

ELŻBIETA WRÓBLEWSKA
Łódź

LEŚMIAN AND THE FAIRY-TALE

Bolesław Leśmian (1878–1937) was primarily a poet but he was also the author of fairy-tales, literary critical essays and posthumously edited letters. He was interested in theatre as well and was one of the founders and stage directors of the Teatr Artystyczny (Artistic Theatre) in Warsaw.

The fame of Leśmian's works began to grow in the late 1950's. Before World War II only one book on Leśmian appeared, namely *Bolesław Leśmian* by A. Szczerbowski (Warszawa 1938). Since the war, in addition to numerous articles in periodicals, four books on Leśmian have been published: J. Trznadel's *Leśmian's Literary Works—an Attempt at Analysis*,¹ M. Pankowski's *Leśmian — La Révolte d'un poète contre les limites*,² *Studies on Leśmian*³ (contribution to the programme of a conference devoted to Leśmian, held on June 10–12, 1968 in Warsaw, at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences). In the fourth book (*Memoirs on Leśmian*⁴) which is not a scientific study, the authors attempt to show Leśmian as a man living in the atmosphere of his own poetry.

Most critics consider Leśmian to have been the greatest Polish philosophical poet (since the time of C. K. Norwid), a poet who created a "new language of poetry," and the only true symbolist among the Polish poets, although he often exceeded the standards of that school. Because of its richness Leśmian's poetic art may be—and has been—viewed in many aspects. Scholars have always found it difficult to place Leśmian adequately in the Polish literary tradition,⁵ which has also been the case with Norwid.

¹ *Twórczość Leśmiana (Próba przekroju)*, Warszawa 1964.

² Bruxelles 1967. M. Pankowski showed the similarities between Leśmian's work and Polish baroque poetry and the poetry of Polish Romanticism.

³ *Studia o Leśmianie*, Warszawa 1971.

⁴ *Wspomnienia o Leśmianie*, Lublin 1966.

⁵ Such attempts were made, among others, by M. Pankowski; M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Gdzie umieścić Leśmiana? (Próba lokalizacji historycznoliterackiej)*, [in:] *Studia o Leśmianie*, p. 15–39; J. Opacki, *Pośmiertna w głębi jezior maska*, *ibid.*, p. 230–351.

Leśmian's poetry is characterized by a cultural syncretism unusual in the history of Polish poetry. In his verse, Leśmian utilized motifs from fairy-tales, legends, and sagas of various nations.⁶

The nature of human things—G. Vico wrote—postulates the existence of a rational language [*lingua mentale*], common for all nations, a tongue expressing the essence of life of societies and at the same time capable of defining all the aspects of human life. Proverbs—the expression of folk wisdom—may serve as an example here: in all nations they are of the same essence yet they are formulated in different ways.⁷

Leśmian attempted to create that universal language, deriving material from various cultures; it is a known fact that certain common elements can be found in the fairy tales of various nations. Yet, in his verse Leśmian—somewhat paradoxically, utilized all the resources of the Polish language. The language of his poetry abounds in neologisms and equivocal formulations and that is why Leśmian's poetry is extremely difficult to translate. The postulated universal language of poetry was rooted in the Polish tongue. Leśmian has widened the limits of our vision but can we hope to find a translator who will be able to use the appropriate clues? I mean here the whole range of Leśmian's verse—not individual poems—since some of his poems are comparatively easy to translate.

In this paper, I am primarily concerned with the role of the fairy-tale in Leśmian's poetry. I am not concerned here with the origins of the plots and with tracing their prototypes (this has already been done by J. Trznadel in one of the chapters of his book; other scholars have dealt with the problem as well), but with their function. I should also like to devote some attention to Leśmian's fairy-tales, especially *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures*, a work comparatively unknown and, in my opinion, underestimated. Summing up, this paper is intended as an attempt at an interpretation, based on the established fact that Leśmian wrote fairy-tales. Did he write them only to meet his publisher's demands, or are, perhaps, the fairy-tale elements an integral part of his poetry?

The discussion of the fairy-tale as a literary genre (in French—*conte de fées*, in German—*Märchen*, in Russian—magic *skazka*⁸) has a rich bibliography. The considerations regarding the subject would furnish

⁶ J. Trznadel deals with the origins of folk motifs in Leśmian's poetry, in his book *Twórczość Leśmiana*, chapters "Motywy, paralele, analizy," and "Rzeczywistość poetycka ludowego świata," pp. 150, 197–206.

