

## MOTIFS OF INANIMATE NATURE AND ATMOSPHERIC PHENOMENA IN POLISH FOLKTALES

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this paper is to describe Polish folktales about inanimate nature and atmospheric phenomena. There are three reasons for the selection of this topic. Firstly, motifs of nature are not popular in Polish folktales despite the fact that nature itself plays an important role in the life of villagers. Secondly, the themes included in these folktales refer not only to Christianity, but also to local beliefs as well as to Slavic myths. And thirdly, Polish folktales perpetuate the separation of man from nature, with the latter being evil and dangerous.

**Keywords:** communication, elements, folklore, folktales, local deities and demons, man, nature, Poland, Slavs' myths

In the well-known Polish comedy *Miś (Teddy Bear)*, 1980, directed by Stanisław Bareja), there is a scene which humorously refers to weather. In that scene the children ask Lech Ryś, an officer of the Citizens' Militia (Milicja Obywatelska), also labelled as Uncle Good-Advice, to advise them how to deal with their friend who uses "bad words":

Tomek Mazur: *So much snow. Butterfly's leg! I have been waiting for the bus for 15 minutes! Chicken's feather!*

A girl: *I can't believe it! How dare you use so many nasty words!*

Tomek Mazur: *And what am I supposed to say? My feet got frozen. Butterfly's leg!*

Uncle Good-Advice: *As you can see, the climate has been almost always against us; but still, this gives us no reason to use bad words, or does it?*

A boy: *Precisely! We are telling him that too.*

Uncle Good-Advice: *I will give you a piece of advice. Next time they cut off the supply of hot water, or the radiators stop working, or else, if the public transport stops functioning and your friend starts swearing, then do you know what you should do?*

Children: *What is that?*

Uncle Good-Advice: *Just pretend you cannot hear what he says. That you cannot hear.* (Miś 1980)

What is particularly telling is the pronouncement of the officer of the Citizens' Militia, who says: "the climate has been almost always against us", since these words do justice to the peculiarities of how nature is conceived in Poland – it is perceived as an obstacle to both life and work or even as a danger. It transpires that such judgements are most often encountered these days in the output of popular culture and – which is of special interest to us – in folk literature, and especially in Polish folktales, in which what was preserved is – as can be justifiably conjectured – the most ancient ways of conceiving the relationship between man and nature.<sup>1</sup>

The reason why the present paper deals with Polish tales is that one of their functions is to inform and to elucidate the situations and phenomena occurring in man's environment, including nature itself. And that is why, when it comes to fairy tales, the fact that fantastic threads are inextricably intertwined with references to real life is neither surprising nor untypical. However, before I go on to analyze Polish tales, let us note the below fragments of two Japanese folktales. The first one comes from Okinawa and runs as follows:

*A long, long time ago, when God (kamisama) created the Yaeyama Islands, they were covered with rocks. So God decided he had to bring something else to the islands so they would look better. One day he called all the trees together. ... To the first, the fukugi tree [Garcinia subelliptica – M.L.], God said, 'You have a strong body and leaves, so you will live around houses and protect them from typhoons and fire.' ... To the second, the pine tree, God said, 'You should grow around the villages and show off your big pine needles and protect the people from evil spirits and epidemic diseases.' ... Then came the bamboo, ... and adan tree [Pandanus odoratissimus – M.L.]. To them, God said, 'Bamboo, you will save drops of rain and keep them in the soil with your roots stretching wide. You will protect people from a landslide in heavy rains and from cracks in the earth during earthquakes. ... Finally, adan tree, I will let you live on the seashore to protect the sand from big waves.' (Endo 1995: 21–24)*

And another example from Yamagata prefecture in Japan:

*In ancient times, Oguni was surrounded by mountains where an enormous snake (orochi) and a crab (ōgani) appeared, and the latter cut off the former's tail. The enormous snake got angry, which sparked a duel between the two. Black clouds covered the sky, while the ferocity of the duel caused an earthquake... (Yamagata 1960: 133)*

The significance of these folktales lies in the fact that they contain references to the geographical location of Japan and to the dangers related thereto. This in turn means that their content abounds in the sensations that are fairly important for the Japanese society. In the former tale, we encounter an unusual case of comprehensive protection of man from dangerous natural phenomena.<sup>2</sup> In the latter one, on the other hand, we can observe the explanation of the cause of the occurrence of an earthquake. After all, typhoons, tsunamis, and deluges are rather frequent phenomena, and they are easily found in many parts of Japan (cf. Yamada 2016). It should also be noted that in the countries where natural phenomena hindering or even threatening daily human life occur, this fact is reflected in tales, legends, and myths. Depending on a culture, there may appear explanations to the effect that natural disasters stem from the influence of accidental forces (deities, animals, etc.) or that they constitute a punishment for bad or evil people's actions.

In the folk perception of nature – and there is nothing strange about it – nature is depicted as simultaneously good and evil or negative and positive.

