

Book Trailer

– is a concept imported from cinematography into literary life – a short film promoting a book. It is composed of dynamically edited images, with information about the author and the book itself, and often arrayed with advertising slogans.¹ Unlike a film trailer, it is not presented on cinema screens, but only via the internet. The book trailer has dropped its connection with numerous synonyms typical of its filmic model, such as the German *Vorspann*, English *preview of coming attractions* or French *avant-coureur*; what remain are the recognizable terms of book trailer and teaser-trailer.

In the Beginning Was the Film

It is not possible to discuss the book trailer without taking into account its background in film history. Devised in the United States during the early days of silent film as an effective way of reaching the largest possible audience, trailers were initially presented in the form of stills (projected as slides) with images of the actors and selected scenes, displaying the film's title. Originally these trailers were shown after the projection of the main feature, thus separating successive showings from each other. 1912 is considered the moment of the film trailer's birth; specifically, a showing in Rye Beach, NY of an episode of the serial drama *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, which ended with a short fragment from the next film in the series, with the aim of encouraging viewers to continue following the heroine's adventures.²

The form of the film trailer was influenced by the dynamic development of the film industry. The emergent form became the area of increasingly conscious use of advertising techniques, greater creativity, and higher levels of stylistic refinement. There was an increasing tendency to underscore the stature of the work being promoted, with evocation of the notable artists participating, awards attained by the film, and quotations from enthusiastic reviews. The first trailers, initially juxtaposing scenes from the film and explanatory titles, quickly became considerably more sophisticated. In the 1930s, a well-constructed trailer contained close-ups of the actors, graphic elements, and dynamic action scenes. With the growth of Hollywood production budgets, trailers ceased to be composed primarily from parts of the finished film (or footage deleted from it but still usable) and began to use material specially shot for their purpose.³

¹ Definition taken from the article "Zwiastun filmowy" (Film Trailer), in *Encyklopedia kina* (Encyclopedia of Film), ed. T. Lubelski, Kraków: Biały Kruk, 2003.

² See J. Mostowska, "Zwiastun: fragment historii kina, jeden z gatunków filmowych, element kultury filmowej" (Trailer: Fragment of Film History, Film Genre, Element of Film History), *Kwartalnik Filmowy* (Film Quarterly) 2007, no. 57-58, 182.

³ Alfred Hitchcock provides a perfect example of this approach by a director to promotional materials. He created some advertisements himself and supervised the production of others. Peggy Robertson, his assistant for many years, recalled that Hitchcock was responsible for 99.9% of each film, including much of the promotional material. Quoted in: M. Sadowski, "Trailery, zwiastuny, forszpany – historia i rozwój," <http://www.audiowizualni.pl/index.php/promocja-filmu/reklama/7085-trailery-zwiastuny-forszpany-historia-i-rozwoj>, accessed 3.06.2016.

The Art of Advertising

The trailer is one of the most important elements in marketing strategy, and its production is guided by a purely utilitarian goal. That goal is, of course, to attract attention and to persuade viewers that the film being advertised is the one they should watch. Jadwiga Mostowska observes that the construction of a trailer is driven by eliciting certain emotions rather than maintaining a cohesive, transparent narrative.⁴ Lisa Kernan, author of the book *Coming Attractions. Reading American Movie Trailers*,⁵ manages in her analysis of 27 American film trailers to identify three main rhetorical strategies that govern their structure: appealing to the audience's interest in film genres, the story told in the film, and its stars. It is thus not surprising that one of the key strategies is to highlight the image and accomplishments of the actors who appear in the film. In the age of the Internet, the trailer serves yet another function: it gives the audience the opportunity to participate in the reality surrounding the film and develops their attachment to its characters, creating and simultaneously satisfying needs among viewers.⁶

It is important to remember that the trailer is a form that exists on the borderline between film and advertising. A trailer is not, of course, a self-contained phenomenon, but forms as a derivative element during the work on the film itself. That presents no obstacle, however, to the increasing tendency to regard a trailer as a form of short film, even a separate film genre. This view is supported by the trailer's conventional structure, in which emphasis is placed either on the linearity of the narrative, which the director closes by means of lacunae, or on presenting spectacular shots created using special effects. Functionality, rather than originality, is the principle that governs the production of trailers. A rapid and intense audience response in a short time demands a repeatable combination of elements. The presence of the trailer in popular culture is not limited only to its being watched and its function as another form of entertainment. The various ways in which trailers are travestied is proof of that fact: for example, fake trailers, for films that do not exist, referencing narrow genre expectations of films, or "spoofs," fan-produced parodies of popular trailers.⁷ Trailers are also becoming the subject of specialized analyses, and serving as material for comparative studies in sociology and cultural studies.⁸

Trailer as Implant. Problems with Literature

According to Piotr Kowalczyk, the book trailer is an example, like the e-book, audiobook, or book excerpt published in blog form, of the Book 2.0; all of these are forms of the book that

⁴ See J. Mostowska, "Zwiastun, 183-4.

