

An Ecocritical Study into Film Adaptation of *Znachor*, Directed by Michał Waszyński (1937)

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Introduction

There have been two film adaptations¹ of the novel *Znachor* [Folk doctor] by Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz. The first, directed by Michał Waszyński and written by Anatol Stern, was made in 1937. The second, directed by Jerzy Hoffmann, and co-written by Hoffmann and Jacek Fuksiewicz, was made in 1981. Both the book and the films were well received by readers and viewers.

¹ I use the term “adaptation” rather than “screen version” bearing in mind the danger of deterministic reductionism, which may connote the latter term. I am not as opposed to the term “screen version” as W. Faulstich and R. Strobel; I treat each of the film adaptations of the novel *Znachor* as a hypertextual (to some degree; see Genette) reference to the source material, rather than to an original. I do not wish to “verify” the adequacy of film interpretations. I treat film adaptations of *Znachor* as relatively autonomous works in terms of plot, style, and communication, which are not based on some media transfer, but on a specific artistic vision inscribed into a specific socio-cultural context and medium. “Relatively”, for there are shared elements of the novel and its adaptations, which allow one to seek dependencies and similarities, but their scope and status do not condition nor limit, aesthetically or cognitively, the films as significant wholes. See W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, “*Uksiążkowanie*” jako problem estetyczno-medialny. *Obcy – ósmy pasażer Nostromo – studium przypadku* [“*Novelization*” as an aesthetic and media issue: *Alien – a case study*], translated by M. Kasprzyk, revised by K. Kozłowski, “Przestrzenie Teorii” 21 (2014), p. 232.

In 1938 Dołęga-Mostowicz published a second installment of Rafał Wilczur's story entitled *Professor Wilczur*. In the same year Michał Waszyński made a film based on the novel under the same title, written by Anatol Stern. In 1939 there was another film, made by Leopold Buczkowski and written by Dołęga-Mostowicz entitled *Testament profesora Wilczura* [Professor Wilczur's testament], released in 1942.

In studies on works by Dołęga-Mostowicz, which were aesthetically and morally disputable even when the author was still alive², various discourses, such as social and cultural, are taken into account. Plenty has been written about *Znachor*, which has a lot of semantic potential for diachronic reading. The novel can be discussed using currently developing discourses, including the maladic discourse and its popular variants³, as well as critical discourse⁴. The proposal to take advantage of ecocriticism, which so far has not been considered in the case of the works by Dołęga-Mostowicz, stems from the semantic potential contained in the film adaptations, especially the 1937 one, which presents functions of presentations of nature and its relations with man which go beyond aesthetics. Illustrating the dynamics and changeability of nature not only confirmed the sensual, non-film experience of viewers, but also exposed relations between man and nature.

The aim of the present paper is to discuss a selected fragment of the 1937 adaptation from the perspective of ecocriticism. Using this example, I will show that already in the early days of cinema there were cognitively original, unorthodox ways of presenting the relationship between man and nature, which can be considered as inclusive signs introducing nature as a dramatically co-significant element of the represented world, which relativizes the anthropocentric scheme – at least to some extent. Inclusive signs understood in such a way resulted from a specific cultural tradition. In the case of the novel and its 1937 adaptation, there is no doubt that social ideas shaped by Young Poland's thought were one of the sources. The fact that the inclusive sign functioned in the area of popular culture is also important.

² In his 1935 *Przewodnik po beletrystyce* [A guide to fiction] Cz. Lechicki is critical of Dołęga-Mostowicz's works, seeing them as problematic in terms of customs and morals. See e.g. A. Tramer *Popularność literatury czy literatura popularna. Kilka uwag na marginesie „Przewodnika po beletrystyce” Czesława Lechickiego* [Popularity of literature or popular literature. Some comments on the margins of *Przewodnik po beletrystyce* by Czesław Lechicki], [in:] *Literatura popularna*, t. 1: *Dyskursy wielorakie* [Popular literature, vol. 1: Numerous discourses], edited by E. Bartos, M. Tomczok, Katowice 2013, pp. 31-39.

³ Dołęga-Mostowicz's novel presents a suffering, sick person's situation (Wasył, Marysia Wilczurówna, Leszek Czyński). This topic obviously could intrigue the reader, and at the same time teach them specialist terminology, thus influencing the popular circulation of medical knowledge. See M. Szubert, *Dyskurs maladyczny – perspektywy badawcze* [Maladic discourse – research perspectives], [in:] *Fragmenty dyskursu maladycznego* [Fragments of maladic discourse], edited by M. Ganczar, I. Gielata, M. Ładoń, Gdańsk 2019, p. 23, 25.

⁴ So far there have been no ecocritical studies into the novel *Znachor* nor its film adaptations. The present paper will discuss selected fragments, focusing on the 1937 film. However, there are publications discussing the works of Dołęga-Mostowicz, for example in the context of contemporary discourses on sexuality: S. Kwak, *Problem płci w literaturze popularnej okresu międzywojennego: samiec i impotent w prozie Tadeusza Dołęgi-Mostowicza* [The problem of sex in the interwar popular literature: male and impotent in Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz's prose], "Pamiętnik Literacki" 2012, no. 4, p. 69-81.

