

SYMBOLIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE FAIRY TALE THEME OF MALFORMED AND LOST BODIES

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Abstract

In the Brothers Grimm fairy tales—which are the main reference point of this paper—motifs such as malformed human bodies (dwarfism) or faces (cyclopia, etc.), and loss of body—e.g. due to its transformation into an animal—occur frequently. They show a significant or total departure from typical human characteristics and are usually a clear sign of the manifestation of evil (done to others or experienced by them) or of a person’s supernatural qualities. A closer analysis, however, reveals a deeper symbol which goes back to the cultural significance of the body part or anomaly which affected the body. A fairy tale is also a message about the subjective meaning of ‘otherness’ for the subject and his surroundings. The aim of this article is to show the cultural and psychological importance of a ‘lack’—congenital or acquired—of the essential attributes of a human form (growth, typical number and position of the organs) from the perspective of contemporary readers.

Keywords: Brothers Grimm fairy tales, symbolism, transformation, loss, body

INTRODUCTION

In the Brothers Grimm fairy tales, which are the main reference point of the paper, motifs such as malformed human bodies which deviate significantly from the average human body, and of the transformation of a human body into stone, an animal, plant or other human, occur frequently. This has an objective sense,¹ as well as a subjective, psychological meaning, for the subject or for other people. This can be deduced—more or less directly—based on the action of the fairy tale and the fate of its heroes. When a person (intentionally and purposefully) changes his/her character with the use of a spell and has the power to return to his/her former appearance, this transformation has a positive meaning for him/her and is treated instrumentally as a means of achieving an intended goal or to avoid a threat.² This last type of transformation will not be taken into account; nor will ‘ordinary’ or irreversible loss of life, even if it happened in a cruel and spectacular manner.³

The subject of this analysis will, above all, be the motif of malformed human figures, beginning with drastic differences in typical body sizes, qualitative changes and, secondly, the unintentional loss of the human form. The aim of this article is to show the cultural, symbolic and psychological meaning of the motif of a malformed or lost body part, identified with the lack of a normal human form—congenital or acquired—or important bodily attributes (growth, typical number and location of organs). Magic, which is part of the definition of a fairy tale as a literary genre, determines the character of this motif.

¹ In fairy tales, this sense is contained in concise information—the type of transformation, loss of attributes of the human body or the human figure in general, or how loss of life occurred. Although this information does not contain any biological or medical characteristics, it is mentioned because it is the starting point of the tale.

² E.g. in the tale *The Foundling Bird* (KHM 51) the main protagonist, adopted by a forester, together with his daughter, change, successively, into a rose bush and a rose, into a church and a chandelier, and into a pond and a duck, and avoid death from the hands of a witch-cook, by drowning her in a pond when she tries to catch the duck. Similarly, in the fairy tale *Sweetheart Roland* (KHM 56), a girl who escapes her witch-stepmother with her beloved, turns him and herself into a lake and a duck floating on it, then into a fiddle player and a flower, finally she turns herself into the red boundary stone.

³ E.g. in the tale *The Robber Bridegroom* (KHM 40) the protagonist observes from her hiding place the cannibal killers chopping up the body of a murdered girl.

The motif of a malformed or lost body has been present in different periods and areas of culture, and still is. The content may differ, depending, for example, on the type of malformation or species of animal into which the human body is transformed. However, it always has a symbolic meaning so it can be understood in a broader cultural context. The fairy tale adopts its multifaceted, symbolic content, to emphasize the most important message (and, according to the nature of the symbol, leaving out the part that is unknown).

A fairy tale also points to the subjective meaning of these motifs (malformation or loss of a body) for the subject and other characters, so that they can become a part of the reader's experience. Their psychological significance is not explained directly, but becomes a subject for reflection due to the suggestiveness of the narrative. When the malformation or loss of a human body—due to its transformation into another being—is against the protagonist's will, it can be assumed it is connected with the mental suffering both of the hero and those people who show kindness to him/her.⁴ Empathy makes the readers of fairy tales identify with the protagonist.

