

Translated by Jan Ziętara

## Leśmian's Dreaded Dryads and their Slavic contexts (literary and otherwise)\*

### Abstract

Amongst other female characters within the literary works of Bolesław Leśmian, we can find the *dziwożony* (dreaded dryads) – demons from Slavic mythology inhabiting wetlands or forests, which are considered malicious and dangerous, because they kidnap newborn children and replace them with their own offspring. These characters were presented as wild women with long hair and breasts so saggy that they would use them as washing paddles. Analyzing literary texts from the 19th and early 20th centuries written by Polish authors (Seweryn Goszczyński, Michał Bałucki, Miron [Aleksander Michaux], Maria Konopnicka, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Wiktor Gomulicki), Czech (Karel Jaromír Erben) and Russian writers (Konstantin Balmont), I would like to show how the representations of these female demons have changed over time and how Bolesław Leśmian stylized them in the poem "Dziwożona" and in the prose fragment "Podlasiak", from the volume *Klechdy Polskie*.

**Keywords:** Bolesław Leśmian, *dziwożona*, dreaded dryad, Slavic female demons, Polish literature, Czech literature, Russian literature

In the literary work of Bolesław Leśmian, among such women's figures as the water nymphs or noonwraiths, known from Slavic demonology, dreaded dryads (*dziwożony*) also appear. The name of these creatures, which also has other variants *dziwożonka*

(dreadydryad), *dziwo baba*, *dziwa*, *samodiva*, *diva*)<sup>1</sup>, comes from proto-Slavic \**divá žena* (wild woman). *Dziwy* and *dziwoki*, Old Polish derivations, as well as Czech *divoky*, have an abbreviated form – *dziki*. The dreaded dryad also has its counterpart in Czech *divá žena*, *wódna žena* (watery-wife) among the Lusitzi tribes and *dykaja žena* among the Hutsuls<sup>2</sup>. In Bulgaria, such creatures were referred to as *дивите жени*/ *DIVite jane* and in Slovenia, *devlje devojke*. They were originally imagined as grotesque, hideous old women, with matted hair and breasts so saggy that they had to be carried over the shoulders, supposedly used as washing paddles. It was believed that the dryads were inherently bad and malicious. They kidnapped young virgins and, even more often,

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<sup>1</sup> “The dialect sources give a number of phonetic variants: from Spisz *dziwożony*, *dżive żony*, near Nowy Targ *dziwne żony*, from Gorce *dziwożonki*, and from Podhale *dziwożony*. In Małopolska, the equivalent of this demonic figure are *boginki*, noted in the vicinity of Limanów under a name with an analogous structure to *dziwożona*: *dzika baba*, *dziko baba* (...). The records from Limanowa seem to confirm the etymological concept put forward by Kazimierza Moszyńskiego, (...) about the *dziwożona* as *compositum* built on the root of the dialect form of *dziwy* ‘dziki’ (< Slov. *divyjъ* ‘ts’) and a noun *żona* (< Slov. *žēna* ‘kobieta’). Evidence of names from neighbouring Slavic varieties (cf. Czech *divoženka*, Slovak *zive żony*), in the view of the range of occurrence of the term in question being limited to southern Małopolska, would indicate its borrowing from southern neighbors. On the other hand, the occurrence of the same name in some of the Rhodope villages in Bulgaria speaks for its generic Slavic origin. The peripheral occurrences of the term *dziwożona* indicate its archaic character, and the name from southern Małopolska *bogunka*, functioning in the same sense, is a typical example of the contamination of older names with the new ones – it is a phenomenon that also affects the blurring of semantic boundaries between individual names of demonic creatures, and thus influences the overlapping of their functions and features” Ewa Masłowska, *Dziwożony i inne straszne baby z ludowego obrazu świata w “Klechdach polskich” Leśmiana* [in:] [https://www.academia.edu/34484301/Dziwo%C5%BCony\\_i\\_inne\\_straszne\\_baby\\_w\\_Klechdach\\_Le%C5%Bmiana](https://www.academia.edu/34484301/Dziwo%C5%BCony_i_inne_straszne_baby_w_Klechdach_Le%C5%Bmiana). See also: Słownik gwar polskich, Ed. Halina Karaś, vol. 1 (Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1979), 10–211; Kazimierz Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, vol. 2: *Kultura duchowa* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1939), 682; Renata Dźwigoł, *Polskie ludowe słownictwo etymologiczne* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2004), 173; Wanda Budziszewska, “Z polskiego nazewnictwa gwarowego: *dziwożona*”, *Język Polski* 5 (1990): 206–208. The dreaded dryads (*dziwożony*) are also known as *mamuny* – this variant, however, does not appear in the works of Bolesław Leśmian.

<sup>2</sup> “In folk tales – says Kartowicz – the dreaded dryad (*dziwożona*) is mixed with *boginka*. The Tatra Highlanders claim that one dryad resides in the depths of Lake Żabie, that sometimes she comes out and drops by nearby villages; that she looks monstrous, with huge breasts, with hair unkempt, and a little red cap on her head; she feeds on a plant called «słodyczka», but fears another one called «dzwonek»; she barges into peasants’ gardens and destroys them; that one old highlander caught a dryad in his orchard and, not being able to hold her, he took away her cap, which she later wheeled out by singing sweetly under his window. The main habitat of the dreaded dryads was a cave near the village of Topuszny. Under the ground they have palaces full of wonders and treasures”. See: Zygmunt Gloger, *Encyklopedia staropolska*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Druk Laskauer and Babicki, 1901), 109–110.

plump and healthy babies, sometimes replacing them with their disfigured, clumsy and/or impaired offspring<sup>5</sup>.

