pretext for a conversation about a person for whom, as Chantal Delsol wrote: "The only wealth of a human being is the time that remains for them to live. With time, everything is possible. Without it, nothing is" (Delsol, 1998, pp. 146).

With this assumption, the events depicted in the referenced story converge. The book by the Tokarczuk/Concejo duo becomes an invitation to reflect on different ways of experiencing existence. On the one hand, it shows a rhythm subordinated to the maxim "time is money," in which everyday life appears as a constant rush, a pursuit of benefits and productivity. In the philosophical sense, this corresponds to the *having* attitude – based on accumulation, possession, and measuring value in material terms. The novel's images, dominated by chaos, emotional emptiness, and growing tensions between people, can be read as a critical reflection of the realities of a consumer culture in a media society that threatens relationships and a sense of meaning.

The second model of life that the Nobel laureate opposes to this vision is the perspective of *being*, associated with the experience of harmony, a calm rhythm, and simplicity. It is a peculiar story about a lost land of happiness – a world where security does not stem from the wealth of one's wallet, but from inner peace and closeness. Finally, there is another dimension in John's story: *recov-*

ered Arcadia. Its foundation is the hero's inner transformation, returning to one-self and the ability to find meaning beyond the logic of possession.

Therefore, reading the schoolbook *Zgubiona dusza* with ten-year-old students, whose interpretation we will follow on an individual example, can begin with questions directed to students about: How do they feel when they are in a hurry? How do they feel when they have time to rest peacefully? What happens to them when they are in a hurry? What happens to them when they have time? What do they miss when they hurry? What they pay attention to when they are calm. What can people do when they have time? What don't they do when they don't have it? Why does a person hurry, and what is the result? How important is family time to them?

The discussion that follows is a form of introducing the atmosphere of the work and is a way of opening students to a dialogue about the literary text. It approaches the subject of classes, which aim to interpret the symbolism of the soul and discuss issues that seem difficult to realize in the context of a child. The issue of man and time, or one's own temporality, is usually dealt with by great philosophers, physicists, and people of great imagination. However, the unlimited imagination characteristic of the youngest allows them to solve problems in a way that would surprise an adult. A child's cognitive activity is characterized by a significant intensity that surpasses the mental operability of adults in many ways. While adults often submit to routine, mechanical regularity and certain behavioral patterns, children manifest a disposition to explore reality from the perspective of a researcher who transcends the boundaries of the known world. Alison Gopnik frames such events in terms of a functional division of roles: children play the role of a kind of *evolutionary laboratory* in which new cognitive models and innovative adaptive strategies are generated, while adults focus on maintaining the stability of the social system through production and management processes. Childhood appears here as a period of intensified epistemic activity – children act as natural experimenters, using inferences, constructing empirical tests of hypotheses, and producing theoretical concepts whose originality and creativity exceed the possibilities of an average, schematic adult (Gopnik, 2010; Fresse, 2008).

At the same time, as Zofia Agnieszka Kłakówna reports, the book should be discussed in school:

> These conversations, which are of course not a methodical revelation, are intended to discover deeper meanings in the text being read and to include the text being read in a broader cultural context. They require various accompanying activities, including analytical ones, reflection, and exchange of observations. […] The entire sense of engaging in reading in school depends on the organization of these activities and these conversations, and on their quality. Today, in the face of a reading crisis, it would be wise to read to students aloud a lot and well (Kłakówna, 2016, pp. 283–284).

The source for a discussion about the referenced work can be a passage from the text read aloud by the teacher, which is not the beginning of the verbal text. Choosing to read it does not mean giving up on the entire text, which should be further interpreted over the next few days. It was cited as an introduction to further work with literature and at the same time as characteristic of the issue under discussion. Its value is the marriage of the real world with the fantastic and human problems resulting from living in a hurry and lack of time. Here the symbol of the soul also appears. Animation humanizes and realistically depicts it, and therefore requires analysis and the use of tools that separate fiction from reality, notice the symbol, and point out metaphors and epithets.

