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“The Monument of Wojtek the Bear” or Polish Projects to Commemorate Animals Involved in World War II

“Bears are tapping their paws to the beat, [...] I’m very much ashamed, I – a human.”

Wisława Szymborska, *Circus Animals*,
in: idem, *That’s What We Live For*, 1952.

Abstract: A monument is not an imitation or representation of the past, but a cultural construct. The choice of a theme and the way it is presented in a monumental sculpture show what a particular group considered important and worthy of commemoration. Although it refers to the past, it is primarily concerned with the reality in which it was created. It is a response to a demand. The monuments of Wojtek which were founded in Poland in 2013–2014 contributed to the consolidation and dissemination of ideas about the bear-hero of Monte Cassino. By exposing patriotic themes and national symbols, the fate of the bear has been linked with the history of Poland during and after World War II. This clear and unequivocal message about the unusual relationship between Wojtek and the Anders’ Army soldiers does not mention how the animal was treated. Thus, the chance to problematize the fate of the bear in man’s captivity has been missed.

Key words: Wojtek the Soldier Bear, statues of animals, animal-heroes, the 2nd Polish Corps (Anders’ Army), the battle of Monte Cassino

The year 2015 marks the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II. On this occasion, there are numerous commemorative ceremonies – public rituals of memory, which provide an opportunity to reflect on “sites of memory” (Fr. *les lieux de mémoire*), i.e. historical, tangible and intangible, actual and imaginary phenomena that serve to “crystallize the national heritage” (Nora, 1995, p. 83). They are a vehicle of “collective memory”, understood as a set of ideas about the past shared by members of a group (Halbwachs, 1950). Any reference to what is past, bears no signs of professional history and is set in the context of a particular group falls under the category of “collective memory” (cf. Szacka, 2006, p. 32 et. al). Aside from the criticism of this concept and the conviction of its usefulness, it is clearly close to “cultural memory” (the term has been used by Assmann, 2008) and is a corollary understanding of culture, in the spirit of Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky, as “non-hereditary collective memory” (Assmann, 2013, p. 11).

The categories of “collective memory” and “cultural memory”, treated as synonyms, are different from individual memory which is of interest to psychology. “Collective memory” is “produced” (Assmann, 2013, p. 10) and used to construct a collective identity. A Frenchman living in the twenty-first century does not remember the French Revolution because he or she did not participate in it, but he or she may not go to work on July 14,

a national holiday established to commemorate the Bastille Day, and participate in celebrations on the Champs Elysees, thus experiencing the collective memory with other people gathered there. The historical fact and its valuation, which is exemplified by the capital letters *La Révolution Française* and the adjective *La Grande*, is the subject of “politics of memory” (the term has been used by Nijakowski, 2008).¹ It consists in an instrumental use of past events by central or local authorities to construct the dominant narrative about the past.

In addition to pompously celebrated national holidays, the commissioning, designing and unveiling of monuments have long been essential elements of the “politics of memory”.

The word “monument” is present in many European languages. It derives from the Latin noun “*monumentum*” which comes from the verb “*monere*”, meaning “to remind”. In Polish, the word “*pomnik*” (Eng. “memorial”) is derived from an obsolete adjective “*pomny*” (syn. “*pamiętny*”, Eng. “mindful” and “memorable”). Both “monument” and “memorial” are semantically associated with memory. In accordance with a dictionary definition, a monument/memorial is “a sculptural or architectural and sculptural work erected to commemorate a person or a historical event, usually in the form of a statue, a group of sculptures, a column, an obelisk, a building, an artificial hill or a natural boulder” (*Słownik*, 2007, pp. 322–323). These conditions – in the broad sense – are met by monuments such as Donatello’s equestrian statue of Gattamelata in Padua dating from the fifteenth century, the Arc de Triomphe at the Place General Charles de Gaulle in Paris or the tombstones in Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv. Their primary function is to commemorate what a group considered important. A monument is a “place of memory”. As such, it is an illocutionary act that conveys a message “do not forget”, addressed to some potential audience (Hamilton, 1990, p. 102, in: Bałus, 2014, p. 387; more on speech acts: Austin, 1962a; 1962b). At the same time, “There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. ... They are no doubt erected to be seen – indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention ...” (Musil, 1987, p. 61). Robert Musil’s remarks are correct, especially when it comes to monuments from past centuries which were designed in accordance with some specific representational convention. A good example is statues of horses which were so popular in ancient Rome but have lost their mnemotechnic function over time and now are just ancient works of figurative art, tourist attractions and topographic points on city maps. It can be assumed, however, that only few people know who Marcus Aurelius was, although his equestrian statue was erected in Lateran, then moved to the Piazza del Campidoglio, and eventually handed over to a museum and replaced by a copy. Although the monument of Marcus Aurelius (the original and the copy) has lost its original commemorating function, it is an artefact, a trace of a community. The glory of the emperor-philosopher has gone, and his statue no longer evokes the same emotions as in the time of construction. As Blaise Pascal wrote, with the passage of time, “We not only look at things from different sides, but with different eyes [...]” (Pascal, 2013, p. 202).