⁷ G. B. Vico, *Nauka nowa*, transl. T. Jakubowicz, Warszawa 1966, p. 161. Such views in connection with studies on the fairy-tale were held by the "mythological school"—by J. Grimm (the founder of the school—according to Propp), and then by A. N. Afanasyev.

⁸ Scholars dealing with the *skazka* suggest the following division: the animal *skazka*, the magic *skazka*, the *skazka* of adventure, and the *skazka* of human life and manners. The magic *skazka* is the counterpart of our fairy-tale, and the animal *skazka*—that of the fable.

material for an extensive dissertation. If I refer to *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* as a fairy-tale I do so not only because of the origins of the plot (*The Arabian Nights*) but also because of the affinity with the Russian magic *skazka*. Seeking such affinities is not surprising if we bear in mind that Leśmian wrote in Russian and had his Russian works published in the symbolists' periodicals, namely "Vesy" (Fiends) and "Zolotyie runo" (Golden Fleece), and that he was connected with the symbolist circles.⁹ Moreover, he read the *skazki* from Afanasyev's collection and others as well. Leśmian wrote in Russian a series of poems, *The Songs of Clever Wasyliśa* (Wasyliśa was one of the prominent characters of the *skazki*). Finally, in the text of *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* certain elements typical of the *skazka* can be found.

"I, Sindbad the Mariner, lost in the fairyland"—wrote Leśmian in the poem *Sindbad the Mariner's Unknown Voyage*. This confession has not been seriously considered by Polish critics. They have associated Leśmian's production with myth, with the baroque and romantic tradition, with modernism, with Bergson's and Kant's philosophy, etc. Leśmian is little known as the author of fairy-tales, perhaps due to the fact that few literature specialists in Poland have been primarily concerned with fairy-tales (which is in striking contrast to the bulk of books and articles devoted to the Russian *skazka*); additionally, according to the opinion of the majority of the reading public, fairy-tales are most correctly placed in the nursery. Leśmian's protests of such opinion (and he treated his fairy tales with extreme seriousness) did not change anything. It is true that both *Sesame Tales* and *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* have been regarded as mere translations or adaptations of the Arabian fairy-tales. Yet this holds only in the case of *Sesame Tales*. *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* differ so much from the prototype that they may be regarded as an original work. Similarly, *Polish Ancient Tales* are not mere replicas of folk stories but a kind of creative synthesis. Therefore, a deeper interest in Leśmian's fairy-tales should not be thought of as an expression of the philologist's pedantry, the more so since the works under discussion are very interesting and indicative of artistic maturity.

Leśmian's fairy-tales were not appreciated in his time.¹⁰ The famous publisher Mortkowicz assigned him to write three books for children. Thus Leśmian wrote *Sesame Tales* (published in 1912 as the so-called "Christmas readings"), *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* (1913), and *Polish Ancient Tales* edited posthumously in 1956. The publisher paid

⁹ The relation of Leśmian's poetry to Russian symbolism has not been thoroughly studied as yet.

¹⁰ R. Zimand gives a detailed account of how the publishers handled Leśmian's fairy-tales, in the paper *Preliminaria do klechd Leśmiana*, [in:] *Studia o Leśmianie*, p. 369—392.

and wanted the authors to comply with his demands; he was not satisfied with Leśmian's work. In a letter written in 1914 to Zenon Przesmycki, Leśmian complained that Mortkowicz, on behalf of children, had requested that "most idiotic modifications" be brought into the text of *The Witch* (*Wiedźma*) whereas Leśmian considered the tale as a specimen of his "own and precious prose."¹¹ Leśmian maintained that his *Tales* could be read and appreciated by both children and adults. The fact that he was rather obstinate where his fairy-tales were concerned suggests that he attached a great importance to them. In the article *Meditations on Bergson* Leśmian wrote:

Our mind, beside the rational faculties, has some other, non-rational faculty whose function is to render possible the cognition of the realms inaccessible to logic. The faculty is the product of instinct and intuition. Metaphysics is derived from fairy-tale.¹²

