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From Korczak to Kulmowa. On Joanna Kulmowa's Ecopoetry and the "Ecopoetic" Games of Seven-Year-Olds

Od Korczaka do Kulmowej. O ekopoezji Joanny Kulmowej i „ekopoetyckich” zabawach siedmiolatków

KEYWORDS

poetic pedagogy,
poetic mindfulness,
imagination, play,
ecopoetics

ABSTRACT

This article is the second part of the author's reflections on the role of high-art poetry in a child's life. The protagonists of the first article were five-year-old children, active recipients of Wisława Szymborska's poems (Chęcińska, 2020). In the second part, the poetic play of seven-year-old children was combined with Joanna Kulmowa's "poetic mindfulness," which the poet has made a carrier of ecological content.. Kulmowa's "ecopoetry," like the "ecopoetics" of the contemporary poet Julia Fiedorczuk (Fiedorczuk i Beltrán, 2020), is associated with the "practice of attentive listening," experiencing the world. Conducted in the dimension of ostensive-inferential communication, it opposes anthropocentrism, is combined with the development of ecological imagination, aesthetic curiosity and self-reflection. This article is addressed mainly to early childhood education teachers, who are to be encouraged to compose poems by outstanding poets. According to the author of the article, highly artistic poetry, due to its great communication potential, can become an important element of a child's life as sustainable poetry. Due to the theoretical and practical distinctiveness of early childhood education pedagogy, the anthropocentric cultural changes progressing in the world, as well as a kind of "poetic aposiopesis," occurring on the publishing market, which is totally dominated by prose works for children, it seems to be important and necessary today.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

pedagogia poetycka,
 uważność poetycka,
 wyobrażenia, zabawa,
 ekopoetyka

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi drugą część rozważań autorki na temat roli wysokoartystycznej poezji w życiu dziecka. Bohaterami pierwszego artykułu były pięcioletnie dzieci, aktywni odbiorcy wierszy Wisławy Szymborskiej (Chęcińska, 2020). W drugiej części z „uważnością poetycką” Joanny Kulmowej, którą poetka uczyniła nośnikiem ekologicznych treści połączona została poetycka zabawa dzieci siedmioletnich. „Ekopoezja” Kulmowej, tak jak „ekopoetyka” współczesnej poetki, Julii Fiedorczuk (Fiedorczuk i Beltrán, 2020), wiąże się z „praktyką uważnego słuchania”, doświadczania i przeżywania świata. Prowadzona w wymiarze komunikacji ostensywno-inferencyjnej przeciwstawia się antropocentryzmowi, łączy się z rozwijaniem ekologicznej wyobraźni, estetycznym zaciekawieniem i autorefleksją. Niniejszy artykuł adresowany jest w głównej mierze do nauczycieli wczesnej edukacji, których ma zachęcić do opracowywania wierszy wybitnych poetów. Zdaniem autorki artykułu wysokoartystyczna poezja ze względu na jej ogromny potencjał komunikacyjny może stać się ważnym elementem życia dziecka jako *sustainable poetry*. Ze względu na odrębność teoretyczno-praktyczną pedagogiki wczesnej edukacji, postępującej na świecie antropocentryczne zmiany kulturowe, a także swoistą „poetycką aposjopezę” występującą na rynku wydawniczym, zdominowanym totalnie przez prozatorską twórczość dla dzieci, wydaje się to dzisiaj ważne i konieczne.

Introduction

“Play is not only the child’s element, it is the only area where we let the child take the initiative to a narrower or broader extent. In play the child feels somewhat independent. Everything else is a fleeting grace, a temporary concession, but play is the child’s right,” wrote Janusz Korczak (2012, p. 105). The author of *Educational Moments* often proclaimed that a child’s play is not only his or her right, it is also the child’s work, a source of emotions and inner experiences. Korczak considered children’s worlds “geographically difficult” because they are predicated on the child’s imagination, his or her need for movement, rhythm, rhyme, and therefore play and theatricality. This is because the author of *The Child’s Right to Respect* was aware that the upbringing of a child cannot do without art. And experiencing mindfulness in play is connected with creative thinking. According to Korczak, the first key to the world of high culture is a lyric composition that accompanies the child from the moment of birth: a lullaby. It is, according to Korczak, a kind of first discourse between the speaker and the listener. “There is nothing new in it for mothers. This is how mothers ‘talk to their little children,’” – wrote Korczak in an article titled “Lullaby,” published

