

Maria Konopnicka's Fairy Tale On Dwarves and a Little Orphan Girl Mary as an Example of Polish Orphan Literature. Looking for Polish Identity?

1. On specificity of Polish orphanage

Orphanage is one of the most important and most explored themes in the nineteenth-century Polish literature for children. In world literature we can find e.g. Cinderella, the girl with the matchbox, all the orphans from the songbooks for kindergartens, protagonists from the books of Charles Dickens, Ann of the Green Gables, the child from the secret garden, children from patriotic Finnish fairy tales of Zacharias Topelius – they all belong to the collective imagination.

A number of texts in Polish literature concerning the issue of orphanage are closely connected with the history of Poland, and with the motif of soldiers-insurgents who emigrated from Poland after the failures of the nineteenth-century uprisings, inspired by folklore. Polish children's literature of that time created the image of an uprooted Pole, a "man without a fatherland", often compared to the image of a motherless orphan (poems of Teofil Lenartowicz). The myth of orphanage is superimposed on the Romantic myth of childhood. Polish Romanticism treated this motif idealistically, Positivism (Realism) – sociologically and Modernism – symbolically. The best patriotic and symbolic-mythical fairy tale in Polish children's literature, *O krasnoludkach i sierotce Marysi* (*On Dwarves and the Little Orphan Girl Mary*), 1896, written by Maria Konopnicka, is representative of the above-mentioned issues and presents three models of orphanage: Romantic, Positivist and Modernist. A link that combines three levels of realising this motif is rurality. Mary is a country girl, the story is set against a rural background, and when the tale reaches its happy end, the orphan-

heroine – finds herself not in a royal palace, but under a thatched roof of a peasant who works on the 'orphan land' (a Romantic symbol of subjugated Poland). In her book *Sierota w polskiej literaturze dla dzieci w XIX wieku (Orphans in Polish Nineteenth-Century Literature for Children)*, Magdalena Jonca claims that Konopnicka's fairy tale "synthesises ... models of orphans' life known from nineteenth-century literary texts" (Jonca 1994: 271) while Ewa Paczoska in her article *Marysia i osieroceni (Mary and Orphans)* observes that "myths of orphanage centred round the following images: a Pole, orphaned by mother – land, an abandoned child as a model for the reader to learn moral virtues, an orphan as the most wretched creature but in God's special care, and hence anything can happen to him, a victim and at the same time a chosen one, an orphan as an object of care and educational activities ... the status of an orphan opened [the road] to another world ... [and] the orphan protagonist found himself in community with God." (Paczoska 1995: 8). Polish Romantic literature often used that motif, which it is particularly visible in poems by Teofil Lenartowicz, the author of texts immensely popular with readers and educators entitled *Złoty kubek (The Golden Mug)* and *Duch sieroty (The Orphan's Spirit)*. They present the particular charisma of orphanage. For the poet the reconstruction of "the orphan idyll" constituted "an aesthetic, moral and patriotic statement" (Jonca 1994: 266) Konopnicka, drawing from Lenartowicz's works, introduced the theme of orphans to many of her works but the fairy tale *O krasnoludkach i sierotce Marysi* is the most excellent example. The title protagonist Mary is orphaned, just like peasant Skrobek and his two sons; marked with orphanage is Skrobek's abandoned and fallow land; also secondary characters, e.g. the old woman – herbalist, or the animals appearing in the fairy tale, such as the rat that loses its children, relate to the theme of orphanage. Dwarf Podziomek, "a changeling" in the human world, and the whole society of dwarves, whose history is closely connected with Polish history (as stated by famous chronicler Koszałek-Opatek while recounting known legends), are also orphans. When Poland loses independence and the dwarves cannot help the country, they can only remember the glorious past of the Polish Republic 'of milk and honey' and they

feel orphaned in the new world. Though their existence is closely connected with the human fate, they sleep through the winter underground and wake back to life, according to the rhythm of nature, in spring. The very great chronicler of the dwarves Koszałek-Opalek is “a character [who] is often interpreted as an embodiment of a grotesque sage with a volume full of false wisdom, who learns the truth about the world only as an orphan” (Baluch 1993: 58; Leszczyński 1990: 30): “the old, abandoned orphan in a lunar ray quietly treads on snow and warms his hands, trembling, at silver light ... Humble he has become, good, quiet, he associates with the little ones and shares his heart with every living creature.” (Konopnicka 1954)

