

## The Symbol in Ethnography

**I**t is unnecessary to explain why a consensus regarding the meaning of the word “symbol” could be of value for all sorts of studies on art or literature, Marcin Czerwiński wrote in *Symbol dzisiaj*,<sup>1</sup> published in “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”. Regardless of the answer to the posed question: *Is such an agreement possible?* each attempt at a presentation of assorted stands concerning the comprehension of the nature of the symbol appears to be equally valuable.

Numerous emergent studies dealing time and again with reflections about the symbol confirm and reflect this need for rendering precise both the term “symbol” and the need for constantly delving into its meaning. Although such inquiries are undertaken in assorted fields of research, and formulated in various languages, it is possible to find numerous tangent points, similar intuitions, concurrent lines of reflection, shared motifs, and alike problems. It would be thus needless to explain the benefits of such investigations for representatives of ethnography, ethnology, and the anthropology of culture – domains that have made such a considerable contribution, and continue to do so, to research dealing with the symbol.

In the cited article Marcin Czerwiński frequently drew attention to science’s enmity towards the symbol, the distance and even antagonism between the two: *Science behaves towards primary language only partly as an opponent, but in relation to the symbol it maintains total opposition (...)*.<sup>2</sup> He went on: *True, in the course of centuries the role of discursive statements incessantly grew in multiple if not all domains of social life. Science, in the form in which we see it today (or rather in which it was seen still yesterday), has questioned the rank of symbolic statements.*<sup>3</sup>

In the case of ethnography and its attitude towards the symbol the situation remained more complicated from the very onset, and generally speaking did not deviate from the general model of science. The most vivid evidence is the absence of the entry: “symbol” in the contemporary *Słownik etnologiczny*. (Ethnological Dictionary)<sup>4</sup> In the suitable spot the authors refer the

reader to the term: “sign”. Although the word: “symbol” as such appears many times on the pages of this book in assorted combinations, variants, and contexts (e.g. in entries on “symbolic culture”, “myth”, “sacrum - profanum”), and although the authors in various places stress the part performed by the symbol in culture, as in the case of Zofia Sokolewicz in the entry: “anthropology of communication” - (...) *It is argued (S. K. Langer) that the terms like “sign”, “meaning” in all their variants are the dominating terms in our times, and that the sign, the symbol, the processes of signifying and communicating belong to our current cultural resources. Since the 1960s at the latest these terms are being introduced into ethnological sciences* – we would look in vain for reference to “symbol” or “symbolism” as one of the numerous trends listed by the author and which consider studying the symbol.<sup>5</sup> To put it in more graphic terms, in this contemporary compendium of knowledge about ethnological terms the “symbol” collapsed and concealed itself amidst numerous entries merged with “sign”. If, however, one takes a closer look at the entry: “sign” then one could say that it had been placed there by force or, to put in gentler terms: “inserted”. Despite the fact that we read: *Symbols might be regarded as a special group of symbolic signs*, and it is mentioned (with reference only to E. Cassirer and S. K. Langer) that: *The concept of the symbol occurs often within a wider conception of man comprehended as animal symbolicum*, only half a column out of a total of nine devoted to the entry on the sign had been intended for the symbol.<sup>6</sup> In this manner, so to speak, the sign swallowed the symbol.

Meanwhile, different authors, such as P. Ricoeur, M. Bakhtin, S. Avierintsev, Y. Lotman and others accentuated in their characteristics of the symbol the differences between the sign and the symbol. In his eidetic analysis Ricoeur considered the specificity of the symbol contrasted with the sign, the allegory, and the myth: *symbols are signs (...) but not every sign is a symbol.*<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Avierintsev, while writing about the symbol as a universal category of aesthetics added that it can be best discussed *via* an opposition to adjoining categories: on the one hand, the image, and on the other hand, the sign.<sup>8</sup> Is, however, a dictionary of contemporary (or rather: yesterday’s) science, depicted by Marcin Czerwiński and oriented exclusively on “ejecting ambiguities”, familiar with only one way of enunciation: *a discourse meeting the sharpened criteria of explicitivity, a science protecting itself against the wavering of meaning*, capable of accepting and including such “imprecise” and uncompleted sequences as those that we may come across among tireless researchers dealing with the symbol, which, in my opinion, can best bring us closer to its essence:

