

## *The interpretative frame as a tool of a multimodal analysis of theatrical poster*

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### **Keywords**

interpretative frames, multimodal analysis, theatrical poster, transtextual relations, visual arts

### **Abstract**

The starting point of the article is the assumption that multimodal messages can be studied using linguistic methods, carefully selected for specific genres and messages. This article presents the stages of a multimodal analysis, in which interpretative frames are used as a research tool. The proposal has been tested in artistic analyses of theatrical posters for *Macbeth*, which are perceived as both persuasive messages and works of art. As a result of the conducted analysis, individual stages of a multimodal frame analysis, which takes into account the reciprocal contextualisation of language and image as well as transtextual relations, have been delineated. Framing structures the reception, suggests possible readings and solutions, but does not preclude interpretation.

### **1. Introduction**

Since the advent and spread of colour and large format printing, many works on the poster have been published in the field of art history and theory: reviews, interviews, exhibition catalogues, artists' biographies, summaries of specific periods, or collections of reproductions assorted by genre. The second group of scientific arguments analysing the poster form the texts

written by the representatives of the semiotic (rhetorical-figurative) approach<sup>1</sup>. Another group constitute cognitive theories of interpretation, which take into account a multimodal approach to the analysed material. Within the latter, researchers recognise that there is no universal way to study messages, but methods should be selected for specific messages, considering their genological properties. Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala recommend:

Here we will take the position that many kinds of methods are required in any complete cycle of research – at some point categories will need to be formed and this process will draw on a variety of interpretative schemes and, at some other point, it will be useful to consider just how well such schemes are matching data that can be collected and measured. This aligns with what nowadays has increasingly been described as *mixed methods research*, a style of pursuing research that explicitly combines qualitative and quantitative approaches<sup>2</sup>.

Bateman et al. also provide model analyses of posters<sup>3</sup>, noticing the blending and fusion of image and text in this genre. The application of conceptual blending methodology in interpretation of posters (including their subgenres: social, film, theatrical posters) was also tested by Winiarska<sup>4</sup> and Bolek<sup>5</sup>. I assume that also other methods developed within cognitive linguistics can be considered in multimodal analysis. Thus, in the further part of my reflections, I will try to adapt and test the methodology of interpretative frames in the reception of artistic theatrical posters for *Macbeth*.

<sup>1</sup> M. Krampen, *On the semiotics of polish posters*, “The American Journal of Semiotics” 1984, v. 4(2); S. Wysłouch, *Znak ikoniczny jako symbol (na przykładzie współczesnego plakatu)*, [in:] *Posługiwanie się znakami*, ed. by S. Żółkiewski, M. Hopfinger, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1991.

<sup>2</sup> J. Bateman, J. Wildfeuer, T. Hiippala, *Multimodality, Foundations, Research and Analysis – A Problem-Oriented Introduction*. Berlin/Boston 2017, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, pp. 273–278.

<sup>4</sup> J. Winiarska, *Plakat jak przykład multimodalnego amalgamatu*, “LingVaria” 2016, v. 2 (22).

<sup>5</sup> E. Bolek, *Metodologia amalgamatów kognitywnych w interpretacji plakatów artystycznych*, [in:] *Język a media. Zjawiska językowe we współczesnych mediach*, ed. by B. Skowronek, E. Horyń, A. Walecka-Rynduch, Kraków 2016; E. Bolek, *Gra znakami i znaczeniami w polskim artystycznym plakacie teatralnym*, “LingVaria” 2018, v. 1 (25).

## 2. Theatrical poster – characteristics of the genre

When describing the theatrical poster<sup>6</sup>, it is worth starting with its structure and noting that it uses various semiotic categories – language, image, graphic arrangement (layout), meaningful typography (text design), specific colours – though these categories overlap and interact at multiple levels<sup>7</sup>, and their arrangement in the poster is not fixed. It should be mentioned that in multi-coded messages, linguistic signs often perform the functions of images and vice versa (for example, meaningful and handwritten typography, letter-shaped images). The artistic theatrical poster, on the other hand, uses such means as symbols, allusions, quotations or metaphors, but it also creatively transforms signs and meanings which are firmly rooted in the contexts of other texts of visual culture.