Cinema as a machine

Roland Barthes described popular culture and its myth-creating potential, stressing dimensions significant in relationship to cognitive and aesthetic values⁵. He wrote that myth is speech – not the subject of its message, but a way of pronouncing it. In the context of the present considerations, the assumption that there are formal, not substantial limits to myth, are crucial⁶. Thus, the role of popular spoken media, to which I include novel and film, is creating myths. At the same time both the audio-visual message and the written word become the substance of modern man's myth – man of knowledge who respects tradition, respects the simplicity of life, is part of nature, but at the same time can do more than others, because of his knowledge and competences, and freedom from superstitions.

On the mythological level, it is the creation of modern man's myth, and more broadly – of modernity, which “heals”, “repairs”, “subjectifies” progress – that is shared by the novel and its film adaptations. Nature is present in the creation of the myth understood in such a way, which is not reduced to a melodramatic “decoration” in the presented world, as I will show on the example of the 1937 adaptation. It is the viewer who is supposed to perceive relationships between man and nature, especially when one thinks of experiencing suffering. I assume that such a perspective echoes Schopenhauer's thought, which entered the imagination of inter-war social creators via Young Poland's “peregrinations”⁷.

Znachor, which was first published in installments in “Wieczór Warszawski”⁸, became popular largely due to its 1937 adaptation. The author knew what readers of the magazine liked, which is probably why he decided to introduce the issue of medicine to his novel, a topic readers found interesting at the time. In general, Dołęga-Mostowicz's works registered al-

⁵ R. Barthes, *Mitologie* [Mythologies], translated into Polish by A. Dziadek, introduction by K. Kłosiński, Warszawa 2008, p. 239.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ This hypothesis requires multi-aspect analyses; here I treat it as a determinant of the possible influence of a specific tradition of thinking on a text.

⁸ A novel published in installments, i.e., so-called serial novel – was characterized by certain ambitions of its author, which manifested themselves in undertaking a current issue presented in melodramatic conventions facilitating “translating” medical or psychological knowledge into a language that allowed an easy understanding of the plot and protagonists' motivations, stylistic games (prof. Wilczur, Antoni Kosiba, Samuel Obiedziński all have their own voice. Obiedziński, who talked the protagonist into buying him vodka and dinner, talks like a criminal, whereas Wasyl Prokop – like a peasant), unexpected plot twists, increasing dramatic tension, the construction of complex characters (especially Rafał Wilczur as Antoni Kosiba; Wasyl, a suicidal victim of medical neglect, becomes an embodiment of affirmation of life once he is healed – in the novel he walks among peasants bringing grain to a mill, in the 1937 adaptation – he proudly walks to the cinema). In the same issues of the magazine where subsequent installments of the novel were published, recurring maladic discourse (to use modern language) was also present in the form of articles about diseases, as well as ads of numerous, various medical services. In this context, the novel became a “crack” enabling an insight into the interesting, mysterious, and definitely unusual world of doctors and what they dealt with. Doubtlessly the novel brought readers closer to the complexity of science – in this case, medical – showing that it was effective in situations when previously people could only hope for a miracle. At the same time, since Dołęga-Mostowicz was also a journalist, he knew the needs of mass readers, who enjoyed reading about doctors and patients. The author read descriptions of diseases, which is probably why he proposed the popular – like *Dr House* – “lesson” on medicine. Popular literature authors, who published them – among other places – in the press, were interested in scientific novelties, fun facts, sensational stories, simultaneously creating alternative, elaborate versions of press reports. See M. Kochanowski, *Melodramatyzm i powieść (Żeromski, Mniszkówna, Strug). Od rytuału do sensacji* [Melodrama and novel (Żeromski, Mniszkówna, Strug). From ritual to sensation], Białystok 2015, p. 34.

most every social, moral, political, and economic change of their times⁹. Doctors of various specializations advertised their services in “*Wieczór Warszawski*” and other contemporary magazines. In a way, the press taught specialist terminology even through ads offering medical services¹⁰. There were many articles about diseases available. Hence, I propose to treat *Znachor* as a medium for creating a social image and transmission of medical knowledge “explained” in simple terms that were easy to grasp for readers (and thanks to the adaptation – viewers), who could learn that modern medicine was effective in situations when before they could only hope for a miracle. In this context, popular literature was doubtlessly a medium, or even “promoter” of modernity. Dołęga-Mostowicz’s fame was unusual, similarly to Waszyński’s popularity¹¹. The novel sold well, and its 1937 adaptation was a box office hit, which must have encouraged both the writer and the director to continue the story. After all, from this perspective the contemporary mechanisms of culture, similarly to those of the present-day, changed insignificantly: success was to imply another success, at the same time minimizing any financial risk related to investing in a completely new project whose reception would be difficult to predict.