The word and the image — (an object, an ethnographer could add at this point – Z. B.) — are symbolic when they contain something more than that, which can be recognised at first glance (C. G. Jung).<sup>9</sup>

*The memory of a symbol is always older than the memory of its non-symbolic textual surrounding* (Y. Lotman).<sup>10</sup>

Not only do we live in a world of symbols, but the world of symbols lives in us (J. Chevalier).<sup>11</sup>

Finally, a contemporary science dictionary could include sentences whose veracity, in the existential experience, could be confirmed by many; the meaning of such sentences appears to be particularly legible and important as regards studies on the still unclear processes of artistic creativity (regardless whether we encounter it within the range of primitive folk art or high art).

*We do not embellish our experiences with symbols but it is they, which cooperate with our experience via processes of affiliation, which we understand only partially. To symbolize means to arrange those particles and elements of a flowing stream of experiences, which, once united, create luminescence, temporary or permanent rays, in which a part of the cosmos, a corner of our habitat or some dark subterranean labyrinth lightens up.*

*(...) At any rate, the first syntax of the defined, embodied spirit is that of symbols.*<sup>12</sup>

As has been said, the attitude of ethnography towards the symbol has been complicated from the very beginning. On the one hand, ethnography as a science emulated and realised this general model of science opposing the symbol, while on the other hand, owing to the object and scope of its interest, it not only documented but also adapted for one-sidedly oriented European civilisation the world of mythical thought and imagination, the "products of the primeval mind", the language of the myth and the symbol. It rediscovered them, with time increasingly consciously and thoroughly, identifying their cognitive value, diversity, and depth. In order to demonstrate more clearly this complex attitude of ethnography towards the symbol I would like to resort to a comparison of two extensive quotations. The first is taken from a classical ethnographic work and the second comes from *Treatise on the History of Religions* by Mircea Eliade. By means of this contrast I would like to show how close the author of a classical ethnographic text is to Eliade's description and comprehension of the symbol, and how many years prior to Eliade he described that, which the author of *Treatise* called "hierophany". Then I shall return to the first quotation revealing the author-ethnographer and a further sequence of his arguments in order to demonstrate how in accordance with the accepted scientific convention these opinions turn against the symbol and how the convention accepted by the ethnographer led him towards a profound con-

tradition between the truth contained in the material and his interpretation.

Ethnographer:

*As we already partially know, not only the features (e.g. hardness, sharpness...) but even the functions (...) of certain objects (...) are comprehended by the primitive and unenlightened mind in such a way as if they comprised - speaking in our language - something akin to condensed matter or energy embedded in those objects or even tantamount to them. Consequently, each such object can be and is interpreted by the uncivilised mind from two or even several sides. A stone or a piece of metal are, i.a. an ordinary stone or piece of metal, but apart from that they can be also something that we may describe as condensed might, hardness, resilience; a thorn is a thorn, but apart from that it can be condensed sharpness or the function of piercing; a lock is undoubtedly a lock, but it is also a condensed function of closing; an egg is, i.a. condensed life in statu nascendi, and a double nut or an ear of grain, etc. is, i.a. a condensed gain, i.e. potential, fruitfulness (and thus also happiness). And so on.*

M. Eliade:

*By way of example, whenever the "cult of stones" is mentioned not all stones are regarded as holy. We always encounter only certain stones worshipped due to their shape, size or ritual affiliations. The heart of the matter is not the cult of stones, but the fact that those stones were worshipped as long as they were not ordinary stones, but hierophanies and thus something more than commonplace "objects". (...) A certain object becomes sacral as long as it embodies (i.e. reveals) something else, something different. At this stage, it is meaningless whether this "difference" should be ascribed to an original shape, effectiveness, or simply "might", or whether it originates from the participation of that object in some sort of symbolism or is the outcome of a consecration rite or the voluntary or imposed situating of the object in a sphere suffused with sanctity (a holiday, holy time, some sort of an "event": lightning..., etc.).<sup>13</sup>*

Let us return to the first quotation borrowed (as could be surmised right away) from Kazimierz Moszyński's *Kultura Ludowa Słowian* (The Folk Culture of the Slavs), since he is also the author of this fragment, so close and affiliated to the spirit of the text by M. Eliade ... and we shall see how many surprising and contradictory conclusions can be drawn. I intentionally repeat parts of a fragment already familiar to us, so as to faithfully render this link with the next paragraph containing conclusions in order to faithfully render the whole drama of the contradiction contained therein.