Incidentally, we should add that the folk perception of nature also encompasses some cases in which nature is depicted as axiologically neutral. To put it more precisely, the said ambivalence – as opposed to myths, in which it figures much more conspicuously – assumes a rather peculiar form in folktales. What is thereby meant is that when it comes to folktales, there is either too little or too much of something therein. In other words, the sun, wind or rain are not bad in and of themselves. Quite the contrary, they might be even useful. But it is only too much sun (heat waves), too many gales (hurricanes) or torrential rains that do harm and pose a risk to man as well as imperil his crops or man's labor (e.g. fishing). We should also bear in mind that in various regions of Poland this situation might be different since where the above-mentioned phenomena occur in excess more frequently, they might be perceived as more negative. After all, these phenomena are fairly accurately documented in ethnographic literature (cf. Wróblewska 2002: 150–153).

## **THE PECULIARITIES OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF POLAND AND OF SOURCE MATERIALS**

Before I proceed, I would like to take a pause to reflect on the issue – rather untypical of folklore studies – of geography and to consider what implications might follow therefrom, which could prove to be of interest from the point of view of the subject matter. Poland lies within one climatic zone and occupies a rather extensive area.<sup>3</sup> To appreciate the peculiarities of threats related to nature, it should be added that nature in Poland is not homogeneous: there is access to the sea, mountains, lakes, rivers, as well as deserts and dunes. Let us take a closer look at them and try to determine the essence of their respective dangers to man's health, life, and general well-being.<sup>4</sup>

- Sea: the Baltic Sea (Morze Bałtyckie). Types of threats: dangerous and starvation-related, e.g., storms, thunderstorms, drowning, shortage of fish, freezing, abrasion.
- Lakes: (Masuria – Mazury), Brodnickie Lake District (Pojezierze Brodnickie), Pomeranian Lake District (Pojezierze Pomorskie), Suwałki Lake District (Pojezierze Suwalskie), Greater Poland Lake District (Pojezierze Wielkopolskie), and a large number of single lakes and ponds. Types of threats: dangerous and starvation-related, e.g., storms, thunderstorms, drowning, shortage of fish, freezing.
- Bogs (whole of Poland) and marshes: Biebrza Marshes (Bagna Biebrzańskie) and small instances thereof across the whole of Poland. Type of threat: dangerous, e.g. drowning.
- Mountains: Świętokrzyskie Mountains (Góry Świętokrzyskie) and their ranges, Carpathian Mountains (Karpaty) and their ranges as well as the Sudetes (Sudety) and their ranges. Types of threats: dangerous and starvation-related, e.g., avalanches, snow and ice, thunderstorms, cold, earthquakes.
- Deserts and dunes: Błędów Desert (Pustynia Błędowska), Kozłowska Desert (Pustynia Kozłowska), Siedlecka Desert (Pustynia Siedlecka), the Moving Dunes near Łeba (Ruchome wydmy koło Łeby), Baltic Sea shore dunes, inland dunes. Type of threat: dangerous, e.g., wind, back-filling by sand.
- Other parts of Poland. Type of threat: dangerous and starvation-related, e.g., windstorms, droughts, downpours, rock bursts, thunderstorms, blizzards, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes.

Keeping Japanese folktales and the above information in mind, it could seem that in Poland we should also find many instances of the folktales alluding to atmospheric phenomena as being dangerous to life and limb. However, it transpires that the actual situation is diametrically different from this expectation, and it is hard to point to robust and clear examples.<sup>5</sup> Uncovering natural-phenomena-related threads in Polish tales is not easy and requires caution as well as making use of appropriate analytical instruments. It is mainly due to the fact that the threads are rather cursory or – as we might hastily conjecture – they serve as a rhetoric means of making the plot more attractive. However, this does not imply that there are no cases in which the threads related to inanimate nature and atmospheric phenomena occur directly. Still, they are a rarity and this fact is interesting in itself and calls for a separate study.

Let us note that what occurs more frequently than the threads related to natural disasters are hints of atmospheric phenomena, which to a large extent play the role of the background for the unfolding events. The said background is quite peculiar for it serves to embellish the plot, to highlight the protagonists' emotions or fear. The instances of this type are easily found in numerous folktales in various regions of Poland. In the tale from Podhale (the region of the Tatra Mountains), "O Marysi 'Dalekiej'" (About Mary the 'Distant'), Kazimierz Tetmajer expressed the protagonist's sadness in the following manner:

*But once a downpour came, there came cloudy, gloomy autumn-approaching days, the snow was scattered over the hill, then the fog fell, the valleys got shrouded in darkness: his soul almost dripped off out of sorrow. (Tetmajer 1987: 90).*

And further:

*Finally, he sat at a spruce, it was all dark above the forest, and the snow was scattering sort of raindrops all around and the mountains were covered in fog. (ibid.: 94)*

In the tale "Zbójecka chałupa" (The Robber's Cottage), also originating from Podhale, the depiction of a shop robbery is preceded by the following description:

