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## *Cinderella* in Polish Drama and Theatre

**Abstract:** The article introduces many version of dramatized *Cinderella* and it shows that the fairy tale in the version of Charles Perrault and brothers Grimm (includes *Cinderella* motif) in the Polish drama and theatre has been not particularly popular. One of the reasons may be that few writers (including authors for children) have related to this story. *Cinderella* has been overshadowed by the story of the Polish Faust – Twardowski – and adaptations of original fairy-tales. On the other hand, the conventional nature of the *Cinderella* motif provoked many fresh, satirical or metaphorical depictions. An uncharted territory remain amateur shows at homes, schools and kindergartens – these are intriguing extensions to the story that lets children examine the reality before they fully enter it with their natural energy and hope.

**Keywords:** *Cinderella* fairy tale, *Cinderella* motif, adaptation, Polish folklore,

*Cinderella*, like no other fairy-tale motif, is a theatrical story par excellence. It became such as a result of Charles Perrault's version with its highlighted ball scene. In this scene, the protagonist triumphs because of her extraordinary and unusual apparel, which she has to abandon when her role, imposed on her by the fairy godmother, has been fulfilled<sup>1</sup>. The plot's theatrical quality comes from the actual reality of the author, who participated in the life of Louis XIV of France's court. Balls, masquerades, ballets, hunts and other such activities not only constituted the rhythm of the day, but also were a means for social advancement – possible also for the more “enterprising” women who offered their barely grown-up daughters as company for prominent noblemen or even the king himself. In Poland, the *Cinderella* motif [known also under the name of Barani Kozuszek (T. 510B)<sup>2</sup>, which can be translated as “The Sheepskin”] lost its carnivalesque dimension, instead becoming a story of an abused orphan who achieves the goal

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<sup>1</sup> Article was published in Italian version. See R. Waksmund, D. Michułka, *Adattamenti teatrali polacchi di “Cenerentola”*. In: *Cenerentola come testo culturale: interpretazioni, indagini, itinerari critici*, a cura di Monika Woźniak e Mariarosa Rossitto. Roma: Lithos Editrice, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> See: J. Krzyżakowski, *Polska bajka ludowa w układzie systematycznym*, vol.1, Wrocław 1962, pp.162–164.

thanks to her persistence, not someone else's protection. Staging of the fairy-tale was facilitated by Rossini's opera *Cinderella, or Goodness Triumphant* (1817), which premiered in Poland as soon as in 1822 (although in German)<sup>3</sup>. However, it is difficult to establish when this motif was staged for the first time. As a drama for child audience, it was already present in Germany in 1824 thanks to Kitty Hoffmann (*Die kleine Aschenbrödel*), yet in renown it was exceeded by Franz Pocci's version (1871) for Munich Marionette Theatre, which included the character of Kasperl – a comic figure that appeared in numerous Pocci's plays<sup>4</sup>.

The Polish literature for children of those times treated the fairy-tale fantasy as inferior, classifying it as "cheap readings", whence it found its way to the Polish folklore. The Poles had no institutional theatre for children at that time and its function was taken over by plays staged in the circle of relatives (mainly among the middle-class), home theatres. These performances usually had a form of so called "komedyjka" (similar to farce or German Posse) or realistic and moralistic one-act plays. To retain plausibility, the character of the fairy was completely omitted, while the metaphorical Cinderellas were saved from poverty or trouble by wealthy philanthropists with no supernatural intervention. This is also the case in Ludwik Niemojewski's comedy (1875), where Zosia (local Cinderella) is discriminated against by her better-off peers, but finds financial support from her mother's friend and her daughter. When these two women face poverty, Zosia pays off her debt inviting them to her mother's estate that she has eventually reclaimed after many years. Since this moment, all four women keep together and their mutual friendship give them happiness. The drama lacks the figures of father, which is arguably an aftermath of the January Uprising of 1863, in which many men were killed or exiled to Siberia.

Only during the literary Modernism the Polish literature for children accepted fantasy, which was, among other factors, caused by growing popularity of western versions of Cinderella's story (especially by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm). The farces were replaced with staged fables, such as Zofia Zacharkiewiczówna's work of 1907. In her fable, the setting is no longer of middle-class but with its old-fashioned chamber and royal palace it resembles rather the medieval reality. Beside Cinderella, her step-mother and step-sisters, there appear also a fairy, her helpers, and a prince with courtiers. The ball scene becomes an opportunity for the heroine to express her compassion for the poor and starving peasants, who have never experienced the delights of royal palace. Still, Anthony Jax's version (Chicago 1912) for the youth is even more developed. Titled *Kopciuszek, czyli sierotę Bóg się opiekuje. Melodram fantastyczny, ze śpiewami i tańcami w 4-ch aktach* [*Cinderella, or God Takes Care of an Orphan. A Fantasy Melodrama with Singing and Dancing in Four Acts* – trans.], it focuses on vocal parts, performed not only by complaining Cinderella (called therein Aniela), but also

<sup>3</sup> See: P. Kamiński, *Tysiąc i jedna opera*, Warszawa 2008, p. 299.

