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## The Tradition of Polish Radio Reportage. In the Circle of Audio Literature

### ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to present the history of Polish radio reportage in a synthetic way, pointing out the most important features of the genre as well as the specificity of the Polish School of Reportage. The qualities developed there (including the “purity of form” and authenticity of sound) became distinguishing elements of the Polish reportage in the international arena. The artistic value of the audio creations makes today’s radio art researchers situate both radio play and sound reportage in the category of audio literature. This paper presents the development of radio reportage, taking into account the historical context as well as the communication perspective. Pointing to the aesthetic function of the message, the reportage is defined as a work of radio art, considered in terms of artistic impact.

**KEYWORDS:** radio, reportage, audio literature

### STRESZCZENIE

Tradycja polskiego reportażu radiowego. W kręgu literatury audialnej

W artykule podjęto próbę syntetycznego ujęcia historii polskiego reportażu radiowego, wraz ze wskazaniem najistotniejszych cech gatunku, jak i specyfiki Polskiej Szkoły Reportażu. Wypracowane przez nią wyznaczniki, m.in. „czystość formy” i autentyczność dźwięku, stały się elementami wyróżniającymi polski reportaż na arenie międzynarodowej. Wartość artystyczna dzieł radiowych sprawia, że obecnie badacze radia sytuują zarówno słuchowisko, jak i reportaż dźwiękowy w kategorii: literatura audialna. W artykule zaprezentowano rozwój reportażu radiowego, uwzględniając kontekst historyczny oraz perspektywę komunikacyjną. Wskazując na estetyczną funkcję przekazu, reportaż został określony jako dzieło sztuki radiowej, rozpatrywane pod kątem oddziaływania artystycznego.

**SŁOWA KLUCZE:** radio, reportaż, literatura audialna

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It is no doubt that press journalism is part of literature. However, determination of the narrative forms of audio art in the context of literature is not so obvious. Meanwhile, the achievements of the Polish radio include many great audio features, which have gained recognition both in Poland and internationally. The subject of this characteristic are audio documentaries seen as artistic works of radio art. The analysis covered the auditory texts that were created within the Polish public radio. Narrowing the scope of this study to the productions of the Polish Radio stems from the fact that it was a dominant producer and distributor of audio literature on the Polish market. The political system change and the associated transformation of the media system in Poland also did not change this situation. As Mary Hopfinger stated:

For two decades after the transformation, the public radio remained almost a monopolist in the field of creating and distributing audio literature ... Original audio literature needs a permanent, generous patron. The main genres of this art include: radio documentary, radio play, or radio novel, and they can be made thanks to the work of many different specialists, well-prepared and competent (Hopfinger, 2010, p. 148).

The production of audio works is time consuming, it requires large financial resources, competence and professional technical support. This makes the Polish Radio as the main producer a leader in audio literature. The aim of the article is to present the Polish radio reportage as a genre of journalism firmly rooted in the history of the Polish radio. Underlying this objective is the assumption that the audio documentary should be understood as a work of audio art, included in the audio literature. A comparative review method was used, and the conclusions were made based on an analysis, a qualitative research methodology appropriate to use in media studies (as in: Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2013).

The first test radio broadcast in Poland took place on 1 February 1925. A year later, on 18 April 1926, the Polish Radio began regular broadcasting. Since the beginning of its functioning, literature occupied an important position in its program offer. The radio anchors read texts by recognized writers live on air, which, according to the broadcaster's managers, was to attract a large group of customers. However, as noted by Mary Hopfinger, they "quickly discovered that reading in front of the microphone, even of the best writing, including plays, is not always enough to attract the attention of the audience. In the end, they were intended for the reader's own quiet reading" (Hopfinger, 2010, p. 133). Therefore, the Polish Radio began cooperating with writers, urging them to create texts, taking into account the requirements of the microphone, which posed some