With reference to reality, the theatrical poster announces the cultural sphere of activity – it encourages people to attend a theatrical performance. It refers to widely understood encyclopaedic knowledge, which includes the knowledge of cultural texts and socially attributed (linguistic and non-linguistic) signs of symbolism. The sender, if they want their message to be effective, must take into account the perceptive and analytical capabilities of the recipients. At the same time, the graphic designers are obliged to observe the formal requirements of the theatrical poster, i.e. the content of the poster must somehow relate to the performance announced. The meaning of the message is therefore not limited to what the viewers see in the poster itself but relates to other cultural texts (the contents of the dramatic work, often also with a specific theatrical production). The non-autonomous character of the poster is emphasised already at the level of the definitions of the genre, as proposed, for instance, by Bożena Kowalska who points out that “Poster is not a fully free and independent artistic creation, like a drawing or painting. It must play an ancillary role in relation to an event or object it announces, promotes and recommends to viewers”<sup>8</sup>. A poster thus becomes an interpretation of another text, a dramatic work, which is also already interpreted by

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed description, see E. Bolek, *Plakat artystyczny – przekaz multimodalny*, [in:] *Współczesne media. Gatunki w mediach. Vol. 1 Zagadnienia teoretyczne. Gatunki w mediach drukowanych*, ed. by I. Hofman, D. Kępa-Figura, Lublin 2017.

<sup>7</sup> See H.J. Bucher, *Multimodales Verstehen oder Rezeption als Interaktion. Theoretische und empirische Grundlagen einer systematischen Analyse der Multimodalität*, [in:] *Bildlinguistik. Theorie – Methoden – Fallbeispiel*, ed. by H. Dieckmannshenke, M. Klemm, H. Stöckl, Berlin 2011.

<sup>8</sup> B. Kowalska, *Glory to Byk! Franciszek Starowieyski's 100 posters from Janusz Pławski's collection selected by Bożena Kowalska*, Radom 2009, p. 5.

the director of a theatrical performance, entering transtextual relations with them (for more on that, see subsequent sections).

Therefore, the purpose of the theatrical poster is both autotelic (related to the creation of the artistic work itself; after being exposed in the street, posters are then exhibited in galleries, placed in catalogues and albums – with intention to be looked at and admired) and utilitarian – promotional. After all, a theatrical poster is supposed to announce the performance and encourage people to watch the show, to guide the audience's choices; thus, it has a persuasive function<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. A multimodal perspective

Multimodal analysis is a structured research activity that aims to reveal the possible reception of a multimodal message. Multimodal analysis takes into account all the significant components of a message (e.g. words, static or dynamic images, sounds) and the fact that they interact with each other. The meanings of one type of signs are explained in the context of other components of the message. Multimodal analysis may involve well-known and proven methods derived from cognitive sciences, e.g. interpretative frames, scenes, scripts, scenarios, conceptual blends, allowing for the adaptation of research methods to the examined genre.

In a multimodal analysis<sup>10</sup>, it is useful to determine the following stages:

- a) Identification of semiotic categories (semiotic modes) taking part in meaning construal.
- b) Description of the relations between signs, or recognition of the multi-stage construction of the message components.
- c) Consideration and description of the genre and the communicative categories and strategies that are specific to it<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Dossena, 'Now on tour': *Evaluation, Persuasion, and Multimodality in Late Modern English Theatre Posters*, "Studia Neophilologica" 2017, v. 89. The researcher recognises that, from a pragmatic point of view, the main aim of theatrical posters is to guide the audience's choices (Ibidem, p. 114) and states that to achieve this aim different means are used, such as suggestive images, unusual typography of different sizes, expressive colours, and the specific arrangement of elements (Ibidem, p. 114, 120). Dossena emphasises that the cognitive approach (taking into account the theory of multimodality) allows us to determine how persuasion can be achieved through the connotation, layout, (non)verbal structure and organisation of elements in a poster.

<sup>10</sup> Many suggestions for consistent methods of a multimodal analysis can be found in C. Jewitt, J. Bezemer, K. O'Halloran, *Introducing Multimodality*, New York 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Czachur and Pappert write that a multimodal analysis may resemble the cognitive definition with a facet structure ("[...] a multimodal interpretative framework

- d) Selection of other possibly ancillary tools of analysis, appropriate to the adopted research paradigm. In the case of this study, this will be interpretative frames.

The multimodal approach strongly emphasises that meaning is negotiated, that meaning construction does not rely on the extraction of a single right judgement, but is a dynamic process, it requires to adopt the perspective and point of view of the recipient – an insightful observer-researcher. However, this insight demands to examine the broadest possible context(s). Firstly, the context of the sign – the semiotic environment of a given message. Further, the situational context, the textual context – transtextual relations, and the cultural context that is related to them, particularly important for the reception of creative messages – it encompasses

the world of concepts and values, symbols and stereotypes, customs and behavioural scenarios inherent in a given culture and specific to a given stage of cultural development. [...] It includes encyclopaedic knowledge, [...] the worldview encoded in various semiotic systems (mainly in language), and integrated cultural patterns and rules (translation R.A.)<sup>12</sup>.