Importantly for our analysis, it must also be observed that

the syncretic fairy tale about orphan girl Mary has, like numerous masterpieces of literature for children, a double addressee: children and adults. As a Modernist text it already conveys a double, childlike and adult, vision of the world: fantasy and naïveté are intertwined with the rational order, and at the same time both the child and the adult recalling his own childhood become implicit co-authors of the text. (Ichnatowicz 1997: 85)

and

magic thinking, a tendency to mythologise and the inclination to combine the real world with the imaginary context of fantasy have determined ... the composition [of the work] (Leszczyński 1990: 29)

Therefore, we shall also concentrate on the structure of narration, the three models of rurality corresponding to the three narratorial types, and on the syncretic character of the fairy tale (the text combines elements of the Positivist novel, the fairy tale, poetry with Modernist polyphonic narration). The dwarves and their excellent world, organised after the human fashion and ruled by adored King Błystek, constitute a magic but at the same time discreet power of the unreal. In conformity with their role in culture, the dwarves (like “nannies”, who are the only authority for a child) help people, constituting the

unifying motif for the three above-mentioned models (levels) of realisation of the tale – bringing the whole story to a happy end.

The fable is illustrative in character, it contains a lot of references to Polish cultural myths and at the same time it is lyrical and amusing.

2. The Romantic aspect – idealisation (character types, rurality, the role of the people, patriotic and national issues, the religious context, elements of extraordinariness and mystery)

The title protagonist is orphan girl Mary, whose origin can be traced to Romantic poems by Polish poet Teofil Lenartowicz. Lenartowicz's poems, drawing from folklore and religion, highlighted the theme of compensating for orphanage with the gift of

noticing things invisible to others, in accordance with ... the poetic belief that God is merciful towards orphans' while the world inhabited by the orphan is reminiscent of the interior of Złoty Kubek. (Ługowska 1999: 330–344)

Orphanage befalls every Pole while

for Lenartowicz the child's charisma, deriving from the myth of the "divine child," has become evidently indisputable, and in particular the charisma of the child orphan, God's chosen, due to being doubly marked (with childhood and with orphanage), a child particularly blessed, blessed with goodness, beauty and truth. (Janion 1972: 95)

The tale's characters are children, country orphans, shepherds and gooseherds, whose daily activities include tending (grazing) animals, singing songs, playing the pipe. Only seemingly does their life seem idyllic. A distinctive feature of such characters is their otherness, loneliness and alienation, and sadness (asked by a housewife why she does not sing or enjoy herself like others do, Mary replies that

“birches weep in groves and the earth is flooded with tears” (Cieślakowski 1975), but – thanks to this – also openness towards another, irrational world: the world of the fairy tale. Rurality played a significant role here and because of the closeness to the land each activity of the character became authentic and touched on the *sacrum*. Also rural simplicity (Romanticism) is sanctified. For this reason character types (country children, peasant Skrobek, the dwarves, Queen Tatra) with their internal transformations are idealised at the first, Romantic level of reception: country children do not work – instead, their tending of animals is a game; orphan Mary, though hungry and poorly clad, sings lyrical songs and does not complain; peasant Skrobek, who raises two little sons on his own, is not very concerned about their future and in a sense awaits a better tomorrow; in their fairy dimension, the dwarves indeed live a life resembling human existence but e.g. sleep through severe winter and wake up in spring, full of hope and optimism; while queen Tatra (Lady of the Polish Tatra mountains, though living far away from Mary’s native village and potentially even resembling Andersen’s Snow Queen, as she seems severe, sitting on her high throne) after all understands Mary’s trouble and soon agrees to return the geese stolen by the fox.

