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From an eco-fairy tale to an environmentally friendly lifestyle : an eco-friendly reading project by Agnieszka Marzęcka

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FROM AN ECO-FAIRY TALE TO AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY LIFESTYLE. AN ECO-FRIENDLY READING PROJECT BY AGNIESZKA MARZĘCKA²⁷

ABSTRACT

The article is concerning on the eco-critical literary phenomenon on the perspective of new species polish eco-fairy tale. The fabulous tale about ecological style of life (*The metaphorical ecology of human biography*) was illustrated by the Agnieszka Marzęcka's modernity tune entitled *The Victory of King of Cleanness*²⁸.

Key words: bibliotherapy, biography, eco-fairy tale, late-modernity, style of life

ECO-FRIENDLY LITERATURE: FUNCTIONAL LITERATURE (NOT) ONLY FOR CHILDREN

Today's reading market requires that literature should be given the status of a product by its author and publisher. The status of an object designed for a target client with defined aesthetic (consumer) needs. Naturally, it is not only about market rationality of supply and demand undermining the literary quality, commercialisation that ruthlessly treats literature as an object²⁹, but particularly about a significant shift of the work's aesthetic role to the functional domain of a text, and therefore about the primacy of its practical use by a reader. What the reading public (designed not only in high-circulation marketing plans but also in the reading market rules³⁰ secondarily adopted by authors themselves) sees in reading is particularly the chance of personal growth: broadening its own experience or going on an escapist journey into a stress-free world of fiction. Such self-awareness of reading³¹ is, to a certain extent, the fulfilment of the post-structuralists' dream about an active virtual reader who takes out threads needed in both present and

²⁶ The authoress is a winner of stipend START for young researchers (in 2012 edition the START Programme of Foundation for Polish Science).

²⁷ From polish translated by Martyna Wielgosz, correction and markup language by Tony Ames.

²⁸ The full *The victory of King o Cleanness* text is included in annex at the end of this article.

²⁹ To read about the cultural clash of authors (particularly poets) and marketing systems (both commercial and secondarily symbolic ones illustrating the social process of text commercialisation) – see Ignacy Fiut (Fiut 2008, pp. 11-17).

³⁰ The fact of adopting a media discourse in direct presentations of authors who marginalise the meaning of the text itself in favour of its "author" deserves separate study.

³¹ The Internet (as an instant messenger) plays a particular role in building this self-awareness as a channel of peculiar "texting" of a meeting with the text's author (Nyczaj 2007, pp. 164-168).

episodic acts of reading from Barthes' textual fabric. A long time ago, in positivist projects of work at the grass roots, such a cultural phenomenon was called tendentious literature³², an ideologically marked literary production. A positivist, thinking reader owed one thing to the author and his programme. It was an appropriate and previously expected "pull-out" of ideological themes from the text. These themes were to build the reader's cognitive horizon. Naturally, in the code provided for by an authoritarian creator. In other forms of literature with a thesis (programme), which are known in Poland particularly thanks to their socialist realist exaggeration, literature functionality was marked in an extremely pejorative way. The thesis-controlled act of reading was perceived as less creative; worse. The wide current of literature for children has, however, escaped this judgement as in the process of education, children are always subject to the programme (although culturally diverse) ideologisation in social science which is called *socialisation*. Late modernity teaches the reading public how to independently outline biographical and aesthetic limits (Waksmund 1985). Independently but on the basis of interpretative cooperation with social reality that is changeable, inconclusive and requires abilities to follow a distant project. Nowadays, it is necessary to know how to read tendentious literature (frequently referred to as motivating literature) as all the abilities to cooperate with another human convinced of his own, often controversial arguments are required of us. In late modernity, one needs to know how to be both a mature leader and a guided child. In this meaning, the detailed status of a reader does not differ from the status of each mediocre social actor, an individual constituting a part of a community. As a result of this culture-creating shift of limits between a "non-adult" (requiring an educational control) and "adult" (intellectually independent) reader, didactic literature (including eco-fairy tales) functions as a peculiar, double-encoded text, i.e. symbolic reserves possible to be assimilated by a child (Giddens 2001), but also as a reservoir of stories attractive for an adult. Another, extra-literary aspect of this phenomenon – reading the literature created for children by adults – is the social shift of the limits of childhood dating back to the mid-20th century, which undoubtedly has two observable signs: professionalization of childhood (lowering the age brackets of formal and informal education) and – its social reverse – self-infantilisation of adults (marketing aestheticisation of immaturity). The attraction of literature "for children" in "adult perception" is also connected with culturally expansive psychological trends³³ oriented to timeless and, so to speak, nonlinear childhood that, as a part of an individual reading therapy, each of us can have regardless of age (Poźniak 2006,