in the journal *Dziecko i Matka* [Child and Mother] (Korczak, 2017, p. 281) – and then authoritatively stated that the absence of lullabies and rhymes in a child's life delays the development of his or her speech and thinking. As a physician and educator, Korczak had an excellent understanding of the role of literature in human life. Being a writer and educator, he appreciated the importance of the pedagogical impact of literature. According to Korczak, it teaches us knowledge of a human being: from the moment of his or her birth and childhood as a time of "great fun," as this is how childhood was perceived by Jerzy Cieślowski (1985), until death. In the literature that Korczak himself created for a child audience, he unveiled poetry while reversing the established order of communication between adult and child. As Hanna Kirchner, academic editor of subsequent volumes of Korczak's writings, noted: "Knowledge flows from bottom to top, from the child; in Korczak's dialogue between the educator and their young partner, the 'I-you' relationship is constantly fluid and means – as in the Hindu philosophy so dear to Korczak – 'you are me'" (Kirchner, 1997, p. 14) The purpose of this article is to show the role of poetic play, inspired by the "ecopoetic" poems of Joanna Kulmowa, in which seven-year-old children participate. As Korczak wrote, "a separate place is occupied by games whose purpose is to try one's hand, to learn one's worth, and this can only be achieved by comparison with others" (Korczak 2012, p. 113). And this is the idea of this article based on comparing Joanna Kulmowa's poems, showing their role and place in developing children's imagination and practicing children's attentiveness, which Joanna Kulmowa taught consistently, throughout her life. It requires a wise "thinking with theory about practice," as Dorota Klus-Stańska (2018) has repeatedly stated, and a proper reading of it by parents and teachers.

Reflecting on the "poetic" state of research

Nowadays, when the role of poetry in the life of a young child is fading, it seems especially important to refer to the poetic playfulness and "poetic mindfulness" present in a highly artistic literary texts. Alicja Ungeheuer-Gołąb and Katarzyna Wądołny-Tatar have written about the declining role of poetry in the child's acculturation space. The editors of an important volume, published in Krakow in 2023, and entitled *Od rymu do wiersza. Refleksja nad poezją dla dzieci w drugiej połowie XX i XXI wieku* [From rhyme to poem: Reflections on poetry for children in the second half of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries] noted in the introduction that the publishing market currently lacks highly artistic poetry for children, and poetry books by prominent authors have not been reissued for a long time. The anthologies of children's poetry no longer resemble the old canons of poems painstakingly prepared by educators and experts in children's literature of such stature as Irena Słońska, Jerzy Cieślowski, Bogusław

Żurkowski, Jolanta Ługowska, Ryszard Waksmund and Grzegorz Leszczyński. This fact is brought to light by the authors of works on poetry and “children’s discovery of literary texts”: Alicja Baluch, Joanna Papuzińska, Katarzyna Krasoń, Małgorzata Dągiel, Alicja Ungeheuer-Gołąb, Katarzyna Wądolny-Tatar and most recently Magdalena Kuczaba-Flisak. Reading children’s poems by Maria Konopnicka, Janina Porazińska, Józef Czechowicz, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, Józef Ratajczak, Danuta Wawiłow, Joanna Kulmowa and Teresa Ferenc, they ask the question about the metaphorical source of children’s imagination. They are aware that the younger the child, the more often he or she should interact with fine poetry. This is where light should merge with image – as Józef Górniewicz wrote in an important monograph published in 2023 under the significant title *Światło i obraz. Spory o istotę wyobraźni* [Light and Image: Disputes over the essence of imagination]. Poetry should prepare the child to master basic emotional habits, improve his or her self-awareness and self-control according to the principle of “minimum interference, maximum accompaniment”: with nursery rhymes and play on words, full of philosophical impulses and references to dialogue with the child, without whose help, as Korczak wrote, no educational work will succeed. Proof of this is the poetic mindfulness of Joanna Kulmowa. As Aniela Książek-Szczepanikowa wrote in 1994, “Joanna Kulmowa’s poetry for children, however, contains something of the avant-garde – it paves the way for forgotten goodness, amplifies the voiceless CRY of nature ‘after nothing’, destroyed at all costs, regardless of the values it carries and serves” (Książek-Szczepanikowa, 1994, p. 39).

Kulmowa’s “poetic mindfulness” in the play of seven-year-olds

Joanna Kulmowa – poet, writer, translator, author of plays, radio plays, opera librettos, stage songs, illustrator of her poems, actress and director by profession – practiced a peculiar pedagogy throughout her life, which, due to the place where she lived, could be called the Pedagogy of Strumiany. The multidimensionality of this pedagogy stemmed from Joanna Kulmowa’s many interests and artistic activities. As a poet and writer, she showed special affinities with Greek *paideia* and *kalokagathia*.