Obviously, there are many similarities and differences between the literary source material and its film adaptations. Moreover, in the 1981 adaptation there are references to both the novel, and the 1937 adaptation. The first is more closely related to the novel’s hypotext than the later. All three share a similar plot scheme: the medical success of prof. dr. Rafał Wilczur – amnesia – the protagonist’s roaming about and working in the countryside – important surgeries – trial and the regaining of his identity. In Waszyński’s film there are plotlines which do not appear in the novel, such as the story of Beata, the protagonist’s wife, and her daughter Mariolka (i.e., Marysia Jolanta) who live in the countryside. In the film, Beata’s lover, Janek, dies crushed by a tree (I will return to that later) – whereas in the novel he dies of tuberculosis. In the 1981 adaptation, Beata’s and her partner’s plotlines are not included; neither is Marysia’s childhood; events preceding the protagonist’s memory loss are reduced to metonymically fictionalized pictures, based on which a viewer who does not know the source material or the 1937 adaptation can only deduce the reasons behind his tragic situation. In the novel and the 1981 adaptation, the plotline of Wilczur’s false identity is presented in a similar way; the protagonist is arrested for vagrancy, for he is unable to provide any personal data. Both in the novel and the adaptation the protagonist steals Antoni Kosiba’s documents from a police officer’s desk. In the 1937 adaptation, the protagonist becomes Kosiba after he receives documents from a fellow vagabond. In the novel, Szokpowa owns the shop where Marysia

⁹ See P. Śliwiński, *Dołęga-Mostowicz*, Poznań 1996; I. Poniatowska, “*Płci opętani, gęba spętani*”: tabu w powieści popularnej na przykładzie powieści Tadeusza Dołęgi-Mostowicza (“*Bracia Dalcz i S-ka*”) i Witolda Gombrowicza (“*Opętani*”) [“Possessed by sex, bound by mouth”: taboo in popular literature on the example of Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz’s (“*Dalcz Brothers and co.*”) and Witold Gombrowicz’s (“*Possessed*”) novels, “*Napis*” 2012, No 18, pp. 191-205.

¹⁰ “*Wieczór Warszawski*” published ads of clinics treating arthritis; STD, stomach, bowel specialists, orthopedic surgeons treating “sport injuries, bone afflictions, deformities and fractures”, prostheses and orthopedic equipment, as well as RTG for treating heart, lungs, liver, skin, and even hair. This list is based on press advertisements published in the first issue of “*Wieczór Warszawski*” from 1st January 1936, which also published a magazine novel by Dołęga-Mostowicz entitled “*Dr. Murek Zredukowany*” <https://crispa.uw.edu.pl/object/files/102741/display/Default> (23.01.2021r.)

¹¹ Michał Waszyński directed 40 films between 1929 and 1939. His creative potential was massive. See <https://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?osoba=118265>. The documentary *Książę i dybuk* [The Prince and the dybbuk], 2017, by E. Niewiera, P. Rosołowski is a valuable resource on Waszyński’s persona.

Wilczurówna works and she looks after her; in the 1937 adaptation, she owns the cinema where Marysia Wilczurówna plays the piano; in the 1981 adaptation Marysia works in a shop. During the trial, both in the novel and the 1937 adaptation Dr. Dobraniecki, prof. Wilczur's former student, who is called upon as an expert evaluating Wilczur's surgeries, reveals his true identity only at the Radoliszki cemetery. In the 1981 adaptation prof. Dobraniecki reveals Wilczur's true identity in court. I point out the basic (not all) similarities and differences between the different versions in order to show that on the dramaturgic level, they are partially the same – however, as hypertexts, both adaptations focus on different plot elements of the novel and their social references. Any differences between the literary hypotext and its film hyper(trans- due to a different medium)texts present references which were important for directors and audiences at a specific socio-cultural and historical moment. However, the 1937 adaptation directly shows relations between man and nature based on mutual connections, using montage and audiovisual materials (such as outdoor images of trees or wind whistling through grass).

Adrian J. Ivakhiv, an original scholar who combines film studies with ecocriticism introduces the concept of cinema as an anthropological, geomorphic, or biomorphic machine¹², using the notion of “the anthropological machine” proposed by Agamben. Ivakhiv points out three layers which permeate one another and bring film closer to the real world. However, he stresses that a moving¹³ picture produces worlds presenting people, objects and things and creates pictures showing dependencies between them, including those between man and nature. As an anthropomorphic machine, cinema creates film versions of man or forms similar to man, thus generating a subject-world or seemingly social world; as a geomorphic machine – in the creation process of spatially organized or materially mapped object-world – it builds “geography” based on the contrast between here-ness and there-ness, as well as on relationships and distances between elements of the represented world; cinema as a biomorphic (or anamorphic) machine is revived in the creation process, allowing one to see forms which are presented as those that see and are seen, hear and are heard, similar to us – viewers who see and hear them, thus learning how to perceive what is “alive”¹⁴. In this context cinema reveals the world of subjects, objects, and things connecting them. The anthropomorphic world of Antoni Kosiba, a folk doctor, and the miller's son, Wasyl, on whom he performs a surgery, is inscribed in a countryside space, with its advantages (community life, work) and disadvantages (poverty, superstition, lack of access to medical specialists). The biomorphic perspective shows – like in the case of the 1937 surgery scene (which I will analyze later in the text) – that the distance between what is happening “here” (in a chamber, among people, during a surgery) and what is happening “there” (outside, outside the window, in nature) is not big; moreover, the distance is not shortened with conventional, melodramatically motivated aesthetic solutions, which

¹²A. J. Ivakhiv, *The Anthrobiogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema*, “Film-Philosophy” 15.1 (2011), p. 118.

¹³A. J. Ivakhiv stresses that movement is the key ontological category in cinema, from the perspective of which relations between film and reality, as well as between man and nature, should be studied. Ivakhiv often claims that pictures surrounding us move us, and we move with them. We begin to understand that a world filled with moving pictures transforms itself into a world of moving pictures. See A. J. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of The Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press 2013, p. VII-X.