Romantic is the portrayal of queen Tatra’s castle – a great, admired and ideal queen – full of elements of extraordinariness and mystery and it corresponds to the poetic image of animated fairy nature (entry ‘nature’ – *Dictionary of the Polish Language of the 19th century*): “corns parted before her [Mary]” (Konopnicka 1954: 145), “wild pear trees leaned towards the little wanderer,” “she was surrounded by ... spreading oaks ... black pines” (ib. 146). Interesting is the commentary concerning the above-mentioned phenomenon written by Grzegorz Leszczyński and his interpretation of the following excerpt: “two spruce forests led to the gates of the castle, two stone giants held guard at the gates ... two streams poured silver in the gateway out of malachite pitchers day and night ... two eagles hovered over the turrets of the castle, two winds howled on the threshold like two savages, two pale stars shone through the turret windows: the morning and evening star.” (Ib. 108) Leszczyński stresses the Romantic atmosphere of terror and poetry, which

“was constructed through interweavement of pairs of elements which inspire the sense of fear (both in the protagonist and the virtual reader) and fascination with the splendour and subtle beauty,” i.e. the feelings of terror and wonder are shown parallelly here (Leszczyński 1990: 30) (e.g. phrases “two spruce forests” and “two stone giants” intimate coldness and darkness, whereas “two groves”, “two streams” and “two stars” imply peace and warmth and brightness). (Ib.)

These images form a landscape resembling the atmosphere of Andersen's fairy tales, where the parallel fates of people and nature constitute a solid background to the world presented: “Queen Tatra's castle stood on a high mountain; a mountain so high that clouds lay at its feet like herds of grey sheep, while the summit shone in the sun against the clear azure” (Konopnicka 1954: 148).

The characters' fates interlace, as the main protagonist, orphan girl Mary, is helped by both the dwarves and Queen Tatra and some animals, and finally even Skrobek takes her into his cottage. Mary “brings into the work both childlike and adult modes of existence in the world ... as abandonment, suffering and forced independence befall her ... while otherness, loneliness, homelessness, abandonment, enslavement, uprootedness, helplessness, poor condition and lack of prospects” (Ichnatowicz 1997: 85) constitute the image of Polish Romantic orphanage of the nation, in which a society without a fatherland is regarded in terms of social orphanage (a nation without a fatherland is like children without a mother). Such view of orphanage becomes a national myth.

Romantic in origin is also the Gypsy character, as he has the right to transgress the border of the real and unreal world. He is a free man, so he lives closer to nature; he is also a brigand type, who raids, captures and enslaves (e.g. dwarves Koszałek-Opalek and Podziomek). (Cieślakowski 1975: 62). Romantic seems also the religious dimension of the piece – children pray to God, believe in his mercy and assistance.

3. The Positivist aspect – sociologisation (work, history, a synthesis of Polish national myths, ethnography, characters: peasant Skrobek, the Gypsy, the wise old woman)

The Positivist model of the tale is manifest in the emphasis on the theme of work and the broad sociological context of the text and social issues of the Polish countryside at the turn of the 20th century. The Positivist dimension is also characterised by the epic character of narration, especially clearly manifest at the beginning: “The winter was so severe and long that His Majesty Błystek, the king of the dwarves, froze to his throne.” (Konopnicka 1990: 11) The beginning of the tale is realistic and the narrator can be categorised as omniscient (auctorial). The village where the tale is set – Głodowa Wólka – is presented like real villages within the temporal and spatial framework of Polish Mazowsze, the life of the country children in the fairy tale corresponds to the life of real children, and adult Skrobek is a true reflection of the character of a tough, stubborn Polish peasant who, though attached to his plot of land, cannot cope with farming and raising sons whose mother has died (cf. Bolesław Prus’s *Placówka [The Centre]*, Positivist novellas *Janko Muzykant [Johnny Music-Maker]* and *Antek [Tony]*). In just such an ethnographical and sociological model of the world there is also the country herbalist – not a witch, but a wise old woman who knows forest secrets and can treat with the herbs she collects, knowing their medicinal components and “magic power”. (Cieślowski 1975: 72–73) At the Positivist level of the text it is not magic and wizardry that lead to success but science and knowledge. Partly Positivist is also the model of the Gypsy character – a real ‘wanderer’ of the second half of the 19th century – who “roves from fair to fair and plays the jew’s harp ..., earning his living by tinkering and robbing people.” (Ib. 62) The fairy tale also contains a clearly visible and elaborated theme of the mountains – the Polish Tatras (as queen Tatra lives there), whose symbolism has already been thoroughly analysed by Polish folklorists, ethnographers and literary

specialists (numerous works related to mountains appeared at the turn of the 20th century and the great fascination with the motif of mountains appeared in Polish literature at the beginning of the 20th century), (Kolbuszewski 1995: 21) in the context of Rousseau's Romantic "return to nature". Also in connection with the mountains – as in Konopnicka's fairy tale – there are clear references to the *topos* of treasure seeking, treasure being buried deep underground (often in rocky mountains), and the *topos* of the brigand:

The night was warm, quiet, long before twilight, when Piotr Skrobek, returning home from a fair, saw a sudden brightness ahead. Well, simply, as if something was burning by the rock. "What is it?" thinks Skrobek. "Fire, not fire? Or maybe treasure is being cleaned? After all, old people say that here, in these rocks, brigands lived of old, robbing gold and silver and hiding it underground. It is nothing else but this holy fire that purifies the money of human grievance ... It has to burn so for a hundred years. Or two hundred if it is the orphan's mite ... Not sooner than this grievance has burnt out can such treasure go to a man. Only that the poor and orphans must partake of it, otherwise it would go to waste. Oh, would it be my share!..." (Konopnicka 1988: 189).

Clearly Skrobek's interpretation of the story of treasure allegedly buried underground contains the motif of orphans, privileged because of their afflictions. Orphans should be given part of the treasure found in order to redeem the guilt of the brigands who have stolen that treasure.

Positivist literature presented and verified Polish national myths. What is very clearly visible here is the dispute with the Romantic tradition: although it is Romantic feelings and respect for imagination that actually determine the choice of the proper way of living and the perception of the world in Konopnicka's tale, yet Positivist honesty, firmness and family values determine the presentation of the world in the text. The story of orphan girl Mary highlights also the theme of respect for work, unpopular in Romanticism but promoted in Positivism (e.g. the myth of the peasant – ploughman). Following the Positivist tradition, Konopnicka's fairy tale contains a juxtaposition of

tale and truth while the dwarves, though deriving from the fairy tale tradition, do not tell “tales”: “fairy elements [their tales] constitute inner realism treated in the same way as the real world.” (Cieślowski 1975: 29). A characteristic of the Polish dwarves (similarly to the image of the Scandinavian gnomes) is their attachment to land and home, and so in the tale the dwarves “live a human life” and help the girl find a surrogate family. The tale’s ending – and the image of Skrobek’s family, where Mary in a sense plays the role of a housekeeper – is again realistic and matter-of-fact (“perhaps some hemp ... and maybe two patches of cabbages! Black, fertile soil, cabbage heads would be as big as pumpkins” (Konopnicka 1957: 72) and brings to mind the realist novels of the second half of the 19th century. There is also a poetic accent there, which for Polish readers once again constitutes a reference to patriotism and national issues – namely “the song about Earth.”

4. The Modernist aspect – symbolism (polyphonic narration – fantasy and naiveté are intertwined with the rational order, verification of myths – the internal transformation of the peasant, the mythical role of the journey, magic)

Yet the fairy tale about dwarves and orphan girl Mary quite clearly breaks the Positivist sociological order. In the opinion of Jerzy Cieślowski, who compared Konopnicka’s fairy tale with *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* by Selma Lagerlöf, the introduction to the rational world of only slightly irrational elements constitutes “a structural dissonance” for both authors, after all representing the Positivist spirit. Another Polish scholar, Grzegorz Leszczyński, writing e.g. about the tale’s distinctive features (polyphonic structure or syncretism) in the context of world literature (e.g. *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Alice in Wonderland* or Andersen’s fairy tales), emphasises a major impact of Andersen on the shape of Konopnicka’s fairy tale. (Leszczyński 1990). Magic and wonder gradually enter the tale, and the story changes into a fairy tale. Characters, who at the beginning

of the tale inhabit a real world and cannot cope with life in it (fox steals Mary's geese and Skrobek is not able to handle his fallow land and feeding children), receive help from the unreal world.

At this level of realisation of the text a significant role is played by Queen Tatra, who "no longer inhabits the temporal and spatial framework of the Mazowsze fairy tale, but lives behind the seven mountains." Orphan Mary goes to the Queen for rescue (she wants to recover the geese stolen by the fox) – an expedition "as if for the water of life". Help can be given only to a good and honest but at the same time poor and humble person. Polish folklorist Jolanta Ługowska, basing on Wladimir Propp's definition of the fairy tale, observes:

Mary, similarly to folk-tale characters wandering in search of the water of life or another magic agent necessary for remedying a grievance, reverses a bad fortune, and thus they cover a vast distance, as the end of their quest lies 'behind the mountains, behind the forests ... behind the three-ninth river.' (Ługowska 1997: 63)