Fairy-tales have been made use of in various epochs, especially in the period of Romanticism. Yet, in Leśmian's attitude towards the fairy-tale something peculiar and closely connected with his "philosophy of poetry" can be detected. Leśmian's remarks contained in his essay *Transformations of Reality* may provide a starting point for comprehending the problem: "What is real in the given time is not what can be ascertained but that which needs no ascertainment." Thus, according to Leśmian, reality is something patent, axiom-like. In old times gods were such a patent reality. The lower the man's intellectual capacity, the broader was the realm of patency. In course of time that realm has considerably shrunk. Yet, there is in man's mind a "song without words" which "does not come from the sphere of logic where all words are generated but from different, non-logical realms where one can exist without uttering a single word." Man himself is the author of his own image, "his inner landscape." Yet

he is longing to return to his true self, to greet himself at the door of his own reveries, hear his voice, see his face reflected in the mirrors of a house he had abandoned long ago [...] and then, after the short ecstatic mornings and long nights of meditation he shall be given the chance to relive his youthful enchantments, and all things which have heretofore inspired no faith whatsoever will offer their inherent charm and meaning, and they will enter his soul like words of the only song that never fails to enliven the human spirit. And once more the entire world — from a tiny primrose to God's grandeur — will become reality.¹³

The theme of return, in different versions, is recurrent in Leśmian's works,¹⁴ and it has been subject to a variety of interpretations. Man

¹¹ B. Leśmian, *Utwory rozproszone. Listy*, ed. J. Trznadel, Warszawa 1962, p. 337–339.

¹² B. Leśmian, *Szkice literackie*, ed. J. Trznadel, Warszawa 1959, p. 30–31.

¹³ Leśmian, *Utwory rozproszone*, p. 182–186.

¹⁴ The theme of retrogression in Leśmian's poetry has been dealt with by Trznadel, *Twórczość Leśmiana*, chapter „Motyw wielkiego powrotu”, p. 69–113, and J. Pro-

always comes back to a past, to the "abandoned house." In the famous *Drowned in Verdure* (*Topielec zieleni*), man is driven by a peculiar irrational force to return to where he originated from—driven into the depths of verdure, into the depths of the earth. And what is there, hidden, in the verdure? Maybe there is the other, already forgotten, world which man has been unable to regain and which he has been desperately seeking? The theme of duality, or reflection, also recurrent in Leśmian's poems, is of the same provenance. The sense of duality of existence is evident in the poem *Rowing a Boat* (*Szmer wiosel*). Here are some fragments:

Tak właśnie trzeba i tylko tak:
 Płynąć wbrew ziemi — niebu na wspak!
 Perły, korale skradzione dnu
 Rzucić w głębinę własnego snu —
 I nasłuchiwać — o, złudo złud!—
 Czyli uderzą z jękiem o spód?...
 Łódź się odbija w fali na wznak —
 Tak właśnie trzeba i tylko tak!
 Dwoistą łodzią i tu, i tam
 Płynąć jednocześnie, po dwakroć sam!
 Dwoistą łodzią w bezmiary płyni,
 Podwójnie kochaj, podwójnie giń!
 Czwooro masz wiosel, dwa stery masz,
 Ku własnej twarzy schyloną twarz.¹⁵

[This is the way it must be done: / Rowing against the land and the sky! / Corals and pearls desecrated in the depths / Into your dream ought to be thrown— / Then you shall hearken—oh! deluding hope! / To their fall moaning from the very depth?... / The boat's reflection in water glides— / This is the way it must be done! / The double boat rows here and there, / You also double and twice alone! / Let your double boat in the infinite go, / Your love be double and double your death. / Four oars you have, two steering wheels, / Your face is looking into your own face].

In *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* Hindbad (Sindbad's alter ego) offers the princess Piruza an unusual wedding-present: it is a book containing no words.

Piruza opened the book and gave a cry of surprise and joy. On the pages of that magic book the beautiful pictures lived their own colourful life. Spring had just come. The pages of the mysterious book were emanating all the fragrances and the sunshine. Tiny people were coming out of miniature palaces into miniature streets. They were running along the streets and out to miniature meadows where they were picking miniature flowers.¹⁶

kop, *Niepochwycień* (*Motyw regresu w poezji Leśmiana*), [in:] *Studia o Leśmianie*, p. 53—61.

¹⁵ B. Leśmian, *Poezje*, Warszawa 1975, p. 13.

¹⁶ B. Leśmian, *Przygody Sindbada Żeglarsza*, Warszawa 1955, p. 40. Further quotations from this edition.

A book without words—the song without words—the same Authentic Book which the narrator of Bruno Schulz's story (*The Book*) looked for in vain.

