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Narratives in family transmission. Threads of verbal folklore in regional literature on the example of one of the volumes of the series “Jako downi bywało”

Narracje w przekazie rodzinnym. Wątki folkloru słownego w literaturze regionalnej na przykładzie jednego z tomów serii „Jako downi bywało”

Abstract

Aim. The aim of this article is to discuss selected threads of verbal folklore used in the study of an inhabitant of Upper Silesia published as part of the publishing series “Jako downi bywało” by the Museum “Górnośląski Park Etnograficzny” in Chorzów. The genres, the circumstances in which they are evoked, and their functions are presented. The form in which they are presented reveals the role of family transmission in the communication of the values carried by these cultural texts.

Methods and materials. Analysis of the source text – a publication from the series “Jako downi bywało” entitled *Najmilsze zimowe wieczory. Pырzi furgalo, berow sie sluchalo* by Anna Stroncsek.

Results and conclusion. The book *Najmilsze zimowe wieczory* is an important contribution to the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of Upper Silesia. The descriptions of traditions cultivated in the community to which the author belongs, and the verbal folklore found in the message, are an important expression of their worldview, while the work itself is a valuable source of regional cultural content for researchers. It is also an in-

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teresting and valuable source for designing scenarios for regional education or supporting family transmission in the absence of the older generation or when transmission disappears for other reasons. Folklore is an important factor in building up the image of the world and of man; it is an expression of the values shared by the community, of the socially desirable model of man, and thus provides an opportunity to shape the personality of its members. The additional value in the form of the presentation of plots gives insight into their “natural” message, places them in their proper context, which contributes to enriching their content with non-verbal meanings.

Keywords: folklore, intangible cultural heritage, regional education, custodians of regional culture, family transmission.

Abstrakt

Cel. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest omówienie wybranych wątków folkloru słownego wykorzystanego w opracowaniu mieszkanki Górnego Śląska opublikowanym w ramach serii wydawniczej „Jako downi bywało” przez Muzeum „Górnośląski Park Etnograficzny w Chorzowie”. W opracowaniu zaprezentowane zostały gatunki, okoliczności, w jakich są wywoływane oraz funkcje, jakie pełnią.

Metody i materiały. Analiza tekstu źródłowego – publikacji z serii „Jako downi bywało” pt. *Najmilsze zimowe wieczory. Piryzi furgalo, berōw sie słuchalo* autorstwa Anny Stronczek.

Wyniki i wnioski. Książka *Najmilsze zimowe wieczory* stanowi istotny wkład w zachowanie niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego Górnego Śląska. Opisy tradycji kultywowanych we wspólnocie, do której należy autorka oraz znajdujący się w przekazie folklor słowny są istotnym wyrazem ich światopoglądu, samo zaś dzieło jest dla badaczy cennym źródłem treści kultury regionalnej. Stanowi też interesujące i wartościowe źródło do projektowania scenariuszy z zakresu edukacji regionalnej czy też wsparcie dla przekazu rodzinnego w sytuacji braku starszego pokolenia lub zaniżającej z innych przyczyn transmisji. Folklor stanowi istotny czynnik budujący obraz świata i człowieka, niesie wartości podzielane przez zbiorowość i społecznie pożądany model człowieka, przez co daje możliwość kształtowania osobowości członków wspólnoty. Dodatkowy walor w postaci prezentacji wątków daje wgląd w ich „naturalny” przekaz i wpisuje je we właściwy kontekst, co przyczynia się do wzbogacenia ich treści o pozawerbalnie znaczenia.

Słowa kluczowe: folklor, niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe, edukacja regionalna, depozytariusze kultury regionalnej, przekaz rodzinny.