restrictions, but also opened new, hitherto unknown possibilities. According to M. Hopfinger: “It was necessary to recognize and take into account the auditory dimension of events and experiences” (Hopfinger, 2010, p. 133). Sound was to be adopted as a new material, and human speech as the material to create on the radio. “Radio writing” meant for the authors to change the approach to constructing the story. Sound as a means of expression, and the word as a sonic matter as quickly learned to be used by creators of radio performances. The first audio play, created on the basis of the original text, written specially for radio, was a radio play *Pogrzeb Kiejstuta* [Kiejstut’s funeral] by Waldemar Hulewicz (which premiered on May 17, 1928). The world of sound, the audiosphere, understood as a sound environment (Hopfinger, 2010, p. 1p. 141), became the dominant of the radio texts.<sup>1</sup> This applies to dramas, which are converted into radio plays and audio journalism, which later transformed into the audio documentaries. To create the latter, outstanding creators of literary reportage were invited: Melchior Wankowicz and Ksawery Pruszyński. For technical reasons (the need to use transmission trucks, the lack of sound recording capabilities), the first audio documentaries, written for the radio, were devoid of audiosphere, they were not “sounded.” They accounted for a variety of literary texts to be read in front of a microphone. Although in 1936, the first stationary recorders appeared in the Polish Radio, allowing for sound recording on tape, without the possibility of interfering in the recording, this meant that the reportage still had to be limited to text (written for the radio) read aloud in front of the microphone (Białek, 2015). In addition, due to the emerging genre identity for the new medium, the term “reportage” was used synonymously, among others, with various broadcasts, news and reports (Pleszkun-Olejniczak, 2012). Reportage as an audio documentary did not develop before after World War II.

## Polish School of Reportage

Artistic plot, classified as a cultural text, is an acoustic work characterized by such elements of radio art as invisibility, intimacy, strong impact on the imagination, and a variety of sound elements that are the material of radio art (Kaziow, 1973). These features are common to the radio reportage and

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1 From directors and radio producers, it required a creative approach to “producing sound effects.” In the first radio play (1925) of by Stanisław Wyspiański’s *Warszawianka*, director Alojzy Kaszyna reproduced the sounds of passing cavalry by having the actors beat out the rhythm with their hands on their knees, while the march of infantry was imitated by rubbing rice brushes on a table top (cf. Budzyński, 1996, p. 83).

radio plays, but it is different approach to fiction and rules of production that differentiate them. Audio reportage, understood as an audio text of artistic value, is defined as a popular form of radio documentary, which is based on an authentic event, a real-life person in the dramatic dimension, while the material is a dramatized world of sounds, an account of reality. An equivalent of the term “radio documentary” is a *feature*. Simple radio documentaries are various reports from events of major importance for social, journalistic or historical reasons. Artistic features take the form of a closed, clearly outlined artistic works. An author expresses their approach to reality, which is described by the means of sound (Skrzypek, ed., 1999, p. 468).

Radio reportage, whose basic material is sound, in the Polish Radio was created as a work of sound, characterized by “purity of form,” which was the foundation of the Polish School of Reportage. It functions as acoustic recording of real events, composed according to the author’s (reporter’s) concept. The artistry of expression can be achieved through the thoughtful editing and composition, and the use of radio means of expression (including acoustic effects, music, or reverb). Some practitioners insisted that the sound effects should be authentic and recorded while collecting materials for the reportage. According to the current principles of the Polish school of reportage, a model audio documentary should be a sound account of reality in which sound constitutes a complete narrative. Journalists were expected not to use their voice present in the feature. The ideal was to remove all the questions from the reporter. The task of an experienced journalist was to lead the conversation so that the interlocutor could tell the story in a way that allowed for the elimination of all guiding questions. Only the recorded audiosphere and the protagonist’s voice were expected to be there, to form a clear, coherent story (Białek, 2019).