*Once upon a time, at the beginning of November, a horrendous gale, raging for three days and over two nights wreaked havoc in the Tatra Mountains so that at some places the whole hillside was covered with fallen spruces, ... Then came the rain, then snow, and towards the end of November, it suddenly turned freezing cold. (ibid.: 62)*

On the other hand, in the Kashubian (a region of the Pomerania) tale “Krośnięta i rybacy [Krôśnięta a rëbôcë]” (Krośnięta and Fishermen), we can read about “krośnięta” (a dwarf in Kashubian folktales; cf. Sychta 1968: 236–238) who abducts fishermen’s children under rather peculiar circumstances:

*Stealthily, once the night spread its black wings, when through the clouds a silver moon beamed pervasively, while the sea was peacefully rocking its waters, they started leaving their houses only to lurk around these cottages in which they knew that it was exactly in them that there were fishermen’s infants. They took those infants with themselves and in place of them they put their own children. (Samp 1985: 95)*

In the short Kashubian tale “Dąb i trzcina [Dąb ë strzëna]” (Oak and Cane), the description of the tragic fate of an oak tree is preceded by the following: “Suddenly a ferocious storm broke out” (Samp 1985: 20).

Furthermore, in the Kashubian tale “Adon z Dziwnowa” (Adon from Dziwnow), while towing a whale through the sea, a storm broke out, which – once personified – was labelled by the protagonists as “purtek” (a devil or demon in Kashubian folktales, cf. Sychta 1970: 227; Dźwigoł 2004: 113):

*The storm was brought about by a frontal cloud, bolts and storms will be coming for the forthcoming three days. Then a violent storm will come and things will get even worse. (Necel 2012: 25)*

In the region of Greater Poland (in the neighborhood of Poznań city), in the tale “Madejowe łoże” (Madej’s bed), the protagonist on his way to hell encounters “the sound of empyreal, breakers, scary whistling of winds, horrendous crash as if millwheels were rotating, a crack of flames” (Kapełus & Krzyżanowski 1957: 240).

In the village of Łęczyn, close to the town of Urzędów, a tale originates about the devil carrying a man, which is accompanied by the occurrence of a gale:

*Cocks are only crowing, but I went outside and there – he says – such a gale, such a gale – he says – is howling. I got scared, how come such a gale? I take a look – he says – and here I see the devil carrying a man... (Michalec & Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2019: 88)*

In the tales originating from Masuria and containing a daemonic thread, the moment of the appearance of a “kłobuk” (a demon according to Slavic folk beliefs) in a cottage is accompanied by a rainy season: “One year, it was raining heavily,

for the whole week on end it was pouring down with rain until vermin started to die” (Koneczna & Pomianowska 1956: 66).

The last example is as follows: in the tale originating from Opole Silesia (Śląsk Opolski) “O trzech braciach z Opola” (About Three Brothers from Opole) the depiction of an “utopec” (water demon in Slavic mythology) waking up in the River Oder is accompanied with the following description:

*From the mountain of Ślęza, the gales drove a severe storm all the way to Opole. The sky went darker due to violet and pale clouds, whilst the River Oder on this horrific day suddenly turned gray and murky, ... The sky was permeated by lightnings which severed the thick darkness like golden swords. (Dobkiewiczowa 1963: 5)*

On the basis of the materials cited above, one may come to believe that the motifs connected with nature are rather easy to decipher and apart from some aesthetic value they do not contribute anything particular to illuminate the relationship between man and nature. However, there is more to these motifs than just one option of making use of them. What is more, they may (and they do) serve different meanings and purposes.

## **FOLKTALES ABOUT SCARY NATURE AND THEIR PECULIARITIES**

A distinctive feature of Polish tales is the fact of attributing to inanimate nature – and mainly to atmospheric phenomena – the property of being dangerous to man’s life and health or to his environment. The reasons for this situation can be sought for beyond the scripts of tales, the sources of which are found – depending on the region of Poland – in the proliferated modes (not only the folk mode) of understanding reality. These in turn comprise mainly the threads stemming from Catholicism – especially in its folk aspect – as well as from local reminders and Slavic beliefs. The foundations of this worldview are rather loose references to the Old and New Testament, the Apocrypha, oracles (e.g. *Księgi sibiliańskie* (Sibylline Books)) and oral stories (cf. Zowczak 2000: 7; Grzeszczak 2018; Michalda 2009; Nowa Sybilla 1913). It should be added that an important constituent of these convictions is being based upon the belief that the world is susceptible to the workings of two forces: a good and an evil one, both of them having participated (and still doing so) in its creation as well as in daily events (also at the individual level; cf. Szyjewski 2003: 29). As a result of this sort of

understanding, amongst the current inhabitants of the area of Poland, what was (and still is) dangerous to them was inextricably connected with evil forces: devils, daemons, and other entities (cf. Dźwigoł 2004: 8). That is why people equated everything that was hostile (or even dangerous) to them with nature, thus somehow implying that they were not a part of the latter. In other words, man is isolated from nature, which proves to be dangerous to him. Man does not constitute a part of nature in the sense that he does not feel as if he is nature's integral part, whilst accepting the natural phenomena as they actually occur. He comes to terms with deluges, storms, and earthquakes, regarding them as indispensable elements of his surroundings.

