

**REVIEW OF ALINA BRZUSKA-KĘPA'S MONOGRAPH:
*IN THE CIRCLE OF EXISTENCE. TOPICS OF THE RHYTHM
OF LIFE IN THE POETRY OF MARIA KONOPNICKA***

Monika Olędzka

Masaryk University, Brno
Faculty of Arts, Slavonic Literatures

Uniwersytet w Siedlcach
Wydział Nauk Humanistycznych
Instytut Językoznawstwa i Literaturoznawstwa
monika.oledzka@uph.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-1678-1775

Abstract: The purpose of this review is to introduce Alina Brzuska-Kępa's book *In the Circle of Existence. The topics of the rhythm of life in the poetry of Maria Konopnicka*, which reads her works in an unconventional way, based on the rhythm of life. Human in the cyclical nature elements coexists in the harmony of phenomena and looks inside himself with the hope of resurrection. The analyzed language is full of sacralization, symbolism and individualization of scenes. The writer mentions metaphors, rhetorical questions, hyperbolization and image universalization as common figures used by Konopnicka.

Keywords: poetry, Maria Konopnicka, language, nature, life cycle

**RECENZJA KSIĄŻKI ALINY BRZUSKIEJ-KĘPY *W KRĘGU ISTNIENIA.*
*TOPIKA RYTMU ŻYCIA W POEZJI MARII KONOPNICKIEJ***

Streszczenie: Celem recenzji jest przybliżenie monografii Aliny Brzuski-Kępy *W kręgu istnienia. Topika rytmu życia w poezji Marii Konopnickiej*, która w nieszablonowy sposób odczytuje jej utwory, bazując na rytmie życia, który jest słabo rozpoznawalnym wątkiem twórczości poetki. Człowiek w cykliczności żywiołów przyrody współistnieje w harmonii zjawisk i patrzy w głąb siebie z nadzieją na zmartwychwstanie. Analizowany język jest pełen niesamowitej subtelności, sakralizacji, symboliki i indywidualizacji scen. Jako powszechne figury stosowane przez Konopnicką pisarka wymienia metafory, pytania retoryczne, swoistą hiperbolizację i uniwersalizację obrazu.

Słowa kluczowe: poezja, Maria Konopnicka, język, żywioły, natura, cykl życia

The aim of the article is to introduce a monograph that approaches the works of Maria Konopnicka in an unconventional way, based on the rhythm of life woven into her extraordinary poetry. From beneath the masks, schemes, and ideologization of the great poet in historical-literary consciousness, Alicja Brzuska-Kępa conjures the image of an intelligent, impetuous woman – an emancipist – and reinterprets her poetic work.

By structuring the theme into five chapters, nature is exposed as the dominant motif in Konopnicka's poetry. In particular, the poet favours landscapes reflecting the state of the human soul are particularly favoured. The first chapter contains theoretical findings on topos and topics, with the aim of systematising theoretical and literary achievements and adopting specific methodological guidelines. The author notes Konopnicka's use of metaphors some common in Mediterranean culture and some individualised ones and emphasises the omnipresent passage of time that dictates the mutability of life¹. She also reflects on the different stages of life: there is a topicality of youth and fullness, old age and death, and even resurrection. The poet, living on the edge of two eras, the Positivist and the Young Poland eras, is shown as a woman who is sharply attuned to social and existential issues, drawing inspiration from Romanticism, folklore, and national-patriotic motifs.

Alina Brzuska-Kępa emphasises the invariant nature of the poets' topos, while on the other hand, she points out that they are a binder for a common literature and the continuity of cultural traditions². She sees in the poet's works a clear sense of the rhythm of life, and the existential reflections of the attempt to unravel the riddle of being. Attention is drawn to the concurrent motif of the personification of nature. At the same time, the author notes, following the linguist Władysław Zelech, that the folk pedigree of Konopnicka's poetry is not confirmed by statistical studies of linguistic structures, as there is a lack of dialects and colloquialisms. On the other hand, her created fairy-tale world is permeated with personal feelings woven into realistic descriptions, which invites the reader to decipher the subjective landscape of the soul and the poet's peculiar worldview.

The author emphasises that Konopnicka is a master of constructing landscapes both natural and social, intimate and emotional, as well as their hybrid forms, complementing the humanisation of the image. Through her choice of appropriate style and linguistic structures, she effectively smuggles themes of national liberation into her work. In addition, her poetic genius is demonstrated in

¹ Alina Brzuska-Kępa: *W kręgu istnienia. Topika rytmu życia w poezji Marii Konopnickiej*, Siedlce 2022, s.11.

² T. Cieślukowska, „Po co Homer?”, [w:] *Topika antyczna w literaturze polskiej XX w.*, red. A. Brodzka, E. Sarnowska-Temierusz, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1992, s. 14-16.

works immersed mainly in the theme of death and hope for Poland's resurrection. What is more, the incredible subtlety hidden in the linguistic layer, the sacralisation, and individualisation of the scenes make visible the poet wrestling with the mystery of life from the side of death. The impossibility of human cognition, the contradictions of spirit, matter and and the individual's domination of time and impermanence make man split in on himself. On the other hand, she shows how man strives for immortality in a Platonic way.

