

Elwira Bolek

***Language and Image in the Theatrical Poster. Semiotic and Cultural Analyses***

Doctoral thesis summary

The subject of the research reported in this doctoral thesis is the relation between word and image in the Polish theatrical poster; it is also concerned with embedding the meanings of the investigated artefact in cultural contexts. The scientific aims of this thesis are twofold. The first is to empirically verify two research hypotheses – 1. A theatrical poster is an interpretation of another text of culture, 2. Linguistic tools may be used to study multimodal messages. The second aim is to apply a coherent, operational methodology of analysis of multimodal messages to interpret the artistic meanings of theatrical posters. Having recognised that a given multimodal message is open to interpretation, and that different receivers – with different knowledge, competences or experiences – can develop an individual interpretation of the whole message, in the analytical part of this dissertation the author of this thesis adopts the perspective of an interpretative researcher.

The collection of posters from which the artefacts for analysis have been selected is very extensive and comprises a selection from the digital reproductions known to the researcher and made available by the Poster Museum at Wilanów, Branch of the National Museum in Warsaw, as well as from numerous albums of poster art and exhibition catalogues, the most important of which seems to be *Oto sztuka plakatu*, edited by Dorota Folga-Januszczyńska and Lech Majewski (2018), containing not only numerous (1,724) illustrations of posters, but also stories by and about artists, as well as essays on the way people think graphically through letters and iconic signs.

The present thesis analyses posters by artists such as Stanisław Wyspiański, Karol Frycz, Zofia Stryjeńska, Stefan Norblin, Tadeusz Gronowski, Józef Mroszczak, Tadeusz Trepcowski, Henryk Tomaszewski, Jan Lenica, Jan Młodożeniec, Franciszek Starowieyski, Roman Cieślewicz, Leszek Hołdanowicz, Mieczysław Górski, Rafał Olbiński, Wiesław Strebejko, Jerzy Czerniawski, Lex Drewiński, Andrzej Pągowski, Tomasz Bogusławski, Sławomir Kosmyńka, Ryszard Kaja, Ryszard Kajzer, Monika Starowicz, Sebastian Kubica, Joanna Górka, Jerzy Skakun, Luka Rayski, Grzegorz Myćka, and Piotr Depta-Kleśla. Some of the artefacts (19 posters) have been analysed in detail, some (23) have been described, while others have been mentioned as examples to illustrate the theoretical argument.

The doctoral thesis comprises two main parts – the theoretical and the analytical one, as well as an introduction, a conclusion, a list of references, a catalogue of works (with colour

reproductions) and an index of posters. Of the five chapters, four are theoretical (although already featuring two detailed analyses to illustrate the methodological concepts described there) and one, consisting of four parts, analytical.

Chapter 1 outlines the history of Polish poster art, the knowledge of which facilitates the understanding of the phenomenon of the “Polish poster school”. Further, different definitions of the poster are adduced and the explanation why this artefact is treated as a multimodal genre is provided.

Chapter 2 describes *multimodality* in terms of as a communicative phenomenon, a theory and a method of research. It refers to the studies conducted by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, Hans-Jürgen Bucher, John Bateman, Janina Wildfeuer and Tuomo Hiippala, Carey Jewitt, Jeff Bezemer and Kay O’Halloran, and Jolanta Maćkiewicz. Possible steps for conducting a multimodal analysis have also been proposed.

Chapter 3 lists and describes linguistic tools useful in the analysis of theatrical posters: Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner’s *conceptual blending theory*, Charles Fillmore’s *frame semantics*, Ryszard Tokarski’s *open definition* and Agnieszka Libura’s *second degree multimodality*. All these theories and methods allow for the consideration of peripheral connotations in the construal of the meaning of the analysed message, i.e. contents that do not derive from denotative meanings of signs but rather from associations with other texts of culture.

Chapter 4 deals with the pragmatics of the poster, i.e. with the possible impact of the artefact on the receiver and his cultural decisions. The field of research has been extended by a discussion of selected tools of persuasion, of which metaphor turned out to be the most interesting but also the most difficult to describe. A hypothesis has been put forward that the other poster tools: metonymy, symbol and repetition usually refer the receiver to what is known, conventional and familiar, while metaphor tends towards the multiplication of meanings, stimulating receiver’s mental effort, involving the receiver in the interpretation, and as a result, strengthening the persuasive function of the poster.

Chapter 5, the last one, comprises analyses and interpretations of stylistically diverse posters. The first two subchapters discuss the painting and drawing works by Jerzy Czerniawski, juxtaposed with the style-wise radically different – simple in graphic composition – proposals of the young artists: Joanna Górską and Jerzy Skakun. The next two subchapters analyse selected works of different artists, linked by a theme – a blend of linguistic and pictorial structure referring to a single literary text (*Macbeth*). The analysed

artefacts were selected with a view to test different methodological approaches in semantico-cultural interpretations.

Research on theatrical posters from a semiotic and cultural perspective has demonstrated that the meanings of posters constantly balance between referring to what is recognisable, known, familiar, sometimes even obvious, and the possibility of discovering new allusions, often surprising to the interpreters themselves. Searching for meanings created in poster worlds has allowed the author of this thesis to notice a whole network of inter-semiotic relations and numerous textual, situational (especially historical) and cultural contexts which lead to new interpretations of artistic theatrical posters.

29 marce 2022 r.

Elvira Bolek