The significance of this motif, as discussed herein, is seen to be complementary to Bruno Bettelheim's analysis; he noticed that fairy tales have the ability to show not only problems related to growing up, but that they also bring to light 'existential fears and dilemmas' and confront the child with them,⁵ and introduce them into the tradition of culture.⁶ Although more than forty years have passed since the following words were written 'the dominant culture wishes to pretend, particularly where children are concerned, that the dark side of man does not exist, and professes a belief in an optimistic meliorism' they are still relevant and it is worth paying attention to the role of fairy tales in tempering attitudes towards one's own corporality and other people, especially from a pathological aspect or the perspective (threat) of losing its significant properties (symbolized e.g. by its transformation into an animal).

1. THE MOTIF OF MALFORMED HUMAN BODIES – CONGENITAL ANOMALIES: DWARFS AND GIANTS

A malformation of the entire body, which consists in a reduction or enlargement of its size, occurs both in reality and in fairy tales, where differences in relation to ordinary people are marked in a spectacular way.⁷ In medical terms, dwarfism and gigantism do not have a single aetiology or clinical picture.⁸ However, the fairy tale uses simplifications, which is why dwarfs or giants occur as separate and homogeneous categories and their main feature—their abnormal size—is innate. The dwarf theme is more common and occurs, for example, in the fairy tales: *The Three Little Men in the Woods* (KHM 13), *The Elves* (KHM 39), *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs* (KHM 53), *Rumpelstiltskin* (KHM 55). Compared to the aforementioned tales, the protagonist's individualism stands out in: *Tom Thumb* (KHM 37) and *Tom Thumb's Travels* (KHM 45). Giants are mentioned in the fairy tales: *The Gallant Tailor* (KHM 20), *The Young Giant* (KHM 90), *The Giant and the Tailor* (KHM 183), *The Drummer* (KHM 193), and others.

⁴ A similar meaning can be assigned to a 'transformation' which consists in the degradation and loss of one's social status, e.g. in the tales: *Cinderella* (KHM 21), *The Goose Girl* (KHM 89).

⁵ B. Bettelheim (1996), pp. 30–32.

⁶ Ibid, p. 34.

⁷ E.g. Tom Thumb who at birth was the size of a finger, later could not only get into a mousehole, but also into the shell of a snail (KHM 37), and even under a thimble (KHM 45). The extraordinary size of giants can be inferred, for example, from a description that when fighting each other 'they uprooted trees'; *The Gallant Tailor* (KHM 20).

⁸ See: *Encyklopedyczny Słownik Psychiatrii* (1986), p. 14 (acromegaly) and p. 179 (gigantism); *Mała Encyklopedia Zdrowia* (1973) (dwarfism).

1.1. The motif of dwarfism

In the Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales, the dwarf motif⁹—popular in art and culture¹⁰—seems to have a more important role. Individuals who are significantly shorter than those of average height are described from the external perspective of a normal person. They do not live alongside people, but in secluded places, therefore meeting them can give rise to fear (*Snow-White*), however they can also be friendly and caring. They are characterized by their wisdom—which is not unusual in real dwarfs¹¹ and by their strong personality, which expresses itself in decisive actions and assertiveness—even when they help, it is on their terms.¹² They are guided by a sense of moral righteousness: rewarding for good and punishing evil;¹³ they introduce their own rules of behaviour in a man's world in bringing up girls.¹⁴ The dwarf exemplifies many aspects of the traditional model of masculinity, which is indicated, for example, by the information that they are miners (KHM 53). This creates a distance, which contradicts the principle put forward by psychology which states that contacts with little people are more intimate because they are treated as a 'substitute for children' and that they are attributed with childlike characteristics. Meanwhile, the distance separating normal people and fairy-tale dwarfs is no smaller even than that which separates them from giants, and the relationships they enter into with one other are usually based on transactions. Both in the case of dwarfs¹⁵ and people¹⁶ a relatively shorter body goes hand in hand with shrewdness mainly in its good meaning. Only if witchcraft is involved it may temporarily turn the balance in the side of evil.¹⁷