In the second chapter, the thorny road is followed by homo viator, who, endowed with the gift of life by the God-poet, weaves a thread of existence. In the created vision of a wanderer semiconsciously, as if in lethargy, wandering along the road of life, the author sees a multitude of metaphors oscillating around the theme of movement, life's momentum or dynamics, for example, in the "life's storm" "life's current". Through comparisons, Konopnicka highlights the similarity between the roar of a sea wave and the beating of the human heart as the depths of life. Elsewhere, Alina Brzuska-Kępa notes that the fire of the home hearth symbolises the life of both family and state³. She shows a treatment of the anthropomorphisation of the mother-earth, used in the poet as a related vision of the Mother of Sorrows and the human son of the earth. Metaphors of human life from different semantic fields are also recognised, which is a similar tendency to the metaphors used in Young Poland. In addition, the author reads Konopnicka like a Heraclitean sage in a clear and legible way, emphasising the changeability, dynamism, and transformation of life. Her man, 'embedded' in the cyclicity of the elements of nature coexisting in the harmony of phenomena, looks within himself and follows the Neoplatonic thought of the immortality of the spirit, which is to free him from himself and the world from the prison of matter.

In the third chapter, the author considers the theme of youth undertaken by Maria Konopnicka along with the symbolism, as well as other poetic devices, attributes she used to name childhood and adolescence. The apparent morning simplicity and delight in the world, or the sensitive eroticism included in the poems, brings solace to the mature poet. Her age is revealed by the structure of the work and the content, definitely richer than that of an immature person, but put into the mouth of a child. On the one hand, she feels the joy, the freshness of spring flowers, while on the other she sees the faded, shabby rags of a girl symbolising spring, who must mature more quickly and, in a pejorative sense, face temptation and sin. The allegorical nature of the poet's themes and their symbolic rather than landscape function are obvious, as is the reference to the seasons: summer rays or spring in shades of white or green. She uses epithets to show a saturation of light or brightness linked in meaning to moral purity. Metaphoric visions glide and

³ Alina Brzuska-Kępa: *W kręgu istnienia. Topika rytmu życia...*, op.cit., s.68-69.

winging surround the bloom and freshness of spring. The author also notes that among the singing of larks and nightingales, the youth is more inclined to great actions, idealism, enthusiasm and energy.

The anthropomorphic pattern can be found in the wedding ceremony. Through the grammatical type of the names Czorsztyn and Niedzica, Konopnicka shows the wedding of a man and a woman, during which a kind of contamination of landscape and cultural elements takes place. Moreover, Longings may follow a Bovarian impossibility, a delusion. Another theme explored by Alina Brzuska-Kępa is the theme of love in the poetry of the national poet, as a feeling hidden from the world, yet greedy and jealous at the same time. There is a clear reference to gentle eroticism and allusions to maidens who lost their garlands after mating, to the myotological Eros or the naked breast of the Faun.

The author combines the themes of old age and death in her studies. In *The Autumn of Life or Relation from a Journey*, she repeats after Konopnicka: *memento mori*, highlighting the effectiveness of poetic treatments achieved by contrasting references to, a bustling crowd and a grave, austere grave slab. Elsewhere, in the work *Biblical Judgement*, inspired by the Sistine frescoes, the figure of Adam appears as a death sower, being disobedient to God, which places the burden of dying on humanity. Death is considered the apocalyptic time epiphenom which makes people stony, and the cup is a chalice of bitterness with evangelical provenance. In doing so, he concludes that *life and death become two despairs, floating on the edge of being*⁴.

The writer mentions rhetorical questions, a kind of hyperbolisation, and the universalisation of a timeless image as frequent figures used by Konopnicka⁵. He notes that the power of expression is also reinforced by references to categories of colours, sounds, or smells in the landscape. The whiteness of death is complemented by the red of blood and the black of graves and crucifixes. Personified death with a scythe or swan in a folk setting is recalled by the sound of bells or a deathly silence. Konopnicka's modernist ideologies correspond to the tenets of symbolism: old age and death are compared to autumn and winter. The vision of a steppe covered with bones or the gloomy night scenery encourage existential reflections on the meaning of life⁶. In her work, Alina Brzuska-Kępa indicates that liberation from death and rest in God, respite through resurrection, is part of a European trend with Christian roots⁷. Closing the wheels of human life, it announces a new existence. This is supported by the metaphor of dawn, which linguistically uses the noun as a marker of time, while heralding the daybreak of a renewed humanity.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 134.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 137-142.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 168.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 170.

Chapter five deepens the consideration of rebirth and the rhythm of life in Maria Konopnicka's poetry most often in the context of Christ's resurrection, which confirms her as an inheritor of the Romantics, gifted with an esopic language of messianic origins. Other themes outlined by the author include rebirth from ashes and rising from the grave as an awakening from sleep towards resurrection, complete with the sound of a bugle call to action.

More phraseological than symbolic is the image of native fields, where the seed conceived in the ground turns into ears of grain, needed for baking bread. According to the author of the study, Konopnicka uses agrarian phraseology in poetic imagery drawn from the region⁸. She also sees clear phrases to God, speaking on behalf of the wronged, as well as the metaphor of the seasons, the wheel of constantly renewing nature. The image of eternity, of divine perfection peeping through the waters of the sea, is a reference to Neoplatonic emanation, where the perfect being of the Creator is reflected in earthly space.

Alina Brzuska-Kępa addresses one of the less recognisable themes in Maria Konopnicka's poetic output, that of the rhythm of life, and analyses it according to the 'existential key'. She analyses poems showing the transformation of the poet's views on human life, which evolved without revolutionary and violent changes. She also points out that the reevaluations in the author's views are due to the constant variability of life subject to constant transformations in time and earthly space.

The author shows that for Konopnicka, man is an element of cyclic nature and part of the eternal universe, and the belief she professes leads him through the gates of death to the resurrection of soul and body according to Christian doctrine. He also notes that she uses a circle of associations and images to define opposite concepts, such as life and death.

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⁸ Ibidem, p. 208.

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Dane kontaktowe / Contact details:

E-mail: monika.oledzka@uph.edu.pl