¹⁴Ivakhiv's concept is complex; here I only offer an outline. A. J. Ivakhiv, *The Anthrobiogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema*, pp. 118-119.

use violent natural phenomena only for illustrating Wasyl's suffering during the surgery. The biomorphic perspective creates a context in which man perceives nature and simultaneously its might, fierceness and dynamicity, learning that he is an integral part of it.

Nature is bigger than man

Of course, the novel and its two adaptations represent the melodramatic convention from the genre perspective, which becomes a peculiar medium of socio-cultural transformations affecting the reception of the novel and its two adaptations. Melodrama allowed recipients to identify with protagonists, and thus facilitated learning about medicine or nature – for many viewers this might have been the first time they had had contact with such topics. After all, the 1937 film, similarly to the novel, was the medium of modern knowledge confronted with folk knowledge. At the same time, I disregard their artistic value.

What I am interested in here is the relationship between man and nature, significant from the perspective of ecocriticism. In the novel, it is presented as a background for man's life, its descriptions construct an emotional ambiance and help with situating events and characters – such as e.g., the description of nature on the day of Wasyl's surgery: “Meanwhile the sun emerged from the mists covering the horizon and flooded the world with its brightness. The outhouse was already full of light. Antoni, already bustling about for some time, was murmuring something to himself. Wasyl followed him with his eyes and did not speak.”¹⁵ The 1981 adaptation is similar; nature exposes the human drama. Each frame allows us to deduce that on the day of the surgery the weather was nice, but the operation is shown only in Kosiba's chamber in order to underline Wasyl's suffering and pain, and to illustrate the unusual skill of the folk doctor, at the same time highlighting the anthropomorphic perspective. Wasylko and Kosiba are shown close-up, using dynamic montage, which connotes strong emotions and their having to deal with danger.

The 1937 adaptation is an example of an approach that was ahead of its times, valuable cognitively, not just aesthetically. The film ceases to be exclusively an anthropomorphic machine (to paraphrase Ivakhiv); it becomes a geomorphic and biomorphic machine at least at one point, initiating the metonymic contiguity of what is human, alive and suffering, and what is living, co-significant nature, on the level of figures. It is life, presented in the film on the horizon of the man-nature relationship, that reveals their shared ontology. I appreciate the interpretative risk; at first the viewer assumes that nature is supposed to illustrate Wasyl's suffering, which is why it is strongly functionalized, hence on the stylistic level it seems to be a conventional device. And this is probably the case from the perspective of that time, but nowadays, taking advantage of ecocriticism, a complementary interpretation can be proposed.

Of course, it should be stressed that the nature of the novel makes universal rights real, it is their rule, which – like the will to live in Schopenhauer's philosophy – manifests its might

¹⁵T. Dołęga-Mostowicz, *Znachor*, Wolne Lektury, p. 38. The electronic version of the novel was published by Fundacja Nowoczesna Polska based on the 1990 Warsaw Labos edition.

in subsequent representations. Dołęga-Mostowicz shows that nature is stronger than man. Antoni Kosiba visits the village shop where Marysia works. The folk doctor immediately takes to her, and she to him. Neither of them knows the source of this strong bond, trust, and ultimately sacrifice; to perform surgery on her, Kosiba steals surgical tools from the local doctor, ending up in prison for fighting for her life. Dołęga-Mostowicz shows that the bond between father and daughter is a relationship which reflects some major natural order, and each character is just a medium of that order. Antoni Kosiba is prof. Wilczur, who lost his memory; Marysia is a daughter who has not seen her father in years, and yet – they both felt a natural bond from the onset, feeling for each other, they found each other; she in him, and he in her, they experienced love as *caritas*, which made them metaphysically identical¹⁶, and it was because a relationship between a father and his daughter belongs to the natural order. Laws connecting a father and his daughter are thus natural, which is why what is social and cultural – prof. Wilczur's wife, Beata, who by abandoning her husband and taking their daughter with her away from Warsaw is unable to destroy what is natural, i.e., the bond between a father and his daughter. On this level, nature is an ontological and ethical basis¹⁷ of complex interpersonal relationships. In the film adaptations this message is reinforced by the duality of roles played by actresses who play both Beata and Marysia: Elżbieta Barszczewska (1937), and Anna Dymna (1981). In my considerations I propose to employ ecocriticism¹⁸, which I will use for discussing the portrayal of nature, focusing on the 1937 adaptation in order to show that characteristics ascribed to it, based on which man can perceive himself as part of a complex, living, and sensing whole.

Obviously, on the biggest level of generality it can be said that the novel and its two adaptations show – in the example of the protagonist – an important reevaluation resulting from the transition from pre-modern to modern Poland. The novel and its adaptations open with scenes presenting prof. Wilczur performing surgery on a seriously ill patient. Prof. Rafał Wilczur and the world in which he functions are a synecdoche of modern Poland – based on knowledge and higher education, exchange of scientific thought, a convenient world; for example, in the 1937 adaptation the protagonist drives a car, has a landline at home and at work, he lives in a world free of superstitions. Antoni Kosiba is a synecdoche of pre-modern man; he functions among superstitious people for whom religious thinking is superior to, or at least as important as rational thinking (which is manifested in respect for doctor Pawlicki's authority – if he said that Wasyl would not walk again, there is no point in praying), the villagers are superstitious, they live in humble conditions, they go to their folk doctor and town using peasant wagons. Thus, it can be assumed that the protagonist, by losing his modern identity, approaches a world that is disappearing, i.e., the pre-modern world, and at the same time, facilitates the confrontation of those two parallel socio-cultural realities. Wilczur's and Kosiba's Polands meet in the same person. Ultimately modernity wins – the folk doctor is ef-

¹⁶The described relation is of a different character than the one between count Leszek Czyński and Marysia (or her urban suitors, such as Wojdyła) or the one to which Kosiba is encouraged by Zonia, a widow who lives in the miller Prokop's house, i.e., sexual love. The origin of those two types of love is probably representative of Young Poland, and through this path it resembles Schopenhauer's philosophy. See M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Schopenhauer i chuć* [Schopenhauer and lust], "Teksty" 2(14) 1974, p. 26.