Dwarfs tend to have negative features which act as a warning to the readers. In the fairy tale *Snow-White and Rose-Red* (KHM 161), in which a dwarf aims to deprive the heroines of their home, his quarrelsomeness, ingratitude and disorderliness with a 'wrinkled face'¹⁸ are typical of senile personality changes, perhaps even of senile psychosis. The antihero, finally punished for his wickedness, was confronted with the mother of the titular heroines—a model of the good old age—who was awarded for raising ideal daughters by their happy marriages. A negative, and at the same time grotesque figure, is the dwarf who is the titular character of the fairy tale *Rumpelstiltskin* (KHM 55). His selfish request for a human child is thwarted because he prances around claiming no-one will ever guess his unusual name *Rumpelstiltskin* and he is overheard.

Dwarfism as the trait of a child whose parents are of normal growth can be found in fairy tales about *Tom Thumb* and this necessitates a completely different characterization of the miniaturized protagonist. Unlike the previous case, the relationship between 'normal people' and the boy's parents, and the dwarf-person—their son—are far more emotional and it is more important to interpret reality from an individual point of view and the dwarf-like person's subjective experiences. The Tom's manner of thinking and emotionality is characterized by fantasy, almost bravado typical of boyhood,

⁹ The original German word: *Zwerg*, is translated into English as: *dwarf*, less often: *leprechaun*, *brownie*, *sprite*.

¹⁰ See: J. Limon (2015/2016), p. 122.

¹¹ For example, according to Janusz Limon, D.R. Velázquez's portrait of the dwarf Don Sebastián de Morra (1628) 'draws one's attention due to the deep, wise look of this man.' When describing the portrait of 'the most famous Polish dwarf—count Józef Boruwlaski (1739–1837), he states that 'he was an extraordinary figure'; J. Limon (2015/2016), p. 123.

¹² For example, the 'tiny people' helping the poor shoemaker, after receiving clothes from him, abandon this work, but he continues to be successful, *The Elves* [I] (KHM 39).

¹³ In the fairy tale *The Three Little Men in the Woods* (KHM 13) the dwarfs handsomely reward the 'beautiful and good' girl for her goodness and cruelly punish the selfishness and rudeness of the 'ugly and repulsive' one.

¹⁴ Renata Ziemińska proves a hypothesis which is consistent (among others) with Freud's view that each gender is guided by a different type of ethics. R. Ziemińska (2008), pp. 115–131.

¹⁵ E.g. behaviour towards a bad daughter in the fairy tale *The Three Little Men in the Woods* (KHM 13), or using the naivety of a servant 'It was not three days, as she thought, that she had spent in the mountain with the little men, but rather seven years', *The Elves* [II] (KHM 39).

¹⁶ E.g. people's behaviour: *The Gallant Tailor* (KHM 20), *The Drummer* (KHM 193), *The King of the Golden Mountain* (*Der Berg* KHM 92), *The Giant and the Tailor* (KHM 183).

¹⁷ E.g. in the case of attempts to assassinate Snow-White by the evil queen in the fairy tale *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs* (KHM 53).

¹⁸ This feature is consistent with the real characteristics of prematurely ageing adult dwarfs.

so it cannot be compared with the mentality of adult dwarfs. On the other hand, the boy's father fulfils his son's irresponsible wishes, such as placing him in a horse's ear or selling him to strangers—thereby responding to the fantasies of a child guided by the powerful impulses of 'id'.

Tom Thumb makes up for his lack of growth and physical strength with cunning and dexterity, gaining an advantage over those who try to abuse him, as well as his parents' approval. He is not seeking permanent independence –and growth, like other young heroes, but after his adventures he returns to live in his family home.

1.2. Giants

The fairy tale representation of people suffering from acromegaly, or gigantism,¹⁹ are giants, as opposed to dwarfs and normal sized people. They are depicted because of their fundamental attributes: size and strength. These features are, however, a threat to people who—because of their own cunning—can use them for their own purposes. In fairy tales they are not confronted with dwarfs, as is the case, for example, in German proverbs,²⁰ but they are given distinctive characteristics. Their antagonist is usually a self-conceited tailor.