<sup>4</sup> See: H. Jurkowski, *Dzieje literatury dramatycznej dla teatru lalek. Suplement do "Dziejów teatru lalek"*, Wrocław 1991, p. 132.

a Jewish merchant, the step-mother and her daughters. Additionally, Jax's play boasts self-presentations of all seven step-sisters, who try to impress the prince. They play the guitar, paint, sing, dance, and rhyme, which is ridiculed by the humorous comments and puzzles of the court jester. Vengeful, the step-sisters accuse Aniela of witchcraft, but when the executioner arrives, Aniela is saved by the jester, who exposes their evil plot. This scene ends with a group couplet. The play balances on the verge of clownery or even kitsch, especially in the scene with the mother's ghost dressed in white, followed by a cherub carrying a golden gown for the orphan. In Jax's version, the fairy appears as late as in the royal court, as a friend of the king, whom she foretells to that he will find a beautiful pearl among rubbish, lose it and find again just to put it on the throne. The fairy also confirms that Cinderella's ball dress is a gift from her late mother. These scenes suggest that the Modernism established the motif of Cinderella as a theatrical fairy-tale aiming at enjoyment rather than moralising.

Also Jan Brzechwa, 20<sup>th</sup>-century author for children, preferred playful forms rich with songs. He would call his adaptations "fables-selfplays". As a master of children's poetry, he advances the plots with neat rhymes uttered by the narrator and the characters alike. The intense course of events is often interrupted, similarly to Jax's work, with songs sung by Cinderella, the stepmother, and her daughters. The ludic nature of the motif is highlighted by the fact that the ball takes place on June 1, that is Children's Day. The role of the fairy is taken over by an old neighbour, who lends Cinderella her dresses and perfumes, combs the hair, reminds the girl of the gloves, eventually lending also her carriage and urging Cinderella to be back before midnight. The neighbour also warns the girl: "There are no fairies." At the ball, except Cinderella and her step-sisters, there are also other ladies of noble birth, introduced to the prince by the equerry in a counting rhyme. Only Cinderella, as a beautiful and intriguing stranger, remains incognito. She wins the prince's heart not only with her beauty but also by singing a ballade about social inequalities between them. Her "matrimonial triumph" is accompanied by conforming to social rules when she asks the stepmother for her blessing, and her step-sisters for friendship in exchange for positions in the court. Brzechwa's *Cinderella* as a musical fable was recorded on a vinyl in 1963, starring prominent Warsaw actors: Elżbieta Barczewska, Edmund Fiedler, Tadeusz Ross, and others. The music was composed by Mieczysław Janicz, a famous originator of jazz in Poland. A few years ago this 14-minute long recording was republished in a CD format as a part of a collection titled "Bajki-Grajki". Brzechwa's version was popular mainly among school and preschool teachers, who used it to stage school plays. Professional theatres, both actor and marionette, preferred more dramaturgically developed version by Evgeny Shvarts, which actually was an adaptation of a screenplay from 1947.

However, in 2005 Brzechwa's *Cinderella* was adapted for television; in this production the characters were played by Polish most recognisable journalists. Monika Olejnik took the part of the protagonist, while her ballade at the well

was sung by a famous Polish singer, Kayah, whose face reflected in the water. Kamil Durczok, distinguished TV newsman, volunteered as the step-mother. The show was ordered by Fundacja Charytatywny Bal Dziennikarzy [Charitable Ball of Journalists – The Foundation – trans.] and all profits helped treating children with cancer in poorer regions of Poland. The show, 20 minute long, premiered on September 3, 2005 in the Bajka cinema-theatre, Warsaw, and was directed by another star, actress Krystyna Janda. As a result of the journalists' involvement, this adaptation saw enormous advertisement. As a downside, it only featured a simplified stage design (with added cartoon animations for television purposes) representing the old town interiors and exteriors. However, a later marionette staging (by the theatre Teatr Lalki i Aktora z Łomży) was strongly influenced by the reality of La Belle Époque and French impressionism.

