

The Fisherman and His Wife: from Eco-apocalypse and Eco-anxiety to cyclical Coexistence

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APPLICATION

Humans perceive many natural phenomena as threats. We even name them 'natural disasters', forgetting that terrible past earthquakes, erosion, water streams, and wind currents shaped the beauty of the landscape we experience now.

Fear of natural disasters, in addition to romanticism and modern rationalism, is one of the key drivers of environmental movements, especially anthropocentric ones. It recently became clear that human activities do, at least in part, contribute to the causes of responses. Our logical response is to try to mitigate consequences.

Nowadays, there are three types of institutions dealing with environmental problems. The first, mostly natural sciences, apply theoretical knowledge by searching for causes. Others, primarily social and political, identify the (potential) consequences for humanity. The third, generally technological and educational, proposes (possible) solutions. Each type seems successful. The sum of these successes, however, proves to be a failure. What evidence do we have? Well, if this sum were a success, we would deal with environmental problems less and less. As is obvious, we feel more and more threatened, and the fear of the apocalypse is growing along with our economic growth. Do we fail at interconnectedness? Do our solutions tend to be triangulate instead cyclical?

In this paper, I'm showing how Otto Runge, at the beginning of the 19th century, presented to the Brothers Grimm the idea of a causal interconnectedness of human economic and political growth against the reactions of the rest of nature. In the story, he faced and intensified human alienation and the pressures on nature, on the one hand, and on the other, the reactions of water and climate.

Following the demand: "Time is on my hands. I cannot stand it any longer. Go to the flounder. I am king, but now I must become emperor," ... »the water was all black and dense and boiling up from within. A strong wind blew over him that curdled the water.« And after »wanting to become like God,« ... »a storm was raging that he could hardly stand on his feet. Houses and trees were blowing over. The mountains were shaking, and boulders were rolling from the cliffs into the sea. The sky was as black as pitch. There was thunder and lightning. In the sea there were great black waves as high as church towers and mountains, all capped with crowns of white foam.«

The inner drama confronts the growth of impact and eco-apocalypticity, placing eco-anxiety in-between. At the end, Runge or his informant back home near the Baltic Sea brought the story full circle: »They were sitting in their filthy shack again.«

The eco-apocalyptic story *The Fisherman and His Wife* was published under No. 19 in the famous collection of Grimm's fairy tales in 1812. Runge, Grimms, and their contemporaries recognised the interconnectedness between human causes and natural responses. As nature protects humans far more than we protect it, natural wisdom leads the counter-direction to the ever-after cycle.

LECTURE

Numerous experts in the social sciences and humanities have been interested in the fairy tale so far. However, most researchers stop at the mythical nature of the fish, which is believed to symbolise an old deity, maybe the ruler of water. This interpretation is conveyed by the words of the fisherman's wife, who tells her husband that mythological beings typically repay a kindness with a reward. In the aforementioned fairy tale, however, the fisherman saves the fish not from the difficulties it has fallen into, but rather from himself.

Mythological explanations somewhat underpin moralistic explanations. As we all know, fairy tales typically contain a moral message, which was passed down through centuries through multilayered text. As a result, the Christian interpretation concentrates on greed, in which the wife plays the part of an actor, but the husband stays by her side and, as an accomplice, pays the same punishment, a return to poverty.

Literary critics relate the fairy tale concept to other ancient motifs, such as Adam and Eve's relationship in the biblical paradise or Shakespeare's Macbeth. Undoubtedly, these narratives emphasise the question of punishment, or rather the continuation of established social power. Authors who used the fisherman's tale as a motif are also frequently mentioned, such as Günter Grass or Virginia Wolf.

Psychoanalysts observed that the male character of the fisherman is weaker than that of his wife. From their point of view, the fisherman is a passive individual who lacks originality and initiative. His only source of happiness consists of sitting by the lake during the day and dipping his hook. Such an approach also raises the question of whether the fairy tale portrays a prior matriarchal society, which appears rather out of place in the current capitalist civilization of Europe.

I have listed only a few of the most notable study perspectives, which demonstrate not only the scope of contemporary scientific research but also the true complexity of the fairy tale as a literary work of art.

However, a clear anthropocentrism may be observed in research epistemology. Psychoanalysis is concerned with the interior events of both human characters. Moralists and mythologists investigate the dynamics of interpersonal interactions in order to understand the implications for humanity. Surprisingly, and despite the intense drama depicted, they generally overlook the significance of nature or what is occurring in the water and atmosphere.

This prompts the question, who or what did the fisherman fear? Was it dread of his wife, whom he always obeyed despite his concerns, or fear of nature's response to their already ludicrous and excessive desires? In any event, the narrative reveals that he patiently bore both his wife's incomprehensible views and nature's response. Does the researcher apply his own research paradigm? Aren't the fisherman's behaviours, which we now refer to as eco-anxiety, a fully normal trait of all animals, maybe including plants and other organisms? Even animals attempt to steer clear of the unknown. Changes to their living environment also make animals uneasy. Even though the animal quakes throughout the storm, it insists on protecting life. Wasn't the fisherman actually copying the natural behaviour of other animals, which he learned via regular interaction through his daily fishing for food? Feeding oneself is crucial, regardless of the weather or the state of one's circumstances. In nature, there are no supermarkets.