The presence of giants in fairy tales derives not only from Greek mythology, but also from the Old Testament. A common motif is that these giants are defeated by gods or people who are much smaller than they are, but who outstrip them because of their reason or virtue.²¹ The biblical symbolism of giants was explained by Jacek Salij.²² People who lived before the Great Flood were called giants, sons of God, who were born of human daughters (Gen. 6:4). The people of the Canaan—Anakim—sons of Anak were also giants (Num. 13:32–33). The author pointed to the biblical explanation of why the giants died during the Deluge: 'The giants were born there, the famous ones from the beginning of time, who were very large and experts in war. God didn't select them or give them the way of true knowledge' (Baruch 3:26–28). They died because they *had no wisdom*, and they did not want to trust God's Providence, but they trusted [only] in their own strength. Og, King of Bashan (Deut. 3:11)—one of the defeated, known by name—did not win, because God was not with him. Goliath in his duel with David (1 Sam. 17) represents 'the forces of evil armed to the teeth' but he is subjected to 'the forces of justice', 'the power of this world – but only in body, he is closed to spiritual power – he does not cross the borders of death, what is more, being itself the death subject.'²³ However, as Jacek Salij pointed out: 'the Old Testament already knew God's giants ... they announced a Strong Man'—as opposed to those who were evil and prideful.²⁴

An example of a strong man of this kind—not only physically but also spiritually strong—is St. Christopher, the best-known giant of Christianity, who wishing to serve 'the greatest master in the world'—Christ,²⁵ and who is rewarded with holiness. According to Janina Plezia, although the saint himself was portrayed as a 'good-hearted strongman', his story however: 'expresses the very profound idea that a man who is seeking uncompromisingly true greatness must finally come into contact with God.'²⁶ This exceptionally positive image of giants was sometimes referred to in tales in which the protagonist makes use of his strength and speed of movement. Making use of their naivety is justified

¹⁹ People characterized by excessive growth were already described by Herodotus (in the fifth century BC), see: M.D. Grmek (2002), pp. 105–106; European medicine became more interested in them at the end of the eighteenth century, see: *Historia medycyny* (1988), p. 335.

²⁰ The same proverbs apply to both giants (*Riesen*) and dwarfs (*Zwerge*), who symbolize, respectively, largeness and smallness of spirit, e.g. *Ein Zwerg zieht überall Riesen*, see: H. und A. Beyer (1985), pp. 473 and 707.

²¹ In Greek mythology there are giants of divine origin: Titans with serpentine legs (like Atlas carrying the globe) and Titanesses, Giants (Gigantes), fighting in the war with the Olympian gods – gigantomachia, one-eyed cyclopes (like Polyphemus blinded by Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*); see: *Mala encyklopedia kultury antycznej* (1966), pp. 772, 168 287, and 603. Giants (non-deities) also appear in Germanic myths of Scandinavia, the British Isles and of the Continent. S. Piekarczyk (1979), p. 35.

²² J. Salij (1996–1998).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Legenda na dzień św. Krzysztofa*, [in:] J. de Voragine (1996), p. 447.

²⁶ [J. Plezia, Introduction to the Legend on St. Christopher's Day, in:] J. de Voragine (1996), pp. 444–445.

in these messages, because it is not in a giant's nature to help a man.²⁷ Against this background, the titular character of the fairy tale *The Young Giant* (KHM 90), who from birth was as 'small as a finger', but kidnapped and breastfed(!) by a giant, himself became a giant and who with purported naivety uses his extraordinary strength to serve people, and punishes them for their greed and cruelty. His story is a culminating point both with respect to the tale of *Tom Thumb* (KHM 37, 45), and other fairy tales about giants, because it is a warning against disrespecting people who are weaker; either physically or intellectually.