The girl's journey is not dangerous and encompasses three dimensions. Meaningful become (1) descriptions of Polish landscapes, the beautiful, lyrical region of Mazowsze – full of lowlands and fields, (2) "mysterious and solemn forests", finally (3) menacing, rocky and uninhabited mountains. Stratification of space, that is the girl's journey from region to region, called by Cieřlikowski "circles of various fairy tales, landscapes of another fairy tale", which we could even call "circles of initiation". Characteristically for child readers, the circles are set along the line: from the circle of "near home" towards "the wide world" up to the circle ruled entirely by fantasy and imagination, that is to a place where "mountains reach up to heaven (God)".

Moreover, Mary's strength and endurance naturally derive from her orphanage, while God and nature often show "signs of their special care or tokens of hope". (Paczowska 1995: 10) Cieřlikowski claims that this wandering through various lands "is a journey throughout Poland (fields, forests and mountains constitute a

complete allegory of Poland), whose substitute is the Earth.” (Cieślowski 1975: 63).

Mary’s journey to visit Queen Tatra is presented in categories of a fairy tale and a myth:

Queen Tatra lives in a castle, she is mighty, beautiful, but above all – good ... her very name, her palace in the mountains, her descriptive and characterological interchangeability with personified Spring presented in the first chapters of the fairy tale place her in the same semantic field as the Queen of the Polish Crown [Saint Mary]. And events from the moment Mary starts her journey to visit the Queen until the girl wakes up are recounted by a poet-narrator, who at the same time is the creator of the myth. (Ib. 63–64).

The intermediate link between the real world and the world of the fairy tale is the motif of dream. The transportation of a character to ‘a higher floor’ – the fairy tale – through dream becomes one of credible devices used in the tale of the Positivist writer, as dream may account for supernatural phenomena in a realistic way (see Nielsen – Paluszek from *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*: ‘turned into a Dwarf, he is automatically transported to another dimension – dream’) (Cieślowski 1963: 112).

In the opinion of Ewa Paczoska “In the world of widespread orphanage in which the story of Mary, her geese, Skrobek and the dwarves takes place, there can be seen various consequences and aspects of abandonment.” (Paczowska 1995: 10) Not all characters realise that “a lesson on orphanage” is taking place (is being taught) (ib.), e.g. peasant Skrobek, whose impoverished, abandoned farm is situated in a forest, cannot come into contact with nature or understand it and does not understand his long neglected, fallow land, which can give him an identity and free his creative powers. Skrobek is helpless and admits that even dwarves, “a symbol of continuity of tradition” (ib. 11), leave his cottage. Mary takes a “more constructive” and paradoxical view of her orphanage: despite abandonment and loneliness, remembering her childhood, mother and family home, she still endeavours to regain what she has lost,

she anticipates the miracle of returning or meeting ... and dreams about returning to a paradise lost, living the myth in her daily life, being in touch with her dead mother, who comes to her in dream ... she believes that she is in God's special care ... she reads the rhythms of nature as the person best suited to participate in the rituals of life and open for the miracle of resurrection or rebirth. (Ib. 10)

And the miracle happens: Queen Tatra, who lives as if in a pastoral world: "clouds graze like flocks of sheep", creates (reconstructs) Mary's flock of geese. Her pastoral, good world is saved. (Ib. 11) The *topos* of a good shepherd and guardian constitutes a clear reference to the Bible. At the end of the tale King Blystek himself invokes this theme once again in the Biblical style, calling the orphan "a helpless lamb" or "a nestless dove". (Ib.) The thread of Skrobek also refers the reader to the Bible; it constitutes a clear reference to the image of Biblical Job, as through suffering and ordeals the man ultimately discovers the sense of life: farming and family.

Finally, Mary has a true home, becoming Skrobek's adopted daughter, and tidies up his cottage. The tidying up of the cottage has a symbolic meaning here: the girl brings harmony into the peasant's life, "restores all things to order, domesticates them". (Ib. 12) Home acquires here an obvious meaning: that of a happy childhood, family, security and continuity, a centre of a new life. We are referring here to research done by Mircea Eliade and his concept of home as the space of *sacrum* where orphans take shelter (Eliade 1993). Dwarves wandering through the world also dream of a real home – once it is a magnate's manor, then again a nobleman's mansion. Both images refer to the Sarmatian (noble) concept of Polish home, which in this context may be associated with emigrants' Romantic dreams of returning to their native country (Kopaliński 1990: 69).