The aim of this article is to discuss selected themes of vernacular folklore used in a study by an inhabitant of Upper Silesia published as part of the “Jako downi bywało” series of publications by the “Górnośląski Park Etnograficzny in Chorzów” Museum. The text presents some of the species, the circumstances in which they are evoked and the functions they perform. The form in which they are presented reveals the role of family transmission in the transmission of the values carried by these cultural texts and how they are received. As Piotr Kowalski wrote:

Folklore can be understood as a culturally determined set of norms, principles for organising, making sense of the world, formulas for explaining actions, etc., which are available to the individual in every situation of realising psychosocial needs. This does not imply an assumption of the complete rationality of all actions, as it also includes unconscious convictions about “the essence of the world.” Responses to these needs, which folklore regulates, are articulated in various forms, in the form of semiotically diverse messages. The messages encoded in them constitute a manifestation of the worldview of a given culture and determine its vision of the world (Piotr Kowalski, 1990, 100).

This phenomenon is therefore of major importance in maintaining the stability of culture, and studies aimed at preserving its content are of significant value in this respect. The publishing series of the Museum “Górnośląski Park Etnograficzny w Chorzowie” under the title “Jako downi bywało” was established to publish the works of the depositors of the intangible cultural heritage of Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, in order to facilitate the preservation from oblivion of elements of the vision of the world and of man, as well as of the texts of regional culture, which are sometimes stored only in people’s minds. Of the five volumes published so far (Stronczonek, 2017; Kaczmarczyk, 2018; Przeliorz, 2020; Jon, 2022; Stronczonek, 2023), the first one was analysed because of its specific presentation of folklore content. They are usually published in the form of anthologies – they present plots in isolation, separated, closed. Meanwhile, the transmission of folklore is fluid in nature, a motif triggered by a situation can acquire numerous exemplifications, one association leads to another, and this entails further narratives. This is the way in which the author of the analysed book chose to present the themes or descriptions. The examples of verbal folklore in her work are woven into everyday life, the chosen structure of the text reconstructs their “natural” functioning, resulting from emerging needs, associations, narrator’s intentions. This way of presenting the content is also an attempt to reconstruct the family message and past experiences, the shape of the remembered world.

Anna Stronczonek’s publication entitled *Najmilsze zimowe wieczory. Pырzi furgalo, berow sie sluchalo* is a fictionalized reconstruction of an extremely important custom in terms of the transmission of folklore – and at the same time a farming practice – which was *szkubani pyrza* (memories reach back to the 1950s). In it, the author describes nine days of work, starting with the preparations made by the hosts, through the daily gathering, plucking and accompanying behavioural patterns, including narratives and songs included in the dialogues, to the refreshments and farewell, and the *szkubnik*, a ceremony to thank the invited performers for their support. The main plot is preceded by a description of the living quarters and their

furnishings, with particular reference to the kitchen and the rearing of geese or the rules for obtaining feathers.

The author, basing herself on the remembered messages, but also focusing on their proper representation in the speech characterising the area of residence (thus introducing a value in the form of a linguistic image of the world), records valuable examples of the intangible cultural heritage of her neighbourhood (Rybnik-Kłokocin). Transmitted verbal folklore with its functions, among others educational, informational, warning or entertaining, provides insight into the values, norms and patterns of behaviour in force in the community, as well as gives an image of the sphere of belief, revealing the way of thinking functioning within it.

The author tried to reconstruct the “natural” folklore situation, to present the usual way in which narratives exist, how they are delivered, how they are transmitted – from association to association, from thread to thread:

Dwie dziurki w nosie, skōńczyło sie! [...]

– Jak już tak ło tych diobłach bojōmy, to jo wōm jeszcze zabojoṃ – pado Knapkula. – Wiyecie, bōł taki Manuś [...] (Stroncdek, 2017, p. 67).

Bercik yno pokiwoł głowōm, że ja. Teraz wleźli Berta i Alojz nazod do kuchnie i za kwila już Knapek zaczoṃ:

– Downo tymu byli dwa bracio [...] (Stroncdek, 2017, p. 197).

Jak nie pomarli, to dali sie jeszcze dobrze majōm.

Wszyskim sie podobało, wszyjscy Knapka kwolyli, a ciotka Francka padała:

– Jo też słyszała tako bojka, abo prawda to było! Byli se też dwa bracio [...] (Stroncdek, 2017, p. 202).