Long forgotten are older adaptations and versions for children, both from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (by Michalina Zielińska, Maria Markowska, Seweryn Zaleski) and from before the WWII (by Elwira Korotyńska, Tymoteusz Ortyl) – we know about them only from entries in bibliographical registers. From Marek Waszkiel's chronicle of Polish puppetry we may learn that on December 18, 1936 Cracow was visited by the famous Teatro dei Piccoli of Rome. Beside Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Mozart's *Don Juan*, Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*, and Respighi's *The Sleeping Beauty*, the theatre staged also a marionette version of *Cinderella*. On October 1, 1938, the Błękitny Pajac theatre in Poznan (of the Wielkopolska Rodzina Marionetkarzy marionette association) staged *Cinderella*, with Sunday and holiday shows still played long after the end of the season. Its author remains unknown, which is also the case with the Warsaw staging of December 1940, which opened the work of the underground marionette theatre Zorza, led by fourteen year old Wojciech Ruszczyc. The only certain fact is that Ruszczyc would use music from vinyl records. Similarly, little is known about *Cinderella* by a marionette theatre from Białystok, premiered in March 1945 and staged by Stanisław Giaro with a youth group<sup>5</sup>.

Waszkiel in his following chronicle, dealing with the post-war period, mentions not a single staging of the fairy-tale discussed<sup>6</sup>. Other sources provide scarce information about Janina Kilian-Stanisławska's marionette travesty of the Cinderella story, staged on March 29, 1948 in the Teatr Rapsodyczny theatre, Cracow. In this version, the protagonist is helped by household gnomes, while Puss in Boots, as the king's minister, brings her lost slipper for fitting. A master of ceremonies is the court jester mounting a cow, while Puss claims to be a vegetarian and in the ball scene he dances with a mouse<sup>7</sup>. Jolanta

<sup>5</sup> M. Waszkiel, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce (do 1945 roku)*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 164, 182, 192, 218.

<sup>6</sup> See: M. Waszkiel, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce 1944–2000*, Warszawa 2012.

<sup>7</sup> K. Kostaszuk, *Teatr dziecięcy. Przewodnik repertuarowy*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 66–67. In the show by Petr Nosalek staged in Teatr Powszechny (Radom 2010), spiritus movens of the plot is the figure of Rat, who is the fairy's messenger and helper.

Wiśniewska categorised this type of adaptation as carnivalesque, as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>8</sup>. It is important to emphasise that the period of Stalinism banned *Cinderella* from Polish theatres, since the fairy-tale presents social advancement not through hard work but through marriage, which may be easily interpreted as an apologia of feudalism. Only negative and satirical depiction of the royal court allowed eventually the story to find its way to theatres. Also Evgeny Shvarts's version (based on the film directed by Szapiro, 1947) was a travesty: while dressing Cinderella, the fairy forgets the slippers, the king thoughtlessly announces his abdication every other minute, and the court wizard pretends to be deaf and ignores the guests' pleas. For theatrical purposes, this version was translated into Polish by Irena Lewandowska and Witold Dąbrowski, and may be found in repertoire of numerous marionette theatres (Wrocław – 1973, 1978, 2006; Bielsko-Biała – 1974; Toruń – 1975; Wałbrzych – 1977, Cracow – 1979; Kielce – 1979; Warsaw – 1982; Szczecin – 1984, 2000).

Photographic evidence proves a gradual departure from a screen covering the puppeteers. Such "overt" animation, which may be interpreted as a visible transfer of energy between the puppet and its actual source of movement, became the emblem of modern puppetry<sup>9</sup>. Jan Polewka, the art director of a Wrocław staging from 2006, decided to dress the puppeteers in old-fashioned costumes imitating the atmosphere of the fairy-tale<sup>10</sup>. Before him, a similar decision was made by Josef Krofta, a distinguished Czech director, who prepared for the Lalka theatre, Warsaw, a performance (2004) based on Jan Vladislav's *Popelka*. "On the stage there is a middle-class living room, long forsaken. Yet, soon enter maids and servants, who take out puppets from old chests and are about to improvise a fable that will enliven the whole house with its antique chairs, tables and wardrobes."<sup>11</sup> A merge of the actor and the puppet planes is present also in *Cinderella* (2009) by the marionette theatre of Białystok. The actors by playing with the puppets "present a story about a poor cleaning lady in a luxurious hotel, who happens to be at a splendid ball. The puppet plane is shown as the lady's dream [...], who falls asleep with a puppet in the hand, the puppet becoming Cinderella. There are two such moments during the play. At the beginning, after the guests have arrived, Cinderella/cleaning lady falls asleep, and at the end, when she wakes up holding the puppet. The concluding scene shows the protagonist dressed like a modern celebrity, dancing with a matching prince."<sup>12</sup> The role of the actor plane may, however, be predominant, as in the play *Ballada o Kopcieszku* [*The Ballad*

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Wiśniewska, *W poszukiwaniu "Złotego Klucza"*. *Polska twórczość dramatyczna dla teatru lalek (1945–1970)*, Łódź 1999, p.38.