> If someone could look at us from above, they would see that the world is full of people running in a hurry, sweating and very tired, and their late, lost souls that can't keep up with their owners. It creates a big commotion, people lose their minds, and they lose their hearts. I know that souls have lost their owners, but people often don't even realize that they have lost their own soul (Tokarczuk, Concejo, 2017).

It is now worth directing the teacher's spotlight on the students' level of understanding of the read passage, which may differ significantly among students in the same class. At the age of ten, children's symbolic thinking, according to Ewa Guttmejer's research, is most often at its first level (factual). However, the individual possibilities of each of them, as is known, can deregulate this state (Guttmejer, 1997). The pedagogical diagnosis posed here becomes the starting point for further activities, but above all questions that can be asked about the read passage: What images did you see while listening to this passage? What is happening to the people here? Why is this happening? Who is also the hero of this passage? Why do souls get lost here?

The interpretation of the phrase "souls lose their heads and people lose their hearts" is particularly interesting, as is the statement "Souls know they have lost their owner, but people often don't even realize they've lost their own soul" (Tokarczuk, Concejo, 2017). The methodological actions taken by the teacher to lead students to identify these messages from the text depend on the teacher himself, who analyzes the intellectual capabilities of the students (individual work of the child with the text, in pairs, drawing attention to the thesis presented by the teacher himself: emphasizing with the voice, or asking a question: what does the phrase mean, *etc.*).

A philosophical analytical tradition that focuses on the analysis of the concept (linguistic approach) with a pragmatic approach, trying to base consideration of problems that are significant in the life of the whole society, including children (Cam, 2020), may be a good solution for understanding the above, but also a specific symbol: the soul.

The illustration by Joanna Concejo, placed alongside the verbal content, addresses the recognition of the meaning of the sentences mentioned in the quote

and the child's need to explore the world. The scene of Jan sitting alone in the hotel restaurant, shot in shades of gray, symbolizes a sense of emptiness, disorientation, and loneliness, and shows the automatism of everyday life.

It is also worth stopping at this point at the adjectives that describe the state of souls and people. The suggested line of thought is related to the stages of didactic work on language development and children's fascination with words, as designated by A. Kłakówna (Kłakówna, 2016, pp. 132). In this case, activities that help maintain and develop it can be games such as: replace an adjective with another one so that the sentence still has the same meaning or: come up with your own word that means the same as the chosen adjective; it can be a competition to find the largest number of synonyms in the dictionary.

The material dimension of the book and the translucent pages it contains also help in understanding the symbolism of the soul, which students will most likely associate with the concept of the soul being analyzed (for example: by associating it with the animated fairy tale: *Casper the Friendly Ghost*). Such sensory immersion in literature and the defined definition, in the context of primary education, promotes the activation of students' imagination and in-depth interpretation of the work, as well as develops children's ability to decode multi-layered messages.

Finishing work on the discussed fragment, which consists of a narrative about heterogeneous code, it is worth asking: how do students imagine their soul and what adjectives could they attribute to it? They can briefly describe their soul while maintaining the style of the song. At the same time, it is worth referring to what was the beginning of the meeting with the reading of the *Zgubiona dusza* – to the time – thanks to which there is often a reflection on the opposing *to have* or *to be*.

Conclusion

Reflection on the place and function of interdisciplinary literature in early school education leads to the conclusion that contemporary texts for children become not only a space for the encounter of word, image, and sound, but also a field for the confrontation of the student with the demands of the media society. Intermediality and audiovisuality, which are part of narratives dedicated to young audiences, reflect the realities of everyday life, in which a young person learns to navigate between the real and digital worlds. An analysis of the book *Zgubiona dusza* by Olga Tokarczuk and Joanna Concejo reveals that such works can serve as a mirror of anthropological changes in the educational process, as well as a teaching tool that allows for the development of symbolic thinking and interpretive skills in children.

Using intermedial literature in education helps students discover the multi-layered nature of cultural texts, enables them to engage in dialogue with verbal, iconic, and tactile signs, and creates the conditions for experiencing the depth of reading. In this sense, literature opens itself up to the needs of the media audience, but at the same time it poses challenges to them – it demands that they stop, reflect, and re-read. Therefore, if school practice is to remain relevant to the demands of the audio-visual culture, it should not only develop the *media skills* of young readers, but also nurture their symbolic sensitivity, which is at risk of disappearing in the era of visual overload.