– Ale też to było fajne i ciekawe – padała Marta. – I to je prawda, że mściwość i zowiść człowieka szpeci.

A dziolchy sie wszycki śmioły i jedna na drugo zaglōndały na nosy.

– Wiyecie – pado Marta – jo wōm też zabojoṃ, jak tak ło tej zowiści godōmy. Było downo tymu krōlestwo [...] (Stroncdek, 2017, p. 244).

The author’s competence is indicated in particular by the opening and closing formulas that are tailored to specific intentions (Ługowska, 1993), as well as those that characterise particular genres, including – in the case of non-fairy tale prose – making them credible. The audience’s reactions to the stories quoted in the dialogues presented in the work are also an important asset, adding to the interpretative possibilities. In view of the changes that have taken place over time in both the worldview and the sense of humour of members of the public, the segregated text

may be read contrary to the intention of the sender. This is because clear signs do not always appear in it, allowing for unambiguous resolutions (the qualities of the spoken word are unfortunately not preserved in the transcript). For the folklorist, therefore, this additional hint can be crucial in determining, for example, the genre with which he or she is dealing. It also serves to enliven the narrative:

[szyski szkubaczki już beczały, wyciõngwały sznuptychle i sie łuciyrały (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 188).

[...] wszyscy szkubaczki aże jynkły ze zgrozy (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 194).

Wszyscy szkubaczki sie chichrały, choby to widziały! (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 248).

Among the genres of verbal folklore presented in *Najmilsze zimowe wieczory* were:

- folk tales (e.g. T 155¹ – *Tak świat płaci*, p. 149; T 233 – motif in a story: *Ło korytku do lojcõw*, p. 163; T 613 – *Jak to bracik bracikowi loczy wydłubołł*, p. 202; T 706 – *Ło hrabiance, co ji lojciec rynce łobciõn*, p. 187; T 707 – *Trzi siostry*, p. 244; T 1030 – *Jak baba z diobłym interes zalożyćli*, p. 129),
- legends (e.g. T 756B – *Ło Madejowym łõzu*, p. 67; T 791 – *Jak to Põnbõczek z Pietrym po świecie chodzili*, p. 154; T 828 – *Jak to dioboł Ślõnzokõm samogõna zrobićõł*, p. 103),
- tales (e.g. T 4020 – *Jak to straszylõ*, p. 38; T 4060 – *Łutopek za kõnia*, p. 127; T 3040 – *Czarownice były i zło czyniły*, p. 283),
- memoirs (e.g. *Jak to po wojnie w Baborka baby świniã zbijaly*, p. 229)
- anecdotes (e.g. *Wice łõ grubiorzach*, p. 40).

There was also an educationally influential custom of supplementing wish-list formulas with admonishing phrases (*Keby nie te tradycyje...*, p. 52). Belief elements were also represented by the plots *Śnikõw drugimu nie godać* (p. 79) or *Młode państwo z muzyki łõ dwanostej dõ dõm* (p. 126), and examples of healing *Ło racycach* (p. 196) and *Jak to bez wojna znodłõ sie małõ...* (p. 136).

It is impossible to take into account all the multiplicity and variety of narratives that have been cited, nor a complete list of the values they transmit through their content, so the article focuses on genres whose key function is to shape personality. A selection of the norms they point to has also been made.

Educational qualities were mainly characteristic of folktales and legends. The former – by their peculiar construction, which included morally unambiguous heroes, a set of events and an ending in which good always triumphs over evil – taught what a person should be like and what the community expected of him or her in

¹ Numbers according to the Polish systematics of folk prose (Krzyżanowski, 1962-1963).

terms of values and behaviour. The latter – by presenting models of life and sanctity appropriate to the Christian religion – shaped ethical attitudes (Przybyła-Dumin, 2013).

