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## ANIMAL SYMBOLISM IN POLISH LITERARY CRITICISM

We live in a universe of symbols. Symbols are present in almost every aspect of our lives, from the world of children's literature to the modern world of advertising. Of course, the definition of a symbol differs depending on the field of study in which it is being applied. Yet, in almost every field, symbols are used to represent ideas, objects or concepts which cannot be represented through ordinary language. One such field in which symbols are widely used is literature. In this discipline, they represent concepts or things which are beyond human understanding. According to K. Jung, everything can assume symbolic significance: natural and man-made objects, or even abstract forms. In fact, he claims, "the whole cosmos is a potential symbol" [5, p. 232]. Jung's "natural" symbols are derived from the unconscious, while his "cultural" symbols help to express eternal truth and explain the collective image of a society. Jung considers animals to be among the most culturally bound symbols and argues that "the animal motif is usually symbolic of man's primitive and instinctual nature" [5, p. 237].

Obviously, animals may appear in literary texts in a variety of different ways, including myths, especially where the animal forms accompany gods and heroes as well as ordinary people. In fact, animals are the defining feature of the fable, one of the oldest narrative genres. Today, they still play a significant role in contemporary fantasy literature.

The purpose of the present study is to provide analysis of certain Polish literary critics' papers dedicated to depicting animals and utilizing animal symbolism in literature.

As for animal symbolism, literary critics differ in their specificity and arguments. In this aspect, Wendy Doniger, the author of the foreword to the encyclopedia "The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art", states: "animal symbolism works in two directions, anthropomorphism – projecting human qualities upon animals – and

zoomorphism – imagining humans as animals” [2, p. 10]. Anthropomorphism tells us comparatively little about the ways of animals. An anthropomorphic text imagines the animal behaving in much the same way as a human does. A zoomorphic text, in contrast, gives a more detailed observation of animals and bestial qualities which are imposed upon the human in a more precise way. According to W. Doniger, a zoomorphic text “teaches us simultaneously what sort of person it thinks that animal is like and what sort of animal it thinks that sort of person is like” [2, p. 10]. Anthropomorphism does not pay any attention to the fact that most animals cannot speak or make sounds which sound like human speech. For instance, there are few anthropomorphic stories about parrots. On the contrary, zoomorphism considers language to be a point of potential difference between humans and animals. Therefore, it tries to endow certain individual animals with human speech, or give humans the ability to understand animals. As W. Doniger points out, “anthropomorphism and zoomorphism are two different attempts to reduce the otherness between humans and animals, to see the sameness beneath the difference” [2, p. 10].

However, the sameness as well as the difference sometimes leads to the inhumane treatment of both humans and animals. M. Epstein rightly emphasizes that “animal images in literature are a kind of mirror of humanistic self-consciousness” [1, p. 87]. Since self-determination of the individual cannot occur in isolation from other personalities, human self-determination cannot be accomplished outside of its relation to the animal kingdom. Animals, in effect, represent the painful conscience of mankind, a trope which will likely continue to develop as humanity’s domination over nature increases.

In Polish literary criticism, there are many papers dedicated to the study and analysis of animal imagery and its symbolism in literature. For instance, in “Bestiarium Chrześcijańskie” (“Christian Bestiary”), the Polish pallottine, art historian and poet Stanisław Kobiela analyzes the animal symbolism present in early Christianity and the Middle Ages. In particular, he draws attention to the special nature of the relationship between humans and animals in the period of Antiquity and depicts a certain

role of animal images in the Bible. The investigator specifically describes the relationship between Christ and some animals, as well as the Apostles and the world of fauna. At the same time, S. Kobielius notes that “different cultures present, to a greater or lesser extent, the classifications of the animal world which correspond to reality” [6, p. 20]. In general, different cultures rely on popular beliefs concerning the place and purpose of animals within creation, something which has been formed in the consciousness of humanity throughout the centuries. Taking these ideas into account, S. Kobielius provides the following classification of the world of fauna: a) animals (cattle, poultry); b) mythological and legendary animals (griffin); c) sacrificial animals (white oxen, horse, dove); d) clean and unclean animals (clean – dove, sheep, unclean – wolf, fox, snake, eagle); e) prophetic animals (a special place among them belongs to birds); f) demonic animals (bear, lion, fox, monkey); hybrids or “monstra biformia” (sphinx, centaur, chimera, cerberus); g) zodiac animals (buffalo, goat, horse, cock, etc.) [6, p. 20-25]. The works of Aristotle, as well as the collections of “Physiologus” and “Bestiaria” are the main sources of animal symbolism for S. Kobielius.