The above-mentioned themes (e.g. the particular contact of man with nature, the motif of the shepherd, the *topos* of home, God's special care, the symbolism of journey and space recognised in that journey) strongly sustain the level of interpretation of both Romantic and Modernist traditions.

The Modernist dimension also involves a type of mythological fairy tale: the rhythm of the seasons of the year (in autumn dwarves terminate their earthly activity to re-appear in spring), the ritual of farming (Skrobek ploughs, sows and harvests crops in accordance with the rhythm of nature), the rituals and gestures connected with behaviour, e.g. children at work (the song and poetry level), blessing of sleeping children, homestead, human labour, even – interestingly – the national myth of dwarves and their role in Polish history.

While interpreting Konopnicka's fairy tale in *Młodopolska lekcja fantazji* (*The Modernist Lesson of Fancy*), G. Leszczyński also makes a valid remark about the Modernist style of construction of a literary work – syncretism of genres and conventions and Bakhtin's narrative polyphony (Konopnicka's narrator is an epic realist, a poet and a country spinner of yarns). (Bachtin 1970) In Konopnicka's tale there are different levels of narration (and different literary genres), e.g. lyrical (the children's songs and the poetic portrayal of protagonist Mary), epic – from the Positivist novel (the social issues in the countryside of the second half of the 19th century, social stratification, the ethical dimension of work), the fairy tale and the folk tale (passages about Queen Tatra and the world of the dwarves), the fable (the episode with the rat family, the story of frog – singer Pólpanek), or the tendentious novel. This generic syncretism corresponds to the syncretism of conventions: realism, fantasy and poetry (at the Positivist, Romantic and Modernist levels) and narrative polyphony. The narrator responsible for epic layers is an omniscient narrator – auctorial – Positivist realist (recounting the story of Mary Kukulanka and peasant Skrobek, he is well oriented in the countryside issues), whereas fantasy passages are narrated by a Modernist storyteller and a folk storyteller. Both (Modernist and folk) narrators are omniscient but passages belonging to the level of fantasy are narrated with a particular emotional involvement, with emphasis on changes in the mood, with the use of symbols, with myth creation (e.g. passages about Queen Tatra or the world of the dwarves), with some poeticised passages, which thus transforms them or unifies them into the character of a Modernist poet.

Undoubtedly, modernist is also the motif of the peasant, his great transformation, "his mission and heroism of farming [which] is

treated in a symbolic way". (Cieślowski 1963:110) And the Modernist dimension of orphanage acquires here the status of a symbol – transformation. With the intervention of supernatural powers (queen Tatra “creates” a new flock of geese for Mary while the dwarves discreetly “impart” strength to the peasant, who willingly starts working and grubs out the fallow land), the tale gradually changes from an epic narration into a fairy tale, the presentation of the world becomes lyrical, the narrator – the folk storyteller changes into a Modernist poet and begins to dominate the omniscient narrator. The Modernist narrator poeticises the final, conclusive passages of the tale, endowing them with a special atmosphere, deep feelings and sentiment. Skrobek’s cottage is filled with joy and optimism, orphan Mary finds a truer, real home and family, and the dwarves – having fulfilled their mission on earth – can return underground again.

5. Conclusion – epilogue. About the dwarves that gave sense to orphanage

Already the title of the work clearly introduces two motifs: those of dwarves and the orphan. The motif unifying the three levels of the tale – Romantic, Positivist and Modernist – is that of dwarves, deriving from the Germanic prototype. They constitute the distinctive motif in the tale, they are ‘the driving force behind all that happened here.’ The motif of the orphan appears at the song and poetry level whereas the theme of dwarves is presented in the tale in the fantastic – demonic dimension.