It is this mysterious, magic "song without words" that constitutes the primary "true" reality; yet, somewhat paradoxically, at the same time it is the source of words endowed with magic force (Leśmian's whole art is based on paradox). Magic words and gestures—Open, Sesame; Meadow, be and come to my home;¹⁷ Little table, be laid; Come into being, Swidryga and Midryga. Much has been written about Leśmian's so-called creationism. It seems worth noting that all literary creationism is based on the fairy-tale. "Serious" literature also stems from the fairy-tale and it appropriates all the borrowings from that source. Leśmian never tried to conceal the source of his inspiration: on the contrary, he was always making it explicit:

I gdy duch mój prastarą z życiem strudzon waśnią
W ogrodach jasnowidzenia pali snów obiataę,
Pokój się roześlaca w zamkową komnatę,
Ja — i wszystko poza mną wnet się staje baśnią!¹⁸

[And when my spirit, weary of long with life struggle, / In the gardens of seers burns the offerings of dreams, / My house is house no longer but a goldenhued palace, / And all of a sudden my self is in magic enthralled.]

The magic quality of words is most emphatic in *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures*. The princess devouring diamonds has been reluctant for a long time to tell Sindbad her name:

Now I can tell you—my name is Beloved. The name makes the men who know it too familiar with me. Therefore I keep my name secret and I disclose it only to [...] the chosen. [Sindbad replies:] I can already feel the unusual effect of your name. Since you made it known to me I have had a strong feeling that I have known you long, my Beloved (p. 65).

The fact that King Miraż and princess Piruza distorted Sindbad's name gave rise to the beginning of his *alter ego*, namely Hindbad who made Sindbad's history extremely complicated. This may be regarded as an illustration of the *skazka A Rash Word* (*Nieostrożne słowo*) where the word recklessly spoken is immediately materialized. One should be

¹⁷ B. Leśmian, *Łąka*, [in:] *Poezje*, p. 204:

Czy pamiętasz, jak głowę wynurzyłeś z boru,
Aby nazwać mnie Łąką pewnego wieczoru?
Zawołana po imieniu,
Raz przejrzałam się w strumieniu —

I odtąd poznam siebie wśród reszty przestworu.

[That night—I recall—you came out of the forest / To give me the name of Meadow, / And once called by that name / I glanced at myself in the stream — / And now I can tell myself from the rest of the world.]

¹⁸ B. Leśmian, *Kabała*, [in:] *Poezje*, p. 38.

extremely cautious with words; one never can tell which of them may suddenly reveal its magic force and affect our lives. We are in the "fairy-tale sphere."

The magic quality of words is being emphasized throughout the whole story of Sindbad's adventures. Sindbad wants the fantasy and his wish is satisfied. At the beginning the narrator—main character introduces himself:

My name is Sindbad, my home is in Baghdad. When my parents died I inherited a thousand bags of gold, a thousand barrels of silver, a hundred palaces, a hundred gardens, and one of my great-grandfather's molar teeth that my father had been keeping in an ebony casket as a souvenir and curiosity (p. 5).

The very accumulation of numerals indicates that Leśmian was well acquainted with fairy-tale conventions. When reading *Sindbad's Adventures*, we have the impression that Leśmian knew not only the fairy-tales but also the studies discussing them. In *Sindbad's Adventures* a considerable number of motifs typical of the *skazka*¹⁹ can be found—the hero defeating the evil forces; the desire to have a princess for a wife, and to gain possession of magic objects; the plot arranged in accordance with the typical patterns (the hero abandons his home to seek adventure, and eventually returns), etc. At the very beginning of Sindbad's story there is the great-grandfather's molar tooth that is not taken from the *skazka*. It is evident that the author is perfectly aware of employing the fairy-tale convention and besides, that his attitude towards it is ironical. The grotesque uncle Tarabuk, a rhymester who "loves poetry but hates grammar" is a rather striking personage. Sindbad leaves him and always comes back to him; he devotes a great deal of attention to him as well as rather long passages in the text of the story: Sindbad is emotionally involved in this "playing" with Tarabuk. Are we to take that Tarabuk is Sindbad's *alter ego*, and, what is more, a parody of it? If we bear in mind Leśmian's fondness of all kinds of "reflections" this supposition seems to be justified.