As a result, one may adopt a three-fold understanding of nature as being evil (or dangerous). First of all, it is evil in itself. In other words, it is always dangerous to man's life and limb as well as to his well-being. In the collective consciousness of the inhabitants of Poland (and this applies across many regions), what appear to be the most frightening (unfavorable) are – among others – wind, rain, storm, and rainbow (cf. Bartmiński & Szadura 2012; Smyk 2018: 316). By way of an example, we can point to the following tale about a gale:

*Not all the phenomena brought to existence by Jesus are congenial to human beings. People do not tolerate a gale. They get frightened when they feel it. They run away from it and swear at it. They even throw knives at it, and all this is due to the fact that they recognize a gale by its damaging powers but they do not know how it looks like. And a gale in its turn, due to the fact that it is invisible, is so angry at Jesus that it uproots trees, blows away roofs of people's houses and carries them to some other locations, and it does all that harm out of sheer malice. (Simonides 2010: 30)<sup>6</sup>*

And the following illustrates some harmful effects of the rainbow:

*Earlier on, people used to believe that a rainbow emerged so as to suck in the water remaining after either a storm or rain. Yet, the rainbow stuck to water as a mushroom to a leave and it kept drinking that water even when storms or rains were gone. ... Because when there was a drought and people were waiting for water, and there was just a mere drizzle, the rainbow entered a lake and from it collected water up to the sky. (Simonides 2010: 30)<sup>7</sup>*

An interesting example is provided by a tale related to an earthquake:<sup>8</sup>

*Earth is normally rather stable, only exceptionally it may collapse and even if it does, it applies exclusively to the soil of graveyards and only on tombstones so that coffins cannot reach the sky. It was believed that earth is founded upon one pillar or is supported by some animate being such as a bullock, buffalo, dragon or others. If that creature ever moves, then an earthquake takes place. (Simonides 2010: 37)*

In the region of Pomerania tales circulate about a sea daemon referred to as “szolińc” (“szalińc”; cf. Sychta 1972a: 215–216), which is responsible for causing gales:

*Gale szalińc – a player above all the players  
Grabs the devilish fiddle  
Jumping over Hel’s<sup>9</sup> dunes  
Shrouded in a dusty cloud of sand,  
Willing to antagonize everybody  
As bad as purtk, as envious as smantek<sup>10</sup>  
(Fenikowski 1978: 52)*

In the region of Opole Silesia, we may encounter numerous tales about water demons labelled as “utopiec”, which stymie human life, e.g.:

*The water in the river was clear so life evolved therein. The most important inhabitants of the river were utopiecs. These were water-inhabiting creatures sort of resembling nymphs. What characterized them was the fact that once somebody in the evening rambled along the riverbank, they pulled them underwater. (Simonides 1977: 131)*

The above is slightly differently preserved in Silesian tales related to demons inhabiting coal mines:

*Once upon a time in the mines of silver and zinc ore, there lived ghost Szarlej. That was an evil ghost lurking for the lives of gwarks – currently referred to as miners; he did harm to them, that is, he swamped the drifts, plucked boulders off the ceiling and knocked them over so that they would fall on the miners, flooded mine tunnels with water, exuded poisonous ‘earthly odors’, that is, gases; in other words – there were many bad things to be said about him. Eventually, he flooded coal mines and zinc ores and moved to some other place – God knows where. (Morcinek 1984: 58)*

The region of Pomerania is no worse in this respect. In the Kashubian tale, there appears a thread of “Klabaternik” (or “Klabiternik”)<sup>11</sup> presaging the doom to the sailors at sea:

*Here they encountered the southwest storm. They passed by the island, but the storm grew in intensity. Somebody noticed an infant at the front mast. The captain said it was Klabaternik and it presaged that the ship would sink. ... The captain quickly approached the front of the mast and drew a hidden shoe and knocked it against the wiry rope. The infant turned into a man in a dark blue attire. The storm hit once again with its dying-down vehemence and the said man disappeared and silence prevailed again. (Necel 2012: 141)<sup>12</sup>*

This sort of cases in their pure form are encountered least frequently. We might also venture a hypothesis that they are mainly preserved in oral form.