<sup>9</sup> See: H. Jurkowski, *Metamorfozy teatru lalek XX wieku*, Warszawa 2002, chapter: *Animacja, animizacja, synergia*.

<sup>10</sup> See: *Dla jednego gestu. Scenografia we Wrocławskim Teatrze Lalek*, Wrocław 2006, pp. 406–413.

<sup>11</sup> L. Bardijewska, *Bal mistrza*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2004.

<sup>12</sup> S. Grygorowicz, *Baśniowy taniec z gwiazdami*, "Teatralia" 8.03.2010.

of *Cinderella* – trans.] (2009, Teatr Animacji in Poznan) based on the Brothers Grimm's version and directed by Janusz Ryl-Krystianowski. The director introduced puppets only in the ball scene – in the traditional form with the screen – since the ball is actually a dream of an orphan who is deprived of other kinds of entertainment by her evil step-mother. The puppets in ball dresses appear on a flat, red screen, and dance to the music, moving faster and faster as the time passes. All other scenes, taking place in Cinderella's home, are directly performed by actors. Their realism – especially clothes, behaviour and language of the characters – presents the world of a modern family in crisis: a passive father, an aggressive and relentless step-mother, her opportunistic daughters<sup>13</sup>. Such a shift from a fairy-tale to social commentary seems to be oriented towards the audience of adolescents rather than children.

Malwina Janowska's play titled *Kopciuszek wiejski* [*Rural Cinderella* – trans.] (1937) was published as a part of a youth-oriented series Biblioteka Teatralna "Michalineum". This is a story about mayor's daughter, called Zosia, living in a mountain village. Zosia is pretty and hard-working, she prefers reading books to trips to the town, where her step-mother and step-sisters visit fair stalls. Zosia falls in love with a young highlander, which is against stepmother's matrimonial plans for her. However, Zosia does not marry the highlander but a heir's son, whom she met at the local wedding party. Instead of the fairy, the play has a grey-haired beggar, who gives wonderful dresses to the orphan and claims he was sent by the Lord Jesus himself in order to make Zosia's life a happier one. Actually, he is a wealthy neighbour of the heir; he reprimands the step-mother and makes Zosia the heiress of all his fortune. As a "folk play", Janowska's version features rural occupations, songs, superstitions, customs, and nicknames (Zosia happens to be called a sloven or a duffer). However, there is no evidence that the play was ever staged in a theatre, be it a folk or professional one. In a sense, though, it was a predecessor to Ludwik Hieronim Morstin's post-war drama *Cinderella* (1960). Here, the main heroine is a daughter of a highlander from the Podhale, while her own sisters (who study in the town) are presented as antagonists. They all compete for a love of a young skier, who appears to be film director looking for a plain girl to star in his movie. Although Cinderella and the director become close, there is no happy end: after the film is finished and published (with much success), they have to part, as the director is seriously involved with another woman. Morstin's drama, despite its masterful composition and brilliant dialogues, was never staged. The reason was its message – suspicion towards accelerated industrialisation of the rural areas in Poland, – which was against official (governmental) and public expectations.

Many years had to pass (and the period of martial law in Poland had to occur) before the society understood how illusory was prosperity under the

<sup>13</sup> This show is analysed in a book by Alicja Morawska-Rubczak titled *Teatr animacji Janusza Ryla-Krystianowskiego*, Poznań 2011, pp. 71–79.

totalitarian regime. An expression of this recognition was Janusz Głowacki's *Cinders* (1979, 1981 in London) – a metaphorical drama set in a reform school for underage girls. *Cinders* might have been an inspiration for Andrzej Malicki's *Cinderella* (2011) – although based on Perrault's fairy-tale, it includes a prologue set in an orphanage, where pupils ruthlessly try to uncover all secrets of one of the girls. The play's subtitle *Historia możliwa* [A Story Possible – trans.] refers to the protagonist's dream of having her own home. Sadly, the home she is taken to resembles a feminised world of anti-bourgeois comedy by Gabriela Zapolska titled *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska* (1906): an authoritative step-mother, bored and aggressive step-sisters, an absent and weak-willed father. The orphan's triumph at the ball is accompanied by beautiful music from Prokofiev's ballets *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*.

The above overview does not allow for the conclusion that the Cinderella motif has been particularly popular in Polish theatres. One of the reasons may be that few writers (including authors for children) have related to this story. Cinderella has been overshadowed by the story of the Polish Faust – Twardowski – and adaptations of original fairy-tales. On the other hand, the conventional nature of the Cinderella motif provoked many fresh, satirical or metaphorical depictions. An uncharted territory remain amateur shows at homes, schools and kindergartens – these are intriguing extensions to the story that lets children examine the reality before they fully enter it with their natural energy and hope.

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