¹⁷See M. Kochanowski, *Melodramatyzm i powieść*, p. 47.

¹⁸W. Howarth, *Some Principles of Ecocriticism*, [in:] *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Ch. Glotfelty, H. Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. 69.

fective because he relies on his medical knowledge, which gradually returns, even if he also prescribes herbs. The trial is also a praise for modern Poland, both in the novel and its adaptations, because the state – modern, fair, passing judgment based on respect for (medical) science and scientific authority – wins. Ultimately, Antoni Kosiba is not punished. To put it simply, the novel and its 1937 adaptation are a literary and film “reportage” describing socio-cultural transformations, the everyday reality of living in pre-war Poland. The 1981 version is a peculiar “summary” of those transformations, which however are not a simple synthesis of the novel and the 1937 adaptation, for obvious reasons.

Ecocritically

Nowadays, ecocriticism may inspire mistrust in scholars in many situations, for several reasons. First of all, the prefix “eco-” is overused in the world of marketing. For example, advertising clothes or food as “ecological” (which can have many different meanings) may cause disdain for using it and expressions containing it in the area of the humanities or social sciences. Many skeptics believe that ecocriticism is but an intellectual trend which superimposes a new conceptual network on well-established analytical and interpretative academic patterns, without any new cognitive value¹⁹. This is obviously not the case – it is enough to read academic studies on it²⁰.

In the academic discourse there is a nature-natural science distinction²¹, whereas colloquially and in artistic discourses the meaning and references of those notions often overlap, they are used interchangeably and intuitively. I will continue to use those two notions as synonymous, in order not to deviate from the cognitive bases accompanying Dołęga-Mostowicz and the directors of the two adaptations. Many scholars stress that we are stuck in the nature-culture opposition²², as if we wanted to continue to think and act dichotomously, as if we could not look at living, passing, and dying biodiversity as a whole, of which man is just one element.

In literature studies ecocriticism has been employed not only to describe what refers to the natural environment today, but also to study earlier manifestations of (to put it very simply) ecological awareness. The growing amount of academic literature on the topic is huge, but also simply significant. This applies to foreign research, starting from the somewhat seminal volume edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, as well as Polish works, such as Julia Fiedorczuk’s *Cyborg w ogrodzie. Wprowadzenie do*

¹⁹In ecocritical studies, many scholars cannot free themselves from initiating world-view and political contexts, provoking and reinforcing many simplifications and stereotypes, such as that leftist scholars are supposed to be associated with a reflection focused on the man-nature relation, whereas conservative scholars – even if they accept this dichotomy – consider man superior to everything non-human. The present paper presents only a small part of the author’s research, for whom academic reflection is treated as unconditionally primary in terms of political or market expectations.

²⁰Rich academic literature on this topic reflects the diversity of issues discussed within it. See A. J. Ivakhiv, *The Anthropogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema*, p. 119.

²¹For semantic relations between the two terms see, among others, A. Barcz, *Realizm ekologiczny. Od ekokrytyki do zookrytyki w literaturze polskiej*, Katowice 2016.

²²W. Howarth, *Some Principles of Ecocriticism*, p. 69.

*ekokrytyki*²³ [Cyborg in the garden. Introduction to ecocriticism] or Anna Barcz *Realizm ekologiczny. Od ekokrytyki do zookrytyki w literaturze polskiej* [Ecological realism. From ecocriticism to zocriticism in the Polish literature]. If we assume that the number of academic publications and the concern that one may leave out some work by an important scholar prove that a discipline is “maturing”, then ecocritical theories had matured even before they made themselves at home in humanistic and social discourses²⁴. Ecocriticism has a short history in film studies: it represents the tradition of academic work on the man-nature relationship in cinema in different countries, so-called national cinema, and European comparative studies in film cultures. Pietari Kääpä claims that ecocritical reflection was already recognized in film studies when David Ingram published *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* in 2004 (which, by the way, is the same year when Greg Garrard published *Ecocriticism*), and Pat Brereton – *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology and Contemporary American Cinema* in 2005²⁵. The monograph *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* is another important book on the topic. In Poland, there have not been many works on ecocriticism in cinema: only individual papers²⁶, thematic magazine issues²⁷ and monographs.

The variety of references and contexts shows that ecocriticism is not a fashion, a manifestation of political sympathies, or an attempt at colonizing some domain in science in order to establish one’s academic status – it is a cognitive and ethical necessity. Apart from everything that has been written on ecocriticism as a research approach, bearing in mind complementary research in ecological humanities or posthumanism, ecocriticism stems from an apocalyptically “motivated” awareness of the inevitability of changes influencing life in the biological sense, caused mostly by man²⁸.