During the reception of a multimodal message, certain interpretative frames are activated in the minds of the recipients, but their individual elements – the points of access to them – yield the more meanings, the more competent and insightful the interpreter receiving the data is.

#### 4. What are interpretative frames

I use the term *frame* with reference to Charles Fillmore's proposal:

By the term 'frame' I have in mind any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits; when one of the things in such a structure is introduced into a text or into a conversation, all of the others are automatically made available. [...] It is necessary to distinguish two importantly different ways in which the cognitive frames we call on to help us interpret linguistic texts get introduced into the interpretation process. On the one hand, we

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resembles the cognitive definition as proposed by the Lublin school of ethnolinguistics, organised into facets, such as appearance, origin, action, etc. Also in the case of multimodal analysis, the selection and arrangement of facets should reflect the specificity of the examined material"; W. Czachur, S. Pappert, *Wizualny populizm: analiza praktyk multimodalnych na przykładzie plakatów wyborczych z Polski i Niemiec*, "Tekst i Dyskurs – Text und Diskurs" 2019, v. 12, p. 177).

<sup>12</sup> J. Maćkiewicz, *Jak można badać komunikację medialną? – perspektywa odbiorcy*, "Studia Medioznawcze" 2016, v. 65 (2), pp. 33-34.

have cases in which the lexical and grammatical material observable in the text 'evokes' the relevant frames in the mind of the interpreter by virtue of the fact that these lexical forms or these grammatical structures or categories exist as indices of these frames; on the other hand, we have cases in which the interpreter assigns coherence to a text by 'invoking' a particular interpretive frame. An extremely important difference between frames that are evoked by material in the text and frames that are invoked by the interpreter is that in the latter case an 'outsider' has no reason to suspect, beyond a general sense of irrelevance or pointless in the text, that anything is missing<sup>13</sup>.

Knowing that the term is currently vague and, since it appears in various fields of cognitive science, it is profiled depending on the perspective adopted, I want to present the perspective of some Polish linguists. This will allow me to further motivate the use of interpretative frames as a tool for a multimodal analysis of the theatrical poster.

In the way linguists studying Polish define and use the concept of framing, the conceptual nature of frames has been repeatedly emphasised:

Frames are coherent, dynamic, open-ended mental representations of various concepts, which give structure to experiences and behaviours – including linguistic ones. Frames are generally thought to form networked structures; thus, updating a certain element of a frame (for example, using a specific word) can 'open access' to structured knowledge anywhere in that network (translation R.A.)<sup>14</sup>.

Based on more recent works (Maćkiewicz, Czachur and Pappert), it can be inferred that the signs of a (multimodal) message constitute access points to frames, but the relationships between these points must be revealed in the process of analysis:

Interpretative frames are [...] certain cognitive schemas that organise experience, and surface elements – verbal, i.e. words, phrases, as well as [...] non-verbal, iconic elements – constitute nodes of access to these schemas (translation R.A.)<sup>15</sup>.

We consider here an interpretative frame as a cognitive structure that organises our knowledge about life and the world, as well as a method that

<sup>13</sup> Ch. Fillmore, *Frame semantics*, [in:] *Linguistics in the morning calm: Selected papers from SICOL-1981*, ed. by The Linguistics Society of Korea, Seoul 1982, pp. 111, 123-124.

<sup>14</sup> D. Filar, *Narracyjne aspekty językowego obrazu świata. Interpretacja marzenia we współczesnej polszczyźnie*, Lublin 2013, pp. 61-62.

<sup>15</sup> J. Maćkiewicz, *Podpis pod zdjęciem jako rama interpretacyjna*, [in:] *Barwy słów. Studia lingwistyczno-kulturowe*, ed. by D. Filar, P. Krzyżanowski, Lublin 2017, p. 493.

enables a holistic analysis of the meanings created in a multimodal message (translation R.A.)<sup>16</sup>.

The frame organises the analysis, suggests possible readings, solutions, guides the interpretation. It is activated by access points (signs of the message) which form a network. The use of interpretative frames as an analytical tool makes it possible to determine what a given message is about, ordering the study, while simultaneously leaving space for the detailed determination of the network created from the components of the message, the elements entering mutual contexts. Thus, a frame does not impose a single reading of the message belonging to the artistic discourse, as this depends, to a certain extent, on the interpreter's competence, insight and sensitivity.