Upon another understanding, nature is ambivalent. This in turn means that it might be good (favorable) but it may also become evil (unfavorable). In this case, it is difficult to say why this happens to be so and what may trigger danger. What is illustrative of the above is an excerpt from the tale by Maria Konopnicka, “O krasnoludkach i o sierotce Marysi” (On Dwarves and a Little Orphan Girl Mary), dating back to 1896, with the said excerpt pertaining to the actions of Queen Tatra (Królowa Tatra). To put it sharply, what is meant is what follows:

*And suddenly a bang pierced the air as if a hundred thunderbolts hit and the choir of the spruce forest became audible, with the choir – while playing its black harps – singing forcefully what follows:*

*– Queen Tatra is formidable and inspires awe. Her head is lifted high above the earth. The crown of ice embellishes her temples – the curtain of snows drips down her neck, the cloth of pale fog covers her silhouette. Her gloomy and vindictive eyes throw thunderbolts, her voice is a bang of streams and of thunders of storms. Her anger ignites lightnings and crashes forests, her bed – clothed with black clouds – does not provide any sleep to anybody, her feet mash each flower and all the grass... Her stone-cold heart is never moved by anything. Queen Tatra is formidable and inspires awe. Yet, once the echoes died, another choir became audible, playing a song on silver lutes. This choir in turn sang as follows:*

*– Queen Tatra is good and merciful. She weaves thin fogs, she covers the nakedness of the mountains, she makes garlands out of mugo pine and puts them on their foreheads. She turns dead snows into clear streams,*

*she waters fields and lowlands so that they could yield the crops of bread. She provides shelter to their eagles and rocks their featherless nestlings in high nests. She gives shelter to a rupicapra in her chambers and protects it from hunters. She marvels at the valleys with her sweet eyes and protects a flower therein from scorching heat. She weaves wonderful wall hangings out of velvet moss and lays them at the bottom of her secret abysses. She feeds poor people, who are not endowed with either fields or cereals, and she teaches the children from highlanders' cottages to marvel at the sky where she resides. Queen Tatra is good and merciful! (Konopnicka 1958: 141)*

In Kashubian tales there is a god of sea called Gosk (cf. Samp 1987: 39), which is also marked with the ambivalence in its actions:

*Long long time ago, the only master of the Baltic Sea was God Gosk – the god inhabiting a palace at the bottom of the sea. When he was resting, the sea was calm and no waves roiled its surface. When he was walking around his property, a cool breeze was blowing into the sails of fishermen's boats. However, sometimes Gosk had a tantrum. Then a storm stirred the sea, ominous waves started hitting against the shores and all the adventurers who did not manage to return to their homes from their sea voyages in time, got lost in the sea abyss. (Bursztyn n.d.)*

Quite similarly to the previous case, it is difficult to point to pure motifs which would demonstrate the ambivalence of nature. This is mainly due to Christian influences, which affected both the character of the tale and its message.<sup>13</sup>

The third case is related to the kind of tales in which nature is dangerous (evil) but only as a punishment for a violation of faith or principles as well as for wronging other people. What neatly illustrates the above is the following short tale:

*[A girl on her way to church spots an elderly man sitting on a stone] And that was Wind itself. [The girl passes him without even greeting him, for which the latter decides to make the girl feel ashamed one day. Then the girl leaves the church], and then, an unexpected sudden gust of wind was so strong that it lifted her dress and shirt all the way up to her head...; and only then did she realize that it was due to the elderly man's agency. And this is how Wind made the girl ashamed. (Bartmiński & Bączkowska & Prorok 2012: 334)<sup>14</sup>*

We can also point to the following tales as a telling instance of the combination of prior beliefs with Christianity:

*Our mother told us that evil resides in storms. What accounts for it is the fact that when earthly evil masses, it finally starts moving upwards. And then, for it not to reach the sky – because only good resides there – it hides in clouds. And when evil excessively masses therein, it must explode. It usually explodes when people quarrel, are in conflict and have fierce arguments. This somehow affects clouds. And they in turn throw their thunderbolts which target people – and not accidental people but the ones which engender evil themselves. (Simonides 2010: 28)<sup>15</sup>*

Another interesting instance of older – most likely Slavic – beliefs being supplemented with a Christian thread are folktales about lightning-ignited fire, for example:

*Before, one did not want to extinguish lightning-ignited fires because it is morally wrong for people to oppose God's will. Similar fires were only to be extinguished with milk. (Simonides 2010: 29)*

There is another tale – originating from the neighborhood of the town of Opoczno and being representative of the type of understanding under consideration – “Baranek na bagnach” (A Lamb in the Swamps), which is about drowning drunk men in the swamps as a form of punishment. It reads as follows:

*A peasant was coming back from a fair in the town to his cottage. He was drunk as a lord. The whole pavement belonged to him. Nay, he was even bumping into trees and bushes. The peasant spotted an about-half-a-year-old lamb, ... One should not let it free. ... Upon reflection, he took to chasing this creature. ... But the lamb was cunning, it got itself almost straight into the chaser's hands and legs and thus lured him into the swamps ... The peasant is chasing after the lamb on and on and ...bang! ...into the swamps! (Wojewódzki 1974: 47)*

A similar thread – the appearance of an intermediary in the enforcement of a punishment – can be found in the Kashubian tale, “W wąwozie szczęścia” (In the Gorge of Happiness), which tells about a punishment exacted by a “purtek”:

*Before the mother managed to forestall his actions, he had jumped into a tall rock towering over a shore. The veins got swollen on his forehead,*