Alternatively, Konrad Górski defines the three main origins of animal symbolism in the article “Zwierzę jako symbol literacki” (“The Animal as a Literary Symbol”). The first one is the allegorization of human relationships through the anthropomorphization of the animal world. Here it is important to draw attention to the fable, which is arguably the oldest form of fictional narratives. In the structure of the fable, animals (donkey, wolf, fox, hare, bear, cat, sheep) perform the functions of allegory. Through analyzing fables written by Aesop, La Fontaine and Krylov, Górski comes to the conclusion that “their animal images play a certain role in a certain allegorical situation but they are not transformed into permanent literary symbols” [4, p. 326]. The only exception is the image of the lion, which in the Middle Ages became a symbol of monarchy.

The second source of animal symbolism is associated with proverbs. According to K. Górski, they are “the manifestation of the sensitive attitude of man towards some species of animals because of hunting, pasture or field practice” [4, p. 325]. The system of animal images in such

proverbs depends on the contact which people have had with different species of animals in certain geographical, climatic, cultural and historical conditions. The literary critic provides examples of many proverbs and finds similarities and differences in the symbolic meanings of animals in the poetry of J. Słowacki. He comes to the conclusion that “the second source plays a greater role in creating animal symbolism in literature than the first one” [4, p. 325]. Moreover, K. Górski suggests that “language tradition as well as the literary tradition of animal symbolism can undergo great changes depending on the spiritual climate of each epoch” [4, p. 329].

The third source deals with the traditions of primitive beliefs, myths and legends which can be found in fables and proverbs. For instance, in Aesop’s Fables, the lion is afraid of a rooster crowing and the elephant is afraid of the gnat (“The Donkey, The Rooster, and The Lion”, “The Lion and The Elephant”, “The Lion, Jupiter, and The Elephant”). These primitive beliefs are attributed to various fantastic characteristics of the animals, although they have no manifestation in the real world of fauna. The three sources are of ancient origin. In regard to animal symbolism in literature, K. Górski is convinced that animal symbolism causes writers to change the traditional imagery and the conventional ideas of animal characters [4, p. 325].

One of the basic works in Polish literary criticism concerning the symbolic image of the horse in Romanticism is the anthology “Koń ma duszę w sobie” (“Horse Has a Soul”) by Łucja Ginkowa. The author suggests that an important feature of the animal’s image during this period is that it must be both beautiful and graceful. The Romantics interpret the beauty of the horse as a source of aesthetic knowledge. It is manifested in their ability to identify and describe in detail the animal’s appearance, especially in relation to obedient behavior or movement. This suggests that to some extent, the Romantic aesthetic is connected with the symbolism of the horse. Of course, the external beauty of the horse is not the main reason for its depiction in Romantic poetry. However, almost every poetic text contains a few words which emphasize the attractive appearance of the animal. Ł. Ginkowa asserts that “the horse has a soul which feels its

energy and it is frustrated that the Creator imprisoned it in the animal's body" [3, p. 11-12]. In fact, it is precisely because of "the soul imprisoned in the horse" that such a close connection between the animal and the rider is possible. The anthology provides a number of poems and extracts of poems by Polish Romantics in which horse symbolism is distinctly represented. The evidence suggests that in Romantic poetry, the image of the horse has consistent features. It is: a) endowed with a soul; b) often depicted galloping in the distance; c) present in the life of the gentry; d) as light and agile as a Cossacks' horse; e) as beautiful as an Arabian horse.