Sindbad wants to dwell in a life of reverie and he does enter the fairy-land but it is often emphasized that he is aware of its illusive character. Leśmian uses a variety of means: overdoing, almost caricaturing of the fairy-tale motifs, as well as stressing certain situations. If we tell a story and we repeatedly use the words "really" and "undoubtedly" it indicates that either we call in question the authenticity of the story or that we are anxious to emphasize the fact that the situation in which the narrator or the character have found themselves is typical and we realize it.

The letter was undoubtedly magic, and its contents, in spite of the kindly appearances, were really fiendish (p. 24).

There was no doubt—I was under a spell (p. 39).

I replied to the yawn with a polite nod and I knelt on my knee to greet the princess who, I was guessing, came from this one or any other fairy-tale (p. 63).

¹⁹ Cf. N. M. Vedernikova, *Russkaya narodnaya skazka*, Moskva 1975.

Such a manner of indicating that we are in the sphere of the fairy-tale is typical of the *skazka* where short sentences are used as a rule:

There is a glade in the forest, a fire is burning there, and a maiden is sitting there, and so lovely she is that only in a *skazka* her beauty can be praised.

That's all—there's nothing more to say.

I do not know if it was true or not.²⁰

Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures is a fairy-tale about fairy-tale making, on how one escapes from reality and then returns; yet, illusion becomes "reality" and vice versa. To our eyes *Don Quixote* is a knight errant and not a lunatic; likewise, the Sindbad wandering on the seas and seeking adventure seems to be more "real" than the Sindbad awoken from his dreams.

Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures can be regarded as an original work not only because the plots and characters borrowed from the Arabian tales have been considerably changed or transformed; the composition of Leśmian's fairy-tale is entirely different and its meaning is different, too. The very beginning of Leśmian's tale obviously differs from the Arabian prototype; in the Arabian tale we have the "casket-type" narration—Szeherezada is the first narrator and Sindbad the Porter, to whom Sindbad the Mariner subsequently tells his adventures, is the second. Sindbad the Mariner from Leśmian's tale and Sindbad from the original Arabian tale have different reasons for their voyages: the former seeks to escape from everyday routine and the acquisition of wealth is not his goal; the latter is ruined and sets out for the voyage to gain riches. The Sea Devil (this is also Leśmian's original contribution) renders possible the fulfilment of Sindbad's wishes. The Devil appears when Sindbad grows weary of his uncle Tarabuk or of himself in his Baghdad character.

"I have been missing you"—the Sea Devil replied. "I was sure that you had taken my counsel to heart and that finally you would leave your uncle's uninspiring home to seek new adventure in the wide world." — "It is not your counsel that makes me go to far-away lands but my own desires"—I replied proudly (p. 51).

Thus Leśmian used the idea from the Arabian fairy-tale and he elaborated it into a work of his own where influences of the Russian *skazka* can also be detected.

In discussions regarding the theory of the Russian *skazka* attempts have been made at defining its specific features. Some of the scholars have maintained that the "awareness of fiction" (*ustanovka na wymysł*) is the principal feature, for in the *skazka* neither the narrator nor the audience believe in the authenticity of the story and the personages, and this is made explicit in the texts. (Several examples have been quoted

²⁰ A. N. Afanasyev, *Narodnye russkie skazki*, vol. II, Moskva 1957, p. 6, 45.

already.) Pomeranceva²¹ is one of the scholars sharing the above point of view. According to Propp, however, it can be accepted only with regard to the magic *skazka* and the animal fable.²² The "awareness of fiction" makes the *skazka* different from other works of fiction (at the very beginning of a *skazka* it is indicated that we are dealing with a work of fiction). Other scholars, for instance Kravcov, Chistov, and Barog, refute that point of view; they maintain that one of the shortcomings is the lack of definition of the term "fiction." Fiction is characteristic not only of the *skazka* but also of legends and *bylinas* (ancient Russian epic folk songs). Besides, every kind of art is based on creative fiction. In primitive society the audience believed in the authenticity of the events related in the *skazki*; it never occurred to them to call in question the existence of witches and fiends.²³ It seems most appropriate to accept the point of view of those scholars who have studied the problem in its historical context. The *Polish Dictionary of Literary Terms* gives the following definition of fantastic fiction: "Fantastic fiction consists of elements that do not meet the criterion of reality, *accepted in the given culture*."²⁴

Leśmian was well aware of the relative character of the notion "reality":