1.3. Monocularity, three eyes and other facial abnormalities

In the Brothers Grimm fairy tales people with abnormalities occur—both those with congenital malformations, such as cripples with deformed bodies as a result of injuries. No direct 'quotes from medicine' have been introduced, i.e. references to real pathology, but their more or less symbolic transformation based on folk tradition, myths and legends. One such motif is monocularity and three eyedness as an example of facial deformities.

The lack of an eye (one-eyedness can be congenital, in which case the eye is located on the axis of the face (cyclopia)²⁸, or is the result of the loss of an eye. The first variant—practically unheard of in reality, occurs in one of the titular characters of the fairy tale *One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes* (KHM 130). Three-eyedness refers to the so-called third eye, the parietal eye, which only actually occurs in some organisms, whereas in most animals and in the human being, there is a pineal gland in its place.²⁹ Three eyedness is, however, a motif known in various cultures. In Hinduism, the god Siva has three eyes, the third of which is mystical and has the power to incinerate the world. Similarly, his wife, the terrifying Kali, has three eyes symbolizing the past, present and future.³⁰ In the *Divine Comedy* (*Paradise*, XXIX), Prudence, the most important of the cardinal virtues, is shown as three-eyed, because, as Dante says in *The Convivio* (Book 4, Chapter 27), 'One should therefore be prudent (that is, wise), and being wise requires a good memory of things seen, a good knowledge of things present, and a good foresight of things future.'³¹

Eyes, in the positive sense, signify light, both that which man takes from nature and from God, as well as inner light which signifies the heart and soul of man. The idea of an eye as a symbol of life and the sun derives from ancient Egypt and it was later adopted by Plotinus, and is present in culture to this day. Nevertheless the Gospels proclaim that: *The light of the body is the eye* (Mt 6:22, Lk 11:34), establishing one of the most important Christian senses of the eye.³²

The good and pious Two-Eyes epitomizes total humanity, 'physical and spiritual normality', One-Eye—'a lower level than human', because her soul lacks sufficient light. Three-Eyes, unlike One-Eye, is infallible, she also dominates Two-Eyes' human weakness. She illustrates both divine vision, 'the ability to penetrate everything, omnipresence, the impossibility of losing control over one's own sphere of action and vision', and also imperfection ('like every multiplicity') and destruction.³³ The action of the fairy tale, however, emphasizes the negative qualities of Two-Eyes' sisters. They are the antithesis of the meaning of the two eyes of the positive heroine, and the person.

²⁷ In the fairy tale *The Gallant Tailor* (KHM 20) the titular character cheats the giant three times to make him believe he has extraordinary strength, then craftily provokes the giants to fight one another and when they are exhausted he kills them. The Drummer (KHM 193) also uses a giant for his own purposes. However in the fairy tale *The Giant and the Tailor* (KHM 183) the boastfulness of the tailor is punished by the scared and gullible giant.

²⁸ From the medical point of view, cyclopia (a form of holoprosencephaly) is a rare congenital disorder (birth defect), see: J. Limon (2015/2016), pp. 121–122; A. Olejek et al. (2011), pp. 221–225; S.S.A. Ghassan et al. (2015), pp. 19–23.

²⁹ See: *Mala Encyklopedia Zdrowia* (1973).

³⁰ H. Ellinger (1997), p. 30; see: J.E. Cirlot (2006), pp. 284–285.

³¹ D. Alighieri (1959), p. 308 (*Purgatory*, 29, 130), p. 575 (footnotes).

³² D. Forstner (1990), pp. 347ff.

³³ J.E. Cirlot (2006), pp. 284–285.

The lack of one eye, as a feature of unclear aetiology (probably acquired because the other eye is on one side of the face) appears in the fairy tale *Brother and Sister* (KHM 11), its symbolism is also negative. It intimates the unpleasant experience of losing the other eye—it does not appear to refer to the myth of Odin which says that he gave his eye in exchange for drawing from the well of wisdom,³⁴ but to the common European motif of punishment by removing the eyes. The one-eyed girl is the daughter of a witch, the co-murderess of the main protagonist and a crafty usurper trying to insinuate herself into the favour of the murdered person's royal spouse. The young woman's visible disfigurement symbolizes her low moral stature.