¹ This term is used interchangeably with “historical politics,” “politics of the past” and “politics of history”. For more information on the terms see *Geschichtspolitik*, 2013; Traba, 2009; Wolff-Powęska, 2011, and on “Politics of Memory” see Rappaport, 1990.

Decisions on the construction of monuments, their artistic forms, ways of getting funds and competition proceedings say a lot about the past and the present in a community. The very choice of the subject of a monument is a criterion for judging whether a particular historical event is part of a "duty to remember" or may be omitted as irrelevant to the current narrative. Thus, monuments that are beyond the existing convention in terms of subject matter or form are of particular interest. They usually concern forgotten or repressed matters which are no longer remembered because they were not important, or they were considered shameful and have therefore been deliberately forgotten. These new monuments confirm Assmann's hypothesis, according to which "cultural memory" is a dynamic and liquid relationship between what is forgotten, what is remembered and what is currently recalled (Assmann, 2013, p. 144).

Animals in wars are an example of a new theme that has emerged in monumental sculpture in recent years. *The Animals in War Memorial* was erected in London in 2004 as one of the first initiatives of this kind in the world. The monument is located in the city centre, on the edge of Hyde Park. It was unveiled by Anne, The Princess Royal in the ninetieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I. The pioneering nature of the London monument does not mean that there were no memorials dedicated to animals in military campaigns before, it means that they were different in theme, location and scale from the project in the British capital. Previously, such monuments usually depicted animals sharing the hardships of war with people. Hence the most frequent subject of monumental sculptures was a soldier and his horse (mainly in relation to World War I when horses were commonly used in artillery and cavalry). Therefore, the fate of an animal did not constitute an autonomous subject but had a right to exist only as a supplement to the dominant narrative in the centre of which was man. Monuments which presented animals only were less frequent. They were erected to commemorate those animals that showed – from a human perspective – heroism and were given names. *The Animals in War Memorial* bears an inscription, "This monument is dedicated to all the animals that served and died alongside British and Allied forces in wars and campaigns throughout time," and is an attempt to cross both representational conventions. Significantly, it is dedicated to anonymous animals, but only those that were on the "right side", i.e. on the side of the British and Allied forces. Therefore, the dedication does not address all animal victims. Despite the innovative aspects of the monument, it still represents the practices of constructing the collective memory, embedded in the tradition of a national community (in this case the Commonwealth). At the same time, one can see here a certain inconsistency when considering the other, smaller inscription placed on the monument – "They had no choice". One can ask at this point why the authors of the monument did not take into account all the animals that suffered and died in armed conflicts, regardless of which side of the front they were on, if none of them had freedom of choice.

No other monument in Poland is similar to the one in London in terms of formal assumptions and the semantic layer, although the country has been going through a kind of "memory boom" (the term has been used by Nora, 1989; Berliner, 2005) for several years. Although more than a decade has passed since *The Animals in War Memorial* was unveiled, the subject of suffering and death of millions of animals in both world wars has not been taken on in Poland yet. Since mid-2015, three monuments dedicated to the war fate of animals have been erected, yet all of them are inspired by just one subject – the ad-

ventures of Wojtek the soldier bear. They were made in 2013–2014 and located in Żagań, Szymbark and Kraków. There is also a foundation in Sopot which is raising funds to build a statue of Wojtek the bear. Since 12 July 2015, almost half of the funds necessary for the project's implementation have been collected. These initiatives are a continuation of earlier projects of this type that were undertaken mainly in Scotland, where the famous bear arrived together with Polish soldiers after World War II.

