Barbara Sapała
orcid.org/0000-0001-7916-2309
e-mail: barbara.sapala@uwm.edu.pl
University of Warmia and Mazury

Małgorzata Sławińska
orcid.org/0000-0002-4941-009X
e-mail: malgorzata.slawinska@uwm.edu.pl
University of Warmia and Mazury

Beata Sarnowska's Questing Books as the Source of Children's Knowledge of Cultural Heritage

Książki questingowe Beaty Sarnowskiej jako źródło dziecięcej wiedzy o dziedzictwie kulturowym

KEYWORDS

questing, cultural heritage, questing literature, values, children's literature

BSTRACT

In recent years, questing has become increasingly popular in Poland. It is a variation of the urban game as a form of cultural tourism. The subject of this article is children's books by Beata Sarnowska from the "Urban Mysteries" series, which are referred to as questing literature: a term that has not yet been widely embraced in literary studies. We conducted a study to determine whether it is possible to transpose questing into a literary form, and whether this procedure succeeded in the case of Sarnowska's books. To answer these questions, we carried out a formal, stylistic and content analysis of the works based on the features of questing defined in the literature. The analysis showed that the plot of the books reflects the most important feature of questing, which is the popularization of knowledge about cultural heritage by means of an urban game. We also noted the compatibility of the books' style and form with traditional questing. Sarnowska's works show children cultural heritage as a value, in a way that combines their preferred entertainment form (game) with a classic book, which further sustains their interest in literature.

SŁOWA KLUCZE   ABSTRAKT

questing,   W ostatnich latach w Polsce obserwujemy rosnącą popularność
dziedzictwo   questingu, czyli odmiany gry miejskiej jako formy turystyki kulturo-
kulturowe, literatura   wej. Przedmiotem rozważań prezentowanych w niniejszym artykule
questingowa,   były książki dla dzieci autorstwa Beaty Sarnowskiej z serii „Miejskie
wartości, literatura   Tajemnice", które określane są nieutrwalonym jeszcze w literaturo-
dziecięca   znawstwie mianem literatury questingowej. Przeprowadzone przez
                     nas badania miały na celu ustalenie, czy możliwe jest transponowanie
                     questingu na formę literacką oraz czy zabieg ten udał się w przypadku
                     książek Sarnowskiej. Aby odpowiedzieć na te pytania, dokonano ana-
                     lizy formalnej, stylistycznej i treściowej utworów na podstawie zdefi-
                     niowanych w literaturze przedmiotu cech questingu. Wykazała ona, że
                     treść badanych książek odzwierciedla najważniejszą cechę questingu,
                     jaką jest popularyzowanie wiedzy o dziedzictwie kulturowym w ra-
                     mach gry miejskiej. Odnotowano także zgodność analizowanych po-
                     zycji z tradycyjnym questem na płaszczyźnie formalnej i stylistycznej.
                     Utwory Sarnowskiej ukazują dzieciom dziedzictwo kulturowe jako
                     wartość w postaci, która stanowi połączenie preferowanych przez nie
                     form rozrywki (gra) z klasyczną książką, podtrzymując dodatkowo za-
                     interesowanie literaturą.

Introduction

In recent years, the publishing market has witnessed the release of children's books by Beata Sarnowska in the "Urban Mysteries" series, which are devoted to four Polish cities: Olsztyn – *Tajemnica Zaginionej Kotki* [The Mystery of the Missing Cat] (2016); Krakow – *Tajemnica Krakowskich Pocztówek* [The Mystery of the Krakow Postcards] (2017); Toruń – *Tajemnica Profesora w Meloniku* [The Mystery of the Professor in a Bowler Hat] (2019a) and Warsaw – Tajemnica Zielonej Teczki [The Mystery of the Green Briefcase] (2019b) (Photo 1).

Photo 1. The covers of Beata Sarnowska's books in the "Urban Mysteries" series.

In online reviews (Musiał, 2017; *Czas dzieci* [Children's Time], n.d.), these works are referred to as questing novels, although this category is not yet defined in literary studies. In this article, we have attempted to determine whether the quest as a type of game that educates players about cultural heritage can take literary form, and whether Sarnowska's works can be included in the category of a questing book. We have conducted an analysis of the form, style and content of all the publications in the series, by looking for the features of a quest in the studied works.