Another type of disfigured face motif occurs in the fairy tale *The Ungrateful Son* (KHM 145). The toad, which cannot be removed from the titular character's face, as an acquired 'incurable disease', has all the hallmarks of a malicious tumour 'devouring' man. It is both a punishment for evil committed and a sign that it has taken control over the unfortunate person.

The toad, which from the late Middle Ages, has been an attribute of the devil and witches, carries far greater negative symbolism than the frog, associated with Egyptian plagues (Ex 8:5–6) and the unclean spirits coming out of the mouths of false prophets (Rev. 16:13)³⁵. The last motif appears in several of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales (e.g. KHM 13). The plot of the fairy tales has a close analogy to the sermon of Peregrine from Opole (b. 1260): a miser, like a frog, is always weakened by a desire for riches and hungry for them, full of venom, with eyes directed downwards towards earthly goods.³⁶

2.1. Motif of a lost body due to being transformed into an animal

Taking on the attributes of other species (and even people of other categories—of another gender, age, state) is in one sense the quintessence of fairy tales. On the one hand, it embodies the human desire to be somebody else, have superhuman properties (the ability to fly, move quickly, strength, etc.), the possibility of achieving goals for which one's own body is an obstacle or inadequate. A similar function is fulfilled in fairy tales by 'employing an animal' to carry out the commands of a man.

On the other hand, transformation into an animal is (often) a way to eliminate a hero—a form of punishment, and revenge. A man who is transformed into an animal is faced with dangers he has not experienced before, and above all he endures suffering due to being unable to function as a human being.

The fairy-tale transformation of a man into an animal fulfils—potentially—the following functions:

- 1) it symbolizes the imprisonment of the human element (and divine in man) in the sphere of instincts) and lack of will which drives impulses;
- 2) it is a symbolic picture of a serious mental health disorder—Lycanthropy (KHM 11).³⁷ There is a significant difference in relation to the normal functioning of an adult person, whose internalized restriction of the superego means that he usually does not feel such strong, 'irresistible' impulses;³⁸

³⁴ S. Piekarczyk (1979), p. 69.

³⁵ S. Kobielski (2002), pp. 352–353.

³⁶ S. Kobielski (2002), pp. 353–354.

³⁷ Lycanthropy is such a form of madness involving the delusion of being an animal. So he imitates sounds characteristic of the imaginary animal, as well as its appearance or behaviour; see: *Encyklopedyczny słownik psychiatrii* (1986), p. 606. In the fairy tale the Brother wants to drink enchanted water despite the threat of being transformed into a tiger, then into a wolf. The third time, he unstoppable and turns into a deer. In animal's shape he shows a lack of an instinct of self-preservation, even fascination for a deadly threat. Even after being hurt by hunters and being healed by his little sister, the deer does not renounce his destructive desires and when his sister stops him, he says: 'I will die of sadness – replied the deer – when I hear hunting horns, I cannot stand still'.

³⁸

- 3) it also refers to some physical diseases in which the face, and sometimes the body is disfigured, so that the patient resembles an animal (e.g. a lion's face in leprosy).³⁹

As mentioned in the introduction, the type of animal into which the transformation takes place is also significant. In the fairy tale *Brother and Sister* (KHM 11), it is a deer although incomparably less wild than the tiger and wolf, but according to Bruno Bettelheim,⁴⁰ its impulsiveness is very far removed from the human manner of functioning. The deer's escape from the hunters is close to the Christian image of the soul which 'escapes from evil in the desire for saintliness', and rejects its previous desire to drink poisoned water while the deer pursues the water of life.⁴¹

