Summary: Ewa Wziętek, Analysis: Marta Pszczolińska, "Entry on: The King of Witchwood [Król zaczarowanego lasu] by Katarzyna Nowacka", peer-reviewed by Katarzyna Marciniak and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1413. Entry version as of November 04, 2026.

Katarzyna Nowacka

The King of Witchwood [Król zaczarowanego lasu]

Poland (1996)

TAGS: Dragons Griffins / Gryphons Midas Narcissus Sirens





Courtesy of WSiP, the owner of the now-defunct periodical *Miś* since 2008.

General information	
Title of the work	The King of Witchwood [Król zaczarowanego lasu]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	1996
First Edition Details	Katarzyna Nowacka, „Król zaczarowanego lasu," *Miś* 12 (1996): 6–7; Katarzyna Nowacka, „Król zaczarowanego lasu," *Miś* 13 (1996): 6–7; Katarzyna Nowacka, „Król zaczarowanego lasu," *Miś* 14 (1996): 6.
ISBN	ISSN: 0137-7698
Genre	Fairy tales
Target Audience	Children (pre-school)
Author of the Entry	Summary: Ewa Wziętek, University of Warsaw, ewawzietek@student.uw.edu.pl Analysis: Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw, kamar@al.uw.edu.pl Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Creators



Photograph courtesy of the Author.

Katarzyna Nowacka , b. 1960
(Author)

A philologist and journalist. Author of two series of short stories for children: *Opowieści Zaczarowanego Lasu* [Witchwood Tales], 2010, and *Opowieści z Bajkowego Osiedla* [Tales from a Fabulous Estate], 2010. Contributor to *Miś* – a famous Polish magazine for kids. MA in Polish philology from Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań. Since 1994 has been working as a journalist for TVP Poznań (Polish Public Television's regional centre for Wielkopolska [Greater Poland]). Privately a huge fan of an English rock band – The Strawbs, especially of their song From the Witchwood, which inspired the title of her first series of short stories. Interestingly enough, the Polish title of the *Witchwood Tales* is nearly the same as the title of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* translated into Polish (*Opowieści z zaczarowanego lasu*), but, as Katarzyna Nowacka says, there is no intentional connection between her short stories and Hawthorne's book. Apart from the song by The Strawbs, another impulse to write was provided by the pre-school adventures of the author's daughter.

Source:

Bio is based on the material kindly provided by the Author.

Bio prepared by Ewa Wziętek, University of Warsaw,
ewawzietek@student.uw.edu.pl

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Additional information

Summary

Based on: Katarzyna Marciniak, Elżbieta Olechowska, Joanna Kłos, Michał Kucharski (eds.), *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity: A Catalogue*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2013, 444 pp.

The King of Witchwood is the title of one of the short stories included in The Witchwood Tales. Griffin was walking through the woods and eating some forest fruits, but he forgot that they could be dangerous, especially the dragon berries. He absent-mindedly ate a dragon berry, looked at his reflection in the water and saw himself as a very handsome creature with a strong personality and truly exceptional intelligence. He knew he should be a king, the King of Witchwood. He told the witch about this self-appointment, but she did not care. Then, he declared himself King of Witchwood in the presence of all its residents. Sirens, creatures who are widely known for their malice, were laughing at Griffin. Unfortunately (especially for the Sirens), Griffin lost his sense of humour and proportion and exiled the Sirens from Witchwood. What is more, he decided to exile anyone who was green and had a tail. At first, no one reacted, even the Sirens. So Griffin decided to expel them by force. Witchwood citizens were desperate and tried to calm Griffin's anger without success. Griffin's lust for power was enormous; he wanted to expel everyone who did not want to tolerate his violence. In effect, almost everyone started hating Griffin. In the meantime, Dragon, Griffin's best friend, put two and two together and uncovered the root of Griffin's problem, which was, of course, the little dragon berry. Dragon knew how to cure Griffin's narcissism and his need for domination. He asked Griffin to bathe in the Rainbow Stream with him. Griffin agreed, and… was cured. Unfortunately, Dragon forgot that the Rainbow Stream was bad for him. So the Witchwood residents had to bring him dragon berries – the cure for Dragon's power lust.

Analysis

The story presents the lust for power, not as a character trait, but as a result of swallowing a special berry. The mechanism of power as a corruptive force is shown as a simple consequence of unwise decisions. The person who made them may immediately regret them but is unable or unwilling to budge. What saved the situation was the

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wisdom and friendship of a dragon.

The author creates fairy-tale woods full of unusual creatures, most of whom are rooted in folk tales or originate in the writer's imagination. However, some are classical mythical creatures, such as griffins and sirens. These display novel features that do not resemble traditional mythological beasts. Their names, however, retain their Greek origin.

The protagonist is a griffin, in Polish, Gryf, a species instead of a personal name. Having eaten a dragon berry, he looks at his reflection in the water. He sees "a wonderful eagle beak, slender silhouette and graceful wings" (12/81, p. 6), a description of what a griffin looks like: a lion with a head and wings of an eagle. The description is reinforced by the illustrator, Krystyna Michałkowska, who explicitly shows Nowacka's version of the griffin. This scene brings to mind Narcissus' self-admiration. Gryf (Griffin) is pleased with his appearance and views himself as handsome, strong and wise. He also takes pride in often being the creature figured on crests and coats of arms, in other words, in heraldic, so important for the venerable medieval traditions. When his dragon friend, Podpuszczyk [UnderWoodOwl], helps him lift the curse using the waters of the Rainbow Creek, we recall King Midas, who rids himself of the Golden Touch curse by bathing in the Pactolus river.

Podpuszczyk hardly resembles ancient reptilian dragons as we know them from decorations on ancient pottery, but looks like an unknown three-headed species of dinosaur, combining the look of Cerberus with a nine-headed hydra. While mythical dragons often acted as guardians – Podpuszczyk is the guardian of Witchwood – he looks unrelated to the terrifying dragon images from Greek vases. Nowacka's Sirens* also have little in common with the Homeric half-bird, half-women creatures. They are presented as merry maidens with a fishtail, green in colour, without any trace of predatory instincts. There is no mention of their songs, so they evidently draw inspiration from the silent water creatures from Polish folklore.

* In Polish a single term, syrena, is used for both siren and mermaid.

Dragons Griffins / Gryphons Midas Narcissus Sirens

Classical, Mythological,

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Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Appearances Authority Desires Disobedience Fairy tale references Magic Punishment
Further Reading	"Hesperydy", "Midas", in Stanisław Stabryła, *Słownik szkolny. Mitologia grecka i rzymska*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1997, 102, 150–151. Andersen, Øivind, "Homer's Sirens" inLutz Edzard, Jens W. Borgland, and Ute Hüsken, ed., *Reading Slowly: A Festschrift for Jens E. Braarvig*, 1st ed., Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018, 47–58. Mayor, Adrienne, and Michael Heaney, "Griffins and Arimaspeans", *Folklore* 104.1/2 (1993): 40–66.
Addenda	Illustrations by Krystyna Michałkowska, courtesy of WSiP, the owner of the now-defunct periodical *Miś* since 2008, who gave the authors of the catalogue, *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity*, a blanket authorization to use their covers and illustrations.

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