Jerzy Cieślowski, a renowned expert in Polish literature for children and folklore, writes that the first illustration of the dwarves – the German *Bergmännchen* (little miners with long hooded aprons, lanterns and pickaxes) – reached Poland through publisher Arct. While trying to “polonise” some books for children, he became interested in Konopnicka’s works and gave her the drawings of the dwarves, suggesting that she should write the text. The scholar distinguishes two “sub-groups” of dwarves: pygmies (i.e. creatures who live independently of people) and the household

gods: Roman Lares and Penates (that is creatures closely connected with people's lives, their families and homes). (Cieślowski 1975: 115) The household gods in Poland were called *ubożęta* (meaning God's servants and poor people) or *lutki* (meaning little people or in Czech – puppets) (Brückner 1924: 114) and offered discreet help in the homestead (cf. the Danish Dwarf *spiritus familiaris* in the Scandinavian mythology). In Poland the 19th century and its interest in folklore produces quite a few “documents” concerning dwarves, e.g. in 1861 Klepaczewski writes that the name “dwarves” is associated with the red colour, since dwarves wore red: “they usually inhabit bread ovens, stove-corners and inglenooks. They are creatures with huge heads, very little in size, stocky in built and ugly, with flat faces, with coarse and dishevelled hair”. (Kolberg, 22)

Quoting research done by Swiss folklorist Anhorn in his work *Magiologia*, Cieślowski claims that one could already talk of some “systematisation of the genre” in German demonology:

household spirits, which can be heard on dark nights, move furniture, run up and down the stairs, slam doors, light a fire, but also bring water and wood, prepare meals in the kitchen, yet on the next day not a trace of their nocturnal frolics can be found. (Anhorn 1674)

or “Polish gnomes are guests with an enormous appetite. They must be scrupulously served the same meals that are eaten by people.” (Tharsander 1735: 408)

In Konopnicka's fairy tale the dwarf characters are similar. Undoubtedly, they belong to the category of household gods but in fact are a combination of several types. The most obvious characteristic of the dwarf is his little size and domestication (the Scandinavian type). Podziomek rides a cat (in Anglo-Saxon demonology elves ride horses) and flies a stork, which justifies the comparison to birds' behaviour. Cieślowski claims that their “vegetative lifestyle [dwarves sleep through the winter underground] incorporates birds' joy and birds' anxiety”. (Cieślowski 1975: 119) Peasant Skrobek remembers them from his childhood and talks about them in positive terms, as when they made their presence felt: “all good thrived and

the farm prospered". (Ib. 120) A significant place in the tale is occupied by the thread of Koszałek-Opalek writing his chronicle. The character of a dwarf historian, a great scientist, who recounts Poland's past and its subjugation (national orphanage) and gathers information about the contemporary world, is innovative and original. This character reinforces the Positivist level of reception of the work. By reconstructing the tale from the chronicle, Koszałek-Opalek creates a "scientific" (pseudo-scientific) Romantic vision of history (taking into account the role of the people) and by teaching children he thus highlights the didactic aspect of the stories told. The world of the dwarves is colourful and interesting, the dynamic presentation of the adventures of the gnomes resembles the thriller convention (abduction, exchange, wandering), the dwarf portraits are profound and psychologically interesting, the emphasis is clearly put on the thread of Koszałek-Opalek – dwarf – historian – educator – teacher and passages in which the dwarves help people (mainly lonely orphans). With all these elements of "the dwarf world presented" the poet creates "a national myth about Dwarves". (Ib.) Cieślowski proposes the following interpretation:

Christianity brought about degradation and degeneration of Dwarves. ... in order to reconcile pagan and Christian myths in her fairy tale for children, Konopnicka had to endow her dwarves with the qualities of good, though miserable demons. Due to this, the reader's sympathy is divided between *Bożęta* and angels. (Ib. 120)

Two among the dwarves are personified (Koszałek-Opalek and Podziomek) and, similarly to people, undergo psychological metamorphoses. Chronicler Koszałek-Opalek realises that writing a real chronicle is a difficult, complex undertaking and requires thorough preparation (please take note that his volume burns and he himself stays with people on earth), whereas glutton Podziomek, the "changeling" from the cottage, when he really feels hungry – like country children – grows more sensitive to the afflictions and orphanage of others.

To sum up, Konopnicka's fairy tale is an excellent illustration of the history of Polish culture and has a broad cultural context for Polish readers. The author of the tale about orphanage "synthesises Polish myths of condition and space" (also the space of identity), which become meaningful in "the orphaned world" of Poles only "thanks to the recognition of the boundaries of abandonment and care", and in this context it is the orphan who understands it best. As a particularly popular theme in Polish literature for children, orphanage survived three ages (Romanticism, Positivism and Modernism) and thanks to the fairy tale about dwarves and orphan girl Mary it has also acquired a patriotic character and has developed into a national myth.

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