From a pedagogical perspective, it seems particularly important that reading intermedial literature, as in the case of the *Zgubiona dusza*, be linked to the experience of conversation, reflection, and the search for meaning. This means that reading becomes a process that is not so much mechanical, but rather spiritual and existential, opening the young reader to questions about time, the meaning of life, human relationships, or the human condition in a world dominated by technology. At this point, literature can serve as a compensatory function for media logic: reminding us of the need to slow down, the value of being beyond possession, and the importance of closeness and mindfulness.

Cannot be overlooked is the fact that contemporary humanities are increasingly subject to the pressure of measurability and utilitarianism. Meanwhile, as Małgorzata Piasecka notes:

> In today's world of reductionist tendencies, associated with the concretization, quantifiability, and applicability of post-culture, subtle phenomena with their non-opportunistic nature may seem unworthy of attention. All these brilliant, flashy, trendy discourses of contemporary humanities are not, in fact, a true representation of the struggle for the individual, his autonomy, the depth of his spiritual world. The *storyitself,* which I describe as the Dreamer's tender and universal narrative about a better world, is, in my opinion, a discourse from which new and unknown, universum-sized, objectified worlds, possible and desirable cultural worlds, can emerge and become present (Piasecka, 2019, pp. 59–70).

From this perspective, media literature, included in the school curriculum, appears as a tool that opposes the superficiality and acceleration of modern times. It reminds that literary education should not be limited to the development of technical skills but should also support the spiritual and axiological development of the child. Ultimately, introducing young audiences to the world of symbols, metaphors, and hybrid narratives is not only a didactic task, but also an act of caring for the preservation of sensitivity and contemplation in a culture that encourages haste.

Intermedia literature, especially that which, like Lost Soul, combines layers of words, images, and sensory experiences, should become a way of learning *a different pace of life* in education. Her presence in school creates the conditions for building a culture of mindfulness, reflection, and existential depth,

through which the young reader can shape their own worldview. In this sense, intermedial literature becomes not only a reflection of the changes in media culture, but also an antidote to its dominant reductionisms – a space in which a child learns to see that the most important thing is not *to have*, but *to be.*

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Praktyka intermedialnej literatury w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej. Odsłanianie symboli – egzemplifikacja

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje tematykę związaną z kształceniem literackim w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej w sytuacji zmiany kulturowej wyznaczonej przez nowe media. Kluczowe miejsce zajmuje tu pojęcie intermedialności – rozumianej jako „między-przestrzeń" sztuki i życia, obejmujące zarówno funkcjonowanie społeczeństwa medialnego, zjawiska kulturowe, jak i indywidualne doświadczenie człowieka w zmediatyzowanym świecie. Literackie teksty, zwłaszcza adresowane do młodego odbiorcy, nacechowane coraz częściej heterogenicznością narracyjną, wpisują się w medialne kompetencje współczesnego dziecka, które posługuje się „nawigacyjnym" sposobem lektury. Jednocześnie zostaje w szkicu podkreślona potrzeba rozwijania zdolności interpretacji symbolicznej, istotnej w kontekście utraty kontaktu z językiem symbolicznym w epoce wizualnego przesytu. Przykładem praktycznej realizacji koncepcji literatury intermedialnej w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej staje się interpretacja książki *Zgubiona dusza* Olgi Tokarczuk i Joanny Concejo. Symboliczna natura utworu umożliwia taką wczesnoszkolną praktykę literatury, która poprzez rozmowę, analizę metafor, wspiera proces rozumienia symboli, myślenia symbolicznego i możliwości językowych ucznia. Literatura intermedialna stanowi także przestrzeń do budowania refleksji nad egzystencją człowieka i człowieczeństwem, sposobem na zwolnienie tempa życia w zdominowanym przyspieszeniem świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: intermedialność, literatura symboliczna, kod semiotyczny, edukacja wczesnoszkolna, symbol, refleksja, dialog z literaturą, rozmowa w szkolnej lekturze.