In Polish literary criticism there are many collective works dedicated to the depiction of certain animals in literature, culture and media. For example, collective works "Koń w języku, literaturze i kulturze" ("Horse in Language, Literature and Culture") [7] and "Kot w literaturze, kulturze, języku i mediach" ("Cat in Literature, Culture, Language and Media") [8] were published in 2016 and 2018 by the scientific publishing house IKR [i] BL in Siedlce (Poland). Besides, there are collective works dedicated to the analyses of various forms of animal imagery in literary genres of various literary epochs. One of the fundamental studies in Polish literary criticism concerning animal symbolism in literature is a collective work edited by Anna Martuszevska, entitled "Literacka symbolika zwierząt" ("Literary Animal Symbolism"). It is comprised of the papers of eleven authors which analyze the representation of animal symbolism in Polish literature. They discuss the following issues: the animal as an anthropologic problem (K. Obremski), the reception of ancient animal motifs in Old Polish poetry (J. Kotarska), the berserk as a historical and literary character (A. Chojecki), animal symbolism in Romanticism (M. Śliwiński), the "zoo" of A. Mickiewicz (J. Bachórz), wolf symbolism in Sienkiewicz's works (J. Data), the bestiary of young Polish eroticism (W. Gutowski), animal symbolism in literature and art of the interwar period (E. Kuźma), the eagle and crow motif in war poetry (D. Dąbrowska), the animals in Polish fables and children's fables (G. Skotnicka), and animals in both popular and narrative prose for young readers (A. Martuszevska). In most of these articles, animals are characterized as symbols

which represent particular features of human beings. They can also be anthropomorphized or contrasted with people.

As there are many motifs concerning the presentation of animals in literature, A. Martuszevska suggests “literary zoos” can be categorized in two ways. Firstly, they can be categorized according to literary genres which introduce different types of animal characters and present them in a specific way. Secondly, they could be categorized according to specific literary epochs, each of which also has its own specific bestiary [9, p. 14].

All the papers in the aforementioned collective work edited by A. Martuszevska are based on the representation of animal symbolism in literature. Taking into account their topics and aims, it should be stated that the papers are rather diverse. However, as A. Martuszevska points out, “there are two forms of animal symbolism in the collective work” [9, p. 16]. Firstly, there is the kind of symbolism which is connected with a particular animal species. We can speak here about symbolism of existing animals as well as fantastic ones which appear in myths or fables. Secondly, there is the symbolism of the whole animal world which represents nature. According to A. Martuszevska, it is necessary to take into account the animal features which are the most typical of nature. And with consciously accepted ecological assumptions, these animal features are “first and foremost positive attributes of ‘wild’ nature, signaling its greatness and beauty” [9, p. 16]. However, the existence of the second kind of symbolism is not always pointed out. This is due to the fact that sometimes the selection of presented animals and description of their appropriate traits are dull. As a result, animals are connected with nature and not with man.

Among the contemporary works worth mentioning in this context is Wiesław Przybyła’s “Kulturowa semantyka motywu zwierząt” (“Cultural semantics of animals”). In the article, the author describes the function of animals in art and literature from the times of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, emphasizing that “only an artist can fully testify to the importance of human and animal community” [11, p. 239]. Based on the argument of Rainer Wiedemann, Przybyła adds that the symbolic diversity of animal signs, patterns and paradigms does not result from

the complications of the semantics. It is more associated “with historical processes of mental changes in the religious and scientific spheres” [11, p. 241]. Therefore, in the cultural semantics of animals, a polarized mosaic of human attitudes towards the environment is reflected. The multiplicity of images resulting from various human approaches towards the natural world is dictated by both epochal differentiation and the individual view of the artist. W. Przybyła claims that from among many attempts to systematize the issues of aesthetic animal functions in literary works, several categories can be derived which are common among different (epochal, genre, ideological) artistic images. They are: 1. the animal in terms of cultish and supernatural function; 2. the anthropomorphized animal; 3. the theriomorphized man; 4. the naturalistic animal [11, p. 246-251].