*...A stone or a piece of metal are, i.a. an ordinary stone or a piece of metal, but apart from that they can be also something that we may describe as condensed might, hardness, resilience; (...) an egg is, i.a. condensed life in statu nascendi, and a double nut or an ear of grain, etc. are, i.a. a condensed gain, i.e. potential, fruitfulness (and thus also*

happiness). And so on. Absolutely undisputed and simultaneously innumerable examples of similar concepts are preserved among all the unenlightened peoples on Earth. One of the most vivid mistakes in ethnology is to dispose of the discussed products of the primitive mind by using the term: s y m b o l; I do not know in ethnology a more naive view than the one claiming that, in its day, in folk magic a double ear of grain played the role of a fertility symbol, and an egg - that of a symbol of life, etc.<sup>14</sup>

It does not suffice to merely quote yet another example of the opposition of science *vis a vis* the symbol, which at times assumes outright the shape of an anti-symbolic manifesto. I try to delve into the intentions of such astonishingly contradictory conclusions. What do they conceal? What forbids Moszyński to recognise the symbolic dimensions he had just described as symbols? First and foremost, we are dealing here with a certain already anachronistic understanding of the symbol. Defending ethnography against the symbol Moszyński presumably secured it against the looming danger of excessive poetisation, an invasion of superfluous literariness, and a flood of aestheticisation. Moszyński warned against the temptation of treating those beliefs or, as he put it, those “products of the primitive mind” as metaphors, and against the application in relation to them of some sort of allegorical interpretations. Remember that the author of *Kultura Ludowa Słowian* wrote the book, or rather those parts relating to spiritual culture, at a time of ever strong and increasingly lively disputes about the symbolic or “imaginary” nature of the construction of *Wesele* (Wedding) by Stanisław Wyspiański, when assorted symbolic interpretations of the spectacle tended to multiply, and when a publication of the unequalled study by Stanisław Pigoń: *Goście z zaświata na Wesele* (The Guests from the Other World at Wedding), which contains a reference to ethnography and the world of folk culture, was still far off.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in his capacity as an active poet<sup>16</sup> the author of *Kultura Ludowa Słowian* must have been familiar with the most varied fate and adventures of symbolism in poetry, including the extreme degeneration attained by symbolism in Russian poetry (if only in the works of A. Bely, a theoretician of this movement and the author of *Simvolizm*, 1910).

One may thus suspect and deduce that whenever Moszyński used the word “symbol” he treated it as a synonym of a poetical metaphor and even allegory. At any rate, from this viewpoint the symbol appears to be not something embedded in an ethnographic concrete, abstract, arbitrary, and dependent exclusively on man, creator or interpreter of the symbol and arbitrarily evoked by him. In this approach the symbol seems to be predominantly something distant from the world of primitive culture, something literary and devised, as if exclusively reserved for sophisticated or