It is worth mentioning that the Polish reporters also experimented with form and formed distinct varieties of genres, which deviated from these main assumptions. One such experimenters was Jacek Stwora from Krakow, a journalist who created epic sound stories, where the author’s narrative was an important part of the audio feature. The reporter made it an important element. As noted by prominent radio reporter, Janina Jankowska: “Stwora’s dramaturgy is built not from the course of events, but from the clash of thoughts and ideas. True reality is treated instrumentally” (Jankowska, 1996, p. 106). Stwora challenged the rules of the Polish School of Reportage and his metaphorical feature works placed him as a full-fledged character of his reportage. Just how controversial his features were and how far removed they were from the principles of the Polish School can be seen in the fact that the Polish Radio took a long time to decide whether his work, *Pasja, czyli misterium Męki Pańskiej w Kalwarii Zebrzydowskiej widziane* [The Passion of Christ in

Kalwaria Zebrzydowska],<sup>2</sup> deserved to represent the Polish Radio in the most important international competition, the Prix Italia. Fortunately, it was decided to submit the reportage and Stwora was awarded the main prize, known as the radio Oscar.

Yet another, albeit different form of reportage was offered by journalists from Polish Radio Białystok. They created sound comedy, in which the authors staged exaggerated everyday situations in order to highlight the absurdities of Polish reality. Their reportage created over time became known as the Natural Theater, and the creators, Andrzej Bartosz and Wiesław Janicki, became forerunners of a separate school of reportage, still called the Białystok School of Reportage today (Kurianiuk, 2016). The examples of Krakow and Białystok testify to the fact that radio reporters, creating their works, like artists in other fields of art, were looking for new forms of expression and different ways of speaking about reality.

The Polish radio, however, was dominated by the principles of the Polish School of Reportage and the “factual pact” (Bauer, 2004) which considered to be valid. Even the term itself: documentary/reportage was variously understood. Reportage, is understood by the Polish Radio as an artistic genre, while in Western Europe it is referred to as a feature. “Reportage” in the West is considered to be an informative genre, faithfully representing reality. This separation, both terminological and generic, was caused by, among others, the political division in post-war Europe, which had an impact on international cooperation of various radio broadcasters.<sup>3</sup>

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2 1972.

3 Polish Radio emerged internationally in May 1927, with the accession to the International Broadcasting Union (UIR). From that moment on, the Polish radio representatives actively participated in the activities of international radio broadcasters (including the Commission for the Intellectual and Cultural Harmonization of Peoples). In 1934, bilateral agreements were concluded with German and American radio broadcasters. International cooperation involved a wide range of activities (including broadcasts of music concerts, information exchange, establishing common radio rights). The artistic forms of radio creation – radio plays and features – were also included in the international exchange. In 1936, the Polish Radio transmitted 20 Polish radio plays and documentaries about folk culture and sightseeing to foreign radio companies. World War II and occupation of Poland interrupted the activities of the Polish Radio and all its international contacts. After 1945, the situation on the international radio market changed in the wake of the political division of Europe. Two organizations for radio broadcasters were created: International Broadcasting Organization (Organization Internationale de Radiodiffusion), bringing together the countries of the communist bloc, and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), bringing together Western countries. Only the political transformation in Poland and other Eastern European countries enabled the Polish Radio accession to the EBU (in January 1993). This meant adapting our broadcaster to the standards and requirements of the Western media. Following this, differences became apparent, including determinants of radio genres. It can be clearly seen for example of radio documentary. Even the term itself: documentary/reportage is variously understood.

“Purity of form,” postulated by the Polish School of Reportage, stands in opposition to feature as an artistic genre, developed in Western Europe, which is a blend between fiction and document. A classic example of the feature is the 1960 *Singing the Fishing* by British artists Evan MacColl (poet, composer and folklorist) and Charles Parker (composer and radio director). It is a ballad about the lives and work of three generations of fishermen (from the days of the sail, the steam engine and the internal combustion engine), infused with dialect, folk chants, with incorporated MacColl’s poems, recited or sung by actors. The juxtaposition of these two different methods of working on an audio text allows us to point out the basic differences between them: reportage is built from authentic accounts and original sounds, while in feature, truth is combined with creation. This differentiation of the principles of the Polish School of Reportage has become a distinctive feature of Polish audio works and has been noticed and appreciated during international reviews. Janina Jankowska, winner of the Prix Italia in 1981, jokingly stated:

If the progress of our entry into the EU had been determined by the position of Polish radio documentaries, visible for many years at international competitions and festivals, the EU would not have imposed any conditions on us (Jankowska, 2002, p. 1).