If we analyse this phenomenon from a contemporary perspective and ask about the cognitive mechanisms underlying the conceptualizations of the dreaded dryads, the sources will point to the stereotyping and demonization tendencies of said figures. If we, however, decide to look for the causes of those mechanisms, then, at first sight, we should enumerate the most important three. Firstly, there is a violation of social conventions that are imposed by the traditional community. To visualize this, it is enough to recall women who died during pregnancy or immediately after giving birth, who lived with a man without marriage and who carried illegitimate children – they all turned into dreaded dryads. I would almost say that becoming a dryad was a punishment for immorality. In turn, the main motive of the woman transformed into this demonic being was – as it turns out – jealousy for her offspring. The second reason for the stereotyping and demonization of these characters is that they are different in the social sense. In this case, the dreaded dryads came into being as female children who were illegitimate or abandoned by their mother, that is to say, they were descendants of women who, for some reason, did not fulfill their social roles sanctified by tradition. The third reason is that the child was either unwanted and killed by the mother, or was not born due to a deliberately induced miscarriage. Such killed or unborn girls transformed into dreaded dryads and took revenge for their suffering on other women by abducting their offspring,

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<sup>5</sup> See on this subject: Czesław Białczyński, *Stworze i zdusze, czyli starostwoiańskie boginki i demony*. Leksykon (Kraków: Kraina Księżyca, 1993); Andrzej Szyjewski, *Religia Słowian*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2003); Tomasz Ławecki, Robert Sypek, Magdalena Turowska-Rawicz, *Mitologie świata. Słowianie* (Warszawa: Rzeczpospolita S.A., 2007); Karolina Haka-Makowiecka, Marta Makowiecka, Małgorzata Węgrzecka, *Leksykon fantastyki. Postacie, miejsca, rekwizyty, zjawiska* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Muza S.A, 2009); Kazimierz Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, vol. II, no. 1 (Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk 1934); Jan Stanisław Bystróż, *Słowiańskie obrzędy rodzinne* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akademia Umiejętności, 1916); Aleksander Brückner, *Mitologia polska* (Kraków: Instytut Wydawniczy "Biblioteka Polska", 1924). Kazimierz Moszyński in *Kultura ludowa Słowian* underlines the fact that the characteristic traits attributed to female characters were also ascribed to demonic entities. Barbara & Adam Podgórski, *Wielka księga demonów polskich – leksykon i antologia demonologii ludowej* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Kos 2005); Barbara & Adam Podgórski, *Mitologia śląska, czyli przywiarki śląskie*. Leksykon i antologia śląskiej demonologii ludowej (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Kos, 2011); Bohdan Baranowski, *Pożegnanie z diabłem i czarownicą* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1965); Józef Kąś, *Ilustrowany leksykon gwary i kultury podhalańskiej* (Bukowina Tatrzańska: Wydawnictwo Dom Ludowy, 2015). On the subject see also: Hanna Ratuszna, "Boginki, ludowe demony kobiecie i ich dzieci. Kilka uwag o młodopolskiej fascynacji folklorze" [in:] *Inspiracje ludowe w literaturach słowiańskich XI–XXI wieku*, Ed. Iwona Rzepnikowska (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe im. Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu, 2009), 77–98. About the dreaded dryads paying visits to newly delivered mothers (just to replace their "hideous", "deformed", "hunch-backed" offspring) see: Aleksandr Nikolaevitch Afanasjev, *Poeticheskie vozreniya slavyan na prirodu*, vol. 3 (Moskva: Gracev, 1869), 310. The swapped infant would be taken to a refuse heap and beaten with a birch. The dryad, hearing the baby's cry would feel sorry and swap back the stolen child. Afanasjev also makes an interesting remark that the dreaded dryads (*дивьи жены*) were blamed for stillborn births. According to an old custom, the father of such a child should cut its head off and throw it into the water. Afanasjev, *Poeticheskie vozreniya slavyan na prirodu*, 311. In turn, in the work *Славянские древности: этнолингвистический словарь* next to the description of the features and attributes that were traditionally ascribed to the dreaded dryads a new reference appears – a being called in Ukraine (and the Carpathian regions) *дика баба*, which distinguishes itself in beauty, seduces young men, replaces children and drinks their blood. See: N.I. Tolstoy, *Slavyanskiye drevnosti: etnolingvisticheskiy slovar'* v 5 t., vol. 1 (Moskva: Rossijskaja Akademiya Nauk, 1995), 92.

sometimes also kidnapping young brides – for whom this fate, understood in the social sense, was much kinder.

It is worth emphasizing that the reasons for the demonization, and thus also for the stereotyping of these mythological female characters, did not concern the ancient Slavs, for whom the dreaded dryads were not so much an object of reflection as an object of religious beliefs. However, it is worth considering whether and, if so, to what extent this has changed over time, as writers became progressively more interested in these characters. One should also peruse the literary representations of Leśmian's characters that appeared in his prose, for example in "Podlasiak", from the volume *Klechdy polskie* (written at the request of the publisher Jakub Mortkowicz at the turn of 1913–1914, and published posthumously only in 1956), and in "Dziwożona", from scattered poems.