In the context of the functions performed by the folk tale, scholars have drawn attention to its ethical aspect, pointing out that thanks to the presentation of a binary system of values, a strict moral order and heroes who are unambiguous in this respect, it is a treasury of models of behaviour (Ilnicka, 1870; Olkusz, 2000), which led to an emphasis on the educational significance of this genre of folk prose. Folk tales also played a compensatory role, they were a substitute form of fulfilment of desires – it was in them that a poor, orphaned, wronged person had a chance to change their fate (Simonides, 1969; Krzyżanowski, 1980). They told the story of how things should happen in life so that it could be considered good and just – a dignified, value-based existence after enduring hardship should be rewarded (Ranke, 1997; Jolles, 1965). Legendary plots, on the other hand – being an exemplification of the Christian axiological system (in Polish folklore this genre is limited to texts dealing with issues related to this religion) combined with a folk vision of the world – presented a model of life based on them and emphasised the sanctity of the hero (Kosowska, 1985; Woźniak, 1988).

The narratives cited by Anna Stronczek resound with universal values, including those stemming from the prevailing religiosity that was strong in the community. For example, instruction on respect towards the elderly can be found in the story *Ło korytek do łojcōw* (Stronczek, 2017, pp. 163–165), in which the oldest member of the family is treated in an inappropriate manner due to the disgust he arouses in his daughter-in-law, which the son does not oppose. The old man eats his meals separately and is then forced to turn his back on the family. He is also given wooden utensils because the daughter-in-law fears that the porcelain ones will shatter (an indication that material objects are valued more highly by her than human beings). The elderly man is reconciled to his fate, and the value he brings to the family is shown by the love and learning he passes on to his grandson (in this connection, there is a valuable record of the “interpretation” of birdsong and the sounds of other animals, while in terms of upbringing, it points to the essential quality of being curious about the world and observing nature):

A mieli te młode gospodarze syneczka, kery tymu starzikowi łogrōmnie przo!
 Bo roztomańte rzeczy go łuczōł: ło ptozkach, jak na wiosna wrōble ćwirujōm
 “Filip siej, Filip siej” abo “Mie ćwierć, tobie ćwierć,” abo “Ciu ćwi, ciu ćwi”
 abo “Cir lip, cir lip!” Jak jaskōłki śpiujōm “Krynci nici, krynci nici, pojady-
 my łorać” abo “Łuszylabych ci rynkawiczki, ale ni mōm nici, nici!”, jak żaby na
 wiosna w stawie rechoczōm “Kumo, kumo, kaś to była? Na jarrrrmaku! Kumo,

kumo coś kupiłała? Szczewikikiki na korrrkach! Kumo, kumo, coś warziłałała?
Barszczcz, burakikiki!”

– Cha, cha – śmieją się wszyscy, a Pieszka pado:

– Musza to zapamiyntać! (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 163).

The son and daughter-in-law come to their senses thanks to their offspring, who – by preparing a trough for them for their old age – makes them aware of the example they have set for their child, and henceforth the senior family member is treated with respect and sits at the table in a place of honour.

The duty to care for the elderly, justified by the knowledge and wisdom they can share thanks to the experiences they have accumulated during their lives (usefulness to the family, to the community is also a value emphasised in passing), is the axis of the story *Mōndrość starości* (Stronczonek, 2017, pp. 178–179), in which the order of the ruler, against whose embezzlement was punishable by death, orders the elderly to be taken out into the forest. However, the protagonist of the story is unable to obey this order; he hides his father, whose advice in a crisis situation (re-threshing the thatch) saves his son from the famine facing the principality after a drought disaster. The duke – having realised his mistake – revokes the order and from then on, the elderly become a valuable part of the community again:

Ksiōnże teraz dopiyo zrozumioł, że źle robiōł i starych ludzi do lasa posyōł na śmierć, bo staro głowa, to wielko skarbnica przeżyć, kere mogōm być przidatne młodym jako dorada w życiu. I tak to starzi ludzie żyją do śmierci, abo poważani, abo pytani (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 179).