overly refined intellectual creativity. In other words, Moszyński's enmity towards the term: “symbol”, his postulated turn towards empiric research and description of those concepts and “psychic products”, so characteristic for all unenlightened peoples and the world of folk culture whose examples he had just described, could resemble identical hostility and be modelled on the critical attitude towards symbolism that appeared in the poetry and aesthetics of *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*, among representatives of Acmeism or the sort we encounter in the case of Osip Mandelstam, returning to classical sources of the comprehension of the symbol and describing literary and poetical symbolism outright as faux-symbolism.<sup>17</sup> Quite possibly, this resentment towards the symbol in the case of Moszyński, with a simultaneous postulate of a factual description of the matter of those primary concepts, could have the same source and in praxis is caused not so much by animosity towards the symbol in general as by enmity towards interpretations posing a threat to ethnology. However deep we would delve into the intentions of the author of *Kultura ludowa Słowian* or explain his aversion towards the term: “symbol”, facts remain facts. Despite the fact that in his introductory reflections about spiritual culture<sup>18</sup> Moszyński with great caution and numerous reservations accepted the premise that it is impossible to speak about progress in religion and art (at least in the meaning of progress mentioned in the preceding volume, in reference to material culture), the cited fragment, whenever there is mention of the symbol, and the whole *opus* reveal a distinct division into the world of primeval man, an unenlightened and primitive mind, and the world of man of the culture of writing and developed civilisation, a world to which the contemporary researcher belongs. Between those two worlds there yawns a chasm. Naturally, it would be superfluous to recall that in this conception the former world is devoid of symbolic thinking and the symbol of the sort that may appear in the latter world. In an even more vivid presentation of this question, and posing a possibly caricature question: *Can a peasant (a person living in the primeval world) think symbolically?*, Moszyński proposed both in this fragment and in many others an unambiguous answer: *He cannot. Nothing resembling a symbol exists in the primitive mind.*

Several verses after the cited fragment rejecting the possibility of symbolic interpretations in ethnography Moszyński disclosed the chasm separating the world of primitive, primal man and that of civilised, contemporary man:

*It is impossible to precisely describe the essence of the psychic creatures with which we become acquainted at this moment. Their completely elementary and spontaneous simplicity cannot be embraced in our concise concepts. At any rate, they do not belong to a world ruled by clear-cut views and sober thoughts but to a totally*

*different world, whose roots, trunks, and branches are embedded in the subconscious while we see only their tops.*<sup>19</sup>

This time, in the light of the above-cited words, the “symbol”, rejected a short while ago, deprived of the right to exist in the world of primeval man, and feasible only in the world of high culture and sophisticated activity pursued by the intellect, appears to be a synonym if not of a precise, lucid, and unambiguous concept then certainly of one that is endowed with concise contents and thoughts. Upon numerous occasions Moszyński, describing those products of the primitive mind, so different and distant from the world of the researcher, drew attention to the characteristic absence of conceptual distinctness, the variability and fluidity of their contents, the numerous cases of an absence of consistency in ascribing those products of the primitive mind to a great variety of often contradictory meanings in accompanying folk interpretations.

Summing up: the symbol as understood by Moszyński seems to be, on the one hand, abstract, unreal, distant, and detached from the concrete and, on the other hand, approaching the unambiguity characteristic for intellectual concepts. In both cases, the symbol remains somewhat intellectual. It does not appear in the reality of the culture of the primeval man, or at least not in this role or in the same manner as in the culture of man belonging to a developed civilisation. Elsewhere, the symbol in Moszyński’s work occurs as a synonym of the sign or in reflections concerning embellishment.

I devoted so much attention and place to Moszyński’s deliberations not only to indicate the source of the deep contradiction between what he obtained in material descriptions of folk magic-religious beliefs and the conclusions he drew in his book, and not merely to show how certain *a priori* accepted historical conditions and a limited comprehension of the symbol made it impossible for him to use the term “symbol” in reference to those beliefs and phenomena belonging to the spiritual heritage of folk culture. I recalled his thoughts also because Moszyński’s comprehension of the symbol, despite the fact that I described it as anachronistic, has left a distinct imprint upon the attitude of ethnography towards the symbol and is continued up to this day in various statements. Despite the multifaceted development of contemporary research into the myth and the symbol it is still possible to observe in ethnography a dislike and reservation towards the symbol and symbolic interpretations. The symbol and symbolism continue to be treated as something unreal, abstract, arbitrary, and distant from the world of “authentic” folk culture. The fundamental premise assumed by Moszyński and discernible in his comprehension of the symbol mentioning the basic difference between the world of the primeval,