Wojtek was a Syrian bear (*Ursus arctos syriacus*), a smaller subspecies of the brown bear which inhabits the Middle East and the South Caucasus. In 1942 in Iran, this possibly several-month-old bear cub was sold by a local boy to Polish soldiers who were heading for Palestine, where the Polish 2nd Corps was being formed under the command of General Anders (i.e., The Anders' Army). The animal, named Wojtek, was growing up among people. As Aileen Orr claims, he was "more than just a military mascot, around Wojtek the men's morale was sky-high" (Orr, 2012, p. 53). Wojtek was famous for wrestling with soldiers and travelling in the cab of a truck. He stole women's underwear and captured an Arab spy in a bath, took showers and devastated food supplies. These anecdotal stories made the journey of Polish soldiers and civilians, who had recently arrived from the Soviet Union, attractive. He had a collar around his neck and was sometimes chained as a punishment for damages he made. At the same time soldiers would hide Wojtek's pranks from officers and feed him from their own rations.

The conditions in which the bear was kept in Iraq and then in the Negev Desert differed from his natural environment. Because of the permanent contact with people, changing climate and constant access to food, the bear did not fall into a winter sleep. Adapted to life in the mountains because of the thick fur, he would get overheated and demand to be cooled with water in the camps located in the desert. According to witnesses, in addition to baths, Wojtek also liked alcohol and cigarettes which he received from soldiers.

A two-year-old Wojtek travelled from Iran, through Iraq and Palestine to the Egyptian port of Alexandria with Poles, and there he boarded MS Batory in February 1944 and went to fight on the Italian Front.² The corps was sent to Monte Cassino where Polish troops were supposed to be the main force of the Operation "Honker". It was the fourth attempt to capture the Benedictine abbey defended by the Germans, which was important for strategic reasons. The 22nd Artillery Supply Company (renamed 22nd Transport Company), to which Wojtek belonged, was responsible for providing ammunition for artillery units. Initially, the bear had serious adaptation problems caused by the sound of bombs and artillery fire. He was afraid of the unknown and would seat in his room at first. With time, however, he got used to the noise and sometimes even watched the course of military operations from the surrounding trees. Wojtek's behaviour gave rise to a legend, enriched by a story repeated by eyewitness that the bear helped move crates of ammunition (some claim that he even moved missiles cf.: *Wojtek*; Lasocki, 1968) near the artillery fir-

² According to Archibald Brown, a courier of General Bernard Montgomery, "General Anders made him a corporal. I had no idea that he had even some rank, that things went that far. All this was done to officially get him on the list of the Polish 2nd Corps" (*Wojtek*). According to Wojciech Narebski, the bear "had his own service number, military book, and even received pay for cigarettes, which he loved to eat. He was a soldier, a real soldier" (*Wojtek*).

ing line. After an extremely bloody offensive, the Germans capitulated on 18 May 1944. To commemorate these events, a bear carrying an artillery shell in his paws became the emblem of the 22nd Company.

For Poles, the Apennine Peninsula campaign ended with the capture of Bologna in April 1945. The end of World War II was followed by the demobilization of soldiers who were waiting for decisions concerning their future. This was complicated by the provisions of the Potsdam Conference and the beginning of the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States. Eventually, on 26 September 1946, soldiers of the 22nd Company, along with the bear who was also entered on the list of passengers of the ship, left Italy with their own allocation of food stamps and sailed to Glasgow.