Agnieszka Osińska-Szpur, in the article, ““Czym powietrze dla ptaka a morze dla ryby...”. O znaczeniu symboliki zwierzęcej w twórczości Williama Blake’a i Juliusza Słowackiego” (““What is the air for a bird and the sea for fish ...”. On the significance of animal symbols in the works of William Blake and Juliusz Słowacki”) pays special attention to the images of the lamb, tiger, snake, worm, spider, swan, eagle and salamander. These animals represent the classic, primal elements of water, fire, air, earth and their symbolic meanings differ depending on the context. The same animal images “can symbolize either progress or regression” [10, p. 97]. According to the literary critic, these animal images are the so-called leitmotifs and their presence in the poets’ works is connected with historiophy, resurrection and fall, sin and apostasy (liberation). Agnieszka Osińska-Szpur comes to the conclusion that the aforementioned animal symbols are universal, timeless signs which Blake and Słowacki use in order to “build and structure an extremely intricate but a suggestive, vivid picture of the world, in which both animalia and homo sapiens exist next to each other” [10, p. 98].

Paweł Zych and Witold Vargas, the authors of “Bestiariusz Słowiański” (“Slavic Bestiary”) [12], present a powerful illustration of the wealth of Polish folklore. They investigate family tales, myths and legends, which are sometimes sad and frightening, sometimes funny, mysterious or exciting, but always original and produced by the narrator’s imagination. In

their book, there are illustrations and descriptions of real animals as well as those whose existence is based on ancient literature. Many real animals are endowed with fantastic features or unusual appearances. For example, the panther is depicted with a horse's head and horns, and it breathes fire. Many creatures from the tales also act as heraldic emblems which embellish various coats of arms.

The evidence presented here suggests that many Polish scholars have dedicated their research to animal studies, and especially to the investigation of the symbolic use of animal imagery in Polish or foreign literature. These examples indicate that in Polish literary criticism, there are papers concerning the so-called history of the representation of animals in literature in general (K. Górski, A. Martuszevska, W. Przybyła, P. Zych, W. Vargas, K. Obremski, G. Skotnicka), articles concerning the symbolic use of a single animal image (Ł. Ginkowa, A. Chojecki), or animal symbolism in the literary works of one particular author (K. Górski, J. Bachórz, J. Data) or one epoch (S. Kobielus, A. Martuszevska, A. Osińska-Szpur, J. Kotarska, M. Śliwiński, W. Gutowski, E. Kuźma, D. Dąbrowska).

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### Анотація

#### Світлана Гайдук. Дослідження символіки тварин у польському літературознавстві

У статті аналізуються праці польських літературознавців, присвячені зображенню тварин та їх символіці в літературі. Автор підкреслює, що літературознавці по-різному окреслюють специфіку та сутність символіки образів тварин. Тим не менш, можна виділити два напрямки символіки тварин у літературі: антропоморфізм (проєктування людських якостей на тварини) та зооморфізм (уявлення людей як тварин). Антропоморфізм цілісно не відтворює природне життя тварин, бо антропоморфічний текст завжди має на меті увиразнити типові риси схожості між твариною та людиною. Основним об’єктом зооморфічного тексту виступає людина. Приписувані їй бестіарні риси зазвичай дозволяють авторові художнього твору більш детально та точно, ніж в антропоморфічному тексті, змалювати і тварину. Таким чином, змальовується водночас характер і людини, і тварини. Отже, антропоморфізм і зооморфізм втілюють різні підходи до подолання відмінностей між людьми і тваринами, а також до трактування схожості між ними. Наголошується, що важливою проблемою символіки тварин є презентація у літературних творах питання: чи можливе взаєморозуміння між людиною та твариною. Автор констатує, що багато польських літературознавців присвятили свої праці дослідженню символіки образів тварин у польській і світовій літературі. Наведені приклади вказують на те, що у польському літературознавстві є праці, у яких аналізується так звана історія зображення тварин у літературі загалом (К. Гурскі, А. Мартушевська, В. Пшибила, П. Зих, В. Варгас, К. Обремські, Г. Скотніцка), символічне використання образу певної тварини у творі (Л. Гінкова, А. Хоєцкі), символіка тварин у творах конкретного автора (К. Гурскі, Ю. Бахуж, Я. Дага) або конкретної літературної епохи (С. Кобелюс, А. Мартушевська, А. Осінська-Шпур, Я. Котарська, М. Слівінські, В. Гутовські, Е. Кузьма, Д. Домбровська).