The Polish radio documentary, representing the so-called Polish School of Reportage, arouses interest and recognition in international competitions of radio creativity. The most important ones include:

- The Prix Italia; the oldest, organized since 1948. International Festival of Broadcasting Creativity, which takes place in Italy in a different city every year. Prizes awarded during this competition are called radio Oscars. Poles won the Prix Italia nine times, in the category of radio plays.<sup>4</sup>
- Premios Ondas, organized since 1954 in Spain. The competition recognizes the best creators in radio, television and music. Poles received the main prize of the festival six times.<sup>5</sup>

4 Witold Zadrowski for *Śmierć stonia* (1966), Jacek Stwora for *Pasja, czyli Misterium Męki Pańskiej w Kalwarii Zebrzydowskiej w Kalwarii Zebrzydowskiej widziane* (1972), Janina Jankowska for *Polski Sierpień* (1981), Maciej Drygas for *Testament* (1992), Anna Sekudewicz and Anna Dudzińska for *Cena pracy* (2004), Katarzyna Michalak for *Niebieski płaszczyk* (2006), Patrycja Gruszyńska-Ruman for *WINna niewinna* (2009), Katarzyna Michalak and Dorota Hałas for *Modlitwa zapomnianej* (2009), and Bartosz Panek for *Chcę więcej* (2014).

5 Krystyna Melion for *Głębokie zanurzenie* (1974), Janina Jankowska for *Powódź wszystkich Polaków* (1998), Agnieszka Czarkowska and Alicja Pietruczuk for *Cały Wasz, czyli jak przez małą wieś przetoczyła się wielka historia* (1998), Irena Pilatowska for *Kosowo z daleka* (1999), Maria Blimel and Wanda Wasilewska for *Zawód na czasie* (1999), and Cezary Galek for *Kołysanka dla Brajana* (2006).

- Prix Europa; festival and competition of the best radio, television and Internet productions, held in Germany since 1966 (in a different city each year), initially under the name Prix Futura and since 1997 as Prix Europa. In the category of radio document, Polish radio reportages twice won the main prize.<sup>6</sup>

Polish radio reporters are appreciated internationally, winning awards in various categories, and their works are in the audio collections of many scientific institutions worldwide (including the Institute of Gen. W. Sikorski in London and the National Library in New York).

### Audio literature

In Polish radio broadcasting, audio literature has a nearly 100-year tradition. It has been in phonic transmission since the beginning of radio broadcasting. As Mary Hopfinger stated:

The advent of radio made it possible that next to the dissemination of works of written and printed literature a new form of literature began to develop: audible – by premise – literature (Hopfinger, 2010, p. 137).

The researcher acknowledges that the role of the radio in disseminating literary works in the early years of broadcasting was one of its first and undoubtedly the priority tasks, but as noted:

It was quickly noticed, however, that printed works intended for silent reading, read into a microphone, did not take advantage of the peculiar aural properties of the new medium, the voice qualities of speech and the rich repertoire of the audiosphere (Hopfinger, 2018, p. 9).

The sense of hearing plays an essential role in the reception of an audio work, and sound stimuli affect the viewer in a different way than visual stimuli, which – as Wojciech Siwak estimates – results in the fact that: “the role of intuitive, affective cognition is greater in the perception of the audiosphere” (Siwak, 2005, p. 165). Maria Gołaszewska, who was one of the first Polish researchers into the audiosphere, pointed to the important role of the recipient participating in the audio communication (Gołaszewska, 1997), followed by Tomasz Misiak, who states:

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6 Jolanta Kryswata for *Osieroceni* (2003), and Monika Hemperek and Katarzyna Michalak for *Chłopcy z Węgnańki* (2005).

In this perspective, it is less important what kind of sounds we are dealing with, but rather what states (physical, mental) and aesthetic are awakened through them (Misiak, 2010, p. 67).

Taking into account the specificity of radio transmission, its invisibility, superspatiality and ability to evoke associative images, “radio” literature was quickly created for the needs of this medium (Hopfinger, 2010, p. 136):

In the mid-twentieth century, audible literature existed on the communications scene alongside canonical printed literature, realized on radio as the art of the sounding word (Hopfinger, 2018, p. 10).