The concept and features of questing

Questing is a concept derived from the field of cultural education, which Delia Clark and Steven Glazer (2006) define as a model of regional education (place-based education) that focuses on exploring a person's immediate environment and learning about its cultural and natural heritage in an unconventional way. Questing is a type of a self-guided field game. The questing scenario is fixed, and the participant can engage in the game without anyone's supervision and at their own convenience. The game itself involves creating unmarked trails, which participants navigate by following clues, usually rhyming ones, provided in a free description (quest), and a simplified map of the area with the starting point marked, but with no marked route. At the destination point, a so-called treasure awaits the participant. As quest researcher Katarzyna Czarnecka writes:

> Two types of segments are fundamental to the composition of a quest:
> 1. topographical clues that help to find one's way around the area and navigate it according to the author's idea;
> 2. riddles, i.e. tasks that are interwoven into the narrative, whose presence also makes the expression "tourism with riddles" synonymous with questing (Czarnecka, 2017, pp. 190–191).

When following the clues and solving the riddles, the participant learns facts about the area: the history, cultural heritage, geography and nature of the space covered by the quest. According to Grzegorz Droba and Sabina Przepióra (2014, p. 36), it is the educational element that constitutes the main difference between a classic urban game and questing: while the main goal of questing is to familiarize participants with elements of cultural heritage, this is not necessary in city games. Urban games only use urban space as a significant element of gameplay (Smalec, 2015, p. 195).

Clark and Glazer (2006) view questing as a tool through which communities can create lasting connections with the cultural landscape of their native land. However, the term was soon transferred to cultural tourism in the broader sense. In Poland, it has been popularized since 2011, largely by NGOs (Droba and Przepióra, 2014, p. 37). Today, numerous Polish cities and municipalities also have it in their tourist offer. Questing is an interesting addition to the network of local tourist and cultural trails, as it leads participants through lesser-known landmarks and places located outside areas where tourism is concentrated. Its essence is "searching for uniqueness in seemingly completely ordinary spaces and promoting unique places that have a remarkable landscape, nature or cultural heritage" (Droba and Przepióra, 2014, p. 37).

What makes for successful questing? What characteristics should a quest have in order to properly fulfill its function? Questing trainer Łukasz Wilczyński says that its success lies in the effect it produces, which he describes in three words: fun, excitement

and education. It is the combination of these three elements that ensures good fun and learning for participants of all ages. Wilczyński also points out one more element that is a condition for success: involvement, which keeps the participants interested in the quests. When engaged, they take an active part in searching for more clues, thus becoming part of the quest (Wilczyński, 2011). Sometimes questing is also multimedia-based: in recent years quests connected to downloadable applications have been appearing. Quest creators are also opening up to questers traveling by bicycle, for example. The books that are the subject of our research are also an attempt to expand this form of engagement.

Cultural heritage as a carrier of value

Questing is growing in popularity as interested institutions and organizations are looking for ways to disseminate knowledge about the cultural heritage of the region and the country, considered as a carrier of value. Cultural heritage is a multidimensional concept, present in the language of science, journalism and politics (Kobyliński, 2012), but it is becoming a key term in studies on regionalism and regional education (Petrykowski, 2003). According to the definition that was adopted in 2005 in Faro during the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, cultural heritage is "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions." (Article 2, paragraph 1a). It also consists, notably, of intangible elements, i.e.

> the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts …. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, 2003, art. 2, par. 1 item 1).

Humanities scholars are engaged in a debate about cultural heritage and its value. One position is an affirmative approach to heritage, which is considered an intrinsic (autotelic) value for a particular community. As a medium of intergenerational communication, it constitutes an enduring element of social identity (Brumann, 2014). In this sense, heritage is mnemonic in nature and requires constant reminding of what must be saved from oblivion because of its imperishable value (Silberman, 2015). According to this approach, in the culture of each country there are places with universal value, which are carriers of high humanistic and general human values: beautiful

landscapes with natural and scenic qualities, places with unique historical values, as well as places and objects with exceptional aesthetic, artistic and cultural characteristics. To understand their significance as a testimony to the cultural, historical and spiritual development of human beings throughout history, we must be aware of their existence, understand their function, and become familiar with the historical and cultural context in which they were created (Torowska, 2008, p. 8).