The Poles who came to Scotland were sent to adaptation camps, one of which was located in Winfield. Wojtek arrived there on 28 October 1946. The keeper of the animal found it challenging to feed the bear as he was officially classified as a private of the Polish army. The food rations granted by the British were too small to cover the energy requirements of the bear who tried to satisfy his hunger with all kind of food he found or received. Wojtek soon became an honorary member of the Scottish-Polish Society. At night, the bear was locked in a shed and tied by his paw. In the daytime, he would move freely around the camp. As the months passed, the boredom of camp life was broken by weekend country dances. Poles would often take Wojtek with them as an attraction. The animal was allowed to bathe in the River Tweed, which was located near the camp, and occasionally in the ocean.

Since 1947 soldiers from the Winfield Camp were successively discharged and they had to decide what to do with Wojtek. Some were holding out for his return to the Warsaw Zoo (Orr, 2012, p. 179), but little was left of it after the war. The idea of euthanizing or shooting him was also taken into account. Finally, in autumn 1947, Wojtek was given to the Edinburgh Zoo where he became an attraction for visitors (*Wojtek*). In the meantime, the authorities of the Gdansk Zoo took efforts to acquire Wojtek. The communist regime wanted to use the legend of the bear for propaganda purposes and, therefore, their efforts were unsuccessful (*Wojtek*). The ailing bear was euthanized at the age of twenty years on 15 November 1963 at the Edinburgh Zoo and cremated (Orr, 2012, p. 191; in the film *Wojtek*, the date of his death is 2 December 1962).

The legend of Wojtek was attractive for media, which found its expression in a series of initiatives to commemorate his war history. A commemorative stone tablet was placed at the bear's former paddock in Scotland immediately after his death. With time, the stone tablet disappeared and Wojtek was forgotten.

A book *Wojtek spod Monte Cassino. Opowieść o niezwykłym niedźwiedziu* by Wiesław Lasocki (1968) contributed to the revival of the bear's history in the Polish community in London. Its English version entitled *Soldier Bear* gained more popularity. It was published two years later and its co-author was Geoffrey Morgan. In 1973, inspired by the war adventures of the animal described in the book, an artist David Harding created the first sculpture of the bear entitled *Wojtek fails again to catch a chicken*. The work was placed at Honey Bear Buttery in Post House Hotel, Edinburgh, and after the change of decor in 1985 it was sent to the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London.

The end of the first decade of the twenty-first century brought increased interest in the fate of the bear. An illustrated book about Wojtek's adventures came out in 2008 (Paulin,

2008). In 2010, Aileen Orr published her book *Wojtek the Bear: Polish War Hero*, which was then translated into Polish.³ Her fascination with the war adventures of the bear did not fade after the publication. In 2009, the Scottish author decided to establish The Wojtek Memorial Trust (WMT) and raise funds to build a monument of the bear and his caretaker, designed by Alan Beattie-Herriot (The Wojtek), in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh. On 16 September 2013, the city council of Edinburgh approved the initiative of WMT, for which the Polish ambassador to the UK, Witold Sobkow, expressed his gratitude. Thanks to the growing popularity of Wojtek's history, members and sympathizers of WMT succeeded in getting the support of the Ministry of Culture and Foreign Affairs of Scotland. On 28 October 2014, the Scottish Government and WMT held a banquet in the Botanical Garden of Edinburgh. It was attended by Scottish MPs, representatives of the world of business, culture and art and the Polish community who officially supported the initiative of building the monument.

Aileen Orr was not the only author inspired by the war adventures of the bear. A book *Private Wojtek: Soldier Bear* by Krystyna Mikula-Deegan came out in 2011, and in 2014 Jenny Robertson published her *Wojtek: War Hero Bear*, a biography of the animal for children.

Books, documentaries, media reports, initiatives of WMT and plaques in the Imperial War Museum in London, among others, contributed to the popularity of the bear's war story, but mainly in the UK. Local initiatives gave rise to the erection of several sculptures such as the wooden *Wojtek: Polish Soldier-Bear 1942–1963* in Weelsby Woods, Grimsby, songs, websites and even beer named "Wojtek". The popularity of the bear on the British Isles also contributed to the first exhibition dedicated to Wojtek in 2010 at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum. Krystyna Ivell was its curator. It was addressed mainly to representatives of London's Polish community.