⁵ L. Kernan, *Coming Attractions. Reading American Movie Trailers*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

⁶ Maja Strzelecka discusses instances of how marketing ties viewers to characters in "Tajemnice filmowych zajawek" (Secrets of Film Trailers), <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,4719896.html>, accessed: 3.06.2016. On the promotion of films using doses of suspense provided by trailers, see R. Kulczyk, "Sztuka ekstraktu" (The Art of the Extract), <http://kultura.newsweek.pl/sztuka-ekstraktu,29286,1,1.html>, accessed 3.06.2016.

⁷ See M. Walkiewicz, "Tajniki filmowej gry wstępnej" (Secrets of Filmic Foreplay), <http://film.onet.pl/wiadomosci/tajniki-filmowej-gry-wstepnej/8h6c4>, accessed 3.06.2016.

⁸ See J. Mostowska, "Zwiastun," 181.

present a more contemporary update from the paper version.⁹ The trailer is closely linked with the cultural space of the Internet. It does not occur at all outside the sphere of the worldwide web (for example, attached to a book, the way film trailers appear on VHS tapes or DVDs), but owes its existence to the medium of the Internet, and therefore meets the criterion set by Piotr Marecki for “web literature” which he calls the “liternet.”¹⁰

Nina Metz holds that the book trailer is a counter-intuitive formula.¹¹ It would seem that in a reality where an increasing number of readers rely on the Internet as their main source of information about literature, reading reviews, buying books, and seeking out interviews with authors on the net, the trailer should fit comfortably into the equation. Metz claims that that has not happened for several reasons. The first is their execution; book trailers are cheaply made, often home-made.¹² What readers receive is usually a fairly literal representation. The form is similar to a film trailer, with actors enacting scenes from the book, animation, or a series of stills shown with a music track and a spoken word text relating the narrative, but it is usually made on video, with unknown actors dressed up as characters, a comic strip or what was extremely typical for earlier trailers – a montage of photographs of the book itself and its author.

The difficulty with reception of a trailer which is neither an interview with the author, nor a recording composed from fragments of filmed material wherein the artist speaks of his work, nor a video-review available on the website, blog or vlog, is based on the mechanical duplication of the method used to promote film art, and thus the lack of consideration for the specificity of literature as a medium. A trailer is inherently assumed to precede the reader’s first contact with the book and stands in contradiction to the picture-generating powers of the imagination. The act of reading is a private activity, and any kind of earlier visual presentation of a book carries the characteristics of commonality.¹³ Another difficulty is thus the kind of automatization that in the case of a film trailer is justified since it does, after all, duplicate images from the film, featuring fragments of it; but in the literary

⁹ P. Kowalczyk, “W stronę książki 2.0” (Toward the Book 2.0), <https://pl.scribd.com/doc/16628606/W-strone-kniazki-2-0-prezentacja-na-Bookcamp-09-1>, accessed 3.06.2016;

¹⁰ *Liternet. Literatura i internet* (Liternet. Literature and the Internet), ed. P. Marecki, Kraków: Rabid, 2002, 7. It should be noted that the first attempts to advertise books with trailers came slightly earlier: one example could be the television spot advertising John Farris’s book *Wildwood* from 1986. The popularity of the book trailer is, however, closely linked to the possibilities created by the Internet and goes back some fifteen-odd years, making it coeval with net phenomena such as the blogosphere, publishing and book portals; it is now aided by the service BookReels, started in 2014, which allows publishers and authors to release all kinds of multimedia content relating to books.

¹¹ N. Metz, “Super sad book trailers. The conundrum of online book advertisements – and why they usually fail,” *Chicago Tribune* 6.06.2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-07-06/features/ct-prj-0708-book-trailers-20120706_1_book-trailers-publishers-videos, accessed 3.06.2016.