The second approach to cultural heritage, dubbed the constructivist approach, refers to the concept of invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2008), i.e. groups of symbolic objects and practices produced in the recent past that are helpful in instilling norms and values that enable a particular community to generate a sense of continuity with some era in the past. As Piotr Petrykowski notes, the power of cultural heritage "is not embedded in any so-called objective values," but "in the people, whose dynamic relationship to the past subjects tradition (cultural heritage) to constant reexamination" (2003, pp. 156–157). Therefore, the cognitive and emotional, moral, social, religious, aesthetic, patriotic and other values attributed to cultural heritage (cf. Torowska, 2008; Kobylinski, 2012) may or may not surface depending on the understanding of the concept of cultural heritage itself and the reflections of the people who are involved in its transmission. When a person's value system is only just being formed, that is, in childhood and adolescence, it is important to "assist young people in following their own but proper hierarchy of values," which is called value education (Chałas and Łobacz, 2020, p. 109). Learning about cultural heritage lays the foundation for a value that is, so to speak, the sum of the above-mentioned values: a person's identification first with their closest environment, the little homeland, then the region, and finally, with the nation and the great homeland, which Kazimierz Denek counts among the highest values (Denek et al., 2009).

Analysis and interpretation of the books

In the analysis of Sarnowska's books, we combined the literary and pedagogical perspectives. Using genological methodology, we carried out a study of the genre features of the novels on the basis of a categorization model that is referred to as classical or structuralist (Makuch, 2015; Witosz, 2001). In addition, we used qualitative content analysis, a method used to study existing messages, "in which analytical categories are derived from the research concept rather than from the research material – the analyzed text. In turn, indicators of the category are searched for in the text" (Rubacha, 2008, p. 284). The use of this method helped us to identify the genre features of the quest and to recognize the meanings attributed to selected elements of Poland's cultural heritage.

The plot of the books under study is set in four major Polish cities: in Olsztyn (Sarnowska, 2016), Krakow (Sarnowska, 2017), Warsaw (Sarnowska, 2019a) and Toruń (Sarnowska, 2019b), respectively. All books were published by the Krakow-based Skrzat Publishing House. In terms of illustrations, they all feature drawings made by Artur Nowicki that have been incorporated into photos of cities taken by the author of the series (photo 2).

Photo 2. Example of an illustration from the book *Tajemnica Zielonej Teczki* [The Mystery of the Green Briefcase] (Sarnowska, 2019b, p. 75)

The main characters are children aged 9 to 12: Kama, Zuza, Krzysiek (called Skinny) and Wojtek (called Saint). They all live in the Kwiatowy housing estate in Olsztyn.

The starting point of the plot in each book is some intriguing event, which prompts the children to embark on an "investigation." In the Olsztyn book, the children look for a missing cat that they were supposed to be taking care of during the vacations. In Krakow, they track down the thief of a valuable collection of old postcards that were brought as a gift for Kama's grandfather's friend. In Warsaw, they search for the stolen manuscript of a new novel by a well-known children's book author, and in Toruń they want to find a mysterious professor and his dog to save them from imminent danger. In all the books, the characters carry out their search according to the clues and tasks included in the mysterious messages they discover one by one. Each of them contains details about where the next clue is hidden, thus marking a route through the city to the destination point where the detective mystery is solved. At the climax, it turns out that what the characters thought was a crime-solving quest was in fact a game organized by adults. In Olsztyn, the game was put together by the parents of the little detectives, who wanted to make their last day together before leaving for the summer camp more attractive. In Krakow, the organizer of the game was a friend of a grandfather. In Warsaw, the city game was invented by the children's favorite writer in order to select candidates to participate in a film being shot based on his latest book, while in Toruń it was part of the opening of an exhibition of works by Zbigniew Lengren and the prize for solving the puzzles was free entry to a special exhibition. Conducting the quests was possible thanks to the involvement of many people, including employees of cultural institutions (a librarian, a tourist guide, a museum employee, an actor, a film director, etc.).

The routes that the children follow, while solving successive puzzles, go through places with landmarks characteristic of each city. These include mainly well-known monuments, such as the High Gate and St. James Cathedral in Olsztyn; St. Mary's Church and the Cloth Hall in Krakow; the Royal Castle and the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw; and the Leaning Tower and Copernicus House in Torun. Another category of landmarks includes monuments of Nicolaus Copernicus in Olsztyn and Toruń, Adam Mickiewicz in Krakow, Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Warsaw and others. A separate group of landmarks consists of cultural institutions that the characters visit, such as the Provincial Public Library in Olsztyn; the Museum at the Royal Castle and the WARSawy Theater in Warsaw; and the Filutek Gallery in Toruń. The author inserts interesting facts into the text, which make these places attractive to children. For example, we read the following about the Palace of Culture and Science: "Did you know that it is as high as two hundred and thirty-seven meters? It has forty-two floors and contains three thousand two hundred and eighty-eight rooms. It is said that a pair of eagles nest on the forty-second floor, and order in the basement is guarded

