

## SLAVIC MARKERS IN THE ARTISTIC THINKING OF KORNEL MAKUSHYNSKYI: CULTURAL CODES, FOLKLORE IMAGES, NATIONAL IDENTITY

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**Abstract.** The article is about a cult figure in the Polish national literature for children. Tsapok Matolek (Koziołek Matołek) serves the principal characteristics and forms of mental consciousness of several generations of Poles. Thus, the paradigm of multicultural education is considered as the basis for national education; the phenomenon of cooperation between writer and artist in the fabric of children's work is conceptualized.

**Keywords:** Polish literature, world society, polyculture, national character.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Slavic literature of the twenty-first century is not a peripheral voice, but a full-fledged part of the world literary mosaic. It enriches the global discourse with deep historical layers, existential tension, and cultural complexity. Through translations, international projects, and dialogue with other cultures, it is increasingly shaping the global literary canon.

The literary paradigm of the Slavic peoples is the literary texts of a large group of ethnic groups united by common historical roots, linguistic affinity, and similar cultural traditions. One of the main ethno-cultural features is a common linguistic origin, which makes fiction close to understanding and analysis. Another important feature is traditional culture – rituals, songs, crafts, folk costumes, which is fully reflected in the fabric of the work. Slavic peoples retain ethnic affinity. First of all, they are united by their love of nature, song, folk wisdom, hard work and deep respect for culture. Of no less importance is the religious component, which has also played an important role in shaping ethno-cultural characteristics.

The works of contemporary Ukrainian researchers - psychologists, philosophers, cultural studies scholars, and historians - reflect the discourse of individual and collective myth-making as a mechanism of intergenerational continuity. The continuity of the historical tradition is considered by V.A. Romenets, V.S. Gorsky, S.B. Krymsky, I.G. Bilyavsky, O.M. Laktionov, M.L. Chepa, O.A. Donchenko, V.O. Tatenko, T.M. Titarenko, V.O. Vasyutynsky, V.T. Kuevda, and others. The conceptual foundations of Slavic myth-making in Ukrainian literature are studied by scholars such as Olha Kravets in the context of the phenomenon of popularisation of Polish literature in Ukraine, Nataliia Zubrytska at the level of

comparative studies (mythopoetics of Ukrainian and foreign children's literature), Vira Ageieva (who does not specialise in children's literature, but analyses mythological thinking in Ukrainian literature, which is also relevant to children's texts), Tetiana Kachak – trends in the development of Ukrainian prose for children of the early twenty-first century. prose for children in the early twenty-first century, Olha Slonovska is interested in the issues of national identity and folklore tradition in children's literature. Traditionally established approaches to the study of the literary text as an artistic phenomenon and the latest achievements in the theoretical understanding of the nature of artistic creativity (historical and typological, receptive, hermeneutical strategies, the principles of structuralism, intertextuality, narratology) are represented by the research of N. Deviatko, T. Kachak, V. Kyzylova, L. Ovdychuk, O. Slyzhuk, L. Kutsoi, O. Kutsoi, and others.

Significant in the study and analysis of Polish literature are the works of Bogumila Stanuw (Stanuw, 2011), who provides an extremely interesting overview of selected works by Polish scholars on children's literature in the first decade of the twenty-first century. S. Adamchukova, who studies the special nature of literature for young readers, R. Waksmund's work on the history of the formation of children's literature (Waksmund R. *Od literatury dla dzieci do literatury dziecięcej*. Wrocław, 2000). Studies by A. Balukh and J. Papużyńska are aimed at connoisseurs of children's fiction.

## 2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Slavic motifs in children's literature are the use of images, themes, plots, characters, and ideas that come from the culture, mythology, folklore, and traditions of the Slavic peoples. They help to form national identity, transmit cultural heritage and arouse interest in the past. In the works of Polish writer Kornel Makuszyński, one can find a number of Slavic markers that reflect his cultural background, historical context, and literary influences. These elements are manifested in the themes, symbols, language and images that form the national identity of his artistic thinking. In his texts, the children's writer Makuszyński uses a rich Slavic lexicon, including archaisms, dialects and phraseology typical of the Polish language. This adds colour to his prose and emphasises his connection to folk tradition. According to the scholar Olha Kravets, "Having an established canon of literature for children and young people, Polish children's literature is becoming an organic and full-fledged part of the national literature. A clearly structured subsystem of fiction with its inherent genre and thematic features attracts not only Polish but also Ukrainian scholars" (Kravets, 2023, p. 22).