³² Interestingly, in the 19th century, "didacticism" was still opposed to "tendentious literature," but the latter was positively evaluated. According to the entry "Didacticism" in the *Dictionary of the 19th Century Polish Literature*, "in the 19th century, this term [didacticism] is rarely used with reference to literary phenomena and when it appears, it is most often a pejorative epithet describing a thesis novel or a social comedy. The fact of playing a particularly or even exclusively educational role by literature is generally required and described by means of the following categories: tendency, tendentiousness, determination, aim, usefulness or sometimes utilitarianism and most rarely – idea of a literary work" (Martuszevska 2002, p. 192).

³³ It is necessary to mention hundreds of how-to books (also in Polish) referring to a psychodynamic idea of "inner child" whose mature reintegration ensures life success.

pp.131-148). From this point of view, literary learning how to be a child is a significant breakthrough in social functioning of the institution of literature. In other words, the *literature only for children* has hereby become almost a relic. Nowadays, there exists, i.e. functions in the reading sense, double-encoded (childish-adult or adult-childish) literature as only such has a chance of marketing adaptation to the publishing market. And the market always reflects the main trend of its clients' needs. This is where an interesting synthesis of two cultural phenomena comes from: a genre fusion of functional literature for children and auto-therapeutic how-to books for adults³⁴. One of the most distinctive signs of this promising marriage of the "childish" didactic literature and "adult" publishing economy of the late modern age is the fairy tale by A. Marzęcka *A Victory of the King of Cleanliness*³⁵. *It is a herald of the new genre of eco-friendly literature: an eco-fairy tale. An eco-fairy tale is a story for children hidden in adults and for adults who are hidden in children. It is a story about ecology of biographical transformation. A transgression that is possible in everyday life thanks to an environmentally friendly lifestyle. In this meaning, the ecology of reading is the successful ecology of being in the world.*

AN ECO-FAIRY TALE: ECO-FRIENDLY LITERARY INSTRUCTIONS

When suggesting the new genre name "eco-fairy tale", I mean a particular kind of didacticism of this functional literature. It is about a symbolic translation of the world of such ecological values as respect for Mother Earth: water, forest and animals into ready-made eco-friendly strategies expressed in words. Literature in this form loses its programme autotelic nature eulogised in Cassirer's thinking, but her lost "seclusion" can no longer be regained in the present realities. Nowadays, modernist and avant-garde gestures of "art for art's sake" simply clash with the everyday economy of thinking and, excluding professional literary scholars, cannot take place in ordinary people's private biographies. In other words, today's reader is incapable of going too often on independent and reckless reading journeys. The crucial role is played here by time capital which is scarce, limited and subordinated to entropic coping with life³⁶. Reading "for a purpose" as a conscious path of personal

³⁴ Teachers mention even a "fairy tale therapy" (personality identification with the fairy tale content) which is used in every age bracket. In the preface to the collection of fairy tales written by children, Katarzyna Slany recommends it as a book for children and adults alike: "Thanks to this book, the reader will have the unquestionable pleasure of going on an imaginary journey to fairylands, where everything can happen. For children, this journey will constitute one of several fantasy escapades as it is a well-known fact that young readers love daydreaming and listening to unusual stories, whereas for adults, it can be a magical return to childhood (...)" (Slany 2008, p. 13).

³⁵ The functionality of this poem - a functional literature text designed for promoting an environmentally friendly lifestyle understood as eco-friendly activities undertaken by the reader in his everyday life - was emphasised already in the nature of this text's first edition. The eco-fairy tale was published in a specialist magazine for nurses and midwives and in this paper, the entire text is quoted on the basis of this edition (Marzęcka 2008, p. 22).