*Dziwożony* (the dreaded dryads) were present in both the iconography and literary writings of the Slavs in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. In the Polish context, the former is best illustrated in the works of Jacek Malczewski – for example, the painting *Topielec w uściskach dziwożony* (1888), from the series *Rusalka* – or Pillati's woodcut published in the 256th issue of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* from 1864. On the other hand, the list of texts in which literary images related to dreaded dryads appear is certainly not limited to the above-mentioned works by Bolesław Leśmian. They also appear in the works of Polish writers such as Seweryn Goszczyński, Michał Bałucki, Miron (Aleksander Michaux), Maria Konopnicka, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, and Wiktor Gomulicki.

In the works of Goszczyński, the mention of the dreaded dryads appears in *Dziennik podróży do Tatrów*, in the part "Świat duchowy Podhalań. Strzygi, upiory, wilkołaki, boginki, dziwożony" (dated May 6, 1832)<sup>4</sup>. The female figures described by Goszczyński live on a plant called *stodyczka*<sup>5</sup>, they have "an extremely shaggy body, a long loose hair

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<sup>4</sup> "They speak most extensively about the dreaded dryads. It is a family of supernatural beings, a creation of the Highlanders that seems to be only proper to them. As the water nymphs or other malicious creatures are gauzy, beautiful, and alluring in their form, staying in harmony with their land, dreaded dryads have features appropriate for the severity and wildness of their native region: they have an extremely shaggy body, long loose hair on their heads, extraordinarily large breasts; a little red cap with a fern branch on their heads. Their favourite type of sustenance is a particular weed called: *stodyczka*. Dreaded dryads were the most terrible threat to mothers, because they kidnapped their children. For this reason the dryads were on the lookout near the cottages of newly delivered mothers. And as soon as they found a mother alone, without the husband in the house, they took her infant and in its place left their own offspring, which was usually clamant, evil, very ugly; in one word – impious. It was, however, possible to recover the baby with the following method: the ill-used mother takes the changeling to the refuse heap, beats it with a birch and force feeds it an egg and cries: 'take yours, give back mine!' The dreaded dryad, touched by the cry of her beaten offspring, secretly returns the human child, and takes her baby back. Even adult girls were not safe from the dryads: there often were accounts of kidnapping. (...) Dreaded dryads, just like water nymphs, are temerarious only with women, as they do fear men. (...) Reflecting on the dreaded dryads, I see a certain trace of kinship between the conceptualizations of our Highlander people and the Eastern peoples. It is known, that the eastern DIW is a kind of malicious genius, and our DZIWO, in the most appropriate sense of the word, refers mainly to a less monstrous phenomenon and corresponds to the image of a ghost, which in the East is called Diw and is in certain affinity with our *Dziwożona*". Seweryn Goszczyński, *Dziennik podróży do Tatrów* (Petersburg: Nakładem B.M. Wolffa, 1853). 81, 82, 83.

<sup>5</sup> The plans usually referred to mistletoe, or the so-called granny's bonnet (translator's note).

on the head, extraordinarily large breasts, a little red cap with a fern branch on their heads"<sup>6</sup>, they kidnap or swap children for their own offspring – “usually clamant, evil, very ugly”<sup>7</sup>.

In turn, in the poem “Sobótka”, which is the initial part of the planned, but not entirely realized poem, “Kościelisko” by Seweryn Goszczyński, the maidens sing the following chant:

“Beware, o mothers!  
Embrace your children.  
A banshee the windows does weigh,  
Came out to prey:  
Wielding Scythe,  
And red cap-clad,  
Oh! It’s the Dreaded Dryad.

Like a malignant death  
And like a fleeting wind,  
She will stealthily arrive,  
She will steal your child  
And vanish treacherously.  
O mother! guard closely the child,  
The Dreaded Dryad lurks nearby.

Oh, comely damsel!  
Don’t run alone  
To the overgrown retreat.  
One fear chases another there.  
Wielding Scythe,  
And red cap-clad,  
Oh! It’s the Dreaded Dryad.

Like a malignant death  
And like a fleeting wind,  
She’ll catch you in the forest,  
She’ll take you beneath;  
Without the (Tatra) Mountains, without the sun,  
You will stay there forever,  
As the Dreaded Dryad.

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<sup>6</sup> Goszczyński, *Dziennik podróży do Tatrów*, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Goszczyński, *Dziennik podróży do Tatrów*, 79.

Oh, poor thing! Oh, poor you!  
They will shag your hair,  
They will make you a cap,  
They'll give you mistletoe to eat;  
For your heart,  
For the bridesmaid, for the bridesman,  
Turning Dreaded Dryads.  
Girl, woe to you!  
You're in the grave before death.  
Ghosts dancing above you,  
Yours are halls and caves;  
Krywań is high,  
As your world is deep,  
Since you're a Dreaded Dryad"<sup>8</sup>.

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"Strzeżcie się o matki!  
Tulcie wasze dziatki.  
Pod okienkiem mara,  
O zdobycz się stara:  
Czapeczka czerwona,  
Kosa rozpuszczona,  
Ach! to Dziwo-żona.

Jako śmierć złośliwa,  
A, jak wiatr, pierzchliwa,  
Podsunie się skrycie,  
Ukradnie wam dziecię,  
I zniknie zdradziecko.  
O matko! strzeż dziecko,  
Czycha Dziwo-żona.

Góralko nadobna!  
Nie biegaj z osobna.  
W zarostój ustroni.  
Strach stracha tam goni.  
Czapeczka czerwona,  
Kosa rozpuszczona,  
Ach! to Dziwo-żona!