The purpose of the article is to introduce a fiction bestseller of the classics of Polish literature for children into the circle of children's reading; to analyse Slavic markers in the multicultural space of the text; to comprehend cultural codes, folklore images, national identity in the artistic fabric of the fairy tale "The Adventures of Matolka the Goat".

Using the theoretical issues of interpretation and poetics of texts for young readers developed by the researcher L. Maciejewko-Beckerska, who believes that the interpretive format of children's literature is valuable "first of all, the text, and then its reflection with the following analytical visions (Matsevko-Bekerska, 2011, p. 20). Thus, the landmark work by Polish writer Kornel Makuszyński, *The Adventures of Matolka the Goat*, is not just a funny fairy tale about a brave traveller. It is also a deeply national story, full of Slavic images, symbols and cultural codes that influence the perception of the world by the main character, the naive, kind and stubborn goat Matolka. Cornel Makushynsky and the artist Marian

Valentynovych propose an innovative format for a book for children, establishing a tradition of collaboration between a novelist and an artist.

Taking into account the artistic features of textual reality, the concept of the work's structure, the unity of content and form, and the systematic approach as a specific scientific methodology, children's literature researcher Tetiana Kachak believes: "In the study of literature for children and young people, it is legitimate to analyse the thematic and problematic, genre and style, plot and composition, figurative, linguistic, temporal and narrative levels (system components) of the poetics of a work of fiction" (Kachak, 2023, p. 32; Kachak, 2025). Actually, within the framework of this research, we will rely on the *thematic and problematic level* of the work – a circle of central events that constitute its artistic basis, reflect the main thought (idea), as well as the problems posed and comprehended by the author.

Traditional ethnoculture is an important resource that helps societies overcome crises, preserve their uniqueness and integrate into the global cultural space, not only acting as a marker of national and cultural identity, but also forming a spiritual basis for the further development of the people. According to Zhanna Denysiuk, Doctor of Cultural Studies: "Ethnoculture occupies a special place because it preserves the archetypes and ideas that form the basis of national identity. Its elements - language, folk art, rituals, crafts, folklore – are a reflection of collective experience and history" (Denysiuk 2010, p. 44).

One of the important Slavic ethnomarkers in Kornel Makuszyński's artistic thinking is his rootedness in the national soil. Although Matolek travels the world, his dream is dominant: to reach Patzanów, the city where, according to legend, horseshoes are forged for goats. This aspiration reflects a deep ethnic trait of the Slavic peoples: love for their native land, a return to their "family origins". The Slavs are characterised by their attachment to their small homeland, to their customs and traditions, which is also evident in Matolko's behaviour – he sincerely believes in the legend, and goes to his goal despite the difficulties. Common to the Slavic peoples is the reflection of the humorous and satirical tradition and folk wisdom. Throughout the work, the author uses a simple, witty language that is close to colloquial. Tsapok often finds himself in absurd situations, but there is something very "folk" about his naivety and optimism. Like a typical hero of Slavic fairy tales, he is naïve but sincere, patient and stubborn - and these are the traits that lead him to success. The work also highlights the importance of the journey as a symbol of self-discovery, a deeply rooted motif in Slavic folklore. Like many heroes of Ukrainian or Polish fairy tales, Matolek sets off from a familiar place to an unknown one in order to become wiser. The journey becomes a metaphor for growing up and forming worldview principles, which is typical of the folk fairy tale tradition.

We would like to remind you that a bilingual (Ukrainian and Polish) version of the famous literary fairy tale "The Adventures of Matolka the Goat" was presented in Ukraine in 2014. The book was published by the Kamenyar Publishing House in Lviv at the expense of the Foundation for Assistance to Poles in the East (Warsaw). The translation was carried out by the holder of the Order of the Smile, member of the Stryi organisation of the National Union of Writers of Ukraine, poet Theodora Savchynska-Latyk.