I find the extension of frame analysis from linguistic to non-linguistic and multimodal texts, as well as other cognitive research methods, both beneficial and desirable. I thus agree with Chrzanowska-Kluczevska's opinion that:

the fact that some analytical tools borrowed from text/discourse studies and linguistics in general have been frequently employed in the semiotics of the visuals should by no means be taken as a symptom of 'linguistic imperialism' in the study of non-verbal texts but rather as a proof of the occurrence of transmedial effects that require a common descriptive terminology<sup>17</sup>.

The use of a certain common basis of the cognitive science methodology for the description of linguistic and non-linguistic, artistic and non-literary texts may indicate that they all draw from culture, while at the same time constituting its essential part.

## 5. The analysis of posters to *Macbeth*

From the perspective of frame semantics, "the same 'facts' can be presented within different framings"<sup>18</sup>. In the case of theatrical posters announcing the performance of *Macbeth*<sup>19</sup>, the same story of *Macbeth*, is "told" via

<sup>16</sup> W. Czachur, S. Pappert, *Wizualny populizm...*, op.cit., p. 177.

<sup>17</sup> E. Chrzanowska-Kluczevska, *Visual Narrativity and the Creation of a Text World – a Semiotic Study of Selected Cases of Transmediality*, "Studia Linguistica Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis" 2019, v. 136, p. 295.

<sup>18</sup> Ch. Fillmore, *Frame semantics...*, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> In the analysed material I consider only those posters where the name *Macbeth* is accompanied by the name of the playwright Shakespeare, although it seems that the proper name will evoke the same connotations even if the poster announces Verdi's opera or Ionesco's play; it is possible to take into account different spellings, i.e. *Makbet* (Polish), *Macbeth* (English), *Magbet* (Serbian).

different access points, forming a network. Thus, the stories are profiled and reveal multiple threads, multiple dimensions and different possibilities of reading of, first, the content of the dramatic work itself and, second, the story about the performance in the abbreviated form of a poster. In the process of interpretation, the recipient is hence confronted with a multi-stage and complicated task. The general frame of Macbeth's story guides and orders the analysis, but the interpretation is ultimately dependent upon the recipient's knowledge, receptiveness and insight.

By referring to what the viewer knows and understands (i.e. precisely to the access points to the frame), the poster influences and affects the viewer – it encourages the viewer to come to the performance. However, the most interesting thing, from the point of view of the viewer's reaction to the poster, is the reconstruction of the whole network of the frame. This process thus seems to constitute an asynchronous dialogue with a persuasive function<sup>20</sup>: the theatrical poster encourages the viewer not only through a slogan, but through a secret, which it only partially reveals at first viewing. In Grzegorz Myćka's expressive poster *Makbet* (2011)<sup>21</sup>, an important element is the title – the node of access to the story of Macbeth, referring to the frame – a word that makes the other elements of the frame accessible by triggering the connotations of that name. I assume that connotative features are specific not only to common names but also to proper names. I understand the connotations of proper names, following Czesław Kosyl, as “[...] a set of judgements and perceptions about the denotation of a given name entrenched in the social awareness (and thus universal, not individual). They constitute a kind of label for a given denotation” (translation R.A.)<sup>22</sup>. Particularly interesting in the context of the assumption about the connotations of proper names seem to be those anthroponyms that refer the recipient to the ideas about cultural figures, canonical literary heroes, such as (apart from the prominent examples from the bible or mythology) Hamlet, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Faust or Werther. Some anthroponyms even give rise to new semantic derivations or acquire extended meanings (e.g. *Hamletism* – a life attitude characterised by disastrous indecisiveness; *hamletise* – to analyse something without being able to decide how to act, *Wertherian* – oversensitive, full of pessimism and melancholy), while the behaviour specific

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting here that slogans are quite uncommon in theatrical posters. By contrast, those found in film posters have already been the subject of analysis (e.g. J. Mahlknecht, *Three words to tell a story: the movie poster tagline*, “Word & Image” 2015 v. 31(4), pp. 414-424).

<sup>21</sup> <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/422564377513538821/> (accessed 17 September 2021)

<sup>22</sup> Cz. Kosyl, *Metaforyczne użycie nazw własnych*, [in:] *Z zagadnień słownictwa współczesnego języka polskiego*, ed. by M. Szymczak, Wrocław 1978, p. 136.



to some characters can be entrenched in some idiomatic expressions (*tilting at windmills*). Consequently, even for people who are unfamiliar with the details of the literary classics but still proficient language users, the names of these characters are automatically associated with a whole range of names for human behaviour, attitudes, longings and weaknesses. I put forward a hypothesis that the name *Macbeth* is associated with concepts such as ‘king’, ‘ruler’, ‘crime’, ‘death’, ‘possession’. At the same time, the values form a network for the described frame. It is a certain conceptual structure, about which Ryszard Tokarski writes that it is “something that goes beyond language and is related to cultural conventions, human knowledge and experience” (translation R.A.)<sup>23</sup>.