Thus, in literature or film, ecocriticism refers to an analysis and interpretation of those representations which illustrate the man-nature relationship (e.g., *Plakat z drewna* [Wooden poster] 1961; *Wieża. Jasny dzień* [Tower. A bright day], 2017; *Pokot* [Game count], 2017), as well as those texts of culture in which such accounts are a background for events, their frame, or context (e.g., *Struktura kryształu* [Structure of crystal], 1969), although in this perspective it is significant to extract the meaning of nature as a reality constituting the represented world or its elements. The ecocritical research practice that I am proposing refers to relations between people and their natural environment, and ways of presenting such relationships in texts of culture, including Dołęga-Mostowicz’s novel and its two adaptations. Below I shall analyze only one fragment of the 1937 adaptation.

²³J. Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg w ogrodzie. Wprowadzenie do ekokrytyki*, Gdańsk 2015.

²⁴No 2. of “Teksty Drugie” (2018): *Ekokrytyka* [Ecocriticism].

²⁵P. Kääpä, *Ecology and Contemporary Nordic Cinemas. From Nation-building to Ecocosmopolitanism*, London 2014, pp. 3-5.

²⁶M. Podsiadło, *Ekokrytyczny trójgłos w kinie polskich reżyserek filmowych* [Ecocritical three-voice in the cinema of Polish female directors], “Pleograf. Kwartalnik Akademii Polskiego Filmu”, No 3/201: <https://akademiapolskiegofilmu.pl/pl/historia-polskiego-filmu/pleograf/polskie-kino-kobiet/18/ekokrytyczny-trojglos-w-kinie-polskich-rezyserok-filmowych/691> (20.11.2020).

²⁷Thematic issue of “Ekrany” Magazine, *Ekokino* [Ecocinema]: “Ekrany”, 2(54) 2020.

²⁸I use “apocalyptically” in order to highlight not only visions of the end of life on Earth in the form we know as humans, but also to stress that modernity in the form of technology, instrumental treatment of science, and vulgar reduction of biodiversity has led to situations whose consequences are impossible to predict. I have an impression that ecocriticism is thus also an attempt at understanding reasons which set in motion events in complex, multi-vector cause-and-effect orders, an attempt based on reading texts of culture which store images and knowledge on this topic.

I would like to stress that the fragment I selected illustrates nature in a conventional way, which nonetheless can be interpreted in a new theoretical context, thus going beyond the traditional opposition of subject (implicitly: man) and object (implicitly: thing, animal, plant). In the 1937 adaptation nature is shown as actual trees or reeds. Its references to man serve the role of metaphor illustrating Wasyl's suffering. It should be noted here that in the analyzed sequence the juxtaposition of nature and man was supposed to evoke certain emotions in viewers. Simple dramaturgic devices were calculated to result in a box office success; Waszyński relied on well-established schemes, typical for melodrama²⁹.

Thus nature, as a biomorphic subject, is not something "good" because it imitates man, is subjected to man, serves man, or resembles man (hence nature's picture is released from sentimentalism which instrumentalizes it in the represented world). What inspires ecocritical reflection in the discussed fragment is the presentation of the world of nature, living, dynamic, diverse, "taking over" man's suffering, which is why montage consisting of frames of nature and subsequent stages of Wasyl's painful surgery, is so significant. Dynamic images show natural phenomena and plants at the same time and place as viewers could experience them themselves³⁰. As a biomorphic subject, nature thus includes man and his life, "absorbing" them in its ontology and existence.

The subject perspective goes beyond traditionally aesthetic images of nature treated as "decorations" of man's life. Nature does not approach man – man approaches nature, as if he wanted to imitate it again. The subject vector goes in two ways: from man to nature, and from nature to man, where direction implies the supremacy of one order over the other; in the first scenario, nature is superior to man, and in the second vice versa. However, subordination is not crucial; it is continuity allowing to make man aware (at least to some extent) that he is a part of a living whole, he depends on it – he is dependent in a continuous way, not nature shown in the form of specific images. I do not claim that the analyzed fragment made man realize that he is in fact part of nature; this was not the goal of the film's creators, although the montage, music, and frames showing actual images of nature can be treated as elements which – to some extent – release the dramaturgy from the anthropocentric perspective and highlight the co-dependency of man and nature.

Two vectors

In my analysis and interpretation, I will show that the introduction of a realistic representation of nature to the film initiates contexts which are complementary for the anthropocentric perspective, dominating the contemporary culture. At the same time, I assume – although this hypothesis requires complex, intermedia (literary and film) studies – that we can look for the sources of ecocritical sensitivity in cinema based on Polish literature (and in our case – popular literature) in Young Poland presentations of the man-nature relationship.

²⁹A. Madej, *Mitologie i konwencje. O polskim kinie fabularnym dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [Mythologies and conventions. On Polish feature cinema of the interwar period], Kraków 1994.

³⁰Por. A. J. Ivakhiv, *The Anthrobiogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema*, pp. 118-119.