According to dominant interpretations, the story concludes with punishment. After their greed had reached the point where they want to become like God, they remained in front of their decaying

hut, poor and deprived of any fortune or social power. Is the fairy tale truly about punishment? In fact, if we compare the last act to the first, i.e. the end of the tale to the beginning, we see that it is just a subject of circling. The fisherman and his wife had just recovered to their initial condition. The moral of the story is not punishment, but rather the cyclicity of natural processes. With all the amplified drama, we understand that even social interactions are subject to the laws of nature. Everything indicates that serious consideration was given to the issue of whether or not it was necessary to maintain the natural rhythm within social processes as early as the beginning of the industrial age.

SLOVENIAN TRANSLATION

Pravljica *O ribiču in njegovi ženi* je doslej pritegnila pozornost različnih raziskovalcev s področij družboslovnih znanosti in humanizma. Raziskovalci se najpogosteje ustavljajo ob mitski vlogi ribe, ki naj bi predstavljala neko starodavno božanstvo, morda vladarja vode. Razlago implicirajo besede ribičeve žene, ki svojega moža ribiča pouči, da je mitska bitja praviloma človeku nekaj povrnejo, če jim človek naredi neko uslugo. No, v primeru obravnavane pravljice ribič ne reši ribe iz težav, v katere je sama zašla, ampak jo reši pred samim sabo.

Deloma iz mitološke razlage izhajajo moralistične razlage. Kot vemo, pravljice načeloma vsebujejo moralni nauk, ki se jprav s pomočjo večplastnih besedil prenašal med generacijami. Krščanska razlaga se tako osredotoča na pohlep, pri katerem sicer žena igra vlogo akterja, vseeno pa ji mož zvesto sotji ob strani in je kot sokrivec na koncu enako deležen kazni, ki je vrnitev v revščino.

Literarni kritiki motiv pravljice primerjajo s podobnimi starodavnimi motivi, na primer odnos Adama in Eve v svtopisemskem raju ali Shakespearov *Macbeth*. Te zgodbe seveda izpostavljajo problem kazni, oziroma vzdrževanja pridubljene družbene moči. Pogosto obravnavajo tudi avtorje, ki so pravljico o ribiču vzeli kot motiv, na primer Günter Grass ali Virginia Wolf.

Psihoanalitiki ugotavljajo šibkost moškega značaja ribiča v primerjavi z močnim značajem njegove žene. Z njihove perspektive ribič predstavlja pasivno osebnost brez lastne ideje in pobude. Njegovo zadovoljstvo je izkjučno omejeno na dnevno sedenje ob vodi in namakanje trnka. Iz takšne analize izhajajo tudi vprašanja, ali pravljica odslilkava nekdanjo matriarhalno družbo, kar se zdi evropski družbi sodobnega kapitalizma nekoliko nenavadno.

Naštel sem le nekaj najbolj izstopajočih raziskovalnih pogledov, ki ne pričajo le o sedanji širini znanstvenega raziskovanja, ampak tudi o dejanski večplastnosti pravljice kot literarnega umetniškega dela.

Vendar, če pogledamo epistemologijo raziskav, opazimo izrazit antropocentrizem. Psihoanaliza se fokusira v notranje dogajanje obeh človeških likov. Moralisti in mitologi analizirajo dinamiko medčloveških odnosov ter ugotavljajo, kakšne so posledice za človeka. Ob tem, presenetljivo in kljub prikazani izraziti dramatičnosti, spregledajo prikazano vlogo narave oziroma dogajanja v vodi in ozračju.

Tu se zato vprašamo, koga ali česa se je ribič bal? Je bil to strah pred ženo, ki jo je sicer ob pomislekih dosledno ubogal, ali strah pred odzivom narave na njune pretirane in že kar absurdne želje? Vsekakor v zgodbi opazimo, da je stoično prenašal tako nerazumljive ideje svoje žene, kot odzive narave. Ali raziskovalec vanj projecira svojo raziskovalno paradigmo? Mar niso reakcije ribiča, ki jih danes označujemo kot eco-anksioznost, pravzaprav povsem sonaravno obnašanje, značilno za vsako žival, verjetno tudi rastline in druga bitja? Tudi žival se skuša izogniti neznanemu. Tudi živalim so

neprijetne spremembe v njihovem življenjskem okolju. Tudi žival ob nevihti drhti, a vseeno vztraja pri ohranjanju življenja. Mar ni tudi ribič dejansko posnemal naravno obnašanje drugih bitij, ki ga je spoznal ob stalnem stiku, vsakdnevnem riblovu za vsakodnevno prehrano in preživetje? Kljub nevihtam in slabim okoliščinam je namreč prehranjevanje nujno. V naravi pač ni supermarketov.

Prevladujoče razlage v sklepu pravljice vidijo kazen. Po tem, ko je njun pohlep segel do želje postati kakor Bog, sta obsedela pred svojo staro kočo, revna in brez vsega bogastva in družbenega vpliva. Ali pravljica res govori o kazni? Če namreč zadnje dejanje primerjamo s prvim, torej konec zgodbe z začetkom, ugotovimo, da gre samo za kroženje. Ribič in njegova žena sta se samo vrnila v prvotno stanje. Pravljica torej ne kaže na kaznovanje, ampak nas uči, da so naravni procesi krožni. Ob vsej stopnjevani dramatičnosti tako spoznamo, da je tudi družbeno dogajanje naravnim zakonitostim ne more uiti. Vse kaže, da so o nujnosti ohranjanja naravnega kroženja tudi znotraj družbenih procesov intenzivno razmišljali že na samem začetku industrijske dobe.

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