Know the beloved lie of my most personal fairy tale: I believe that early childhood still sees, hears, feels what philosophers never dreamed of, and I thank God that I see this world foolishly as a child, because this is – and probably only this – what gives me the right to write poetry. And to write for children (Kulmowa, 2005, p. 179)

she said in 2004 at the Art for Children Biennale in Poznań, thus echoing Korczak’s remarks that poetic images are most vivid in childhood. And writing for

children should be treated as a highly artistic and ennobling activity. Kulmowa, like the educator Professor Zygmunt Mysłakowski, who was a friend of hers (Chęcińska, 2024, pp. 80–81), claimed that it was through poetry that we gain our psychological experience and sense of moral values. And through catharsis we experience a profound transformation, learn the art of living and move to a higher plane of spiritual life. Kulmowa, more than half a century ago, built a peculiar poetic pedagogy, which she combined with the world of unconventional experiences and feelings associated with the observation of nature and the cyclical changes in it. In Joanna Kulmowa's poems, "poetic mindfulness" was combined with experiencing the phenomenon of poetic language, which today, amid anthropocentric changes, helps to build a deeper ecological awareness. Here is Joanna Kulmowa's poem titled "Pretending," which Alicja Baluch described as having a meditative quality, because it is an attempt to reach one's inner self, and helps one connect the outer self with the deep self (Baluch, 1994, p. 28). The "lyrical utility" of "Pretending" makes this poem perfect for practicing the "ecopoetic" art of mindfulness and highly artistic experience of beauty.

Frogs pretend to be leaves
 And leaves –
 Green clouds.
 Clouds
 Pretend to be mountains.
 Mountains – the river that flows by.
 The river sings like crickets.
 Crickets
 Are flutes in the meadow.
 The flute emulates a nightingale.
 And the nightingale –
 A frog concert.
 Everyone is trying terribly
 To pretend to be someone else.
 Only I
 can be everything at once –
 The flute
 The frog
 Myself
 The cricket
 And the river.

Mindfulness associated with Buddhist philosophy and psychology is coupled with the search for inspiration in highly artistic literature and art. *Paliya sati* means awareness, attention and memory. Mindfulness requires "awareness of consecutive moments" (Germer, 2015, p. 32); thus, it requires focus, attentiveness, and sincerity of

sensation and intention. This is the view of Christopher Germer, who adds that the essence of mindfulness cannot be put down in words. It can only be likened to experiencing sound in one's body and describing what becomes audible and experiential. Following the four principles of mindfulness, one can refine the mind, strengthen one's ardor and wisdom, and experience goodness and well-being. Being mindful of one's body as well as mindful of one's feelings, one can experience mindfulness of the mind, which leads to mindfulness of mental objects. This is the highest, fourth degree of mindfulness, experiencing and "exploring the texture of the phenomenological landscape." All four degrees of mindfulness influence a sense of balance and peace, the creation of friendly relationships and the strengthening of one's integrity. This is true for adults. The practice of mindfulness for a child involves awareness of the here and now. It goes hand in hand with childlike curiosity about the world, spontaneity and openness, which are characteristic of the child and the "beginner's mind" (Goodman, 2015, p. 277). As Trudy Goodman writes, the "beginner's mind" just as the child's mind, hides pre-verbal awareness. When experienced directly, it is connected to the emotion-filled, "current moment," and to the space of nature, where the child can carry out his or her own scenarios and projects, full of subjective experiences and emotional intimacy. The main aesthetic idea in "Pretending" is a sense of community with the natural world, which is closest to the child. Education through poetry, combined with ecophilosophy, which refers to the cultural traditions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the folk school of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and the creative evolution of Henri Bergson, inspires creative activity, unconventional experiences and aesthetic satisfaction, in which rhythm and rhyme play an important role. Joanna Kulmowa's poems abound in original metaphors and "cognitive tenderness," merging children's emotions into unity. The magic of "pretending" is meshed with realism, which is supported by a child's imagination and body language, an expression of children's powerful emotional needs. The child expects full acceptance. He or she craves to be appreciated and listened to: to be who he or she is, with his or her own consciousness, energy and emotions. And here is a poem titled "What am I like" (Kulmowa, 2008, p. 74) published in Kulmowa's volume for children:

What am I like?

Sometimes tall tall tall
 I jerk the clouds with a gnarly head
 I'm covered with needles
 with pine bark.

Sometimes
 a tiny speck

a ladybug
I roam under the blueberry bushes
and think they are the entire forest.

Sometimes
I am a flame with a hot tongue
I sing
I smell of a campfire.

Sometimes I am
A greenish sea.
In my eyes there are islands far and near.