Reality is subject to the same evolutionary transformations as life itself, as the human spirit involved in the stream of life. What are we to think of the realism in literature and in other arts, that apparently imposes upon all the idea of one unchanging truth and one unchanging form to express that truth? It is nothing but a misconception like many others occurring in the history of human thought. Every epoch and every individual artist employ a specific notion of reality.²⁵

Apart from defining the notion of fiction it seems necessary to define the notion of reader's or listener's "belief." Children's "belief" in fairy-tales is different from that of adults. Gusev has observed that

the specific structure of folk art works does not change with changing audiences. Among the same audience there may be people who do or do not believe in the authenticity of a myth, tale, or legend, and this fact does not result in altering the basic character of the myth, tale, or legend.²⁶

With adults the question of "belief" or "disbelief" in fairy-tales is rather complex. The modern man has been taught rationalism and yet,

²¹ V. Pomeranceva, *Sudby russkoy skazki*, Moskva 1965.

²² V. Propp, *Folklor i dejstvitelnost*, „Russkaya literatura," 1963, no. 3, p. 5.

²³ N. J. Kravcov, *Skazka kak folklorny zhanr*, [in:] *Specifika folklornykh zhanrov*, Moskva 1973; K. V. Chistov, *O principakh klassifikatsii zhanrov ustnoy narodnoy prozy*, Moskva 1964, p. 5–6; A. F. Barog, *Skazochnaya fantastika i narodnoe verovenie*, [in:] „Sovetskaya etnografia," 1966, no. 5, p. 15–17.

²⁴ M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich*, Wrocław 1976, p. 116.

²⁵ B. Leśmian, *Przemiany rzeczywistości*, [in:] *Utwory rozproszone*, p. 182–186.

²⁶ W. Gusiew, *Estetyka folkloru*, transl. T. Zielichowski, Wrocław 1974, p. 145.

from time to time, he is inclined to believe that there actually exist caps of invisibility and magic charms. The adult reader may also "believe" in fairy-tales in the sense that he looks for some implied, symbolic meanings in them.

Vico maintains that the primitive man is incapable of creating abstract ideas; instead he makes up fantastic images which "contain" not only facts but also knowledge about the facts. The primitive man can think exclusively in terms of poetic images and myths. For Vico myths and fairy-tales are carriers of truth. The rationalistic thought has associated myths and legends with illusion and deception. "If we manage to see it in the proper light the truth of poetry is of a metaphysical nature, and when it fails to be in accordance with metaphysics it must be regarded as falsehood."²⁷

Leśmian—the poet—"thought," like a primitive man, in terms of images, myths, and fairy-tales. He has been often referred to as a philosophical poet and attempts have been made at tracing the source of his inspiration in philosophy (especially in the ideas of Bergson, Kant, and Husserl). J. Błoński has confronted Leśmian's poetic programme with Bergson's philosophy.²⁸ The programme is contained in Leśmian's literary essays, and partially in his letters, whereas his verse expresses only what may be called a "poet's philosophy." Leśmian does not claim to do the philosophers' job neither does he reproduce their ideas. He creates a universe defying unequivocal description, a universe rich in implied meanings. Many of Leśmian's poems may be regarded as "philosophical ideas" but they never cease to be poetic images. One cannot speak of Leśmian's "philosophy" without considering his poetic art; *The Meadow* or *Drowned in Verdure* ought not to be regarded as illustrations of Bergson's or Kant's ideas.

Despite his "thinking" in terms of images and myths Leśmian was by no means a primitive man. He was fully conscious of entering the fairyland and he endowed Sindbad with the same awareness. What does the awareness then mean? Is it a playful caricature of the fairy-tale convention combined with ironical autothematic posture? Sindbad wishes to live in the fairyland; he wants to return to the original "abandoned home" he had left long ago. The home is not a matter-of-course possession, if one desires to enter it one must create it with a great effort of imagination. Therefore *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* is a fairy-tale on the fairy-tale in the making, on an attempt at returning to the origins. The fairy-tale is close to the dream but dreams come only to those who desire them. Fairy tales and dreams can be destroyed by harsh reality. Urgela is a sym-

²⁷ Vico, *Nauka nowa*, p. 51, 53.

²⁸ J. Błoński, *Bergson a program poetycki Leśmiana*, [in:] *Studia o Leśmianie*, p. 62–91.

bol of the fairy-tale and dream. Sindbad meets her in the vaults and breaks the glass coffin where she has been lying. Urgela rises:

—Did you die long ago?—I asked.