I propose to consider the analyzed fragment from my original perspective of a **two-vector ecocritical concept of referring film fiction to non-film reality**. In terms of the proposed concept, the introduction of frames that present actual images of nature to the fictional world of the film initiates a double perception of the same signs which are functionalized in two ways. The first vector, **aesthetic-expressive**, allows one to look at what is real from the fictional perspective. In this approach the presentation of nature is treated as an element which completes man's fate in a metaphorically charged way. This perspective is anthropologically dominated, it treats nature in an instrumental way, as a decoration, "ornament", axiological resource. The second vector, **cognitive**, allows one to reverse the dependencies. From the perspective of the genuine representation of nature, semiotically and symbolically introduced to the context of film in an obvious way, in stylistic brackets – in the case of the 1937 film modeled by dynamic montage, visual elements of storm created by the filmmakers, and audio – we look critically at the man-nature relationship, in which we gradually set ourselves free from the anthropocentric perspective, noticing the geomorphic and biomorphic perspective as at least parallel to it. We learn about the order of fiction from the perspective of real references to life, which is as significant, even if it is not human. The second vector points to man's metonymic belonging to nature, of which he is part. Such an approach permits an analysis in the context of interpretations which so far have not functioned, and which are useful for realizing that film – similar to literature – has a huge potential of ecologically significant intuitions, ideas, and contents. I do not assume in advance in terms of my two-vector ecocritical concept that what I call intuitions, images and contents can be unambiguously diachronically reconstructed, constructing a "linear" history of ecocritically "engaged"³¹ Polish cinema: "engaged" in brackets so as to show that with this type of research approach there is a real risk of overinterpreting a film that was made long before the development and spread of modern ecocritical theories. I am writing about intuitions in this context in order to show that in different fragments of the film a way of imaging appears, which can be interpreted traditionally, bearing in mind existing film studies theories – but they can also be analyzed by using new critical references.

Analysis: After Kosiba and Prokop's prayer (the anthropomorphic machine is turned on) first, short frames of nature appear: reed, grass, dead tree, dark clouds (here the biomorphic machine is turned on). The camera is set on the window of Kosiba's chamber, the lens moves towards the doctor, stops at him. A short, dynamic cut with a one-second frame showing lightning. Cut, followed by Kosiba preparing tools and a rope which he will later use to bind Wasyl. Cut, another one-second frame of lightning. Light on the patient's body indicates that there is a thunderstorm going on outside. Cut. Another one-second frame of lightning. The whole chamber is filled with sudden flashes of light, probably from lightning. Cut, another frame showing the cloudy sky and lightning. Cut, followed by a frame showing the folk doctor about to start the surgery. Close-up showing Wasyl's face twisted with pain. Cut. Frame showing a windblown tree against the background of the cloudy sky. Beads of sweat on Wasyl's face. Cut. Prokop is praying for his son's recovery. Cut. Kosiba, focused on his task, and Wasyl, who

³¹I put this word in inverted commas in order to show that at the present stage of the research we are witnessing possible, ecocritical analyses and interpretations of films made when ecocriticism did not function in the mainstream of critical discourse – and if it did, it was in a form modeled by different normative systems compared to the present day.

loses consciousness because of pain. Blurred image suggesting loss of consciousness. Cut. Prokop is still praying; the camera moves from him to a picture of Jesus. Another cut – landscape with heavy clouds, which are slowly blown away revealing the sun. Cut. A reflection of trees in water gives an illusion that they are upside down. During such a major trial as the surgery performed by Kosiba, almost the whole natural order is reversed. Another cut, combined with an image of a tree, this time shown normally. Cut. Sun is peeking through clouds. Cut. The camera shows the window in Kosiba's chamber, light is pouring through it. The camera leads viewers to two characters: Kosiba and Prokop standing over Wasyl. We can deduce that the surgery was a success, order emerges from chaos again, it is light. The montage is based on the dynamics “produced” by the geomorphic machine, as if the distinction into what is happening here (Kosiba's chamber) and there (outside the window) determines the topography of suffering in which it is possible to distinguish two significant “elements”: Wasyl and nature.

“Borrowing”³² the real world for the film is interesting – especially that most scenes where nature as the background were registered in an arranged film studio. The dynamic montage in the analyzed sequence highlights the relationship between Wasyl the peasant and nature, based on coexistence, mutual influence, growing into each other, and hence transgressing the pragmatic usage of nature by Wasyl, and doubtlessly – a far deeper insight into this coexistence than the naïve perspective that a peasant, i.e., a simple man, is closer to nature than the modern man. The analyzed sequence, which focuses on and thus highlights the relationship between nature and man, “pre-depicts”³³ the key rule of ecocriticism: *Everything is connected to everything else*.³⁴ This is how parity and co-significance of life in all its diversity is highlighted. The two-vector ecocritical concept allows one to see this life-giving unity in diversity. I propose to interpret the 1937 film ecocritically in order to extract the man-nature relationship, as well as to look at this relationship from a cognitive perspective representing a way of presenting nature that transgresses contemporary film conventions.

By analogy to Anna Barcz's considerations³⁵ that regard Polish literature and its ecological contexts one may ask what the relationship between film and nature is about, and what it can mean in ecocritical film studies. I think that film – a picture consisting of movement and sound – is especially “predisposed” for presenting the man-nature relationship precisely because it allows one to present life in all of its complexity, dynamics and change, and in time whose experience makes perceiving this relationship and its consequences real.

Writing that films move us and we move in them, Ivakhiv indicates that they influence the understanding of the man-nature relationship³⁶. Change and movement determine shared ontology in those relationships, due to which the represented can become the experienced.

³²Inspired by A. Barcz, *Realizm ekologiczny. Od ekokrytyki do zookrytyki w literaturze polskiej*, Katowice 2016, p. 122ff.