“primitive” man and that of contemporary man (the world of the researcher), is still preserved, although in a slightly altered form. This modification consists of a certain shift. In the case of Moszyński the symbol exists only and exclusively in a world of high culture or within the range of complicated contemporary culture, and is absent in folk culture. Such division reflects the conception launched by Levy-Bruhl and his partition into the world of the primitive, infantile man at the stage of pre-logical thought and the world of civilised man. For the present-day researcher, and in particular for the empirically oriented ethnographer for whom ethnography starts and ends in its research domains (provided, depending on the given village, region or theme, with a suitable footnote referring to nineteenth-century collections of ethnographic material, “Lud”, Kolberg, Fischer, etc.), and often for the scholar representing other disciplines dealing with the culture of contemporary man, the symbol in its ethnological dimension, assuming that it actually existed, took place only in the folk culture of yore (straight out of Moszyński or Kolberg) or the culture of the archaic man of the past, and today is no longer. According to Moszyński the symbol in folk culture has not yet come into being, assumed shape or appeared; numerous researchers dealing with contemporaneity claim that the symbol *already* does not exist. Following the example of Moszyński, solutions and answers to the question whether the peasant (or contemporary man) is capable of thinking symbolically are still sought in empirical field research with a foreseeable outcome, because if the word “symbol” is not mentioned in the “authentic” statement and interpretation (and this is rather the case) then this means that it is absent. This is the way in which the chasm between archaic and contemporary man, the peasant of the past and his present-day counterpart is retained. The whole strategy of such contemporary empirical investigations, based solely on convictions (beliefs, opinions) obtained in an interview and expressed explicitly, often loses that dimension of symbolic legacy and compels to treat it, often *a priori*, as a moribund Skansen, and is ready only to capture that, which is different, original, and individual. It is not surprising, therefore, that from this perspective the symbol and symbolic interpretations – as in the case of Moszyński – still appear to be something given, abstract, unreal, and literary. More, this lifeless Skansen is treated as thoroughly examined. The symbol is still – as it was for Moszyński (from the perspective of “empirical”, anecdotic ethnography that does not transcend the world of the village of N. and informer X) – something provided *a priori* by the interpreter.

This is why the greatest accomplishment of Mircea Eliade is, in my opinion, the fact that his studies abolish the division between primitive and civilised man,

artificially intensified by science, without obliterating the differences between them and indicating that symbolic thinking is both the domain of “primitive, primeval man”, a psychopath, a child, a poet, a member of a village community, a representative of the civilisation of the town, archaic man, and the ultimate contemporary man: *It is consubstantial with human existence, it comes before language and discursive reason. The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality—the deepest aspects - that defy any other means of knowledge. Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being. Consequently, the study of them enables us to reach a better understanding of man - of man as he is ...*”<sup>20</sup>

As we saw, upon the level of empirical material description Eliade's reflections concur with those of Moszyński. Nonetheless, in the case of Eliade the comprehension of the symbol is quite different. In contrast to Moszyński's version, the symbol is not unreal or abstract and is always enrooted in the concrete. One could describe the work of Eliade and his understanding of the symbol by resorting to words of Boris Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago: *The idea that underlies this is that communion between mortals is immortal, and that the whole of life is symbolic because it is meaningful.*<sup>21</sup> Symbolic, hierophanic reality is a reality “*par excellence* existent” (strong, effective) just as in the case of the hierophany of the rock (in the way it appears in folk beliefs). The symbol is not a synonym of unambiguity. Eliade used the concept of the symbol in a loose, unfettered, and frequently collateral manner with the concept of the image and the myth. Etymologically speaking, imagination/*imaginatio* is connected with the word: *imago*, image, emulation, and the word: *imitare* with: to emulate, to recreate. The imagination, *imaginatio* imitates models-images, recreates them, renders them topical, and repeats them endlessly. To be imaginative means to see the world as a whole, since the power and task of images consist of showing all that evades conceptualisation.<sup>22</sup> That, which deserved to be stressed in the first place is the polysemantic and multi-strata nature of the symbol: the true image is, therefore, a set of meanings and not one of its numerous references.<sup>23</sup>

Such an approach to the symbol was further developed by Paul Ricoeur in one of the chapters of his hermeneutics relating to this essential feature of the symbol: the symbol provides food for thought, he wrote, adding that he would interpret the symbol in the most radical sense, in the spirit of Eliade, who regarded symbols as analogous, spontaneously shaped and given meanings. This is the case of the meaning of water as a threat, when mention is made of a flood, or as purification, when mention is made of baptism.<sup>24</sup>