¹² A separate phenomenon consists of how-to books on self-publishing, in which creating a book trailer expands to truly become worthy of being considered its own art form: see S.C. English, *The Book Trailer® Revolution*, 2008, http://www.cosproductions.com/pdf/BookTrailerRevolution_DigitalVideoMarketing.pdf, accessed 3.06.2016; J. Deval, *Publicize Your Book (Updated): An Insider’s Guide to Getting Your Book the Attention It Deserves*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2008; M. Raymond, *Everyday Book Marketing: Promotion Ideas to Fit Your Regularly Scheduled Life*, Ashland: Ashland Creek Press, 2013.

¹³ Nina Metz quotes Peter Mendelsund, a designer of book jackets, who says: “In a way, that’s the key to jacketing books: You have to respond to what the key themes of the book are, what the author’s project is, but you cannot give too much away. You have to respect the fact that people’s imaginations are deeply private.”

context, the trailer becomes a new creation, the first reading, a partial adaptation or interpretation.¹⁴

The final obstacle presented by the trailer is the fact that it is called that. Preview, trailer, promo – all such terms immediately connote the film industry rather than publishing and promise a number of well-known strategies and expectations justified with regard to films, but not with regard to books. Such marketing is thus something derivative, imposing an external, alien order on literature. The question remains open as to how the reading experience can be enhanced by visual means without reducing a book to its narrative layer, and how an immanent form of advertising can be created with new media.¹⁵ A modest answer might be the “video blurb” – a transfer of the typical literary form of book recommendation from the jacket to a short promotional film, in which well-known personalities speak with conviction about the book and their own reading experience.

The book trailer is one possible way of promoting literature in the new media environment using digital techniques. Producers of book trailers invariably face the challenge of how to present a volume containing hundreds of pages, full of complex descriptions and characters and interwoven threads into a thirty-second (or less) film. It must be acknowledged that the greatest stumbling-blocks to this conceptualization are its dependent relationship to the film trailer and the competition it faces from other visual forms of presenting literature.

Cezary Rosiński

¹⁴The works that have been undertaken to classify the different types of book trailer are worth examining. The author of one such typology is the blogger who writes the blog *Pierogi Pruskie*. Taking advantage of the specificity of the internet diary format, she joins critical discussion with humorous onomatopoeia. She differentiates the following types of book trailer: “gee, look what a real trailer I am!” – featuring a quick montage of various illustrations, the presence of a voice-over and information about the book’s upcoming release; it is created by a certain idea of books which is closer to film; “this is what you want? This is what you get” – a filmed adaptation of a scene or several scenes from the book being advertised, typically using slow editing and long takes, and sometimes also featuring the book’s narrator, who leaves the represented world to come nearer to the viewer; “let me read you the cover” – a trailer that takes the form of a multimedia presentation involving text and computer graphics, mainly based on presenting the book’s cover; “I’m advertising a book, but I’d rather advertise a film” – a trailer strongly resembling the filmic model, using a series of filmic devices to visualize the represented world, thus replacing the reader’s imagination—this kind directly reveals the transposition of literary reality into the realm of film, disregarding the differences between the two artistic processes; “why should they know what the book is about, better to listen to the adjectives that go with it!” – constructed from a series of shots of one-word blurbs meant to convey the book’s emotional level (for example, “hate, aggression, frustration, lust” in the trailer for Zygmunt Miłoszewski’s *Gniew* [Rage]) and playing on the public’s associations with the genre; “I’ll boost, but let’s not play games – I’m a book trailer and I’m on a shoestring budget” – this kind of trailer, based on the concept of literature and using its specific qualities, is formally similar to a gossipy conversation, as it attempts to sum up the book’s basic problem; “it’s really all about the moving pictures, right?” – gives away a large part of the plot and uses film clichés, again making a book trailer closely resemble a film trailer; “a book is still a different medium when it comes down to it” – takes the textual nature of literature into account and like a *literal music video* (a parody of an official music video, in which each shot corresponds to the literal text of each line in the song); “I’m part trailer, part review” – a trailer in the spirit of a *video blurb* (a recording using the positive assessments of the book that usually are placed on the first several pages), focused on the reception rather than the book itself. See <http://pierogipruskie.blogspot.com/2015/03/o-zwiastunach-ksiazek-albo-o-problemach.html>, accessed 3.06.2016.

¹⁵Metz suggests that the first order of business should be to come up with a new name for the phenomenon, that would convey its separate, literary nature. In her article, the proposal to use the term “bideo” is mentioned. See Metz, “Super sad.”

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

The article presents a book trailer as a new form of promotion literature and puts this term into a context of poetics and cinematography.

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