In fairy tales where the (unjust) curse of a father turns his sons into crows—in *The Twelve Brothers* (KHM 9)⁴² and *The Seven Ravens* (KHM 25),⁴³ the boys in the guise of birds must live in isolation and await for the removal of the spell by a sister who was the indirect cause of their condition. Their return to a human form is combined with a transition to friendly relations. The symbolism of these particular birds also has an important role. Ravens were usually considered abhorrent, because they feed on carrion. The Book of Genesis (8:7) mentions the raven that Noah released from the Ark before the dove in this manner. In the Book of Job, ravens were considered to be uncaring parents (Job 38:41). This last meaning is particularly rooted in the German language, where an uncaring father is called a *Rabenvater*, and an uncaring son a *Rabensohn*. In the Middle Ages, the raven was believed to reject its offspring for a while and not feed them until it saw that they had black feathers.⁴⁴

The number of brothers in the two fairy tales—twelve and seven—designates a closed cycle, a perfect whole, moreover, the number seven brings to mind the 'seven nations greater and mightier than you' that the Lord will drive out when he brings his people into the land that they are to possess (Deut. 7: 1–2).

A similar theme of changing sons (stepchildren) into birds and condemning them to an isolated life includes the *The Six Swans* fairy tale (KHM 49). The white swan recalls that the raven was also once white, and covered itself with black feathers after people had committed original sin.⁴⁵

2.2. Motif of a lost body part

The loss of a body part (a limb or a part of it, an eye) results in the improper functioning of the body and worsened appearance, as well as physical and psychological trauma. It evokes negative emotions and the need to modify how one thinks about one's self and relationships with others in the new situation, alludes to the symbolism of the respective body parts. E.g. a hand is connected with faith, blessing and hospitality (as one of the more important virtues), but also to absolute paternal authority. Cutting off the hands is a commonly known punishment for theft; but in the fairy tale *The Girl Without Hands* (KHM 31) the meaning of this motif has been reversed: it is fiendish revenge for the innocence of a would-be victim. The hands, which are held up in a gesture of prayer to God, are cut off at the devil's request, and their loss, as a price for saving one's soul, symbolizes trust in God. Nevertheless, evil still has no access to the handless girl, so she still has earthly happiness—i.e. love and marriage with a king. Her husband offers her human compensation—silver hands (silver symbolizes purity). This motif alludes to likenesses of the *Madonna with Golden Hands* showing the Mother of God with hands covered with sheets of gold like 'gloves', additionally ornamented with rings—an attribute of

³⁹ See: W. Szumowski (2008), p. 260.

⁴⁰ B. Bettelheim (1996), p. 135.

⁴¹ See: S. Kobiélus (2002), p. 131.

⁴² One day the king said to his wife, 'If our thirteenth child, which you are soon going to bring into the world, is a girl, then the twelve others shall die, so that her wealth may be great, and so that she alone may inherit the kingdom.' So the brothers had to escape, and they were later transformed into ravens.

⁴³ The father of seven sons and a new-born daughter, fearing that she would die without baptism, sent one of the boys to bring water, and incorrectly thinking that they had forgotten his order, said: 'May these unruly boys be turned into ravens!'

⁴⁴ S. Kobiélus (2002), p. 170.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

upper-class people.⁴⁶ Analogies to the figure of Mary also occur further on. In the seven years of separation from her husband, the queen and her son are looked over by an angel, and when the king finds them 'the angel greeted him from the cottage and invited him inside' where his wife and son were waiting for him. It turned out his wife has healthy hands again, which by the will of God had grown back'. When asked about her silver hands, the angel brings them from the chamber and shows them as if they are relics.

In this fairy tale, the story of loss is not only represented by the cut off hands and therefore her inability to hug her own child, but also by the separation of the spouses and her son whom she calls "Filled-with-Grief" (Polish: Cierpiduszek) who is isolated from his father. However, the metaphysical solution to this dramatic situation was clearly indicated.

SUMMARY

Deformation of the body or / especially the face deprives man of a perfect human form, and in extreme cases becomes the reason why he is considered a freak, a representative of the category of monsters, being an emanation of the forces of evil. The unnatural appearance of a man, since immemorial time has simultaneously fascinated and given rise to fear, and the birth of a child (and also an animal) with a developmental defect was treated as the harbinger of unusual, mostly unpleasant events.⁴⁷ In fairy tales too, the appearance of deformed people announces the need to combat evil.