*and the eternal boulder started wobbling and it eventually fell down the abyss with a bang...*

*Son – said the mother fearfully – you should not have tampered with that rock, perhaps you thereby infuriated a purtek who was residing on it. Now we will take his vengeance on you ... It was Trella, the master of these lands and lakes.*

*– Uh huh, got you, adventurer! Now you will not escape me – he shouted.*

*– It was you who threw into the lake the rock on which I lay ... And you will answer for it. (Necel 2012: 40–41)*

Furthermore, a typical Christian thread is found in the fairy tale about a battle against Christianity waged by a nobleman called Boruta,<sup>16</sup> who got punished by a strike of lightning:

*In Kuyavia there lived quite a knight, Boruta. ... He did not want to pay homage to anyone: neither to God, nor to the king. ... He was in an open conflict with the bishop and a monk. ... The clergy and Christian people were consumed with fear, while Boruta was relentlessly on the rampage, threatening not only Kuyavia, but also moving far beyond Płock, ... Devilish forces were his allies. ... However, the devils, even if they wanted, were powerless to do anything, ... And when he was galloping around Łęczycza, his anger turned into insane hotheadedness. ... Suddenly, the sky went darker and the bolt hit Boruta straight into his heart. He spread his hands and dropped dead spiritless. (Bunikiewicz 1989: 351–356)<sup>17</sup>*

A similar tone manifests itself in the tale on the destruction of the city of Hel, which originates from the region of Pomerania:

*On a parcel of sandy land reaching far into the sea, with the land being surrounded by the waves of the Baltic Sea from three sides, where nowadays grow miserable pine trees and in autumn moors turn pink, many centuries ago there stood a formidable and rich city called Hel. ... However, after some time people inhabiting Hel began to change ... From then onwards, idleness prevailed in Hel. ... The poor were forgotten. God looked down on it and frowned angrily. And then the sky got covered by clouds and the resultant darkness descended onto earth and sea so that the inhabitants of Hel thought that the Last Judgement was close. ... That is why, each successive day, fewer fish were caught in nets so that it made no sense to set out on a voyage to the sea on a fish cutter! (Rabska 1925: 12)*

Let us take heed of the fact that a distinctive feature of the tales of this type is that there is an intermediary therein, that is somebody or something leading man – as a form of punishment – to a certain spot, for example, a lake or swamps in order to deprive him of life or health. In some cases, the intermediary imposes on people a punishment in the form of wind or lightning, which leads to the deprivation of people's property. Usually, depending on the region, the entity that counts as an intermediary is the devil (*diabeł*), "purtek", an imp (*chochlik*), an animal, Skarbnik (a mine ghost occurring in the tales from the region of Upper Silesia, cf. Martin 2005) or Ghost of the Karkonosze (a part of the Sudetes) Mountains (or Liczyrzepa; cf. Jech 2008). I would like to emphasize that the tales of the third type occur most frequently in Polish folktales across all its regions.

A separate issue related to the above-mentioned three understandings of the dangers from nature lurking for man is a contention that it is possible to take counteraction and preventive measures against them. To illustrate this, I may point to an excerpt of another version of the tale from Pomerania about the city of Hel and the process of abrasion and the protection therefrom:

*One day, the wind started blowing eastwards for a change and it kept blowing for several days on end. The waves were eroding Hel while pruning it. Fishermen were petrified and started building a dyke. However, one night such a violent storm hit that Hel's shore started to gradually disappear, ... The storm was ceaseless, ... The dwellers of Hel were very hard-working and given the fact that the island was well equipped with necessary raw materials, they started to build dykes in Hel anew. After several years, a new church was erected, which was bigger than the previous one and additionally made of brick. ... Surprisingly enough, after some time, the fishermen found on the shore a golden statue of the Virgin Mary and brought it all the way over to Hel's church. From then onwards, they believe her to be the queen of fishermen and of the Polish shore ... so that she takes care of them during storms... (Necel 2012: 56)*

A separate example is the tale originating from the Ogonowice village, situated in Lower Silesia, which is concerned with the fear of storm and with the belief that it is a confession that shall provide the protection from lightnings:

*–If a lightning hit us, we shall die without a confession. The confession would come in handy. What a pity, a priest is missing, but we may confess our sins to one another. ... The woman crossed herself and started confessing. ...*

– *Keep confessing, keep confessing, or otherwise a lightning may hit you!*  
(Wojewódzki 1974: 102)

These actions are mainly based on magical thinking that it is possible to influence God's or a daemon's decisions or even an atmospheric phenomenon identified with evil powers. To this end, in folktales, one engages in counteracting magical practice such as spells, gifts, erecting churches, as well as prayers of supplication and making good deeds, with the latter group of preventing measures having more or less the same function. Yet another action taken in order to neutralize ominous atmospheric phenomena was, for example, throwing a knife against the wind (cf. Simonides 2010: 30). Let us also pay attention to the fact that in Polish folktales magical thinking marked with the fear of forces of nature is still proliferating.