Ricoeur thus expanded reflection about the multi-strata nature of the symbol elsewhere, when he dis-

cussed the *sui generis* ambiguous structure of the symbol (in the strict meaning of the word: “ambiguous”); this structure does not possess a single meaning but presents a bundle of assorted meanings.<sup>25</sup>

Such a cluster of meanings entails references of one meaning to another and calls for interpretation (...); regardless what word we use to express it, this task is imposed by the very nature of the symbol, which is a tangle of meaning of sorts, composed of meanings enclosed within each other...<sup>26</sup>

In *Existence and Hermeneutics* Ricoeur described four fundamental figures of comprehending the symbol *via* a symbol.<sup>27</sup> The first consists of extracting and comparing numerous values of the same symbol. The second figure of comprehension entails understanding a given symbol *via* another symbol and will thus encompass an increasingly large range of remaining symbols demonstrating an affiliation with the given symbol (water, stone, etc.). In the third figure, the given symbol will be comprehended *via* some sort of ritual and myths, and thus *via* other symptoms of the *sacrum*. Moreover, it is possible to demonstrate - and this is the fourth figure of comprehension - how in the same symbol numerous spheres of experience undergo a process of merging. This perspective shows how the symbol integrates assorted levels - cosmic, theological, anthropological, existential - binding all the levels, but not melting it into a single unity. Such an understanding of the symbol and such deciphering of symbolic meanings refer to a type of hermeneutics known under various names: “amplifying hermeneutics” (from the Latin: *amplificare*), which expands the symbol, allowing itself to be lifted by the force of its integration,<sup>28</sup> the hermeneutics of a “return to sources” (Eliade), “a return to things”, “the hermeneutics of listening”<sup>29</sup> (Heidegger), and “the hermeneutics of reconstruction” (Gerardus van der Leeuw). Gilbert Durand, a French researcher dealing with symbolic imagination, encompassed this current within a single name by including, alongside the above-mentioned authors, also the works of Bachelard, and proposed: “the hermeneutics of remythization”; remythization means the concentration of meaning gathered in the manner of grapes during a grape harvest (...).<sup>30</sup> Here, Durand referred directly to yet another definition of the sort of hermeneutics that we find in the works of Ricoeur, who described this type of approach as: “the hermeneutics of recollection”; according to the most expressive meaning of the word “recollection” means both: to recollect oneself, reminisce, as well as: to deliberate, to gather, in the meaning used by Heidegger telling us that *legen* - speech is also: *legen* - gathering, as in: *lese* in *Weimlese*, the grape harvest.<sup>31</sup>

Works by Mircea Eliade still constitute a challenge for ethnography and for embarking upon such recollec-

tions. Today, in view of the development of numerous studies on the myth and the symbol, conducted from different points of view— structuralistic, semiotic, and phenomenological <sup>32</sup>, as well as in assorted domains, such as humanistic folkloristic <sup>33</sup>, in the wake of studies making the effort of reinterpreting the material, ethnography cannot be protected by hiding its head in empirical sand. “Empirical” ethnography is compelled to acknowledge that there also exist the empiricism of the symbol.

**\*Bibliographic note:** This is a slightly altered and brought up to date version of an article opening an issue of “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” on the symbol, prepared as an homage for the *oeuvre* of Mircea Eliade [cf. “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” no. 3/1988].