Readers of fairy tales can overcome their fear of malformed bodies, their own, or those of other people, through the mechanism of conditioning, as described by Hans J. Eysenck. It consists in applying an unconditional stimulus that causes pleasure during interaction with the thing that causes anxiety. It is used in behavioural therapy, for example to extinguish a phobia.⁴⁸

The symbolic message of a deformed body serves to teach about virtues, the correct way of acting and the inevitable and mostly cruel consequences of bad conduct and stupidity – understood as disregarding the wisdom of others. It teaches proper (in the narrator's belief) relationships with people whose appearance and behaviour deviate from the norm. It also tells us about the psychology and behaviour of such people, their limitations (suffering), but also to harming others.

The loss of a human's essential features is usually a clear sign of evil (done to others or experienced because of others) or the supernatural properties of a fairy tale character. Closer analysis, however, shows a deeper symbolism that goes back to the cultural meaning of a given organ or the type of disfigurement that has affected the body, as well as the symbolism of the being (e.g. an animal) into which a man has been transformed.

A fairy tale is, among other things, a message about the subjective meaning of physical, and therefore psychological differences, for the subject and his/her social environment. This motif may be more or less of a fairy-tale nature or realistic, but in cases where an unfavourable change is reversible, the spell has to be lifted, and therefore standard logic is suspended, the reader may more easily overcome fear and think about resolving the problem in an unconventional manner.

⁴⁶ E.g. Hagiosoritissa – icon of Mary Advocate (Ital. Madonna Avvocata) in S. Maria del Rosario in Rome; K. Bogacka (2013), pp. 26ff.

⁴⁷ See: J. Limon (2015/2016), p. 120.

⁴⁸ *Encyklopedyczny Słownik Psychiatrii* (1986), p. 418.

**LIST OF BROTHERS GRIMM FAIRY TALES REFERENCED BY KHM NUMBER
(ORIGINAL TITLES ARE IN BRACKETS)**

- KHM 9. *The Twelve Brothers* (*Die zwölf Brüder*)
KHM 11. *Brother and Sister* (*Brüderchen und Schwesterchen*)
KHM 13. *The Three Little Men in the Woods* (*Die drei Männlein im Walde*)
KHM 20. *The Gallant Tailor* (*Das tapfere Schneiderlein*)
KHM 21. *Cinderella* (*Aschenputtel*)
KHM 25. *The Seven Ravens* (*Die sieben Raben*)
KHM 31. *The Girl Without Hands* (*Das Mädchen ohne Hände*)
KHM 37. *Tom Thumb* (*Daumling*)
KHM 39. *The Elves [I–III]* (*Die Wichtelmänner*)
KHM 40. *The Robber Bridegroom* (*Der Räuberbräutigam*)
KHM 45. *Tom Thumb's Travels* (*Daumerlings Wanderschaft*)
KHM 49. *The Six Swans* (*Die sechs Schwäne*)
KHM 51. *The Foundling Bird* (*Fundevogel*)
KHM 53. *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs* (*Schneewittchen*)
KHM 55. *Rumpelstiltskin* (*Rumpelstilzchen*)
KHM 56. *Sweetheart Roland* (*Der Liebste Roland*)
KHM 89. *The Goose Girl* (*Die Gänsemagd*)
KHM 90. *The Young Giant* (*Der junge Riese*)
KHM 92. *The King of the Golden Mountain* (*Der König vom goldenen Berg*)
KHM 130. *One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes* (*Einäuglein, Zweiäuglein und Dreiäuglein*)
KHM 145. *The Ungrateful Son* (*Der undankbare Sohn*)
KHM 161. *Snow-White and Rose-Red* (*Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot*)
KHM 183. *The Giant and the Tailor* (*Der Riese und der Schneider*)
KHM 193. *The Drummer* (*Der Trommler*)

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