Meanwhile, the bear was practically not known in Poland till the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the communist era, there were just a few publications devoted to him, such as Janusz Przymanowski's *Kanonier Wojtek* (1979). In the free Poland, interest in the fate of the bear was growing, which was reflected in two books published in 2007 (Miklaszewska) and 2009 (Wierzbicki), and above all – due to a larger audience – a documentary *Piwko dla niedźwiedzia! (Beer for the bear!)* from 2008. It was written and directed by Maria Dłużewska and produced by the Film Studio Kalejdoskop for TVP Polonia. Shortly afterwards, Telewizja Polska in cooperation with Animal Monday and BraidMade Films produced a film *The Bear that went to war (Wojtek. Niedźwiedź, który poszedł na wojnę)*, directed by Will Hood and Adam Lavis and co-financed by the Polish Film Institute, BBC Scotland and Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk. It was first broadcast in 2011.

The publications and films popularized the history of the bear-soldier in Poland. Over time, there were initiatives to commemorate Wojtek in monumental sculptures. The first monument was unveiled in Żagań on 7 June 2013 at Słowiański Square. The work was designed by Wioletta Sosnowska of the School of Textile and Commerce (ZSTH), exe-

³ In the same year, a monument dedicated to Wojtek (a stone set in a vertical position with a relief depicting the bear and the emblem of the 22nd Company) was unveiled in Edinburgh. The ceremony was attended by A. Orr.

cuted by Stanisław Grzesiowski and funded by the District of Żagań. It was unveiled by one of the promoters of the history of the bear-hero, prof. Wojciech Narewski, a former soldier of the 22nd Company. On the same day, ZSTH adopted General Anders as their patron (*Odslonięcie*, 2013). The combination of the two events was not accidental. As part of the international project eTwinning and in collaboration with an Italian partner from the town of Imola, students of ZSTH made an educational and historical comic book, *Jak niedźwiedź Wojtek został polskim żołnierzem. Prawdziwa historia niedźwiedzia – żołnierza 2. Korpusu Polskiego (How Wojtek the Bear Became a Polish Soldier. The True Story of the Bear-Soldier of the Polish 2nd Corps)*⁴. The whole event was followed by a recital of Katy Carr, who also performed a song "Wojtek".

On 17 September 2013, three months after the ceremonies in Żagań, a monument of Wojtek the bear was unveiled in Szymbark. The bronze statue of the animal was designed by Izyda Szydnicka and located at the Centre for Education and Regional Promotion (CEPR). It was 185 cm high, which was the actual documented size of Wojtek (in vertical position). The sculpture was placed on a pedestal in a small body of water and provided with information boards in Polish and English, along with photos of General Anders and the emblem of the 22nd Company, among others. Before the statue of Wojtek was unveiled, CEPR had been known mainly for permanent exhibitions devoted to Poles in Syberia, Kashubian tradition and the Secret Military Organization "Gryf Pomorski", as well as peculiarities such as the longest board in the world, the largest piano in the world and an upside down house. The choice of the location aroused controversy from the very beginning. Originally, it was planned to put the statue of Wojtek at Monte Cassino Street in Sopot but – as noted by Daniel Czapiewski, the owner of CEPR – "there was no will, so we decided to put it in Szymbark" (*Odstonili*, 2013). The unveiling of the monument was part of the celebrations commemorating the 10th World Day of the Siberian. The ceremony was attended by the Siberians, members of the Katyn and Ponary Families, parliamentarians, local government, representatives of the Polish Army and the gathered audience. Lech Walesa was a special guest. The unveiling of the monument was preceded by a mass concelebrated by the retired Gdansk Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski and the appeal of the fallen.

On 18 May 2014, less than a year after the ceremonies in Żagań and Szymbark, in the seventieth anniversary of the capture of the Monte Cassino monastery, a bronze statue of Wojtek the bear by Wojciech Batko, a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts, was unveiled in Jordan Park in Krakow. Bear tracks, human footprints and stones with inscriptions: "Iran", "Iraq", "Syria", "Palestine", "Egypt", "Italy–Monte Cassino–Ancona–Bologna" were engraved nearby the monument. There was also a granite plaque with the following inscription:

"In the eternal glory of the fallen
For posterity to remember

⁴ In the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of Imola, they unveiled a monumental sculpture there depicting Wojtek who "... holds in his left paw a soldier beret with an eagle and the emblem of the 22nd Artillery Supply Company, which adopted the bear, [... and – ML] climbs up the stone steps, which allude to the hills of Romagna, to put the flags of Poland and Italy on their top." (Sosnowska, 2015).