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<sup>8</sup> Translation by Jan Ziętara (for this article).

Jako śmierć, złośliwa.  
A, jak wiatr, pierzchliwa;  
Pochwyci cię w lesie,  
Pod ziemię zanieś;  
Bez Tatrów, bez słońca,  
Zostaniesz do końca,  
Jako Dziwo-żona.

Niebogo! Sieroto!  
Włosy ci rozplotą,  
Czapeczkę nasadzą,  
Słodyczkę jeść dadzą;  
Dla twego serduszka,  
Za družkę, za družka,  
Będą Dziwo-żony.  
Dziwczę, biada tobie!  
Ty przed śmiercią w grobie.  
Tańczą z tobą mary,  
Twe hale, pieczary;  
Jak Krywan wysoki,  
Tak twój świat głęboki,  
Skoroś Dziwo-żoną<sup>9</sup>.

It is worth noting that in the quoted text the dreaded dryad was presented as an underground creature; an alienated, treacherous being, waiting for the right moment to kidnap someone else's children. Importantly, she is described in an oxymoronic manner as dead, though still alive ("Girl, woe to you! / You're in the grave before death. / Ghosts dancing above you, / Yours are halls and caves"). When the dryad is mentioned, pejorative, deathly comparisons ("Like a malignant death") adjoin epithets indicating her timidity ("fleeting") and nouns that are associated with the element of air ("wind"). In the description of the dryads' dwelling, seemingly contradictory expressions (vast „halls” and narrow “caves”) begin to function as synonyms (your “halls, caves”). In the aforementioned poem by Goszczyński, “Sobótka”, the appearance of the dreaded dryads imparts to the landscape an aura of uniqueness and, importantly and becomes the starting point for presenting the creation myth of the Tatra land, which is inseparably related to these characters. In the piece we read:

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<sup>9</sup> Seweryn Goszczyński, *Sobótka. Z powieści pod napisem Kościelisko* (Wrocław: Nakładem Zygmunta Schlettera, 1852), 13–15.

"Blessed are the eyes, happy the steps,  
that meet the Dreaded Dryads' world.  
Alabaster of all rocks,  
The most precious stone lies under-foot.

All the waters flow crystal-clear;  
Each droplet flies down like a pearl;  
Bridges of gold in all their kingdom,  
And every light is a diamond.  
Our rocks are great, soaring to the skies;  
The pearls of dew feed  
Our streams like crystals;  
And, in the night, fresh forests and forage.  
Because our country comes from the Dreaded Dryads:  
Because in them every spring has its source,  
Because they pamper, because they stand guard,  
A wild, underground, but great family"<sup>10</sup>.

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"Szczęśliwe oczy, szczęśliwe kroki,  
Co świat Dziwo-żon nawidzieć mogą.  
Alabastrowe wszystkie opoki,  
Najdroższy kamień leży pod nogą.

Wszystkie tam wody płyną kryształem;  
Każda kropelka spada perłą;  
Mosty ze złota w państwie ich całym,  
A z dyamentu każde światło.  
Wielkie, pod niebo, są nasze skały;  
Perłami, rosy toczą się nasze,  
Nasze potoki, jako kryształy;  
A, jak noc, świeże bory i pasze.  
Bo u Dziwo-żon nasz się kraj kluje:  
Bo u nich każdy źródło się poczyna,  
Bo je wypieszcza, bo im wartuje,  
Dzika, podziemna, lecz hal rodzina"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Translation by Jan Ziętara (for this article)

<sup>11</sup> Goszczyński, "Sobótka. Z powieści pod napisem Kościelisko", 15–16.

In the poem "Dziwożona" ("Podanie karpackie") by Miron (Aleksander Michaux), published in 1964, in the 265th issue of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, the female figure appears to be as dangerous as the heroine of Goszczyński's poem ("Sobótka"). Indeed, she is presented as a creature dazzling with beauty and alluring, but, at the same time, treacherous and only simulating deep feelings. She appears in the moonlight and lures the naive highlander with her enchanting singing. Having drawn him into the "unfathomable darkness", she joyfully dances and bursts out laughing again and again<sup>12</sup>.

On the other hand, in a collection of sketches entitled *Bajeczny świat Tatr*, published in 1906 in Krakow, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer states that *dziwożony* (the writer explains the meaning of this anthroponym as "strange wives") were so malicious that, fearing for the fate of newly delivered mothers, the men had to watch over them and their babies for six weeks. The women, in turn, cut their hair, so that these demons would not have anything to grab on to<sup>13</sup>. In Tetmajer's description, the appearance of the dreaded dryads is similar to the physiognomy of Goszczyński's characters, with similar attributes. It is worth noting that in Tetmajer's description, the motif of the dreaded dryad practically has not developed since the times of Romanticism. Moreover, it could be said that the demonization associated with it is not problematized in any way, and the cognitive stereotyping is downright intensified – namely, Tetmajer's heroines do not avoid alcohol. This habit could be seen as the reason for their ability to effortlessly enter relationships, which in their former human lives resulted in unwanted pregnancies. There are also several Polish works from the 19th century and some literary texts from the first half of the 20th century, in which the invocation of dreaded dryad motif appears, but does not spark any complex anthropological reflection among other characters. The motif is used only to make the characters feel extraordinary and/or it just sets the overall mood for the text. The former case can be seen in the Michał Bałucki's poem "Cyganka", from 1859, in which the title character was painted as an agile and alluring forest dryad:

"Sometimes she broke away from my arms, like a bird,  
And hidden behind a hazel or a blackberry bush  
She »cuckooed« with laughter,  
Throwing at me a forest nut

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<sup>12</sup> "Once in the night of magic, a monthly night,/ In the depths of the ravines/ Swinging asleep/ Over the precipice, among the boughs/ Of an old alder – the Dreaded Dryad// And through the leaves/ The moon looked silverly at the sleeping creature/ And her lily of the valley wreath/ In a stream of light/ He shone frosted.// Then the silence was disturbed/ By complaint from the gorge/ And the dryad, half-asleep/ Having parted the lingering mist/ She sang: »Come here to me!// Come here quickly you sad boy/ My caressing spell, alluring,/ Will satisfy your longing.«// And her song dropped down like a rain of sounds/ With ominous mocking echo/ Thudding in the gorge, where an errant/ Young highlander was standing/ With a strange shiver – entirely engrossed in the song.// He was standing – and she, like a spring mist/ Run down airy, and she asked/ For his loving grasp/ So that from her pitiful plead/ The alder tree was shaking bleaky.// Thus, he briskly run on the edge,/ as if in madness,/ and, wanting to grab her tiny, swan-like,/ Stretched out hands/ He fell into the unfathomable darkness.// And the traitress, like a spring mist,/ Lightly leading the cheerful dance,/ She flew away into the gleaming distance / And in the pine boughs she is swinging/ and bursts out laughing again". See: Miron, "Dziwożona (Podanie karpackie)", *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 256, (1864), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, *Bajeczny świat Tatr* (Kraków: S. Orgelbranda Synowie, 1906), 10.

Or a berry. Then again she jumped toward me  
Light and agile, like a black squirrel,  
And all-playful she sat on my lap (...)

Once after the church fair of the Virgin Mary,  
I was going to the forest, on the Sunday morning,  
Carrying a string of beads and shiny rings  
As a gift for my forest dreadydryad.  
As she used to do, she was waiting  
For me near the trench around the grove;  
When she did not see me, she ran into the field; (...)<sup>14</sup>.

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"Czasem mi z ramion wydarła się ptakiem,  
I zza leszczyny lub ostrężyn krzakiem  
Schowana »ku ku« kukąta ze śmiechem,  
Rzucając na mnie to leśnym orzechem,  
To jagodami. To znów przyskoczyła  
Lekka i zwinna, jak wiewiórka czarna,  
I na kolanach mi siadła figlarna (...)

Raz po odpuście matki Boskiej zielnej,  
Szedłem do lasu w poranek niedzielny,  
Niosąc dla mojej leśnej dziwożonki  
Sznurek korali i lśniące pierścionki  
Na podarunek. – Ona po zwyczajcu  
Czekała na mnie na okopie gaju;  
Gdy nie ujrzała, wybiegła na pole; (...)<sup>15</sup>.

This stylization of a female figure on a dryad is aimed at making her more unusual<sup>16</sup>. It is very clear in the quoted text, because the Gypsy (*Cyganka*), just like her brothers, lives a wandering lifestyle, but her temporary presence in the forest scenery induces her the attributes of a wild woman, or at least lets the reader associate her with such.

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<sup>14</sup> Translation by Jan Ziętara (for this article).

<sup>15</sup> Michał Bałucki, *Poezje* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo "Kraj", 1887), 7–8.

<sup>16</sup> In a similar function the term 'dziwożona' was used in the poem of Józef Łobodowski, "Zielone oczy". In this piece, elements of disillusion appear. Here is a fragment: "I said – Green eyes are a witches' privilege! / She laughed: – How I would like to become a witch! / Say: Would you condemn me to death at the stake? / She often took offence, but in a moment / she approached me with her swarthy face / and she called: – Guess! / Do I have seven ribs or eight?! / Not at once I could count... / I didn't have enough courage / – for was the green-eyed dziwożona – / guilty of the imperfection of my words...? (...) See: Józef Łobodowski, "Zielone oczy," *Tydzień* 22, (2002), 12.

A good example of introducing dreaded dryads as a mood-setting function could be the fragment of a poem by Tadeusz Miciński, "Umarły świat", from the volume *W mroku gwiazd* (1902). In the text, the faint and "ardent dreaded dryads in the groves" ("rzewne (...) w gajach dziwożony") are a part of the non-existent reality described by the lyrical subject, but could be encountered by following "the charming bends of the forest rivers" ("w uroczu rzek leśnych zakręty")<sup>17</sup>. One deals with a similar situation in the part of Maria Konopnicka's poem "W górach", entitled "Night" (from 1888), in which it is exactly the night that "Untangles glistening hair of the dewy moss/ And, as a dreaded dryad, spurs the sleepy heather" ("Zroszonym mchom rozplata brylantowe włosy/ I, jako dziwożona, łechce senne wrzoso...")<sup>18</sup>. It is worth adding, that one can speak of the dryads' mood-setting function (which is related to the desire to make the landscape or, more broadly, the presented world more unusual) already in the case of the aforementioned poem *Sobótka*, by Seweryn Goszczyński.