## **THE METAPHOR OF FEAR IN POLISH FOLKTALES AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

Julian Krzyżanowski (1892–1976), a Polish researcher and classificationist of folktales, wrote that “taming nature means making oneself its part, entering its rhythm, and coming to terms with what flows therein, including what is dangerous about it” (cf. Krzyżanowski 1980: 65). In this part of the paper, I shall endeavor to justify my claim that in fact the truth is just the opposite. Namely, Polish fairy tales do not talk about taming the nature but affirm man's separation from what threatens him. In other words, the contents of Polish tales do not evince the process of taming nature, nor of making man its integral part.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, one of the most important functions of tales is to illuminate the causes of a given phenomenon (let us add that an explanation is never complete but always valid only to a certain extent).<sup>19</sup> Secondly, taming is the process leading up not to understanding somebody or something, but rather to achieving the state of subordination, subjugating somebody or something to us (or conversely: subjugating us to somebody or something). That is why we can justifiably claim that Polish tales do not include the process of taming, let alone making man a part of nature. Instead, they rather preserve the state of separation by trying to explain relevant causes. Nor – it should be added – is the use of nature-related threads reducible to mere rhetoric devices.

Let us take a closer look at the descriptions of inanimate nature and atmospheric phenomena, and let us try to reconstruct the way present-day Polish inhabitants relate to them. What shall prove handy for uncovering the said

content is the investigations on metaphors employed in cognitive linguistics, especially the book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). The significance of this work reduces to the fact – which is going to be of some aid to the investigations to follow – that it justifies the link between a metaphor and thinking as well as acting (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 25). In order to put the thought more explicitly, let us resort to an excerpt from an Egyptian tale: “One day, when Prince Hasan was strolling about and his turban was flapping in the wind almost like a banner...” (Bushnaq 2013: 86).

Let us note that in the above fragment, wind proves to be wind and nothing else.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, the authors (or narrators) in Polish folktales, while trying to characterize nature, make ample references to fear, to instilling the sense of danger and peril, or – to a lesser extent – to the feeling of discomfort and burden. In other words, the atmospheric phenomena appearing in Polish folktales, such as wind, storm, or winter are not only wind, storm, or winter, respectively. Rather, they are a “horrific wind”, “terrifying storm”, and “harsh winter”.

It transpires that wind *qua* wind is not so emotionally charged as when one assigns an ontological status thereto. Let us scrutinize this issue based on two instances of folktales originating from Kuyavia as well as from Pomerania and the Masurian Lake District, with one tale per region:

*Already the silent wind is carrying a lovely song.* (Dunin-Karwicka 2012: 124)

*The sun is walking low, slightly above the Kuyavian land.* (Dunin-Karwicka 2012: 124)

*It was only when the sun had set that he set foot on some land.* (Necel 2012: 97–98)

*And suddenly it went dark, the thick cloud came and the chest with gold disappeared.* (Koneczna & Pomianowska 1956: 54)

Based on the above-cited examples, we can see that the atmospheric phenomena and inanimate nature were assigned the status of a “being”, thus granting them the status of independently acting “entities”, that is, the ones having some internal (or external) goal. This is evidenced by the underlined phrases in the quotes above; the phrases imply that wind, sun or cloud might move independently and take other actions. As a result, they might make evaluative judgements and act according to their respective principles. What is more, we can ascribe some sort of “personhood” to wind and clouds. For that reason,

generally speaking, nature purposefully and independently of man's will intervenes into the latter's life.

While analyzing the content of Polish tales and resorting to theories of cognitive linguistics, we may distinguish one fundamental metaphor, which is the metaphor of fear. In its weaker form, it refers to a sense of danger or discomfort. Let us scrutinize the examples below:<sup>21</sup>

*Half a year ago, on 9 January, the Rozewie coast and Hel Peninsula were hit by a violent hurricane from the north. And then, malicious waves eroded the side of the Rozewie bank, which in summer started to fleck off gradually. (Necel 2012: 34–35)*

*Thunderbolts were striking so that the earth was shattering. (ibid.: 37)*

*He prayed passionately in Jastarnia's church for winter to finally retreat from the entire Polish coast, .... However, the winter was harsh so that it could not even get eradicated with an axe. (ibid.: 59)*

*The water must have suddenly come up and collected them. (ibid.: 68)*

*And soon early spring came. Enormous snowstorms were moving from the north into a slightly heated land. The snowstorms overshadowed the whole world. Lumps of snow set themselves on the icy surface. After some time, the ice began to break, and the wind kept howling from the north towards the shore. (Necel 1975: 23)*

*Once the weather turned favorable, they set out on a further journey. (Necel 2012: 29)*

*It was in summer. The weather was beautiful. A cloud came out. It carried a storm with itself. The lightning began to strike! (Wojewódzki 1974: 102)*