The need to respect human labour and its fruits in the form of crops or bread baked from them is emphasised in the legend *Jak to ze rżōm bylo* (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 167), in which *Pōnbōczek* wants to punish mankind for wasting rye – and in those days there was plenty of it, as the grain was all along the stalk, and people made brooms out of it, wove shoes, threw baked goods at each other – by depriving them of this precious plant. Only the intercession of the *Virgin Mary* saves them from losing it, as she asks to leave as much of the grain on the stalk as can be fit into her handful. Reducing it makes rye valuable, which requires difficult cultivation, and thanks to that both rye and the bread are treated with respect (which is represented in numerous traditional prohibitions and orders concerning them, such as the prohibition of swearing during the harvest, so as not to offend the harvest, the prohibition of sitting on bags with grain, the prohibition of quarrelling over bread or the obligation to apologise and kiss it when it falls [Kubiak, Kubiak, 1981; Ciołek, Olędzki, Zadrożyńska, 1976]). This is also underlined by the reaction to the quoted story in Anna Stronczonek’s book:

– Jo pamiyntōm, jak moja mama godali – pado Knapkula – jak łōni byli dzieciami, to chlyb yno bōł na niedziela, a tak to placki ze zimiokōw jodali abo prażōnki warzyli, sadłym rostopiōnym to polywali i cukrym sulii.

– A co to były te prażōnki? – pytajōm sie te dziōlszki.

– Nō to była mleto reż i warzōno na gynsto! Tak jak sie dzisio ryż abo gryzek warzi – godo Knapkula. – A jak dożyli, że chlebiczek bōł na codziyń, to zawsze godali taki powiedzynie:

„Chlebiczku wōniōncy, powszedni nasz chlebie,

złe to były czasy, jak nie było ciebie!

Dzisio za to do syta cie jymy,

jyno cie za mało szanujymy!

Jak by tak pozbiyrać te łokruszyny

dać na kupka jyny,

pojadłoby daleko we świcie nieznażōnce chleba,

niejedno głodne dziecie” (Stroncdek, 2017, p. 167).

The motif of *zowiści* [envy], in turn, is evoked, among other things, by the magic tale (a variant of the folk tale) about three sisters (Stroncdek, 2017, pp. 244–251), whose overheard wishes are fulfilled and they are given their dream husbands – the royal baker, the royal cook and the king himself. It is already significant that, while the older girls justify their dreams with the desire for access to tasty meals and a comfortable existence, the youngest thinks of love and producing offspring with nobility (in the form of stars) revealed on their foreheads. The jealousy of the older sisters prevents them from enjoying their wishes fulfilled. When, in the absence of her spouse, the youngest gives birth to the promised children, they swap them for a dead cat and dog. Undeservedly accused and thrown into prison, the main character does not lose her kindness and willingness to help, for which she is rewarded with the gift of being turned into a bird. She does not blame her husband, recognising that, faced with accusations of witchcraft, he had no other choice (the text does not address the issue of trust or investigation). In the form of a dove, she brings him comfort in his sorrow. In relation to his sisters, however, he commits a kind of revenge, for, having overheard that they were behind the swagger, “każdej puściła na łep tako sraka...” (Stroncdek, 2017, p. 248), which introduces a comic motif (the hair-pulling action, also qualified as funny, will follow later). Further on, there is a commentary on motherhood (every mother will know her children) and the reaction of the listeners (emotion or even crying):

I leci miyndzy drzewami, nō i rychtyk widzi niewielko chałupka, łokno było łotwarte, bo to ciepło było, nō i lōna łujrzała szyroko kolybka, w ni dwoje małych dzieciōntkōw spi, kere już z daleka poznała. Bo przeca každo matka swoji dzieciōntko, jak piyrszy roz łujrzy, to go wszyndzi pozno, pra? – pedziała Marta. Szkubaczki zajś pociōngaly nosami, jedne już do sznuptychlōw i sie łobciyrały, a Marta bojo dali (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 248).