This monument was unveiled in the 70th anniversary of the battle of Monte Cassino fought by the Polish 2nd Corps under the command of General Anders.

To commemorate the combat trail of the troops and their faithful companion-in-arms, Wojtek the Bear.”

Below was an inscription with the unveiling date and its originators, founders and executors. The initiator of the monument was Richard Lucas, a Briton living in Krakow. The unveiling ceremony was attended by the founders (including Andrzej Targosz), the President of the Jordan Park Society, Kazimierz Cholewa, representatives of the Polish Army, children from the “Home Army” school in Nieciecz and others.

The three monuments of Wojtek that were erected in 2013–2014 have a figurative form. The bear is presented in a vertical position and with an artillery shell (except the one in Krakow). Apart from the statue in Żagań, which is close to primitivism, the sculptures in the other two cities are realistic and bear the national-patriotic symbolism. The Wojtek in Szymbark has a white-and-red scarf on his paw, and the one in Krakow points to a park alley where there is a bust of General Anders. Both sculptures suggest a clear identification of the prototype with Poland and the ethos of the Anders’ Army. Naturally, both monuments are also decorated with poppies which symbolize the memory of the fallen.⁵ Moreover, the information boards at the three monuments, press releases and speeches accompanying their unveiling left no doubt why it was decided to bring the bear back to the collective memory. One of the speeches made at the unveiling of the monument in Szymbark says that, “The stories of wars do not know any similar cases of so incredible friendship of man with a bear. The monument of Wojtek the bear is an allegory of the fate of a soldier of the Anders’ Army, formerly a Syberian who had fought *For our freedom and yours* to finally learn that his homeland was in a cage – like that of Wojtek at the Edinburgh Zoo – and his family lands near Vilnius, Grodno and Lviv are no longer Polish but Soviet” (Drewka, 2013). In Krakow, the chairman of the city council, Boguslaw Kośmider, thanked the originators and sponsors of the monument by saying, “Some people thought it was an exaggeration, but we know that this is not an exaggeration but a very good idea to celebrate patriotism ... children will learn patriotism here” (*Pomnik*, 2014).

In all of the cases, the primary justification for the construction of memorials was to commemorate the extraordinary bear-hero and promote the places where the statues were erected. The “uniqueness” of Wojtek was the result of his “friendly attitude” to Polish soldiers and the fact that he liked alcohol and cigarettes. The “heroism” of the bear was seen in the fact that he travelled from Iran to Palestine and moved heavy loads during the battle of Monte Cassino. The animal which was entered on the list of members of the supply

⁵ Poppies are a symbol of remembrance of the fallen. They have been present in the collective (mainly Anglo-Saxon) consciousness since World War I. Red poppies are associated with the colour of blood. Sometimes, the earlier provenance of this symbol dating back to the Napoleonic era is indicated. The sources of the symbolic nature of poppies are seen in their fast growth and abundance in areas ravaged by wars, in which the blood of the killed allegedly provided nutrition to the plants. The symbolism of poppies was spread by the poem *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae (1915) and The Royal British Legion, a charitable organization founded in 1921 in the UK to support war veterans and their families. In Poland, however, poppies are associated primarily with the battle of Monte Cassino, mostly thanks to the song *Czerwone maki na Monte Cassino* (*The Red Poppies on Monte Cassino*) written by Feliks Konarski, composed by Alferd Schutz and first performed by Gwidon Borucki.

company as a private and called "Corporal Wojtek" probably for fun was thereby made an icon of a heroic figure in one of the bloodiest battles of World War II.