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> M. Czerwiński, *Symbol dzisiaj*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 1987, no. 1-4, p. 100.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 104.
- <sup>4</sup> *Słownik etnologiczny, terminy ogólne*, ed. Zofia Staszczak, Warszawa, Poznań 1987.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 386.
- <sup>7</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka*, selected, prep. and afterword Stanisław Cichowicz, Warszawa 1975, p. 11.
- <sup>8</sup> S. S. Avierintsev, *Simvol*, in: *Kratkaya literaturnaya entsiklopediya*, Moscow 1971, vol. 7, p. 826; Polish translation in: “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, no. 3/1988, pp. 149-150.
- <sup>9</sup> Quoted after: Gerd Heinz Mohr, *Lexikon der Symbole, Bilder und Zeichen der christlichen Kunst*, Düsseldorf, Köln 1972, p. 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Yuri Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, transl. Bogusław Żyłko, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, no. 3/1988, p. 151, based on the original text: Y. Lotman, *Simvol v sistiemie kulturi*, in: *Trudy po znakovim sistemam*, vol. 21, 1987, pp. 10-21.
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted after: Gerd Heinz Mohr, *Lexikon der Symbole, Bilder und Zeichen der christlichen Kunst*, Düsseldorf, Köln 1972, p. 2.
- <sup>12</sup> R. R. Niebhur, “Harvard Divinity Bulletin”, October-November 1989, p. 3.
- <sup>13</sup> M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, transl. Jan Wierusz-Kowalski, Warszawa 1966, p. 19.
- <sup>14</sup> K. Moszyński, *Kultura Ludowa Słowian*, Warszawa 1967, vol. 2, part 1, p. 316.
- <sup>15</sup> Stanisław Pigoń, *Goście z zaświata na Weselu*, in: idem, *Poprzedz stulecia. Studia z dziejów literatury i kultury*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 442-478.
- <sup>16</sup> Apart from writing poetry Moszyński also studied at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts in the studio of Józef Mehoffer; cf. Wiktor Stoczkowski, *Uczony – postać faustyczna*, in: *Szkice i próby etnologiczne*, “Studenckie Zeszyty Naukowe UJ”, Kraków 1985; cf. also. XY, *Życiorys II*, “Nauka Polska”, vol. 9, 1928.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. S. S. Avierintsev, op. cit., p. 830; cf. Osip Mandelstam, *Słowo i kultura*, Warszawa 1972.
- <sup>18</sup> K. Moszyński, op. cit., p. 15.

- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 317.
- <sup>20</sup> M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, Warszawa 1970, p. 33.
- <sup>21</sup> B. Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, Paris 1976, p. 44.
- <sup>22</sup> M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, Warszawa 1970, p. 41.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 36.
- <sup>24</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Symbol daje do myślenia*, in: *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka*, op. cit., Warszawa 1975, p. 14.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 78.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> This is the sort of hermeneutics, which opposes the “hermeneutics of destruction”, as P. Ricoeur described it (op. cit., pp. 77-94; 80). Fundamental division into two types of hermeneutics was mentioned also by Gilbert Durand: generally speaking, there are two types of hermeneutics, the one that reduces the symbol to something that is (...) only the outcome (...), the symptom, and that which, on the contrary, expands the symbol, making it possible for the power of integration to rise in order to gain access to a certain type of experienced “supra-consciousness”. Cf. G. Durand, *Wyobrażenia symboliczne*, Warszawa 1986, p. 118.
- <sup>29</sup> P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 81.
- <sup>30</sup> G. Durand, op. cit., p. 119.
- <sup>31</sup> P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 80.
- <sup>32</sup> On structural, semiotic, and phenomenological currents in studies on the myth and the symbol as well as their significance for contemporary Polish ethnography see: *Antropologia kultury w Polsce – dziedzictwo, pojęcia, inspiracje*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, no. 1, 2 /1980; no. 1/1981; here also an extensive biography of M. Eliade and his works together with a bibliography. In Polish ethnography I have in mind works that embarked upon the effort of such a reinterpretation of ethnographic sources and material, often referring to studies by M. Eliade: Joanna i Ryszard Tomicki, *Drzewo życia*, Warszawa 1976; and the structuralistic works by Ludwik Stomma, *Słońce rodzi się 13 grudnia*, Warszawa 1981; idem, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX w.*, Warszawa 1980; second edition containing selected essays, Łódź 2002; Jerzy Sławomir Wasilewski, *Podróż do piekieł*, Warszawa 1979; idem, *Symbolika ruchu obrotowego i rytualnej inwersji*, Warszawa 1978, “Etnografia Polska”, vol. XXII, fasc. 1; idem, *Tabu a paradygmaty etnologii*, Warszawa 1989. At this stage it is difficult not to express astonishment that L. Stomma’s *Magia Alkmeny* (issued in different publications, cf., i.a. *Słońce rodzi się 13 grudnia*, op. cit., pp. 24-45) - one of the breakthrough works in Polish ethnography as regards interpretations not only of the symbolic of bonds but also a presentation of the function of the myth, integrating assorted domains of human experiences, as well as methodological consequences and the importance of his study for an interpretation of folk tradition relating to beliefs about time, space, folk demonology, etc. - has been totally ignored in the above-cited *Słownik terminów etnologicznych* (cf. op. cit., 1987); these works by Stomma are not mentioned in bibliographies under: *Magic*, or in the general bibliography. On references to publications and reflections by M. Eliade and the application of “the hermeneutics of recollections” in an interpretation of the symbolic structure of beliefs and folk tradition cf. also later works: Danuta Benedyktowicz, Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, Encyklopedia Kultury Polskiej XX wieku, Studia i materia-