*Dziwożony* (*divé ženy*) are also heroines of Czech literature. They appear, for example, in fairy tales and folk tales collected by the Czech pre-romanticist and ethnographer Karel Jaromír Erben; they appear in the play *Strakonický dudák aneb Hody divých žen* (1847) by Josef Kajetán Tyla; they are also mentioned in the story "Divá Bára" (1856) by Božena Němcová<sup>19</sup>. In particular, in the stories cited by Erben, such as "Pověst o studánce Litoše" and "Divé ženy", published in the work *České lidové pohádky*<sup>20</sup>, the earlier discussed artistic ways of presenting these figures are further diversified. In the first of these texts, entitled "O studánce Litoše"<sup>21</sup>, the *divá žena*, although kidnapped by Holeček, who is in love with her, and separated from her sisters, with whom she bathed in the well, turns out to be provident and loyal to her husband, but, at the same time, extremely vulnerable. One day, anticipating the upcoming hail, without Holeček's knowledge she orders farmhands to take all the grain from the field. Thus, she incurs the wrath of her husband (who, in his anger, reminds his wife of her origin), as a result of which she decides to leave him forever – he falls into despair and is condemned to wait day and night at the well where he saw the dryad for the first time. The aforementioned differentiation in the character presentation in the cited story sheds new light on the figures of the dreaded dryads – they no longer appear demonic, but they do not lack extraordinary abilities either (for example, precise weather forecasting) – and allows their original motives to be explained. They did not assume a conservative

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<sup>17</sup> Tadeusz Miciński, "Umarły świat" [in:] *W mroku gwiazd*, (Gdańsk: Tower Press, 2000), 41.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Konopnicka, "Noc" [in] *Ziemia polska w pieśni*, ed. by Jan Lorentowicz, (Warszawa: Gebethner and Wolff, 1913), 202.

<sup>19</sup> From Božena Němcová's text *Divá Bára*, we learn that the village community starts to avoid the title character Bára, because she is different from other girls (among other things, she is not afraid of the storm, she can swim, she is strong). Ultimately it is suspected that, as a child, she was dropped off in the cradle by a dreaded dryad. And, even though the story ends well for the protagonist, many times in the plot she is forced into a stereotypical role of a misfit.

<sup>20</sup> From the edition: Karel Jaromír Erben, *Kytice. České pohádky* (Brno: Host, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Karel Jaromír Erben, "Pověst o studánce Litoše" [in:] Karel Jaromír Erben, *Kytice. České pohádky*, 187–188.

approach, rather, their activity had its source in emotions, which, on the one hand, resulted in greater sensitivity, affection, readiness to help people, and on the other – could result in irritability, harbouring old grudges, the need for revenge (as was the case with water nymphs<sup>22</sup>) or (as in “Pověst o studánce Litoše”) a tendency to punish immediately those, who dared to hurt them with harsh words and deeds.

In turn, in the text of “Divé ženy”<sup>23</sup> the heroines were assigned the status of forest creatures engaged in hunting, so that they are able to show gratitude and bring the hunted game to the man who, by crying through the window – “Drž ho, drž ho! a mně taky kus přines”<sup>24</sup> / Hold it, hold it! and bring me a piece as well!” – helped in the chase. They have also been described as creatures coming from the forest to the fields and helping the shepherdesses to spin. It was customary for them to dance in circles, and in the place in the meadow where these creatures swirled, tall grass grew later. It sometimes happened that *divé ženy* danced with shepherdesses. For each joint dance the girls were given a twig of birch leaves, each of which, once brought home, turned into a ducat.

On the other hand, in the admonition poem by the Russian elder symbolist Konstantin Balmont, entitled “Дивьи жены” from the volume *Жар-Птица. Свирель славянина*<sup>25</sup>, the dreaded dryads were presented in a completely different way – not as characters helping people, but as forest creatures “setting a traps for the gazing passers-by”. What is striking in Balmont’s work is the oxymoronic construction of the heroines. The whiteness of their shirts “awakens the darkness in the heart”, and the costumes themselves are associated by the lyrical subject with the shroud. Thus, through such associations, the “white dance” of these deceptive demons begins to appear as a death dance.

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<sup>22</sup> I have written about the characteristics of female figures (water nymphs and witches) in romanticism and modernism, in both Polish and Russian literature, in a subsection of *Leśmian międzynarodowy – relacje kontekstowe. Studia komparatystyczne*, titled *Reminiscencje konstrukcyjne (demoniczne postaci kobiece: Puszkina – Gogol – Leśmian)*. See: Żaneta Nalewajk, *Leśmian międzynarodowy – relacje kontekstowe. Studia komparatystyczne*, (Kraków: Universitas, 2015), 153–182. Also published in English translation by Klara Naszkowska with Alan Lockwood, as *Leśmian Internationally: Contextual Relations: A Comparative Study* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Karel Jaromír Erben, “Divé ženy” [in:] Karel Jaromír Erben, *Kytice. České pohádky*, 226–227.

<sup>24</sup> Karel Jaromír Erben, “Divé ženy” [in:] Karel Jaromír Erben, *Kytice. České pohádky*, 226.