by about thirty cats" (Sarnowska, 2019a, pp. 23–24). The attractions included on the protagonists' itineraries are supplemented by a number of lesser-known elements of the cities' cultural heritage, such as the chandelier made of deer antlers in Olsztyn's cathedral; the knife above the entrance to the Cloth Hall in Krakow; the stone bear in Warsaw; and Mrożek's commemorative "shoe" in Torun. These objects are a pretext for evoking legends associated with the cities – both the well-known ones, such as the Warsaw legend of the golden duck or the basilisk, and the lesser-known ones, such as the legend of the knife in the Cloth Hall and the towers of St. Mary's Church, the legend of the deer from the cathedral in Olsztyn, and others. We count these legends among the intangible cultural heritage, which is represented in the books also by the output of famous figures associated with the cities, significant on a national and even global scale. The little protagonists get acquainted with Nicolaus Copernicus (Olsztyn, Toruń), Maria Curie-Skłodowska (Warsaw), Polish rulers (Warsaw, Krakow) and Zbigniew Lengren (Toruń). The author also notes traditions and elements of urban folklore, such as the baking of Toruń's gingerbread or the presence of a barrel organ player in Warsaw's Old Town. The reader, following the fate of the characters, learns the topography of the cities. A simplified map of the parts of the city where the plot takes place, printed on the inside cover of each book, is helpful in this regard. In addition, some books include simplified city plans (Photo 3).
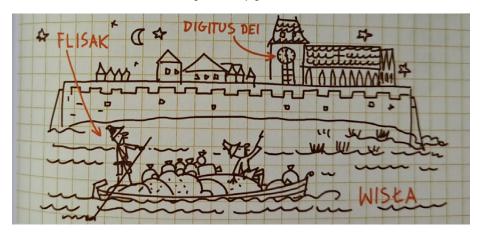

Photo 3. Plot scheme from the book *Tajemnica Profesora w Meloniku* [The Mystery of the Professor in the Bowler Hat] (Sarnowska, 2019a, p. 63).

The plot scheme which is based on riddles about the cultural heritage of the visited areas, which lead to the discovery of a mystery, as well as the close link to the topography of the city, brings to mind the questing games known from cultural tourism. In fact, the author herself evokes this notion in the first book, when the parents of the

protagonists who are the organizers of the game, explains that the children took part in a game that is a combination of a city game with a scavenger hunt and questing. Questing, as Christopher's father tells the children, "is a mix of various forms of tourism and field activities. Its purpose is to learn about cultural or natural heritage. The quest ends in finding a treasure, with the treasure usually being symbolic" (Sarnowska, 2016, p. 129).

To determine whether Sarnowska's books can be considered questing novels, we should examine their plot against the principles of quest construction. Czarnecka, investigating the quest as a separate text genre, distinguished its characteristic formal and stylistic features. According to the researcher, the quest has a limited volume which is determined by the size of the leaflet. It consists of a proper rhymed body with a description of the route and riddles, as well as a paratext with organizational information. Sometimes, the text is also supplemented with artwork or photos (Czarnecka, 2016, p. 36). Applying this description to the books in question, it can be said that the rhyming body of the quest was limited to riddles that allow the characters to find the next point of the route. These were phrased in the imperative mode, which is also, according to Czarnecka, a recognizable feature of the quest (2016, p. 30).

Additional information, both in terms of logistics and description of places and objects along the route, make up the plot of the book. Although it is difficult to compare the volume of a literary work to a leaflet, one can see a certain analogy here as well: each book depicts the characters' passage through the route marked out in the game. The text itself is therefore short and concentrates only on the adventures of the children as they wander through the city. As for the presence of maps, photographs and illustrations that help the reader navigate the topography of the city and find specific objects, these requirements, as we wrote earlier, were met in Sarnowska's books.

In each book, the riddles that provide clues for the characters come in a different and interesting form. In Olsztyn, they are anonymous letters, with words arranged from letters cut out of colorful magazines; in Krakow, they are written on the reverse side of postcards depicting the city's past; in Warsaw, they are inscribed on slips of paper imitating lottery tickets; and in Toruń, the riddle is hidden under a sticker on a puzzle. According to Czarnecka, the content of the quests "is dominated by vocabulary on architecture, art history, as well as names of church furnishings and natural terms" (Czarnecka, 2016, p. 39). In Sarnowska's books, this type of vocabulary appears both in the rhyming riddles and in the fictionalized part of the quest. An example of a riddle that abounds in terms related to both history and architecture is Message 1, which the children receive in Warsaw: "Anna, Zygmunt, Boleslaw lived there. For forty years it did not exist. It has the Chamber of Deputies, the Senatorial Chamber, the Knights' Hall, the Throne Room and the Great Hall. The May 3 Constitution was passed there, still praised to this day" (Sarnowska, 2019a, p. 32).