—I was never dead—she replied.

—Did you never live on earth?

—Never.

—Tell me, who are you?

—I am not. I do not exist at all. I cannot exist. I can only be dreamt of by those who wish to dream (p. 138).

Urgela perishes when Sindbad's wife, the fat Stella, takes her lute away from her. The conflict between the two female personages, similar to the conflict between Majka and the miller's wife in *Polish Tales*, is not only the conflict between the real woman and "the woman of one's dreams" but, as is often the case in Leśmian's works, it stands for a clash of two discrepant worlds.

The farther Sindbad ventures into the fairyland the more uncertain it becomes which of the two worlds is more real. Culmination is reached with Sindbad's adventure in King Mirakles' country. The only reason for the country's existence is that the king dreams of it in blue. When Sindbad wakes the king his country ceases to exist. Later on, however, Mirakles falls asleep again and instead of the blue one a country in purple comes into being. When creating the magic picture of Mirakles' country Leśmian—the "philosophical poet"—seems to ask: isn't it so that we are someone's dream and isn't it so that what we dream of and what is transformed into fairy-tale is at the root of the true reality? Leśmian was not the only one to express such doubts but the formulation is typical of him.

Certain doubts of ontological nature arose (known already before): isn't it so that what we regard as reality is a dream only? Camile Mélinard published in "Revue des Deux Mondes" an essay obviously written under the influence of Schopenhauer's philosophy; while proving the identity of the real and the dream he was writing about the possibility of... waking up. Another doubt arose: aren't we someone's dream?²⁹

Thus to Leśmian the fairy-tale is what constitutes the primary reality, the reality that man is, consciously or not, missing. And what is Leśmian to the fairy-tale? Leśmian was the poet who fully comprehended, appreciated, and made use of its poetic character. He made use of it not only in the course of writing *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* but he also included fairy-tale motifs, and magic vocabulary and imagery in his poetry. In the poem *Fortune Telling (Kabala)* the poet, anxious to grasp the meaning of his life and to learn its further course, is telling his fortune by cards. Then his room is changed into a magnificent palatial apartment and the magic comes to him. In *The Magic Garden (Ogród*

²⁹ A. Witkowska, *Onirológia i oniromania*, „Teksty,” 1973, no. 2(8), p. 65.

*zaklęty*³⁰) we do not know where and how the garden is to be found (and a princess is waiting there) but there is no doubt that the garden exists and that the mystery of man's fate can be revealed there. In *Cinderella* (*Kopciuszek*³¹) Leśmian again transforms the well known fairy-tale motif. Other examples could be added. In the series of poems *The Songs of Clever Wasyliśa* Leśmian wrote: "magic does not know death."³² The poet uses the magic wand and the magic words "let there be." In Leśmian's poetry everything is possible: talking and loving trees, or a shoemaker making shoes for God himself. Certainly one might attempt a comparative analysis, including *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* among the literary fairy-tales, and trying to look for analogies. One may regard the Never-Never Land in Barrie's *Peter Pan* as a counterpart of the world of Sindbad's adventure; one might elicit the unity of dream and fairy-tale in Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and analyze it against the analogous motifs in Leśmian's works. This paper, however, has been meant only as an outline of the problem and my objective has been to suggest possible interpretations—to be accepted or rejected.

Many writers have made use of the fairy-tale, overtly or without admitting it. I shall quote only one author, namely E. T. A. Hoffmann who clearly defined his attitude towards the fairy-tale. In *Hoffmann's Tales* there is a land called Dżinnistan:

—Is there any mail-coach travelling to that country, Andrew?—the prince asked.

—Not yet—the minister replied—but maybe after the country has been sufficiently enlightened we will manage to have a daily coach there.

In these *Tales* there is a myth of a mysterious land where true poetry reigns; the land is referred to as Dżinnistan, Urdagarten, or Famagusta. Master Flea explains:

I do not quite see what you call miracles, most honourable Sir Peregrinus; how can you tell the difference between the miraculous and the ordinary in our life [...] if you wonder at something only because it has never happened to you or because you are unable to perceive the connection between the cause and effect, this is nothing but a proof of your lack of insight...³³

Fairy-tale motifs are present, either explicitly or implicitly, in all literature. In spite of the basic similarities the motifs are subject to modifications, not only in the works of particular authors but, what is more important, in different cultures. The Arabian Sindbad sets out for his first voyage to gain wealth. The Polish Sindbad would have met with

³⁰ Leśmian, *Poezje*, p. 62.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

³² B. Leśmian, *Pieśni przemądrzej Wasyliśy*, transl. M. Pankowski, [in:] *Utwory rozproszone*, p. 75–79.