<sup>25</sup> Константин Бальмонт, *Жар-Птица. Свирель славянина*, Москва 1907. *Дивьи жены* quoted in the original: „Дивьи жёны внушают нам страх./ Почему?/ Вспоминаем ли саван при виде их белых рубах? Пробуждает ли белый тот цвет в нашем сердце безвестную тьму?/ Или людям встречать неуютно/ В тенистых лесах/ Не людей?/ Человек с человеком, как с птицею птица, мелькают попутно,/ Всё удобно, знакомо, хоть встреть я разбойника между ветвей./ Знаю, как поступить./ Я слабей – быть убитым, сильнее – убить./ Или что-нибудь, как-нибудь, ну, уж я знаю, как быть./ Тут принять нам возможно решение./ А вот как поступить, если встретишь ты дивью жену?/ Чуть посмотришь на белое это виденье./ Вдруг тебя, непредвиденно, клонит ко сну./ И впадешь в забвенье./ Ты занул. Просыпаешься – лес уж другой./ На могилах неведомых вёты верушками машут./ Словно старой седою иссохшей рукой, – Убег, мол, скорей, убег, убег. Но видения белые пляшут./ И лучинной зажжённою светят они./ И приходят, уходят, и бродят огни./ Убежать невозможно./ Дивьи жены сковали, хотя и не клали цепей./ Сердце бьётся тревожно./ Разорвётся пожалуй. Беги, убег, поскорей./ Убежать невозможно./ Превратиться в берёзу, в траву, в можжевельник, в сосну./ Если вовремя ты заговор против них не вспомнешь./ Так в лесу, меж лесными, в лесной западне и застрянешь./ Не смотри, прохода меж деревьев, на дивью жену!”.

Against such a background, Leśmian's literary representations of the dreaded dryads are rather original. Relatively closest to Balmont's creation of this character seems to be the dryad's portrayal in Leśmian's "Podlasiak". Indeed, it is impossible to talk about the identity of the protagonists. However, the resemblance of Leśmian's dreaded dryad to the dryad of the creator of the volume *Жар-Птица. Свирель славянина / Жар Птак*. "Flet Słowianina" (1907) is noticeable in the structure of its relation with the oak spirit Podlasiak. For him it is an erotic temptation that is difficult to resist, and at the same time, although unintentionally, turns out to be (precisely because of this temptation) a deadly threat. Podlasiak, before his final death, as "the only one among the participants of the love trance, will be initiated into the mystery of rebirth, marked with blood" from the mouth of the heroine bitten by mosquitoes<sup>26</sup>. His death, called by the comrades of the oak spirit a "departure to heaven", is the result of a chase after the dreaded dryad, during which Podlasiak bounces too forcefully from the ground and, whether he likes it or not, he glides into the skies. The *dziwożona* is shown in the work as an erotic and chthonic creature, described as "nobody's", coming "probably from everywhere, because she comes from forests, streams, mountains, and all kinds of places"<sup>27</sup>. This eroticism comes to the fore in the characterization of the dryad<sup>28</sup> – she lives in the abyss of an oak hollow, her body is sticky with honey and stung by bees. This is how Podlasiak describes her:

"at dawn, she emerged from the shrubs nearby and ran towards me, lively, playful, drenched with dew and waving in her braids with sticky shreds of cobwebs ragged with dust. Before I could follow the wind and throw my shadow to her bare feet, she embraced me with both hands and pressed her warm naked body tightly against my rough bark. And then, her mosquito-bitten and swollen lips she pressed tightly against the *knar*, which now stands unregenerate over my eye. They must have itched and weighed heavily on her, from the excess of blood, because she stained them on that *knar* and ran back to the forest, enjoying the funny sight of blood dripping from her lips to her hand on the way"<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> On this subject see: Marzena Karwowska, "Fenomen kobiecości w wyobraźni poetyckiej Bolesława Leśmiana", *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 16 (36), (2009), 57. In addition to many interesting comments, there appears in the article an incorrect term referring to Leśmian's dreaded dryads (*dziwożony*) as "rusatki" (water nymphs).

<sup>27</sup> Bolesław Leśmian, "Podlasiak" [in:] *Dzieła wszystkie. Baśnie i inne utwory prozą*, Ed. Jacek Trznadel (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2012), 564.

<sup>28</sup> We deal with strong erotisation and humanization of the dryad in the dialectically stylized poem by Emil Zegadłowicz, "O pierścionku odnalezionym": "– on the field, on the road,/ under a fence, behind a fence/ a ring is rolling/ swiftly spinning –/ he saw the two/ lying in wheat –/ he hid in the ruffles/ of the upraised skirt –/ he hides and mocks/ but they continued –/ it was their first time/ the two, together –/ – she grasped her skirt/ utterly wrinkled –/ it smelled of vetch,/ cornflower and mint –/ »– where have you been/ during the whole supper –/ you cannot milk it,/ nor can you bake it – «/ » – I collected feathers/ of golden cranes –/ I collected feathers/ of Cracow peacocks –«/ – files out the orb/ from under the lace –/ and the golden ring/ lands underfoot –/ »– why, have you wed –/ from hence the ring – ?«/ » – I have earned all/ for diligent work – «/ – the wheat is crumpled/ and scruffy –/ – the ring got lost –/ – she turned a dryad –/". See: Emil Zegadłowicz, "O pierścionku odnalezionym" [in:] *Polskie wiersze wybrane*, collected and ed. by Mieczysław Grydzewski (Londyn: Orbis, 1946), 237.