³⁶ The social theme of "coping with life," especially in the meaning of "coping with stress," makes not only reading but also other choices of post-industrial societies' contemporary members pragmatic. Its spectacular example is the so-called practice of "religious coping," the phenomenon of shaping one's private spirituality on the basis of successful, holistic coping with life and especially with everyday life's stress (Górka 2009, pp. 73-92).

growth should be, in my opinion, recognised as a sealed cultural fact, a phenomenon – neither a good, nor a bad one. A phenomenon that occurs and therefore exists, that exists i.e. is real. Eco-friendly instructions for children and literary relaxation for adults – this is a social portrait and a cultural face of an eco-fairy tale.

WHAT DOES A VICTORY OF THE KING OF CLEANLINESS MEAN?

The plot of A. Marzęcka's eco-fairy tale is heartbreakingly simple and winningly episodic. It is, therefore, exactly what the supposed, "double" reader (a child and an adult) expects. A child will see here a story about two kings: the piggy wiggly and the bathing king and their two visions of the world: the environmentally destructive and the eco-friendly one. The story, which is easily assimilated thanks to its rhyme, activates one of the oldest and most popular moral patterns of the struggle between personified Good and Evil (Kapusta 2004, pp. 23-42). Clarity of such division of the world into the dark and bright one, active and passive one, has been enlaced with the dynamics of both kings' fight presented as a dramatic final of the bathing king's educational campaign addressed to piggy wiggly. The characteristics of both kingdoms, two rivalling, ecological visions of the world are as follows. This is how the storyteller describes the mental landscape of both kings:

“When the night falls outside, deep but pale
 I hope you will listen to my fable or rather a fairy tale
 Would you listen to my plotting, or maybe a pleasant talking?
 Would you? Then listen carefully as I will tell you cheerfully
 At this story beginning I will tell you about a niche of cleaning
 There, where the Sky and Earth touch, and by a lake baby-birds hutch
 Forests beautiful and majestic spread in which beeches and hornbeams can be
 met
 Behind the clearing, near the forest's brink, lives the piggy wiggly king
 His castle, though not vast, is covered all in dust
 If you go for the forest's exploration, soon you will see its devastation
 Frolicking is all the king does, chiefly rolling in the grass
 Everyone is afraid, to meet him on their way
 Different tricks he can perform, even turn you into stone.
 The only defence, what a pity, is water in a great quantity
 A bit further, behind a clearing, lives a charming king of cleaning
 What the king values best, is order, fresh fragrance and tidiness
 Both kings are engaged, in a cleaning war full of rage
 Bathing king though distressed is often piggy wiggly's guest
 And persuades him with a zest, not to be such a pest” (Marzęcka 2008).

The bathing king's educational campaign is significantly (metonymically)³⁷ supported by the image of a pure water drop that, as it will turn out in the culminating

³⁷ Metonymy as a linguistic means was considered, already by Lévi-Strauss, the basic means of myth-creation as an association (a peculiar mental shortcut) indicating the magical thinking (Lévi-Strauss 1973, pp. XI-LVIII).

point of the story, will save the good king from the magic designs of the bad one. Talking about the text metonymy - a drop of water as a symbolic abridgement of the whole plot - it is worth realising the linguistic fact that it constitutes a means of language expression related and common to mythical thinking, the *pars pro toto* logic (the rule of a "part" for the "whole") and all memory techniques (mnemonics) useful in education. It is easier to remember an image and an image that additionally constitutes a developed symbol³⁸ refers to creative functions of imagination that are not determined at all by the reader's age³⁹. Nowadays, a drop of water could easily become another logo of a social, eco-friendly advertising campaign as it triggers deep, individual associations. It is not by accident that every novice poet has written a nostalgic poem about a drop of water as this image has always stimulated the imagination. Thus, a cognitive, culturally established pattern and a feature of individual creativity are combined into a coherent educational strategy. Its dynamics are perfectly illustrated by this eco-fairy tale's content. A drop of water that reconciles both kings is also, in this story, a sign of peculiar, eco-friendly pacifism of the bathing king, and his negotiating concept of a "cleaning war" consisting of deepened conversations with piggy wiggy proceeding in an unusually dynamic way:

"Bathing king though distressed is often piggy wiggy's guest
 And persuades him with a zest, not to be such a pest
 But piggy wiggy makes threats, and the bathing king briefly dreads
 -That you to my dwelling come, not afraid of any harm...
 I can my evil magic employ and your court easily destroy.
 Regaining composure the cleanliness king replies:
 I don't want any fight for we are both kings with pride
 But the forest will not glitter when it's strewn with tonnes of litter
 Once streams and rivers meandered here with waters crystal clear
 Today everyone knows that sewage in them flows
 You destroyed almost all in a forest that's not small
 Think about your careless action, discontinue great destruction
 But the magician with a roar changes into a wild boar
 And he wants to tear apart his opponent who's quite smart
 Even though without a gun, the bathing king can quickly run
 In a forest running race he can everyone outpace
 Still, to avoid being caught he finds a hiding spot
 There he waits in peace for the conflict to decrease
 But not ready for ceasefire piggy wiggy tries his fab attire
 A disguise of a squirrel he puts on and chases the king until dawn
 No one would have guessed how the situation then progressed
 Dark clouds change into rain and wash the king not in vain

³⁸ Wladyslaw Kopaliński particularly emphasises the transformational character of the symbol of water "transformation" (Kopaliński 2001, p. 480).

³⁹ The fact that a cultural text has the observable (empirical) power of social transformation in the dimension of a reader's individual biography is most frequently connected by social researchers with the presence of deep mythological structures in its symbolic body. Naturally, film cultural texts constitute the most spectacular examples of this phenomenon in late modernity (Zurek 2009, pp. 137-151).

He still chases the bathing king around the forest ring
 But to his great dismay his evil power fades away
 The magic he used at night is gone and out of sight
 The overnight rain drop shower deprived him of his power
 The bathing king without disdain takes over the royal reign" (Marzęcka
 2008, s. 9).

As it turns out, the final and successful transformation of the piggy wiggy king takes place only as a result of combination of the bathing king's peculiar educational strategy (the element of "culture") and intervention of a raindrop (the element of "nature") that falls down from a cloud on the king running like mad in various zoomorphic forms (wild boar, squirrel). This symbolic abolition of the artificial and environmentally destructive barrier between "nature" and "culture" is also a visualisation of effectiveness of the most spectacular eco-friendly campaigns⁴⁰, whose success should be the practical (pragmatic) integration of knowledge and sensitivity in everyday activities undertaken by an individual. At this point, the eco-fairy tale combines both cognitive horizons: of a child and of an adult. As regards cognition, a child will be pleased with a vivid story about the revitalising power of rain, whereas an adult may find a symbol of aquatic transgression in the text. Growth inserted in the symbol developed from metonymy is available to every biography and this is what constitutes the power of an eco-fairy tale which displays this interpretative work as an attempt to find an ecological niche by individuals in their particularistic everyday life. In this perspective, "ecologically" means "in accordance with one's individual nature", and this "nature" may be revealed by means of an eco-fairy tale.

ECO-FRIENDLY READING: PROMOTION OF A LIFESTYLE

A literary translation of a story into an instructional lifestyle is a crucial element of an eco-fairy tale's social pragmatics. The moral expressed straight and without metaphors is addressed to a child, whereas its adult, metaphorising equivalent remains under management (or in symbolic imagination) of an adult reader. This is just another level of social functioning of such a genre of didactic literature: real and imagined co-reading. Reading together, in a subjective relation, in favourable conditions for social bonds and harmony (in a niche of eco-friendly everyday life). Maybe as a parent who reads a book to his child or maybe as an adult who finds a child in himself? Maybe as a child who finds support in the act of reading or maybe as an adult who gives himself over to relaxing infantilisation thanks to the

⁴⁰ Ecology understood as a harmonious union of an individual (human, animal or plant) with the environment is a sign of both holistic, sacred world view and the newest eco-friendly trends. Such ecology is therefore simultaneously cosmology and anthropology implemented by a human being through such simple, everyday activities as washing hands as it takes place in *A Victory of the King of Cleanliness*. In this late modern concept of ecology, Fiona Bowie emphasises the element of "surroundings," "environment" and therefore relation, stressing that the term "environment" comes from the French word "environner" - "to surround" and means our surroundings, everything that affects development of animals and life of plants (Bowie 2008, p. 118).