The recipient is also referred to this structure by other elements of the poster – the visual signs, especially the crown-snares dominant – a form that clearly stands out from the background (because of its size and the colour contrast of red and yellow), attracting the eye of the observer. The visualisation is based on *perceptual resemblance*<sup>24</sup> of the signs in the poster and the creative, surprising way in which they are composed. Already at this early stage of the analysis, one can notice the mutual contextualisation of signs in the message, which is characteristic of the multimodal approach. The graphic element of the crown-snares is the access node to the interpretative frame of the story about Macbeth (although it seems that it can also be the access point to other frames), because the verbal element present in the same space of the message – the title (of the poster, of the play which it announces and of the dramatic work which both the play and the poster interpret) guides the reception.

This graphic element refers not only to the actual object and its literal meaning: *crown* ‘a metal hoop worn on the head, a symbol of power’, *snares* ‘loops used to catch animals’, but also, and perhaps above all, to connotative values. By contrast, the activation of the frame of the story about Macbeth provides the background and allows the recipient to select the concepts and related values, associated with the crown and the snares, which become activated in the context of the whole multimodal message. For the crown these will be: ‘monarch’s power, dominion, empire, fame, wealth’, but also: ‘pride, vanity, exaggerated ambition, tyranny’; for the snare: ‘danger, trap, pain, suffering, imprisonment, a no-go situation’. The recipient thus perceives a visual

<sup>23</sup> R. Tokarski, *Pola znaczeniowe i ramy interpretacyjne – dwa spojrzenia na język*, “LingVaria” 2006, v. 1, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Ch. Forceville, *Non-verbal and multimodal metaphor in a cognitivist framework: Agendas for research*, [in:] *Multimodal metaphor*, ed. by Ch. Forceville, E. Urios-Aparisi, Berlin-New York 2009, p. 31.

metaphor<sup>25</sup> that communicates: POWER IS A TRAP/ POWER IS SLAVERY<sup>26</sup>. It is also worth noting that the image of the crown-snares is a clear case of a metaphorical non-verbal construction that is explicit and decipherable through the simultaneous use of metonymy<sup>27</sup>. In the analysed poster, the crown is an example of an expansive type (especially in visual and multimodal communication): ACCESSORIES FOR THE STATUS AND/OR CHARACTER OF A PERSON. It is used here to indicate an abstract domain of power, along with its negative (in the whole multimodal context) values and associations mentioned above. The metonymy in Grzegorz Myćka's poster is also an effective persuasive tool<sup>28</sup> by referring to the common knowledge shared by the sender and the recipients, or more precisely to the interpretative frames – to the frame of POWER, to which the crown provides access. The two frames: that of THE STORY OF MACBETH and that of POWER, having a common point of access, overlap, profiling each other, at the same time highlighting those values that are common to them and relevant to the announcement of the theatrical performance and the encouragement to see it.

The components of the nodes, such as colours and meaningful typography, are important in creating the network of the interpretative frame. In the frame of Macbeth's story, red is the colour of 1. 'authority', 'royal power', 'dignity'; 2. generally: 'danger', 'peril'; specifically: 'crime' and 'death'; 3. also

<sup>25</sup> In various posters for theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare's plays we can see the representation of merged objects or an object in the function of something else, e.g. the crown-wall (Andrzej Pągowski, *Makbet*, 1981), the dagger-tongue (Leszek Żebrowski, *Makbet*, 2005), the nest of vipers-brain (Franciszek Starowieyski, *Macbeth*, 1980), the daggers-spikes of the crown (Ivan Misic, *Magbet*, 2010), the heart-snares (Leszek Żebrowski, *Romeo i Julia*, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> The notation indicates a reference to Conceptual Metaphor Theory – a theory whose authors Georges Lakoff and Mark Johnson (G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago 1981) believe that metaphor is conceptual in nature and can be embodied in any sign and through various media. A detailed description of the theory and some constraints in applying it to the description of non-linguistic messages, including multimodal ones, go beyond the thematic scope of this article (see Ch. Forceville, *Non-verbal and multimodal...*, op. cit., A. Libura, *Teoria metafory pojęciowej wobec badań nad komunikacją multimodalną*, [in:] *Nowe zjawiska w języku, tekście i komunikacji. Metafory i amalgamaty pojęciowe*, ed. by M. Cichmińska, I. Matusiak-Kempa, Olsztyn 2012, pp. 117–129).