³³I propose to use the prefix “pre” in order to highlight that film can be interpreted ecocritically, taking into account the chronology of the discipline, which developed almost 60 years after the film was made.

³⁴W. Howarth, *Some Principles of Ecocriticism*, p. 69.

³⁵A. Barcz, *Realizm ekologiczny*, p. 122.

³⁶A. J. Ivakhiv, *The Anthropiogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema*, pp. 121-123.

Using frames recorded outside a film studio, in nature, obviously serves aesthetic-expressive functions: it is an example of an elaborate, audiovisual metaphor which serves to illustrate the internal state of a character who is suffering due to a painful surgery (breaking legs and setting them again). Anxiety and vehemence illustrated in subsequent frames showing nature, heavy clouds, windblown trees, and trees reflected in water connote the uncertainty, fear, and pain Wasyl experiences. Emotions presented in this way are probably supposed to be experienced also by viewers. When the surgery is about to end, the clouds are blown away, the upside-down image of trees is reversed back to normal, the sun is shining again – nature calms down, everything returns to its original order, which is probably supposed to symbolize the success of Wasyl's surgery.

Introducing a real, even partially distorted image of nature shifts viewers' attention from a suffering man to the living presence of nature and the "co-experiencing" of his suffering. On this level, film, as the biomorphic machine, presents life, movement, change inscribed in the image of nature which is looked at and which allows us to see life and its rhythm based on the transition from darkness to light, from storm to silence. It echoes Young Poland's approach to the man-nature relationship but reshapes this aesthetic "origin"; viewers suddenly look at "real" images of nature, at its sympathetic, i.e., unhidden (Greek *a-lethos*) face – and in this sense real or becoming real via fiction, and hence cognitively functionalized (rather than just presenting nature in an aesthetic way). In the latter case we are dealing with a syntagmatic, horizontal contiguity of man and nature. A metonymic way of illustrating the dependence which makes fiction real and universalizes non-film reality according to the common truth that man is part of nature is seen in this contiguity.

If I introduced the category of "compassion" in terms of ecocritical film studies, I could say that anxiety and suffering are experienced by living organisms, by nature in all its complexity, including by man as part of it. In order not to be accused of overinterpretation, I would like to highlight that this veristically charged image of nature, achieved through montage, requires more research in reference to other films, made both before and after World War 2.

The syntagmatic contiguity that presents the connection between man and nature is reinforced by an image which allows communication other than logocentric: suffering and anxiety "speak" in images, nature and man are seen as images by viewers, their ontology is determined by an audio-visual code. This juxtaposition of two shots: aesthetic and cognitive, metaphorical with metonymic, inspires critical reflection. A suffering man is someone who is closer to nature thanks to that suffering; when sick, man experiences things out of his control. The folk doctor is the middleman between these two orders, but even his actions have their limitations. Kosiba says that sleep and time are needed in order for the patient to get better. Man is defenseless in the face of nature – he does not dominate in relation to nature, he is part of it. It is no coincidence that images of nature include reed, which – at least for Pascal – symbolizes the fragility of human existence. Introducing images of trees, reeds, sky, water to the human world using montage connects Wasyl's body as an individual with compassionate nature, returning Wasyl to nature.

The metonymic contiguity of man and nature is obviously present also elsewhere in the film. Prof. Wilczur compares his life to an uprooted tree; Beata's beloved, Janek, a forester (in the

novel he works as a forester, but the 1981 adaptation does not mention it) who clears a forest and oversees tree-cutting, dies crushed by a tree (in the novel, he dies from tuberculosis). Those differences highlight the peculiar, ecocritical (to use modern language) way of thinking about the relationship between man and nature. The 1937 film is a cognitively intriguing “exception”. Using shots of real nature highlights the real relationship between man and nature, via the peculiar medium of sickness.

Conclusion

The proposed reflection allows one to look at a film which is important from an historical perspective as a potential source of ecocentric (and thus new) interpretations. The presented study is the first in a series; my aim is to reconstruct and extend various audiovisual variants illustrating the man-nature relationship. I assume that this will enable the creation of diachronic models for describing transformations in man-nature relationships in Polish cinema.

In the ecocritical perspective nature is important not as a motif, figure, topos, or aesthetic “tool”, but as reality which man is part of. The ecocritical reflection highlights man-nature relationships, as well as reorganizes the represented world and determines the need for a new theoretical approach; extracting nature – diachronically and synchronically – in cinema will influence the critical analysis of traditional poetics and change of research perspectives³⁷. This is necessary if we want to understand when – more or less – film started to “consciously” demand nature, and when it reflected only a purely instrumental and reductionist approach towards it. In the context of the proposed research perspective including literary texts and other media constituting images about life in all its complexity, life whose existence is not indisputable, will be obvious.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

³⁷See A. J. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of The Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature*, pp. 13-14.

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nature

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ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses a 1937 film directed by Michał Waszyński, also considering the novel written by Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicza which became the source of the screenplay, and the second adaptation of this novel directed by Jerzy Hoffman in 1981. The paper focuses on the interpretation of the film directed by Waszyński in the context of the relations between man and nature which was original and – in some way – went beyond the melodramatic convention. The film is interpreted in the context of the strong tension between traditional Poland and modern Poland, between fiction and reality.

film adaptation

LITERATURE

fiction

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