And sometimes more –
most likely most often –
I am like the wide sky
The widest
Which encompasses everything and everywhere.

“Poetic mindfulness” significantly affects the emotional development of the child, the multidimensional image of the structure of deep human and poetic experience, constant awe and wonder, which triggers creative thinking, develops and shapes aesthetic sensitivity, and gives a sense of freedom and creative liberty. Poetry stimulates the development of cognitive processes. Poetic language, whose rhyme and rhythm connects people, performs extremely vital functions: it develops social and emotional intelligence. Great sensitivity to the beauty of the world is always coupled with sensitivity to the spoken and written word. And this is what happens in the play in which seven-year-old children participate. They attend Primary School No. 58 in Szczecin on a daily basis. The children’s intellectual and mental development level is high, and they eagerly participate in artistic activities inspired by poetry, and develop their own playful expression. Thus, the poem titled “What am I like” fits in with the children’s mode of life, and becomes the imperative of children’s questions and raptures. Children repeat the poem aloud, subjecting it to joyful play, while gesturing and experiencing the poem in their own way, tying the text to gestures and musical expression. As encouraged by the teacher, they recite the poem first, louder and loudest, while expressing their own motor-musical creativity. Each child approaches “poetic mindfulness” in his or her own way, which depends solely on their life and reading experiences. A kind of poetic theater, which is congenially paired with play, is open to spontaneous role-playing, which becomes an active training of the senses, which develops expression and imagination. Poetic play entails “cognitive initiative,” with the deepening of children’s interpretive powers; with supportive gestures and expression

of affect. As Alicja Baluch writes, in enthusiastic, open cognition of the world, the child does not seek to organize it intellectually. Words, images, and previous experiences appear to the child “in a holistic shape with the character of a picture or event collage” (Baluch, 1987, p. 16), just like in the works of Joanna Kulmowa. When read through the lens of “ecopoetics,” the poems improve the child’s psychological well-being, influence his or her attitude of self-acceptance, and teach the child attentiveness and Heideggerian “dwelling” in the world. Daniel C. Dennet, the author of *Intuition Pumps And Other Tools for Thinking*, argued that a person’s creative potential should be aided by humanistic thinking, the reception of poetic works, knowledge of modern technology, knowledge of social life, cultural values, but most importantly, knowledge of natural phenomena (Dennet, 1997), as is the case in the poem entitled “Unnecessary Things” (Kulmowa, 2008, p. 128):

Peacock
all in peacock splendor
Of no use to anyone for almost anything.

Indian summer
Sprawling spilling
So beautifully unnecessary.

Suns bright
Dripping from the maple tree
Are probably of no use to anyone.

And therefore
Let there be peacocks for me.

Let there be cobwebs.
Leaves in the grass.

All the things you don’t need at all.

Impractical
beautiful
The colors of the earth
And the sky.

The author of “Unnecessary Things” understands perfectly well that poetry should introduce a child to the world of inimitable events, gestures and behaviors through which child can discover the beauty of the world and profound truths of life. Hence the need to use the method of intersemiotic translation when working with children.

Joanna Kulmowa's poems are associated with "meaning and the veiling of meaning in a poetic work" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 167), as is the case in the poetry of Paul Celan, a poet close to Joanna Kulmowa, who was referred to by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Kulmowa, like Celan, "gives it her all." Like Celan, she demands an active, cooperative open-minded involvement from the audience. Kulmowa, filling her poetic world with a multitude of characters, objects, plants and animals, provokes the viewer to creative activity in a variety of techniques: visual arts, music, and especially those closest to her, like acting.

Intersemiotic translation and the seven factors of awakening

The method of intersemiotic translation promotes engaging in different forms of activity, enhances sensitivity and sensorimotor skills, increases aesthetic competence, and stirs up motivation for independent reading and writing. It triggers activity and independence, and influences the exteriorization and interiorization of experiences. And gradually increasing the difficulty with skill contributes to the development of peer tutoring. With the responsibility of an adult, therefore, it is necessary to form the child's linguistic sensitivity from early childhood, to sensitize the child to the artistry and beauty of their native language, while bearing in mind that it is poetry that is the introduction to high literature and the growth of one's personality, and that creativity and creative thinking is an essential component of mental health. Thus, it is important for the teacher to take the initiative: to foster a creative atmosphere, to link words with action, to awaken intrinsic motivation, to inspire the child to design and stimulate emotional experiences, and to make his or her own choice of how to participate in culture. Poetic playfulness, in fact, as the opposite of seriousness, is imbued with rhythm and harmony: the noblest forms of aesthetic perception granted to humans. Johan Huizinga (1985) pointed out that play is a free activity, unfolding in a certain order, according to specific rules that do not take into account the "common world." The uniqueness of play is revealed in its "otherness," which is inseparable from disguise and mask. All this, full of tension, movement, enthusiasm and festivity, takes on a poetic form. Classes inspired by the works of Joanna Kulmowa are carried out using the method of intersemiotic translation. Before creating collages inspired by Kulmowa's poetry, seven-year-old children learn about seven Delphic maxims, which used to be an ethical guide for Hellad and an excellent literacy material for beginners. Written in verse, the maxims become easy to memorize. Recited firmly and loudly, they influence children's posture, and guide their further actions towards higher values, thus building the proper mood and a sense of self-confidence. They unleash children's ludic