In the narrative layer, too, we find numerous terms and famous names associated with history (e.g., World War II, Jewish ghetto), architecture (e.g., portal, facade), literature (e.g., Adam Mickiewicz, Sławomir Mrożek), science (e.g., Nicolaus Copernicus, Nobel Prize) and culture in the broadest sense (luthier, antiquarian bookshop). They are explained, most often in dialogues, by people that the characters meet along the route. Sometimes children find the necessary explanations in the inscription placed next to the objects. For example, under "Mrożek's shoe" hung on one of Toruń's tenement houses, the characters read the words written on a glass plaque: "In memory of Sławomir Mrożek's stay in autumn 2006" (Sarnowska, 2019b, p. 118). The little questers also recall what they learned at school. As they gain information, they are usually full of appreciation and even admiration. For example, when viewing exhibits at the Royal Castle, children read: "In the upper story, there are coats of arms of the kings of Poland: Augustus III and Stanislaus Augustus, symbols of the monarchical power of the parliamentary states and offices of the crown (on the right) and Lithuania (on the left). The map shows the borders of the Republic in about 1740." The narrator of the story comments on the moment as follows: "We looked in awe at all the interior design elements we had just read about" (Sarnowska, 2019, p. 44).

Joining Czarnecka's discussion on the artistic quality of quests as cultural texts, we must note that rhyming riddles have no literary value as their composition is inconsistent and their rhymes trivial. As the researcher notes, in traditional quests used in tourism, it is necessary to accept the subservient function of the style to the utilitarian objectives of the text. She justifies this by the fact that the authors of quests are usually amateurs, lovers of the region fascinated by the new form of tourism, and not professional writers (Czarnecka, 2016, pp. 6-40) However, with regard to the literary variety of questing, to which, as we assume, Sarnowska's publications aspire, and keeping in mind the educational function of literature, care could have been taken to refine the language devices used in these book fragments.

What remains to be considered is the last feature of questing that we indicated in the beginning of the article, which is the triggering of emotions in the quester. Assuming that the entire content of each book is a quest, it seems that the reader can experience emotions like in traditional questing, as long as they meet the characters for the first time. As we mentioned, the plot of the books is built on the same pattern: it begins as a detective story, and the characters are unaware of their participation in the game. The plot turns out to be a "hoax," as all their adventures turn out to have been orchestrated by adults. If the reader reads the subsequent books following the publishing chronology, they will anticipate the ending, which can be disappointing. It is hard to believe that the characters do not guess that adults are involved in this "detective" adventure and perceive it as real every time. It is also worth noting that the games involving children are not self-guided, as one would expect from questing.

Some of the clues and explanations that the characters need are given to them by the adults that the organizers recruited, and these people have to be in the right place at the right time.

Conclusions

The characteristics of questing found in the literature allow us to conclude that Beata Sarnowska's books are an example of questing fiction. This is due to their fundamental feature: the popularization of knowledge about cultural heritage as part of an urban game, which is also an essential element of questing. This is an example of an attractive way of promoting cultural heritage and getting the youngest generation interested in it, as well as trying to involve young people in local affairs and the cultural life of cities, which are portrayed as witnesses to the rich history of Poland and its greatness in the past. The novels highlight the participation of the cities in the shaping of European culture and science, as well as their contemporary growth as centers of Polish culture. The works, therefore, have an educational merit and portray heritage as an autotelic value, as well as a carrier of cognitive and aesthetic values, thus helping the questing participants to establish a bond with the cultural landscape of Poland. However, in some parts of the books, we have noticed overly pushy didacticism, for example the children manifest an unnatural delight in certain historical objects or architectural elements. In our opinion, this undermines the authenticity of the emotions and behavior of the characters.

Although the game in which the children characters participate is not self-guided like traditional questing, this does not significantly diminish the questing nature of the publication. The reader, when picking up the book, is not tied to a specific time and place and does not need adult support. Introducing secondary characters who control the course of the game makes the plot even more attractive and is thus justified. The questing genre is also evident in the form and style of the books. The transfer of questing to literature can be seen as an attempt to maintain children's interest in classic books, which cannot be underestimated in the era of digitization and the younger generation's focus on new media.

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