**Ключові слова:** символ, образ, природа, символіка тварин, антропоморфізм, зооморфізм.

#### Аннотация

#### Светлана Гайдук. Исследование символики животных в польском литературоведении

В статье анализируются работы польских литературоведов, посвященные изображению животных и их символике в литературе. Автор подчеркивает, что литературоведы по-разному определяют специфику и сущность символики образов животных. Однако можно выделить два направления символики в литературе: антропоморфизм (проектирование человеческих качеств на животных) и зооморфизм (представление людей как животных). Антропоморфизм целостно не изображает естественной жизни, потому что цель антропоморфического текста – подчеркнуть сходство между животным и человеком. Основным объектом зооморфического текста выступает человек. Приписываемые человеку бестиарные черты обычно позволяют автору художественного произведения более подробно, чем в антропоморфическом тексте, описать животное. Таким образом изображается и характер человека, и характер животного. Антропоморфизм и зооморфизм воплощают разные подходы к преодолению различий между людьми и животными. Отмечается, что важной проблемой символики животных является презентация в литературных произведениях вопроса: возможно ли взаимопонимание между человеком и животным. Автор констатирует, что много польских литературоведов посвятили свои труды исследованию символики образов животных в польской и мировой литературе. Приведенные примеры указывают на то, что в польском литературоведении есть исследования, в которых анализируются так называемая история изображения животных в литературе в целом (К. Гурски, А. Маргушевска, В. Пшибыла, П. Зых, В. Варгас, К. Обремски, Г. Скотницки), символическое использование определенного образа животного в произведении (Л. Гинкова, А. Хоецки), животная символика в произведениях конкретного автора (К. Гурски, Ю. Бахуж, Я. Дата) или конкретной литературной эпохи (С. Кобелюс, А. Маргушевска, А. Осиньска-Шпур, Я. Котарска, М. Сливински, В. Гутовски, Э. Кузьма, Д. Домбровска).

**Ключевые слова:** символ, образ, природа, символика животных, антропоморфизм, зооморфизм.

#### Summary

#### Svitlana Hayduk. Animal Symbolism in Polish Literary Criticism

The purpose of the present article is to provide analysis of certain Polish literary critics' papers dedicated to depicting animals and utilizing animal symbolism

in literature. It helps to show the great interest in animal imagery in Polish literary criticism. The author emphasizes that as for animal symbolism, literary critics differ in their specificity and arguments. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify two branches in animal symbolism. Anthropomorphism projects human qualities onto animals. An anthropomorphic text imagines the animal behaving in much the same way as a human does. Zoomorphism imagines humans as animals. A zoomorphic text, in contrast, gives a more detailed observation of animals and bestial qualities which are imposed upon the human in a more precise way. Both of them attempt to reduce the otherness between humans and animals. An important question of animal symbolism in literary texts lies in whether it is possible for mutual understanding to exist between humans and animals. The evidence presented in the article suggests that many Polish scholars have dedicated their research to animal studies, and especially to the investigation of the symbolic use of animal imagery in Polish or foreign literature. These examples indicate that in Polish literary criticism, there are papers concerning the so-called history of the representation of animals in literature in general (K. Górski, A. Martuszevska, W. Przybyła, P. Zych, W. Vargas, K. Obremski, G. Skotnicka), articles concerning the symbolic use of a single animal image (Ł. Ginkowa, A. Chojecki), or animal symbolism in the literary works of one particular author (K. Górski, J. Bachórz, J. Data) or one epoch (S. Kobielus, A. Martuszevska, A. Osińska-Szpur, J. Kotarska, M. Śliwiński, W. Gutowski, E. Kuźma, D. Dąbrowska).

**Key words:** symbol, image, nature, animal symbolism, anthropomorphism, zoomorphism.

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