ly, Wrocław 1992. On the symbol in ethnography: Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, *Stereotyp-obraz-symbol- o możliwościach nowego spojrzenia na stereotyp*, in: *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Etnograficzne*, fasc. 24, 1988, pp. 7-35 and idem, *Portrety 'obcego'. Od stereotypu do symbolu*, Kraków 2000. See also: Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, Danuta Benedyktowicz, *The Home - the Way of Being. The Home in Folk Tradition*, Częstochowa, 2009

- <sup>33</sup> Works by Jerzy Bartmiński are fundamentally important for the interpretation of the symbol in ethnography. Cf. *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*, conception and ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, vice-editor Stanisława Niebrzegowska, vol. 1. *Cosmos*, [part] 1, *Niebo. Światła niebieskie. Ogień. Kamienie*, Lublin: Wydaw. UMCS 1996, 439 pp., part 2. *Ziemia. Woda. Podziemie*, Lublin: Wydaw. UMCS 1999, 481 pp.

The authors invariably retained the specific methodology of the description of the entry devised for *Słownik...*, which reviewers regarded as an original and successful solution. This fact was stressed after the publication of fasc. 1 of *Słownik...* by Władysław Kupiszewski, Anna Tatarkiewicz, Marian Pilot, Jacek Banaszkiewicz, and Roch Sulima in a discussion published in: "Regiony" 1997, no. 3, pp. 2-11; Czesław Hernas, Krzysztof Wrocławski, Anna Dąbrowska, Jan Miodek, Jolanta Ługowska, Roch Sulima, Iwona Smolka, and Piotr Matywiecki in a discussion published in: "Literatura Ludowa" 1998, no. 6, pp. 51-71; Barbara Boniecka in:

"Twórczość Ludowa" 1997, no. 4, pp. 43-45; positive assessments were formulated by foreign researchers: Svetlana M. Tolstaya (in: "Zhivaja Starina", Moskva 1997, no. 4, pp. 52-53), Alexei Yudin ("Slavynovedeniye" 1998, no. 5, pp. 98-100 and "Narodoznavchi Zoshiti" 1997, no. 6, pp. 400-403) and Kasanovič Bogdan ("Slavistika" IV, Belgrade 2000, pp. 277-278). According to Jerzy Bartmiński: It is based on a conception of "cognitive definition" built of stereotype motifs arranged into uniform and semantically cohesive sets resolving questions about the place of the given entry (object) in the system of inner relations (collections, oppositions), its appearance, origin, application, etc. The principle of building entries in the *Lublin Słownik* is the division of explication and documentation; in the latter, contexts are grouped according to genres that can be discovered also in traditional folklore. The purpose of thus created entries is the reconstruction of particular fragments of the folk image of the world seen by a carrier of traditional folk culture. Work on *Słownik...* is being continued; starting with issue no.1. 2007, the quarterly "Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa", published at the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Art, proposes successively selected entries prepared for consecutive volumes of *Słownik...* (cf. Jerzy Bartmiński, *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*; Dorota Piekarczyk, Joanna Szadura, [entry] Chaber; as well as Czesław Robotycki, *Przeciwko Kopałińskiemu w stronę Bartmińskiego - o Słowniku stereotypów i symboli ludowych*, "Konteksty Polska Sztuka Ludowa" no. 1/2007).