In the original version, the book was called 120 Adventures of Tsapko Matolko, went through several editions and was constantly updated – it is one of the first comic books in Polish. The series of stories ("*Przygody Koziołka Matołka*") contains numerous elements of Slavic folklore. The protagonist, a goat, travels in search of the mythical city of Patsyany, reminiscent of traditional Slavic tales of travellers in search of happiness or home. His adventures reflect the typical Slavic culture theme of travelling as a

means of self-discovery and returning to one's roots. Slavic markers in Kornel Makuszyński's fiction include

- Slavic elements (linguistic, cultural, symbolic),
- folklore basis (fairy tales, legends, images of animals, heroes),
- identity (which is formed through children's reading).

The poetic fairy tale consists of 120 stories, in the Ukrainian version - of 4 parts. The characters in the comic are structured as follows: magical creatures (Baba Yaga, Dragon-machine, the Queen, Mr Scarecrow, etc. e.); animals (forest animals, domestic animals, sea monsters, African elephants, reindeer); people (children, parents, soldiers, representatives of various professions). On his way, Matolko the goat meets wise people who give him advice and help him overcome difficulties. The protagonist meets representatives of different nations and races, finds new friends, goes through temptations (money, fame, a princess) and danger, and looks for a way out of various situations. Cornel Makuszynski and his co-author use a typical fairy tale principle – a fight with an enemy who can be defeated with the help of wit and friends. Thus, Matolka is characterised by a triumphant return to his native Poland, to Warsaw and Patsany. Under the author's pen, the hero grows up, gains invaluable experience in distant worlds, gives lectures to students, is published in newspapers, and enriches the community with new knowledge. The author proves that traditional/Polish/Slavic ethnic culture is an important resource that helps to preserve its uniqueness and integrate into the global cultural space, not only acting as a marker of national and cultural identity, but also forming a spiritual basis for the further development of peoples.

We are convinced that the crisis socio-historical processes of the early twenty-first century have led to an urgent need to rethink national consciousness, self-identification and defence of national values. Modern globalisation processes pose a threat of levelling and losing the ethno-cultural identity of peoples, especially in the context of war and provoked military conflicts. Being a highly educated man, Mr Makushynsky constructs a national hero integrated into a multicultural environment (the geography of the protagonist's travels includes America, Afghanistan, India, China, Portugal, and the North Pole). Analysing Mr Makushynsky's fiction, we understand that the cultural component is important for the author - a reflection not only of the way of life and traditions, but also of the philosophy of life of the described ethnic group (Chinese are moderately melancholic, Africans are emotionally active, Americans are commercially oriented, Italians are songwriters, etc.) The work also mentions an old "Hutsul who was two hundred years old" as an echo of Slavic symbolism, an excursion into the past of the writer, who was born in Western Ukraine.

The protagonist of *The Adventures of Matolko the Goat* demonstrates the main features of the national character through the main mental constants of Poles: respect for the family (the "goat family" is mentioned); love for the native language (he gives speeches, writes memoirs); knowledge of history (the mention of the "Polish knight"); memory of heroes (Poland finds Matolko in Africa and brings him back home). The main content elements that indicate Slavic markers in *The Adventures of Matolka the Goat* are:

1. Exoticisms (names of national realities of a particular people that remain unchanged in any translation) are signs of social status: "lord", "Polish knight with a saber"; ranks: "zhovnir"; the name of money: "zloty"; names of holidays, traditions, games, dances: "polonaise and krakowska".

2. Proper names and titles. Each nation has common proper names (Cornel, Matolek, Kasia). Geographical names also indicate national specificity (Warsaw, Vistula, Gdynia, Zakopane, Nowy Targ, Patsanów).

3. Objects and images-symbols. The symbol of patriotism among Poles is a clear awareness of national identity ("Be yourself, the way God created you").

For Kornel Makuszyński, the national basis of the protagonist's character is of fundamental importance, because Matolko's ideal, faith, and sincerity are rooted in the national worldview. According to Ewa Hoffman Piotrowska, "...despite the variety of events, Matolok remains a patriot: he loves Polish children, always returns to the bosom of his homeland, serves in the Polish army, and prefers healthy Polish cabbage to exotic dishes" (Matsevko-Bekerska, 2011, p. 6). In his works, Makuszyński uses a rich Slavic lexicon, including archaisms, dialects, and phraseology typical of the Polish language. This adds colour to his prose and emphasises his connection with folk tradition.

We consider it necessary to emphasise that the Polish ethnic tradition stands out among other Slavic cultural patterns. Poland became a European kingdom early on and had long-standing contacts with Western Europe. Eastern Slavs were largely influenced by Byzantium and later by Muscovy. Poland has a strong tradition of noble self-government and parliamentary struggle, which influenced the formation of the national idea. Other Slavs were often subjected to longer-term pressure from empires, which delayed the formation of modern national movements.

