

Polona Zajec

## *Mojca Pokrajculja*

### The Pearl of Slovenian Folk Tales

At the center of this article is one of the most famous Slovenian folktales called *Mojca Pokrajculja* originally from the Mežica Valley in Carinthia. The article analyzes the relationship between the story's hero, Mojca, and the animals she welcomes in her pot. It identifies *Mojca Pokrajculja* as a chain or formula tale, an "animal fable", as well as a "tale of origin". It concludes that the story's repetitive frame, motives, easy-to-remember plot, and the fact that evil wins and is rewarded while kindness is left unrewarded which offers a lot of opportunities for further discussion, are all reasons that guarantee *Mojca Pokrajculja* a spot in the canon of Slovenian storytelling.

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#### 1. Introduction

*Mojca Pokrajculja* is one of the, if not the most, famous folk tales in Slovenia. It is a very old tale and originates from the Mežica Valley, in the Slovenian part of Carinthia. It has been adopted as a book, a poem, as a doll, a cartoon, a play; the tale has been translated in sign language, and Mojca also has her own stamp. It is safe to say that the narrative is universally known in Slovenia. Children usually already encounter the tale in kindergarten, but if not, it is on the list of obligatory reads in the first grade

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of primary schools across the country. In recent years the written version of the fairytale has gained popularity because of the famous illustrations by Marjan Manček. *Mojca Pokrajculja* has influenced most of the famous contemporary fairytale writers in Slovenia like Boris A. Novak, Svetlana Makarovič, Andrej Rozman, Lojze Kovačič, and Anja Štefan.

## 2. The folk tale *Mojca Pokrajculja*

The first two pages of the written version of the folk tale *Mojca Pokrajculja* start like this in Slovenian:

Mojca Pokrajculja je pometala hišo in našla med smetmi krajcar. Zanj si je kupila piskrček. Zvečer je zlezla vanj, legla in zaspala. Zunaj pa je bil hud mraz in padala je slana. Mojco Pokrajculjo je zbudilo močno trkanje na vrata njene hišice. "Kdo je zunaj?" je vprašala. "Jaz sem, lisica. Oh, Mojca Pokrajculja, lepo te prosim,пусти me k sebi, zunaj brije burja in pritiska mraz. Zmrznem, če me ne vzameš pod streho!" je javkala. Mojca Pokrajculja pa se ni dala kar tako pregovoriti in je dejala: "Če kaj znaš, ti odprem, drugače ne!" "Šivilja sem," je odgovorila lisica. Mojca Pokrajculja je spustila lisico v piskrček. Legli sta in takoj zaspali (Mölderndorfer 1993, p. 1-2).

## 3. *Mojca Pokrajculja* (sometimes translated as "The girl and the pot" in english)

For the purposes of writing this article the following translation/summary has been done by the author of the article:

Mojca Pokrajculja was sweeping the house and found a coin on the floor. With that coin she bought herself a pot. As the night came she climbed into the pot and went to sleep. Outside it was a very cold night. In the middle of the night she was awakened by a knock on the door of her pot. "Who is it?" she asked. "I am a fox, and I am very cold, please take me into your pot". But Mojca insisted: "If you know how to work and will help me in the pot, I will let you in". "I am a seamstress" replied the fox. So Mojca Pokrajculja let the fox in and they both immediately fell asleep.

However, not long after, there was another knock on the door. "Oh, Mojca Pokrajculja, it is so cold out here, please let me in. I am a wolf, but I am also a butcher, and I will help you in the pot". "Because you know how to work I will let you in," said Mojca, and the three of them went to sleep. Not long after, there was a new knock on the door: Mojca Pokrajculja, pretty please, let me in. I am a bear but I will freeze in this cold night if you don't let me stay in your pot". "What do you know how to do?" asked Mojca. "I am a shoemaker," the bear replied and he was let in the pot. "Will there ever be peace this night?" wondered Mojca when she heard knocking again. "Mojca Pokrajculja, please let me in, I am so cold!". "Who are you and what can you do?" asked Mojca. "I am a bunny, and I am a tailor" she heard the answer. And so the bunny was welcomed in the pot as well. Mojca Pokrajculja was getting quite mad when she heard knocking again. "Mojca Pokrajculja, please let me in, I can't take this cold wind anymore". It was a deer and he was a skilled woodcutter so he was let in. All the inhabitants of the pot finally fell asleep.

In the morning Mojca Pokrajculja sent everybody to work. Afterwards, the wolf made them a delicious dinner. He also found a beehive and saved the honey from it in a big bowl. That night, the fox couldn't sleep, she kept crying how she has a stomachache. Mojca Pokrajculja told her: "Go to the kitchen and make yourself some chamomile tea". So the fox went into the kitchen. Not long after she returned she cried again: "I have such a stomachache still!" and Mojca again sent her for some more chamomile tea in the kitchen. So the fox went into the kitchen again. But the fox did not make tea, and she also didn't have a stomachache. She knew where the bear had put the bowl with the honey and ate it all. Then she went back to sleep.