“childishness” text? This question visualises the power of therapeutic and eco-friendly influence of the eco-fairy tale’s simple words:

“Please remember my dear mate cleanliness is just great
 Clean water never fear, let dirt forever disappear
 Only kings with little power lead their life without a shower
 What’s the moral of this story? No shower, no glory
 Do you want your health to be splendid washing hands is recommended
 Let’s keep the bathing king with us and defeat dirt without fuss
 Our schools can look nice at a very little price
 If we collect dreadful litter our cities will be neater
 For our rivers best solution is not to allow more pollution.
 If we clean in the morning, evening and at noon, bad habits will vanish very soon!”

(Marzęcka 2008, s. 9).

Washed hands, defeated bad habits, fulfilled commitments towards oneself and the world. Such a state of reality constitutes a tempting vision for a contemporary reader not only due to a satisfactory sense of order and well completed “training in cleanliness” but because an eco-friendly lifestyle is nowadays the full (naturally utopian, i.e. habitually myth-creating) integration with the environment. In the realities of late modernity, it can mean not only classic strategies of environmental protection incorporated into one’s everyday schedule, but also a subjective feeling of the sense of the world resulting from a conviction that one’s self-fulfilment is in progress. An eco-fairy tale coherently teaches both orders, in both codes of literary “childishness” and “adulthood,” and its outcome is simply this double “childish-adult” or “adult-childish” reader pleased with himself (and with the world). And in late modernity, this learning makes life easier for everyone.

SOURCE

Marzęcka A. (2008), *Zwycięstwo Króla Czystości*, “Magazyn Pielęgniarki i Położnej” 9.

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ANNEX⁴¹

A VICTORY OF THE KING OF CLEANLINESS

(Marzęcka 2008)

When the night falls outside, deep but pale
 I hope you will listen to my fable or rather a fairy tale
 Would you listen to my plotting, or maybe a pleasant talking?
 Would you? Then listen carefully as I will tell you cheerfully
 At this story beginning I will tell you about a niche of cleaning
 There, where the Sky and Earth touch, and by a lake baby-birds hutch
 Forests beautiful and majestic spread in which beeches and hornbeams
 can be met

Behind the clearing, near the forest's brink, lives the piggy wiggy king
 His castle, though not vast, is covered all in dust
 If you go for the forest's exploration, soon you will see it's devastation
 Frolicking is all the king does, chiefly rolling in the grass
 Everyone is afraid, to meet him on their way
 Different tricks he can perform, even turn you into stone.
 The only defense, what a pity, is water in a great quantity
 A bit further, behind a clearing, lives a charming king of cleaning
 What the king values best, is order, fresh fragrance and tidiness
 Both kings are engaged, in a cleaning war full of rage
 Bathing king though distressed is often piggy wiggy's guest
 And persuades him with a zest, not to be such a pest
 But piggy wiggy makes threats, and the bathing king briefly dreads
 "That you to my dwelling come, not afraid of any harm...
 I can my evil magic employ and your court easily destroy"
 Regaining composure the cleanliness king replies:
 I don't want any fight for we are both kings with pride
 But the forest will not glitter when it's strewn with tones of litter

Once streams and rivers meandered here with waters crystal clear
 Today everyone knows that sewage in them flows
 You destroyed almost all in a forest that's not small
 Think about your careless action, discontinue great destruction

⁴¹ Full text of *The Victory of King of Cleanness*. The text of the eco-fairly tale *Zwycięstwo Króla Czystości* (*A Victory of the King of Cleanliness*) from polish version translated by Jadwiga Smith.

But the magician with a roar changes into a wild boar
And he wants to tear apart his opponent who's quite smart
Even though without a gun, the bathing king can quickly run
In a forest running race he can everyone outpace
Still, to avoid being caught he finds a hiding spot
There he waits in peace for the conflict to decrease
But not ready for ceasefire piggy wiggy tries his fab attire
A disguise of a squirrel he puts on and chases the king until dawn
No one would have guessed how the situation then progressed
Dark clouds change into rain and wash the king not in vain
He still chases the bathing king around the forest ring
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For our rivers best solution is not to allow more pollution.
If we clean in the morning, evening and at noon, bad habits will vanish very
soon!"