<sup>29</sup> Bolesław. Leśmian, "Podlasiak" [in:] *Dzieła wszystkie. Baśnie i inne utwory prozą*, 564.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that even against such a broad background of other creations, Leśmian's dreaded dryads appear to be quite original. It is because Leśmian rejected the temptation to follow his predecessors and un-demonized his protagonists. The *dziwożona* from "Podlasiak" was presented as a wild, passionate, sensual, seductive creature, but harmless to people, not so much attacking strangers who have strayed into a forest retreat, but rather arousing desires in them – prompted by their threats and requests for a kiss, previously imprisoned, resorting to adroitness not to bring misfortune on someone, but to regain freedom. One could say that Leśmian's dreaded dryad personifies both the forces of nature and her impulsive character<sup>30</sup>. She appears, similarly to the female characters in "Ballada Dziadowska" or "Zaloty", as an incarnation of sensuality (she has a "dancing nimble body"<sup>31</sup>, "a tongue red like a poppy and concave like a canoe"<sup>32</sup>) and erotic temptations; unlike water nymphs and witches, she is neither an avenger nor a medium which would be a source of self-knowledge for other characters. However, she entices others with her voluptuousness and openly carnal desires<sup>33</sup>. When she wishes to regain the freedom, after being disappointed with the one-armed gimpy man and Podlasiak, she becomes cunning. In the final parts of the story, when the heroine briskly runs into the forest, she triumphs as "free, derisory, unequalled"<sup>34</sup>. However, in Leśmian's poem "Dziwożona" – which is a meta-literary text, since it is a poetic abbreviation of selected elements of the "Podlasiak" plot – the title character was presented not only as a sensual, timid, and willing to dance forest creature, but also, and, perhaps primarily, as an un-demonized literary character that does not replicate the stereotypes

<sup>30</sup> In Wiktor Goulicki's poem *Dziwożona* the lyrical heroine of the title is also identified with the forces of nature. However, the character was presented as the one who unsuccessfully lures a melancholy daydreamer with passionate singing, promising to soothe his body and soul. In the piece we read: "The wind is playing a sweet serenade/ On the bulrush/ It wiggles and shakes the black tail,/ The pale stars are shining./ The reminiscent soul/ is sighing and longing something – / In the dark, tenderly and quiet,/ The dreaded dryad allures...// »Feeble are the attempts to fight your thoughts,/ Feeble your existence without purpose.../ I will soothe your longing,/ My melancholy dreamer./ You won't reach the stars in the sky/ Which drown in the clouds,/ But there are stars much closer to you:/ In the eye of your beloved./ The mouth being kissed/ The hearts beating in love – / That is the answer to the riddle/ Which is called life (...).// Come, oh, come to my bosom!/ I will give you sleep and silence/ And your longing soul/ I will cradle sweetly...«// Now it's quiet, now it's sad/ The treetops are sighing;/ Increasingly louder and more passionately/ Sounds the dreaded dryad's song// (...)". See: Wiktor Teofil Goulicki, "Dziwożona" [in:] *Nowe Pieśni* (Petersburg: nakładem Grendyzyńskiego, 1896), 239–241. It is worth noting that in the ballad the decadent convention, in which the lyrical hero was presented, clashes with the image of the female figure. She personifies "the riddle called life", lives close to nature (similarly to Bałucki's poem *Cyganka*), and is presented in a characteristic scenery, reinforced by synesthetic images ("The wind is playing a sweet serenade/ On the bulrush/ It wiggles and shakes the black tail,/ The pale stars are shining"). This clash, to some extent, weakens the seductive power of the dreaded dryad, who, in fact, allures, but does so ineffectively.

<sup>31</sup> Bolesław Leśmian, *Podlasiak* [in:] *Dzieła wszystkie. Baśnie i inne utwory proz,* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2011), 570.

<sup>32</sup> Leśmian, "Podlasiak" [in] *Dzieła wszystkie. Baśnie i inne utwory proz,* 576.

<sup>33</sup> In *Podlasiak* we read: "The pink and fluted root at last became coloured in the sun with the juicy shine of an ethereally fragrant membrane. The dreaded dryad pressed it between her lips and plunged her sharp white teeth into its flesh. The sweet flag satisfied her hunger that otherwise would force her to roll in the fragrant grass or to shake off the cool dew from the branches of a nearby tree". Leśmian, "Podlasiak" [in] *Dzieła wszystkie. Baśnie i inne utwory proz,* 579.

<sup>34</sup> Leśmian, "Podlasiak" [in] *Dzieła wszystkie. Baśnie i inne utwory proz,* 584.

of femininity. "Dziwożona" "gives the thread to a fairy plot/ While dancing among the blue mayflies flock"<sup>35</sup>. Lastly, allow me to recall this rarely quoted work:

"Every hundred years arrives here a birdie,  
It's a golden birdie, and it's called Gregirdie,  
It pecks at an oak so that, in the chink  
Of the oak-tree, worldward, Werewife can upspring.

Tap and rap and tap! And at once flushed out  
Werewife, to the world, promptly dashes out.  
O behold her now—she dances the looby,  
The babbity bowster, and the hinkum booby.

And she gives the thread to a fairy plot  
While dancing among the blue mayflies flock,  
For her—croons and trills the chorus of reeds,  
O behold her now—she runs and recedes.

So let's look for her, before she's no more,  
Let's not lose her spoore before she's of yore,  
Before the oak seals the crack with its bark  
On dancing and prancing Goldlady aspark.

Since the golden bird does like to delay—  
Thus, one hundred years, we would have to wait  
Before the oak's door once more opens wide—  
And again, once more—make Werewife unhide"<sup>36</sup>.

("Werewife", trans. Marian Polak-Chlabicz)

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<sup>35</sup> Bolesław Leśmian, "Dziwożona" [in:] *Dzieła wszystkie. Poezje zebrane*, ed. Jacek Trznadel, (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2010), 680.

<sup>36</sup> Leśmian, "Dziwożona" [in:] *Dzieła wszystkie. Poezje zebrane*, 680.

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