The war history of Wojtek became interesting to a wide audience because it was considered exceptional and unique. However, the presence of a bear in the army was not a precedent-setting event. There are reports, photographs and a book concerning World War I that deal with the fate of another member of the bear family which was acquired by Polish soldiers on the Kola Peninsula. It was a polar bear called "Baška". In his book *Dzieje Baški Murmańskiej. Historia białej niedźwiedzicy* published in the interwar period, Eugeniusz Małaczewski describes the fate of a small bear which was purchased in 1919 by a Polish cadet in order to impress women. A new owner, however, started to tame the bear cub as she was joined to the Murmansk Battalion as a "daughter of the regiment". She was assigned to the company of machine guns and was granted free board and lodging" (Małaczewski, [no date], p. 28). According to Małaczewski, the new caretaker, Corporal Smorgoński,⁶ "trained the bear with fire and iron, many a stout stick broke on it to splinters, and when the animal protested too loudly in the name of offended dignity, he spoke to her tenderly: – Shut up, you silly bear! I beat you for your own good. No bear has ever been so well trained as you will be" (ibid., p. 31). During their stay in Murmansk, then a trip by sea to Gdansk, and finally to the Modlin Fortress, where the soldiers were deployed, the small bear was forced to perform circus tricks, culminating in a parade on Saxon Square during which Baška "walked on her hind paws, ... turned her head to the commander and saluted briskly," [and when he – ML] "held out his hand to stroke her, she curtsied ceremoniously and gave him her paw without hesitation." The behaviour of the small bear in Małaczewski's story was a manifestation of "belonging to the Polish Nation and its History" (ibid., p. 43). Baška revealed her national consciousness in Gdańsk where in an evening brawl between Murmansk soldiers and border guards, "she helped the Poles win the fight." Małaczewski summed up the reasons behind the bear's behaviour by saying: "It is unbelievable how this intelligent animal at once, at first sight, hated the Fritzes" (ibid., p. 40). Eventually the bear never lived to see adulthood. During one of her baths in the Vistula River, she fled to a nearby village where she was stabbed with pitchforks by peasants. Baška was stuffed and placed on an exhibition in the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw from where she was stolen.

During World War II, Wojtek, just like Baška before, became the property of Polish soldiers. At the same time, he was not the only bear held by them in captivity. In the same 22nd Company, there was another bear named Michael. "When not falling foul of pesky army regulations, Wojtek led the life of an officer and a gentleman." Michael, however, according to witnesses – was crafty, brutal and aggressive (Orr, 2012, pp. 58–59, 69). Unlike Wojtek, Michael did not meet soldiers' expectations and therefore was transferred to the Tel Aviv Zoo.

⁶ The name refers to a bear training school that functioned in the nineteenth century in Smorgon (after World War II in Belarus). It belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian properties of the Zenowiczowie noble family, and since the second half of the seventeenth century, to the Radziwiłł magnate family. In the so-called Smorgon Academy, Roma bear tamers trained bears to use them later to entertain the audience at manors, fairs, festivals and during other celebrations. It is difficult to say now whether the surname of Baška's caretaker mentioned by E. Małaczewski is a poetic license or a historical fact.

The fate of the three bears held by Polish soldiers in both world wars ended tragically, though none of them was killed during military operations. They remind us, however, about the way the animals-mascots were treated by soldiers, the examples of which – in addition to Baška, Michael and Wojtek – are the stories of other pets of the Allied forces, including Donald, a deer kept by the British 42 Infantry Regiment, and Tirah, a donkey which belonged to the British Light Infantry in India. The animals were made drunk by soldiers and consequently became unpredictable and aggressive at times. When Donald and Tirah started to behave like that, they shot the deer and abandoned the donkey.