³³ E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Opowieści*, transl. M. Kurecka, Warszawa 1962, p. 25, 423.

disapproval had he left his homeland for the same reason. In our culture the superiority of "spiritual" over "materialistic" values is a source of poetic inspiration, which does not mean, however, that spiritual values always win. And their failure results either in a "guilty conscience" or in the punishment of the involved characters. This is the case in a whole range of instances, beginning with the legend about King Midas, to *La Grande Bouffe*. In Polish fairy-tales the devil spends gold coins in abundance. In *skazki* a princess and her riches can be obtained but the goal must not be deliberately pursued. In *Sindbad the Mariner's Adventures* the fairyland stands for superior values whereas the material heritage and everyday routine are associated with inferior values.

Thus the fairy-tale is a carrier of universal postulates and it expresses universal desires; it is hardly thinkable that anyone might reject Aladin's lamp, all powerful helpers, and glamorous princesses.

The fairy-tale is the best illustration of the statement that literature constitutes an axiological model of the world and as such "it does not know death." Fairy-tales are the essence of literature and literature has taken its origins from them, although literature sometimes admits the fact and sometimes denies it.³⁴

Translated by *Ewa Książek*

LEŚMIAN I BAŚŃ

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł jest nową propozycją interpretacyjną twórczości Leśmiana. Autorka stara się ukazać Leśmiana-baśniotwórcę w szerokim znaczeniu tego słowa. Rola baśni w jego twórczości nie ograniczała się do wykorzystywania motywów baśniowych w poezji i do tego, że Leśmian był autorem baśni. Poeta w pełni zrozumiał, docenił i maksymalnie wykorzystał ich właściwości poezjotwórcze. Słowo poetyckie traktował jak magiczne słowo baśniowe. Nazwane materializuje się i zaczyna istnieć właściwym sobie istnieniem.

Najwybitniejszy poeta filozoficzny od czasów Norwida był związany z rosyjskim symbolizmem i pisywał po rosyjsku. Napisał m. in. cykl wierszy *Pieśni przemądrzej Wasylisy*, poświęcony jednej z ulubionych bohaterek rosyjskich skazek. W *Przygodach Sindbada żeglarza* tylko pomysł fabularny został zaczerpnięty z baśni arabskiej. Utwór ten można potraktować jako oryginalną baśń Leśmiana, na której zaciążyły wpływy rosyjskiej skazki magicznej. Jest to baśń o powstawaniu baśni. Autor wykazał dużą znajomość konwencji baśniowej, niekiedy ją nawet parodiując. Autorka artykułu analizuje i interpretuje *Przygody Sindbada* w kontekście poezji Leśmiana, dochodząc do wniosku, że baśń była dlań „domem opuszczonym”, rzeczywistością człowieka pierwotnego, który umiał myśleć tylko obrazami i baśniami (odwołuje się do Vica i jego charakterystyki człowieka pierwotnego). Bohater Leśmianowski nie był już jednak człowiekiem pierwotnym. Tęsknił za „opuszczonym domem” i chciał

³⁴ The axiological model is discussed in my paper *Zagadnienie normy literackiej*, „Zeszyty Naukowe UŁ,” no. 50 (in print).

do niego powrócić. W ten sposób można wytłumaczyć pociąg Sindbada do niezwykłych przygód (przy czym Diabeł Morski oraz wuj Tarabuk zostali potraktowani jako *alter ego* poety) i Leśmianowski motyw regresu, a także dwoistość rzeczywistości, tak często występującą w jego poezji. Autorka omawia polemikę toczącą się wokół określenia cech gatunkowych rosyjskiej skazki, wyciągając z tej polemiki wnioski zbieżne ze stosunkiem Leśmiana do baśni, a wyrażone w jego szkicach literackich. W zakończeniu artykułu autorka zwraca uwagę na znaczenie baśni dla literatury, która skrycie lub jawnie z niej korzysta, traktując ją jako najdobitniejszą egzemplifikację twierdzenia, że literatura jest aksjologicznym modelem świata.

Elżbieta Wróblewska