<sup>27</sup> For the explicitness of metonymy and the highlighting of certain features through its use, see E. Urios-Aparisi, *Interaction of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in TV commercials: Four case studies*, [in:] *Multimodal metaphor*, ed. by Ch. Forceville, E. Urios-Aparisi, Berlin–New York 2009.

<sup>28</sup> More on metonymy as a tool of persuasion in general, see J. Maćkiewicz *Metonimia jako narzędzie perswazji (na przykładzie tekstów prasowych)*, "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" 2020, v. 63 (3).

‘(dangerous) love’, although this meaning can only be activated in the context of the dramatic work/theatrical play (more on that later). Gold (yellow in the poster) means ‘wealth’ and ‘nobility’, but also ‘betrayal’, ‘jealousy’, volatility, falsehood, lack of self-restraint. Black is commonly associated with negative phenomena and qualities, in art it is linked to ‘evil, falsehood, error’. It is present as the colour of shadows, but also in the inscription and, importantly, as the element of the poster author’s own typography. The title *Makbet* and the name of the play’s author, *William Shakespeare*, are as if spilled over, written with something liquid – maybe ink or blood?

The final point of the frame analysis are transtextual contexts. The message itself points to them but does not impose them. It is possible that the recipient (with low linguistic and cultural competence) knows what a crown and snare are and can read the word *Makbet*. The recipients can thus understand that the poster is about some Macbeth for whom the crown was a trap, but they cannot recall the background of the message, the encyclopaedic knowledge that is essential for the effective use of the interpretative frame. On the other hand, contexts are necessary to consider when analysing the frame from the perspective of an astute observer-researcher.

The poster constitutes a paratext because it announces another *text*, a specific stage production, as indicated by the inscription at the bottom of the poster: “Teatr Narodowy w Poznaniu” [National Theatre in Poznań]<sup>29</sup>. Intertextuality, in turn, points to the theatrical poster’s references to William Shakespeare’s dramatic work itself. The evocation of this multifaceted and ambiguous story about a man who, at the instigation of his wife, murdered people to become king and keep his crown, can profile the meanings of the aforementioned access nodes to the frame. Thus, for example, the red in the poster, signifying generally intense states, feelings and emotions as well as danger and love, in the context of the recipient’s familiarity with Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* may evoke the conceptual metaphors of LOVE IS DANGER and LOVE IS (MENTAL) ILLNESS. And the snare, which generally – as indicated above – connotes ‘danger, trap, pain, suffering, imprisonment, a no-go situation’, here actualises the premeditated action of a third party – ‘the activity of a violent poacher’, but also ‘the innocence of an animal’, and may thus be a point of access to the poaching frame. In the context of the dramatic work itself, this multi-threaded semantic construction can be read as: “someone – Lady Mackbet?, the Witches? – has planted a trap of power for the innocent Macbeth”. This reading of the poster is not the only right one, but one of possible readings motivated precisely by the activation of the poaching

<sup>29</sup> It was not possible, as part of this analysis, to reach information about the stage production.

frame. Therefore, it seems that the theatrical poster is an in-between work, i.e. it comments on the drama and announces the play. However, it is also possible to see (and partially understand) the poster on the street, in a gallery or on the Internet without knowing the content of the drama, and then to analyse and interpret the poster in more depth after watching the theatrical performance<sup>30</sup>.

To check how the tool of the interpretative frames works in the analysis of other texts of visual culture, it is indicated to make at least a partial analysis of another poster for *Macbeth* which uses completely different pictorial means of expression. The poster to *Macbeth* by Franciszek Starowieyski from 1980 contains visual motifs that significantly diverge from the majority of works<sup>31</sup> announcing the performance of Shakespeare's play.

I treat the title *Macbeth*, similarly to the poster analysed above, as the access node to the interpretative frame of the story about Macbeth. The visual elements are a bundle of vipers or, in the perception of some viewers<sup>32</sup>, a brain entwined with the bundle of vipers.

The theatrical poster as a genre is firmly rooted in cultural contexts, including linguistic context<sup>33</sup>, thus the motivation for using the visual sign of the viper can be sought in all possible forms of entrenchment of concepts. Both the word and the image of a viper refer to 'someone cunning and deceitful' and to 'inflicting death'. Therefore, the bundle shown in the poster

<sup>30</sup> Jan Zielecki (commenting on the graphic work of Lech Majewski, but also on artists creating artistic posters in general) wrote about the deliberate design of theatrical and film posters in such a way that their content constitutes a non-linear discussion between the poster designer and the viewer about art: "Among the important distinctive features of this art, one – very characteristic – concerns the viewer and his perception. With equal curiosity we read the graphic message contained in these posters not only before but also (and sometimes above all) after the film screening or theatrical performance, as if we wanted to confront our feelings and associations with the author's way of conceptualising them" (translation R.A.); J. Zielecki, *Lech Majewski*, "Projekt" 1987, v. 2, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> The exception here is the poster *Lady Macbeth* by Marian Nowiński (2008: [http://theartofposter.com/poster\\_pl.asp?id=10841](http://theartofposter.com/poster_pl.asp?id=10841); accessed 17 September 2021), which includes a very explicit visual metaphor WOMAN AS VIPER.