In the morning Mojca Pokrajculja sent everyone to work, but she told the fox to stay in bed and sleep-in as she was so sick in the night. Not long after, an argument erupted in the kitchen: "You stole the honey!", "No, you ate it all!", "Not me, you did it!". Mojca Pokrajculja stopped the yelling and said that the thief must be amongst the inhabitants of the pot as the doors were shut and locked all night. To clear them of shame the wolf suggested: "Let us lie down in the grass on our backs. If we lie in the sun, whoever ate the honey, will get a shiny mouth". So they laid in the grass under the sun and as it was nice and warm, they one by one fell asleep.

Except for the fox. She was feeling guilty and soon enough her mouth became shiny in the sun from all the honey she had eaten. She quickly wiped her mouth and put the honey on the mouth of the sleeping bunny. Then she fell asleep as well. She was woken by havoc. As the other animals woke and saw the bunny had a shiny mouth they knew he was to blame and started chasing him. The poor bunny ran as fast as he could but fell and broke his front two legs. Nonetheless, he kept on running as the other animals continued to chase him. Mojca Pokrajculja was left alone in her pot. But the bunny's legs never grew back, and that is why bunnies nowadays still have shorter front legs than their back ones.

#### 4. Analysis of the tale

Mojca Pokrajculja is the hero of the tale. She has a special relationship with animals and is always willing to help them, even if it means welcoming them into her home saving them from the cold. She is also presented as smart, as she wants the animals to offer her something in return. The villain of the story is the fox who is willing to hurt others in order to achieve personal gain. The victim of the story is the bunny. He is innocent and yet all the other animals are convinced he is to blame for the disappearance of the honey.

Such a special relationship between girls/women and animals is very prevalent in folk tales and fairytales across the globe, from the stories of the brothers Grimm, to Sleeping Beauty, and even in the animated video series and virtual sensation "Masha and the Bear" (its most popular episode has more than 4.3 billion views on YouTube) that is based on an old Russian folk tale.

Additionally, *Mojca Pokrajculja* can also be described as a "chain tale" or a "formula tale" based on the sequence or "chain" of characters (in this case animals) in the storyline. The popularity of *Mojca Pokrajculja* lies in the fact that the tale is

relevant, repetitive, and easy to remember. It can be seen as an explanatory fairytale or a “tale of origin” since, after all, it explains, why bunnies have shorter front legs than the back ones.

### 5. Structure of the tale

In terms of structure *Mojca Pokrajculja* has a fairly simple layout. The time and place of the tale are Winter and the pot. The story is told from the perspective of an omnipresent third person narrator. The introduction describes how Mojca gets her pot, and how and why she welcomes a fox, a wolf, a bear, a bunny, and a deer in it. The complication in the story happens when the fox eats the honey, and hides this fact when an argument about it erupts. The peak of the story is reached when the fox secretly puts honey on the sleeping bunny’s mouth, thus unfairly making him the culprit taking all the blame. The dissolution happens when the animals blame the bunny and start chasing him, and he breaks his front legs. The conclusion is that Mojca stays alone in her pot, and the bunny forevermore has shorter front legs than the back ones. Because of the anthropomorphism of the animals *Mojca Pokrajculja* can be classified as an “animal fable”.

### 6. Motives of the tale

The tale can also be interpreted in a different way. The animals are welcomed in Mojca’s home, the pot, but there are rules to be obeyed. They must work, and they must share what they have equally. The notion of “something is forbidden” is introduced when the fox knows the honey should be shared amongst all but eats it on her own anyway so that the restriction introduced is breached. What follows is a period of “examination” in search of the culprit. The villain tries to find a victim to deceive everybody, and when that succeeds, in the form of the bunny being blamed instead of the fox, the deception is completed. Many children feel like to story is not fair, as good does not come to a good end (after all Mojca Pokrajculja is left alone in the end), and the innocent is blamed, while the guilty is not punished. The equilibrium is not restored, and many children want to rewrite the end, to make it more fair.

Amongst the most prevalent motives discussed in *Mojca Pokrajculja* are: a.) friendship, b.) kindness – for example, Mojca accepting all the animals, c.) greed – the fox eating all the honey on her own instead of sharing, d.) lying – the fox not admitting what she did, e.) injustice – the bunny is blamed, f.) revenge – the other animals chasing the bunny because he allegedly ate all the honey, g.) loneliness – Mojca Pokrajculja remains alone in her pot despite being so kind, and h.) punishment – the bunny’s front legs will forevermore be shorter than the back ones.

### 7. In conclusion

Because of the unusual ending of *Mojca Pokrajculja* where evil wins and is rewarded, and goodness /kindness is left unrewarded or even punished, the last part of the

story has been modified quite a bit through the years. That being said, the fact that the ending is “problematic” because the fox gets away with lying, and the bunny is unfairly punished for a crime he did not commit, the story gives a lot of opportunities for further discussion with parents or in a classroom with teachers. Therefore, despite the fact that that the tale doesn’t follow the classical fairytale form of good defeating evil; with its easy, clear, and lively story, it has become a favorite amongst the young and the old. At the core of the tale is the battle between good and evil that carries a universal message that speaks to generations. That fact, mixed with the story’s repetitive frame and easy-to-remember plot, not only guarantee *Mojca Pokrajculja* a spot in the future of storytelling in Slovenia and beyond, but make it a special pearl amongst Slovenian folk tales.

### **Bibliography**

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