Employing the metaphor of fear was supposed to serve not only as a rhetoric device, embellishment or to render the message more explicit. It was meant to preserve a sense of danger, with the danger emanating from Nature itself. The incessant reiteration of the phrases such as “thunderbolts started striking”, “thunderbolts were striking”, “the wind kept howling”, “a violent hurricane attacked”, “malicious waves eroded”, “the water must have suddenly come up and collected them”, “the winter was harsh”, “the snowstorms overshadowed”, reinforce among the local recipients thereof the feeling that particular atmospheric

phenomena are threatening, dangerous, and hampering life, labor, and land cultivation. All this put together only strengthens the claim that man is not a part of nature, and the former must act in such a manner as to avoid the dangers stemming from the latter. Nature – mainly inanimate nature but also atmospheric phenomena comprising nature – occupies a very important place in the Polish folk culture because the economic foundations of this culture were reduced to land cultivation and are contingent upon natural environment conditions (Bartmiński & Szadura 2012: 25). However, they become cultural phenomena and thus operate based on diametrically different principles and represent entirely different senses for the participants in the folk culture in Poland (cf. Hajduk-Nijakowska 2005: 16). As we can see, this very proliferation of folk visions of the separation of man from nature and of magical thinking leads neither to its understanding nor its taming as posited by Krzyżanowski (1980).

## CONCLUSION

In the introductory part of the paper, I invoked a fragment from the Polish film *Miś* in which, as was mentioned, Uncle Good-Advice accidentally expressed, culturally speaking, a very significant message: “the climate has been almost always against us”. These words neatly fit the “man versus nature” pattern. In other words, man is not considered part of nature and as such he is threatened with peril and other discomforts inflicted by the latter. Thus, he is forced to assume offensive (or defensive) postures, which are determined by cultural forms of magical thinking. Let us add that the relation between man and nature understood this way was subject – in various periods in which Polish folk culture assumed different shapes – to many influences, eventually assuming the form of a hybrid of local threads (usually originating from Slavic beliefs) and the Christian conception of punishment and reward in terms of what is permissible and what is prohibited. Polish tales, as an important part of folk literature, performed an important function of not only familiarizing the reader with the pictures of reality but, above all, they were supposed to disseminate rather specific behavioral patterns. And it is in this sense that tales proved to be an interesting research subject considered in the present paper.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Let us note that, for obvious reasons, they are not pure but in the course of various social and cultural transformations the new threads were added thereto.

- <sup>2</sup> It is also related to the issue of overcoming trauma resulting from natural disasters such as deluges, hurricanes, etc., as a result of which people die and their respective property gets lost (cf. Hajduk-Nijakowska 2005). An example of overcoming trauma, which has no equivalent in Poland, is provided by, say, the Japanese tale *Kibō-no oka. Sen'nensei-no kimi e* (The Hill of Hope: Dedicated to You in the Next Millennium) (cf. Shōji 2014) concerning trauma resulting from the tragedy after tsunami which hit Tohoku on 11 March 2011.
- <sup>3</sup> The territory of Poland is 312,696 km<sup>2</sup> and its climate is moderate.
- <sup>4</sup> Threats are constant, i.e., they do not change their nature in different regions of Poland.
- <sup>5</sup> Nor is it reflected in the typologies of tales (cf. Krzyżanowski 1962, 1963, 1980: 41). This situation by itself is interesting and it constitutes an issue calling for a separate study. This issue, however, unfortunately remains unresolved here.
- <sup>6</sup> Source and region unknown.
- <sup>7</sup> Source and region unknown.
- <sup>8</sup> This example is interesting inasmuch as earthquakes in Poland do not practically occur.
- <sup>9</sup> Hel is a Polish town on the Hel Peninsula.
- <sup>10</sup> *Smętek* (*smątk* or *smantek*) is a Kashubian malicious daemon (cf. Samp 1984: 20–47; Sychta 1972b: 95–96; Dźwigoń 2004: 110).
- <sup>11</sup> Let us note that the Kashubian version of Kabaternik considerably differs from Klabautermann, the latter originating from German tales and marked with a negative character (cf. Petzoldt 2003: 109).
- <sup>12</sup> A shoe in this tale is endowed with magical powers.
- <sup>13</sup> Christian influences have changed the sense of the Slavic source. For this reason, it is impossible (or very difficult) to understand the meaning of Slavic myths and local beliefs.
- <sup>14</sup> Source and region unknown.
- <sup>15</sup> Source and region unknown.
- <sup>16</sup> The name of a devil-nobleman from Polish legends.
- <sup>17</sup> Region unknown.
- <sup>18</sup> I do not exclude the possibility that such cases can occur. However, they are exceptionally rare.
- <sup>19</sup> In Polish tales, many a time there are only references to the fact that such a phenomenon does occur. However, the justification thereof is still wanting.
- <sup>20</sup> In this fairy tale, the wind has no reference to Egyptian mythology and the god of air and wind Shu (*šw*).
- <sup>21</sup> All the examples, save the last one, come from the region of Pomerania. The last quote originates from a tale from the region of Lower Silesia.

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