<sup>32</sup> The presentation of the poster to linguists from the research centre in Lublin provoked a heated discussion, confirming the thesis that the shape of given visual objects may resemble other objects, evoking different associations in different viewers; consequently, the analysis may lead to interpretations with different profiles.

<sup>33</sup> I give examples taken from the Polish language and culture, although the poster is intended for the German theatrical scene. My analytical concepts and actions are justified by the fact that the theatrical poster is treated as a work of art and hence it can be reinterpreted by researchers representing different languages and cultures, having different knowledge and individual experiences.

connotes: ‘the hotbed of cunning, evil and death’. When we consider these values and the presence of Macbeth’s name in the poster, the multimodal whole could be read as ‘Macbeth is like vipers’ or ‘Macbeth’s brain is like being squeezed by vipers’. However, these seemingly similar interpretations differ in an important aspect. The first one is the realisation of the *man as animal* scheme, which attributes the connoted ‘evil’ to Macbeth. The second interpretation transfers responsibility for the crime to some external force. If we assume that Macbeth’s brain is entwined with vipers, then it is limited, enslaved, poisoned, and the protagonist has no access to his senses<sup>34</sup> and cannot make rational decisions.

In terms of colours, the poster for *Macbeth* is characteristic of the entirety of Franciszek Starowieyski’s work. The use of “dirty”, “rotten” and “earthy” colours, often in combination with deformation, evoke surrealism. These are recognisable features of the Polish artist. The poster, however, is both typical of and stands out in Starowieyski’s work. Red ochre stands out because, apart from other “natural” ochres: yellow, brown, white and black (produced with the use of natural pigments – earth, coal, soot, chalk), is also associated with human and animal nature – it is prototypically the colour of blood. To sum up, the use of “dirty” colours (different hues of brown, beige and ochre) is associated with unpleasant emotional states, profiled onto the concepts of ‘(physical and moral) dirt’ and ‘decay’.

However, from the point of view of an insightful observer-researcher, the most interesting elements of Starowieyski’s poster seem to be transtextual contexts, especially intertextuality, pointing not only to *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare’s drama, but also to François Mauriac’s masterpiece *Vipers’ Tangle* and the image of Medusa, so popular in art visual culture<sup>35</sup>. Janusz Pławski,

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the lack of access to the senses is the intent of the theatrical posters with the motif of a crown – in Andrzej Pałowski’s poster (1981: <https://pagowski.pl/pl/p/MAKBET/54>, accessed 17 September 2021) the crown falls over the eyes and one ear, in Sebastian Kubica’s poster (2016: [http://sebastiankubica.pl/pl/prace/plakaty-teatralne/#&gid=psgal\\_388\\_1&pid=8](http://sebastiankubica.pl/pl/prace/plakaty-teatralne/#&gid=psgal_388_1&pid=8), accessed 17 September 2021) it covers the eyes.

<sup>35</sup> Caravaggio – *Head of Medusa* (painting), Carlos Schwabe – *Medusa* (painting), Peter Rubens – *Head of Medusa* (painting), Jacek Malczewski – *Meduza* (painting), Gian Lorenzo Bernini – *Medusa* (sculpture), Paul Dardé – *Medusa* (sculpture).

At this point, it is worth defining the features of the artistic theatrical poster, a genre that draws on the entire available iconosphere, motifs and images which artists reproduce sometimes even unconsciously, reaching into their minds, full of visual representations they have once seen. An eminent expert on poster art, recommending in-depth re-contextualisation when reading theatrical posters wrote: “The whole history of images is reflected in the poster, and even the authors themselves are unaware of it or simply do not know that they are exploiting some civilisational heritage” (M. Knorowski, in a letter to me, 2020; translation R.A.).

an expert on Starowieyski's posters and collector of the artist's works, comments on the need for re-contextualisation of the artist's posters as follows:

All these props, atmosphere of the macabre and surreal reality, enhanced by the precise drawings of details were supposed, as we believed, not to evoke terror in the viewer of this *theatrum*, but to make him look for associations between this artistic presentations and familiar or imagined message of the work being promoted, to recognize cultural quotations, symbols and metaphors<sup>36</sup>.