expression, and awaken autotelic aesthetic and ecological experiences that pave the way for experiencing the beauty of nature and the world.

Know yourself.
 Respect yourself.
 Know the right time.
 Be yourself.
 Own yourself.
 Steer clear of what is someone else's.
 For nothing is certain.

The seven Delphic maxims can be combined with the “seven factors of awakening” to complement the philosophical excitement of play.

Each factor deepens the participant's concentration on the present moment, his or her self-awareness and wisdom. Mindfulness, willpower and the ability to investigate experiences, then the energy accompanying the moment one is experiencing, the delight and joy, and finally tranquility, focus and balance – the seven maxims and seven factors of awakening together teach responsibility, collaboration, trust and enjoyment. They increase the desire for action and self-reliance. The practice of mindfulness is thus bound up with positive affirmations. In Maura Bradley's simple exercises, this is exercise thirty-eight (Bradley, 2023, p. 58). The more often you practice positive affirmations, the better you will understand yourself and your place in the world. Then there is the teacher's conversation with the children about poetry, which, seven-year-old Igorek calls “humming.” Igorek feels the connections between poetry and music, and sees the connections between poetry and play, since after a while he adds, “poetry is singing, it is bouncing and playing.” He subconsciously perceives the emotional and mental syncretism of Kulmowa's poem, which clearly refers to “great fun”: which, according to Jerzy Cieślowski, “children took from adults, the best that adults wrote for them” (Cieślowski, 1985, p. 6). The communicative and value-based world order combines ethical and aesthetic criteria, which remain the basic condition for aesthetic education. Inspired by Kulmowa's work, the poetic collages of seven-year-olds become an illustration of their artistic freedom. Later comes the learning of correct pronunciation and good recitation, which involves perfecting one's own interpretive skills. Next is the recording of children's voices, because a poem needs to be experienced and recorded in one's poetic memory, as Kulmowa herself did. Each of Kulmowa's poems is a poetic and philosophical message that serves children's enchantment and delight. It is a combination of a philosophical code and a poetic code that helps build a positive self-image and remains in the memory forever. Like diplomas with seven maxims inscribed on them, which are handed out to seven-year-olds at the end of the course by their teacher.

Conclusion

As Janusz Korczak wrote, the child is an ideal addressee of literature and art. The child's sensitivity comes with creative expression, philosophical thinking, poetic contemplation and language development. Throughout his life, the author of *Moments of Education* was interested in European pedagogical thought. But most of all, he was interested in medicine and literature, drew patterns from it, applied it to pedagogical practice, and combined his own literary activity with his passion as a social activist, doctor and educator, an explorer of the child's world. Korczak knew very well that the primacy of play and the nurturing of poetic mindfulness would foster deeper relationships, the skill of setting boundaries, better experience, cognitive empathy and, most importantly, the development of social intelligence, which facilitates better communication in society. Carried out in an ostensive-inferential framework, it opposes anthropocentrism, and involves the development of an ecological imagination. As Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson write, the communicative intention is "to make mutually visible to sender and receiver the fact that the sender has a certain informational intention" (2011, p. 86). According to the authors of the volume *Relevance. Communication and Cognition*, new information, which enters into relations with familiar information through poetic works, cognitively complements the child's feelings. Poetic mindfulness as a tool for personal and social change promotes the fulfillment of one's dreams and goals, provides the child with a sense of inner freedom, promotes mental well-being and awareness of being in control of one's mind. Aesthetic experience, resulting from the beauty of words, develops aesthetic taste, and inspires creative activity. Thus, entering the world of Joanna Kulmowa's "ecopoetry" becomes the key to the world of high culture, which brings a sense of ecological security to the child reader, teaches "ecopoetic" mindfulness, concentration and silence. Due to the anthropocentric cultural changes and the theoretical-practical distinctiveness of early education pedagogy, the participation of highly artistic poetry in the construction of "early humanity" is therefore undeniable and absolutely necessary.

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