The queen's positive personality traits are also evident in her concern for the affections of the old men who rescued and loved her children (the fairy tale won't let them part either – they will live in the castle and remain unaware that they are raising royal children until the end). She is not afraid of work either – wanting to be close to her daughter and son, she employs herself with their current guardians. In doing so, she teaches them to “shriek, sleep, fight...” (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 249). The resolution of the plot occurs at the king's birthday, when the children bring him gifts from their guardians and tell him the story of being swapped, thrown into the river and rescued. The suspicions aroused by it are confirmed by the stars on their heads. There is no end to the king's joy, which again moves the listeners:

Krōl zeskoczył s trōnu, porwoł łobuch na rynce, rozplakoł sie jak dziecko i padoł: «To sōm moji dziadki!» A goście stoli jak wryci, yno bioły gołōmbek furgoł po kōmnacie i było słyseć jak tyrpo skrzydłami.

Wszyski szkubaczki zaczyły beczeć i Marta też nie poradziła słowa pedzieć, ale musiała to skōńczyć (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 251).

The punishment for the sisters was their inability to have children, as we learn in the course of the plot (indicating the value that this possibility represented), and expulsion from the kingdom, while the positive characters lived – of course – happily ever after. The final reaction to the story is the dialogue:

– My sōm aże całe sparzōne – godo ciotka Francka – co my to tak przeżyły.

– Ja! Łogrōmie piykno bojka – pado Knapkula (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 251).

The necessity of patiently enduring hard fate is also addressed in the story *Jak sie to baba utopić chciała* (Stronczonek, 2017, pp. 194–195), prompted by the preceding magical tale about a countess whose father cut off her hands for not wanting to marry him, and who, after much suffering, being noble and loyal even to her tormentor, gained a chance for a happy life, with the phrase that there is no man who does not have a cross to bear: “Ja, to je prowda, ni ma człowieczka bez krzyżyczka!” (Stronczonek, 2017, p. 194). The heroine of this narrative:

Miała siedmioro dzieci. Chłopa ji w lesie drzewo przywaliło i biyda do chałupy sie zaczęła ciś łoknym i dwiyrzami, już nie poradziła zwiōnzać ani kōńca z kōńcym, nō i roz se tak myśli: “Jak by jo sie s tego świata straciła, to te moji sirotki by jacy dobrzi ludzie przigarli i miałyby sie mono lepszy, choby yno głōd by jich nie morzōł” (Stroncsek, 2017, p. 194).

She looked at the cottages scattered around the village and noticed the crosses above them; above her house there was one and it was quite small, when above the others larger ones were visible, sometimes also more numerous, and she changed her mind:

Tōż klynkała na kolana i prosiła Pōnbōczka ło wyboczyni, i teraz szła nazod i sama do siebie se padała: “Jakoś z Bożōm pomocōm byda już biydnie, ale godnie z dzieciami żyła i ło zdrowi Pōnbōczka prosiła” (Stroncsek, 2017, s. 195).

Many of the fairy tales and folk legends cited in the volume are at the same time instructive about the suffering that accompanies human fate, the ability to endure hardship and even injustice and conscious injustice, as well as patience and the ability to forgive, indicating how important these qualities were to the authors' communities. Indirectly, too, on their own life experiences. Suffering is, as these stories seem to say, part of the world order, and a person should – whatever the situation – remain true to values. It is for such an attitude towards life that his reward can await him.

The book *Najmilsze zimowe wieczory...* makes an important contribution to the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of Upper Silesia. The descriptions of traditions cultivated in the community to which the author belongs, and the verbal folklore found in the message, are an important expression of their worldview, while the work itself is a valuable source for researchers, preserving the content of regional culture. It also provides an interesting and valuable basis for designing scenarios in the field of regional education, as well as support for family transmission in the absence of the older generation or the disappearance of transmission for other reasons.

Folklore is an important factor in building up the image of the world and of man, expressing the values shared by the collective and the socially desirable model of man, thus providing an opportunity to shape the personality of the community. The additional value in the form of the way in which the author presents the work's individual themes gives an insight into their “natural,” puts them into their proper context, which contributes to enriching the content with non-verbal meanings. The analysed publication shows how folklore intermingles with life, how it is mediated

by instruction or warning, how it can amuse, how it conveys family values, or – more broadly – those nourished by the community. The content presented within folklore enhances the cultural competence of members of the community, and its preservation is therefore an important value in itself.

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