Audio texts include radio plays and radio reportage. In these acoustic works the verbal layer resonates with the non-verbal layer along with its sign content. Joanna Bachura writes about its importance:

The [artistic radio] communication has its own acoustic material of expression, which consists of voice, rhythm of speaking, intonation, accent, pitch, timbre, and speed of speaking. Thus we can communicate nonverbally through the vocal channel. On the radio, the verbal area coexists with the non-verbal area, hence the supersegmentality of speech has a special place in this medium (as in Pleszkun-Olejniczakowa, 2012, p. 155).

Aneta Wójciszyn-Wasil, a radio practitioner and theoretician, notes the artistic uniqueness that distinguishes radio drama and audio reportage from the multitude of other journalistic radio genres:

The radio play and reportage are considered as the most complete form of creation in radio. The productions within these genres are self-contained programs, distinguished by their coherence, consistent composition, intensity of sound material, and intensity of meaning, which opens up the possibility of interpretation (Wójciszyn-Wasil, 2012, p. 24).

And although radio reportage is sometimes classified as an informative genre (Wolny-Zmorzyński, Kaliszewski, & Furman, 2008), both practitioners and theoreticians quickly understood that in addition to its informative function, the reportage should also evoke an aesthetic experience in the viewer:

a mature audio documentary should meet two basic functions: informative and aesthetic. It should – as any artistic work – not only inform about real events and people, but also show that the author understands



the complexity of the described reality, knows how to see it from different perspectives and how to create dramatic tension (Budzyński, 1979, p. 7).

Jerzy Tuszewski, a radio journalist and radio theoretician, calls reportage “the dramaturgy of reality” (Tuszewski, 2002, p. 309). However, in order for an ordinary account of reality, devoid of artistic value, could become a work of audible literature, each of its creators should undertake this “dramatization.” This requires the author’s intention, and then skillful construction of an audible story, with an emphasis on the creative function, since according to Tuszewski:

After all, we owe it a greater or lesser influence on the transformation of the very “physiognomy” of the texts transmitted; and often to the extent that it is no longer “literature on the radio” but simply – dare I say it – radio literature, a specific radio work (Tuszewski, 2002, p. 105).

Taking into account the inclusion of many radio genres to audio literature, such as radio play, reportage, radio soap opera, audiobook, or song (as in Hopfinger, 2010), adding new convergent radio genres (e.g., photocast, multicast) (Białek, 2019), we can consider that this multiplicity of artistic sound forms, functioning at the intersection of journalism and art, entitles us to consider “artistic radio studies” (Pleszkun-Olejniczakowa, 2012, p. 179).

## Conclusion

We have outlined the history of the Polish radio reportage. The review analysis allowed the legitimate position of this genre in audio literature. As has been shown, the relationship between the radio reportage and the Polish Radio is very strong and goes back to the beginning of radio broadcasting. Both in its activities during the interwar period, and in its post-war history, the radio institution promoted the different forms of radio art. It is hard not to agree with Maryla Hopfinger, who notes:

The Polish Radio has ensured the survival of anachronistic, in the opinion of some reformers, and undoubtedly unprofitable literary genres. This was supported by their excellent tradition, impressive achievements, and the fact that the Radio brought together many prominent artists, writers, directors, sound engineers, composers, technicians, actors who appreciated working with the microphone, and other experienced colleagues (Hopfinger, 2010, p. 148).

Modern radio is subject to two main processes: globalization and concentration (Kita, 2018, p. 17). Convergence and technological progress must be added to these. This makes the radio function today as the “old media in a new media world” (Jędrzejewski, 2020, p. 221). An evolution of the media is taking place. There are the new media, and with them the communications practice of customers are transforming and new varieties of genres are emerging. The term “radio art,” including radio play and artistic audio documentaries, should be expanded to include new convergent genres, for example, photocasts, multicasts and the increasingly popular podcasts. Each of them deserves a separate study. Certainly, this opens up new research perspectives on the intersection of literature and media studies.

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