Wojtek the bear did not undergo a systematic training, yet it could have been otherwise if he had gone to a bear training school. According to contemporary standards, he had therefore enjoyed a certain freedom before he ended up in the zoo in which he spent three-quarters of his life. However, it has been seventy years since the end of World War II. At that time, a critical reflection on the human-animal relationship has been developed, which draws attention to the fact that cultures of the Judeo-Christian origin tend to treat living nature as objects.⁷ Hedonic values, such as pleasure and satisfaction, resulting from human-animal bonds have been subjected to ethical evaluation. This aspect of the relationship was exposed in speeches accompanying the unveiling of Wojtek's monuments, and the impact of the bear on boosting the morale of Polish soldiers was primarily stressed. At the same time, they did not take into account or downplayed the issues of slavery and subjugation of the animal and the lack of preparation and competence to keep him. The reasons for which the animal was in the hands of the Iranian child, the conditions in which he was kept by soldiers and his unsuccessful attempt to escape were consistently overlooked. Efforts were made to emphasize the "human" features of the bear which became "almost" human thanks to the tricks he learned and the name he was given. The negative values, such as discomfort or dissatisfaction (sadness, pain), were mentioned only in relation to the fact that Wojtek was put in the zoo, while pointing out the convergence of the captive bear's fate with the post-war history of Poland in the Soviet sphere of influence and the drama of soldiers from the Anders' Army who did not return to their homeland despite the end of the war.

The story of Wojtek is present in dozens of anecdotes, reports and photographs, thus creating a pretext to reflect on the fate of animal victims of human wars. The bear was ripped from its natural environment by man and sentenced to life in captivity. He was forced to act as a mascot, to entertain soldiers, and ultimately – albeit with regret – he was sent to the zoo. The fact that Wojtek was officially entered on the passenger list of the ship and became a member of the company created an illusion that the animal was empowered. However, since it was a secondary empowerment, given by people, the bear might have been deprived of it and in fact was when he was put in the Edinburgh Zoo. The uniqueness of Wojtek, resulting mainly from a small number of bears kept by soldiers, was not representative of the millions of animals that died at the fronts of World War II or afterwards as a result of exhaustion, starvation and wounds.

⁷ This does not mean that the problem of the human-animal relationship did not exist in other cultures, yet in the twentieth century, it was mostly in the West that the development of the environmental movement has questioned the dominant belief that animals are subordinate to humans, the consequences of which (cruelty) were criticized only by a few, including Albert Schweitzer, before World War II.

* * *

A monument is not an imitation or representation of the past, but a cultural construct. The choice of a theme and the way it is presented in a monumental sculpture show what a particular group considered important and worthy of commemoration. Although it refers to the past, it is primarily concerned with the reality in which it was created. It is a response to a demand. The monuments of Wojtek which were founded in Poland in 2013–2014 contributed to the consolidation and dissemination of ideas about the bear-hero of Monte Cassino. By exposing patriotic themes and national symbols, the fate of the bear has been linked with the history of Poland during and after World War II. This clear and unequivocal message about the unusual relationship between Wojtek and the Anders' Army soldiers does not mention how the animal was treated. Thus, the chance to problematize the fate of the bear in man's captivity has been missed.

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Pomnik niedźwiedzia Wojtka...

Streszczenie

Pomnik nie jest imitacją czy reprezentacją przeszłości, lecz konstruktem kulturowym. Dobór tematu i sposób jego przedstawienia w rzeźbie pomnikowej, są świadectwem tego, co dana grupa uznała za

ważne i godne upamiętnienia. I choć traktuje o tym, co minione, to przede wszystkim dotyczy rzeczywistości, w której został stworzony. Jest odpowiedzią na zapotrzebowanie. Powstałe w Polsce w latach 2013–2014 pomniki Wojtka, przyczyniły się do utrwalenia i rozpowszechnienia wyobrażeń o niedźwiedziu-bohaterze spod Monte Cassino. Eksponując wątki patriotyczne i symbole narodowe, losy niedźwiedzia powiązano z historią Polski w okresie i po zakończeniu drugiej wojny światowej. Dbano o klarowny i jednoznaczny przekaz, którego treścią była nietypowa relacja między Wojtkiem i żołnierzami Armii Andersa, spowodowała pominięcie kwestii przedmiotowego traktowania zwierzęcia. Tym samym nie wykorzystano szans na sprofilowanie losów niedźwiedzia w niewoli człowieka.

Słowa kluczowe: niedźwiedź Wojtek, pomniki zwierząt, zwierzę-bohater, 2 Korpus Polski (Armia Andersa), bitwa o Monte Cassino