However, in the context of the Slavic literary paradigm, elements of linguistic kinship (derived from a common Proto-Slavic language); folklore traditions (in fairy tales, rituals, songs); and folk culture (agricultural roots, with beliefs in nature spirits and pre-Christian customs) dominate. Slavs generally value hospitality, family, and community. It is important to remember that over the centuries there have been constant migrations, exchanges, and cultural influences, which are reflected in artistic works. In analysing the work by Kornel Makuszyński *The Adventures of Matolka the Goat*, we would like to dwell on the folklore elements common to Slavic literature for children and young adults:

- *fairy tales*: magical creatures (Baba Yaga, Dragon-machine, the Queen, the Scarecrow, etc.);
- *Folk symbolism*: animals (forest animals, domestic animals, sea monsters, African elephants, reindeer);
- *social* and everyday people (children, parents, soldiers, representatives of various professional fields).

On his way, Matolko the goat meets wise people who give him advice and help him overcome difficulties. The protagonist meets representatives of other nations and races, finds new friends, goes through temptations (money, fame, a princess) and danger, and looks for a way out of various situations. Matolka is characterised by such Slavic traits as *emotionality*, a tendency to empathy, and a poetic worldview, especially when he tries to save someone.

Kornel Makuszyński uses a principle typical of fairy tales – a duel with an enemy who can be defeated with the help of wit and friends. Thus, Matolko's mental rootedness in the national soil characterises his triumphant return to his native Poland, to Warsaw and Patsany. Under the author's pen, the hero grows up, gains invaluable experience in distant worlds, gives lectures to students, is published in newspapers, and enriches the community with new knowledge. The mentality of every nation is based primarily on spiritual principles, and Poles are known to be very religious and nationally conscious. We understand that the realisation of the thematic and problematic level in a work of fiction

is conditioned by the plot, composition, imagery and other components of poetics and directly depends on them. However, this is not the subject of this article.

Cornel Makuszyński created a cult figure in the national literature for children. *Koziołek Matolek* embodies the main features of the national character and shapes the consciousness of many generations of Poles. This seemingly simple fairy tale demonstrates a new paradigm of multicultural education as the basis of national education. The authors of the most famous fable in Poland propose a cross-cultural dialogue to highlight the national consciousness of the hero. The main goal of the travelling goat is to get to the city of Patsyany, because he was delegated by "wise Polish goats"; the most important task of Kornel Makuszyński is to return Matolka to Poland. The text contains factors important for the functioning of humanity: spiritual (patronage – he builds a theatre, a philharmonic, an amusement park); material – the goat Matolko demonstrates commercial abilities (he sells his coat and beard to buy food); cultural and historical – the way of life, customs, and religious features of different continental groups (Europeans, Americans, and Africans) are depicted. So, although *The Adventures of Matolka the Goat* is a funny children's book, the main character's mind clearly shows Slavic markers: love for his native land, naive faith in goodness, folk wisdom and stubborn hope. It is these features that make *Tsapka Matolka* so close and understandable to readers from the Slavic world. Kornel Makuszyński's artistic thinking reflects a deep understanding of and respect for Polish national heritage, which makes his works important for the study of Slavic literature and culture.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, considering the mentality of an ethnic group with regard to Slavic markers, the literary fairy tale *The Adventures of Matolka the Goat* promotes national values; forms universal spiritual and cultural patterns; and contributes to strengthening cross-cultural ties. In fact, the ethno-cultural component emphasises the specificity of Slavic literatures in harmony with the world discourse of literature for children and youth.

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Соломія Ушневич. Слов'янські маркери у художньому мисленні Корнеля Макушинського: культурні коди, фольклорні образи, національна ідентичність. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника. Філологія*, 12 (2025), 63–69.

У статті йдеться про культову постать у польській національній літературі для дітей. Цапок Матолек (**Koziółek Matolek**) виступає носієм основних ментальних характеристик і формує свідомість не одного покоління поляків. Відтак, розглядається парадигма полікультурного виховання, як основа національного виховання; осмислюється феномен співпраці письменника і художника у тканині дитячого твору.

**Ключові слова:** польська література, світове товариство, полікультура, національний характер.