Thus, in a way, this is not only a poster about Shakespeare's Macbeth, but also Macbeth's nightmare as told by Franciszek Starowieyski. The novel *Vipers' Tangle* refers to negative feelings – bitterness, jealousy, suspicion, envy, negative assessments of the behaviour of others, while the mythological Medusa – a woman whose head, instead of hair, was surrounded by writhing snakes – evokes terror and repulsion. All these associations, encapsulated by the interpretative frame of Macbeth's story, fill in the network of this frame, complementing and motivating each other, at the same time highlighting those aspects which are relevant from someone's (in this case, probably the poster artist's) point of view.

## Conclusions:

The practice of analysing artistic theatrical posters allows us to delineate the following stages of a multimodal frame analysis:

1. Identification and naming of the frame. The question must be asked: what activates what? Words seem less ambiguous and in the case of a theatrical poster whose title is a proper name, familiar to most of the audience, this name can be considered the access node initiating the frame. However, it should be stressed that it is the visual elements that are meant to catch the viewer's eye and "tell a story", thus they should be considered as points of no lesser importance in the frame's network.
2. Listing the (verbal and visual) nodes of access to the frame. These nodes form a network, thus listing them should be like weaving the network, establishing the connections and common nodes.
3. Description of meanings that are autonomous and those emerging (contextualising themselves) in the mutual relations between these nodes.
4. Description of the meanings of the components of the nodes, semiotic categories (in the poster this include, among others, the colours of the

<sup>36</sup> J. Pławski, *Glory to Byk! Franciszek Starowieyski's 100 posters from Janusz Pławski's collection selected by Bożena Kowalska*, Radom 2009, p. 9.

given visual elements, inscriptions and the background, meaningful typography).

##### 5. Verification of transtextual contexts.

This analytical process should lead to an interpretation that verifies the assumptions about the actualisation of a given frame and checks whether the current access points may (or may not) refer the recipients also to other frames.

The proposal to use the interpretative frame in a multimodal analysis allows for considering different predispositions of the recipients and offering one's own perspective – that of an insightful observer-researcher, taking into account both what can be seen in the multimodal message and what can be reconstructed through updating transtextual relations. Adding an interpretative frame to the analysis allows for a holistic perception of not only the global meaning of the poster – the persuasive message, but also of the aesthetic dimension of the poster – the work of art.

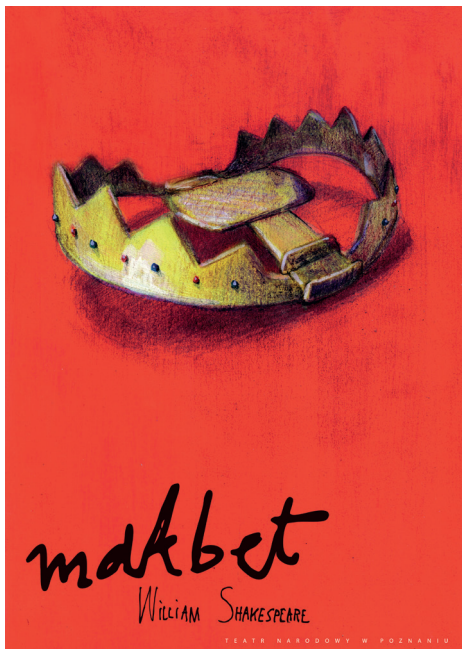
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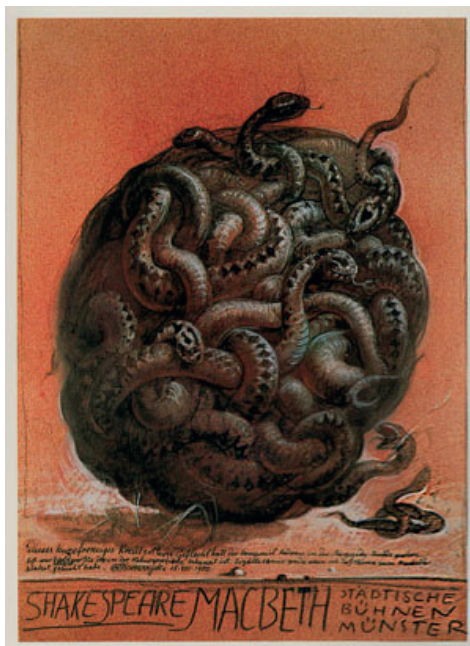
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Poster 1: Grzegorz Myćka, *Makbet*, 2011.



Poster 2: Franciszek Starowieyski, *Macbeth*, 1980.