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“Behind the Scenes”: Migration as (not) a Topic in Children’s and Young Adult Books from the Perspective of Polish Lilliputian Publishers

Abstract: Children’s and young adult literature is seen as an astute and critical observer of societal conditions, social tensions, and processes of change, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between literature and society. It is a medium acting as a diagnosis of the times, reflecting the real world of young readers while at the same time having the ability to question and deconstruct it. In this context, it is unsurprising that societal issues such as migration are increasingly being used as central motifs in children’s and young adult literature. Numerous analyses deal with this topic, with many considering books as an access point to experiences and objects of investigation. However, the production level is often overlooked. This article takes an alternative approach by adopting the perspective of children’s and young adult book publishers, who act as key figures in the field of literary production and whose decisions play a decisive role in shaping the range of literature on offer. Based on twelve interviews with Polish publishers belonging to the so-called Lilliputians, the study examines how publishers perceive migration as a literary theme. The analysis follows the methodological principles of grounded theory and identifies three central patterns of interpretation that explain why migration is considered a “difficult narrative” for Polish children’s and young adult literature. Migration is seen, on one hand, as a peripheral topic for Polish society and as a topic existing outside children’s world of experience, and on the other hand as a socially and politically tense and threatening issue. The analysis shows how children’s and young adult literature either incorporates or omits social phenomena and in doing so can have a deconstructive effect that could initiate social change. However, this transformative function of children’s and young adult literature has so far been used only to a limited extent, particularly regarding the topic of migration.

Keywords: Lilliputian publishers, children’s and young adult literature; social order; production level; child experience space; migration

MIGRATION AS A LITERARY TOPIC.
THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL REFLECTIONS

Migration trends can be observed throughout the ages. They belong to and characterize the cultural history of mankind and are an integral part of political, social, and societal realities. They create a cultural and social experience that is often anchored in the collective memory of a society through literature, including in children's and young adult (YA) literature.

The relationship between literature and society can be thus understood as "a constant reciprocal process of constitution and exchange" (Farzin, 2016: 4). On the one hand, children's and YA literature functions as a social document or product of social conditions (Dörner, Vogt, 2013: 2), with an emphasis on its role as a close observer of social circumstances, social areas of tension, and processes of change. On the other hand, literature is to be understood not only as a reflection of society that represents "excerpts from the real, empirically established experiences of adolescents" (Minges, 2010: 30) but also as a means of (re)constructing and deconstructing societies (Becker, 2007; Rösch, 2013). Given the interaction between literature and society, it is therefore hardly surprising that topics such as migration are increasingly being addressed in literature for young readers and – albeit still hesitantly¹ – analyzed academically.

From the perspective of literary sociology, literature can be considered on four levels, namely: textual, reception, production, and field (Vogt, 2014)². Contemporary academic studies in Poland on the topic of migration in children's and YA books focus mainly on the textual level³, concentrating on two thematic areas: The (labor) emigration of Poles and immigration to Poland. Researchers of the first area analyze, for example, the challenges of growing up in a different cultural environment (Gromadzka, 2022a, 2022b), including by focusing on transnational family constellations (Zajac, 2023; Rembowska-Pluciennik, 2024; Jendrzey, 2025) and the experience of Polish refugees' emigration in the context

¹ Until recently, sociological researchers in particular have paid little attention to children's and YA literature as a subject of analysis. Not until the 1970s and 1980s did the sociological view of children and childhood, and thus also of children's literature, change (Honig, 1999; Hunt, 2005; Singer, 2011; Bühler-Niederberger, 2020).

² At the "textual level," three central questions are pursued: What and how is something depicted in books, and what is its relationship to the non-textual social world in terms of content or structure? At the "reception level," the reading of literary texts is viewed as a social practice that is itself influenced by framework conditions (such as social background, age, and education). At the "production level," the institutional, legal, and economic framework conditions for the production and distribution of literature are investigated, as well as their possible influence on texts. The last level – "field" – understands and considers the various aspects of the sociality of literature (text, reception, and production) as components of a structured social context (Vogt, 2014).

³ A limited number of analyses at the reception level can also be found (e.g., Michulka, 2024).

of their lives in exile (Lutomierski, 2019). The second area relates to the increasing study of representations of immigration, whereby researchers address the question of how experiences of flight and the realities of refugees' lives are represented in books for children and adolescents (Żygowska, 2017; Wójcik-Dudek, 2019; Pietrusińska, 2020). In addition, some studies analyze the representations of the figure of the "other" (Chrobak, 2014; Smoter, 2017). In this context, however, Anna Fornalczyk-Lipska (2017) argues on the basis of her analysis of Polish books on national and ethnic "otherness," or cultural diversity, that there is a noticeable lack of books that address this issue. This underscores the "dearth of [literary] reflection on the coexistence of different cultures in one territory" (Papuzińska, 1996, cit. per Fornalczyk-Lipska, 2017: 28).

In this article, the analytical focus on children's and YA books is shifted from the textual to the production level. As such, books themselves are not at the center of this study; instead, an alternative and as yet underutilized approach is adopted that focuses on the perspective of publishers of children's and YA literature. Publishers are understood here not merely as book producers but more so as "constructors of frames" (Hojka, Jamróz-Stolarska, 2022: 267), whose decisions significantly shape and facilitate the supply of literature for young readers and as actors through whose lens the supply of children's and YA literature is always viewed (Zarych, 2016; Magerski, Karpenstein-Eßbach, 2019: 139) – understood as literary gatekeepers. It is therefore surprising that their perspective has hardly been considered in previous research on children's and YA literature (see also Hojka, Jamróz-Stolarska, 2023).

Publishers' perspectives take center stage in this article, whereby the analysis looks "behind the scenes," making it possible to consider processes, decisions, and actors in the literary field even before a book becomes an object of reading interest and is made available to readers⁴. The focus here is on publishers belonging to the Lilliputians, a term used to describe publishers characterized by the following five features: They were established after the year 2000; they were relatively small at the time of their founding; they are independent; they publish exclusively or predominantly children's and young adult books; and their books are of high literary, artistic, and editorial quality, setting them apart from the existing children's book market (Biernacka-Licznar, Jamróz-Stolarska, Paprocka, 2018: 10f.). This publishing collective is distinguished by its members' roles as "idea-makers": They are viewed as actors who integrate new cultural patterns and thus potentially act as catalysts of social change (Biernacka-Licznar, Paprocka,

⁴ Before a book reaches the hands of readers, it passes through the hands of numerous literary actors. In addition to the publishers, these include the authors, illustrators, and translators who help shape the book (Magerski, Karpenstein-Eßbach, 2019: 131). However, as Cackowska (2013) notes, the release of a book onto the market does not necessarily mean it will reach the hands of the youngest readers. Both gatekeepers such as parents and grandparents, i.e., non-professional facilitators, and professional actors such as teachers, librarians, and educators play an important role in a child's literary environment.

2016: 145). Their philosophy is to take children and youths seriously – as competent readers – and to consider their (literary) demands more than has been done previously. Using Anselm Strauss’s (1998: 12) term, Lilliputians can therefore be described as a specific “discourse community” following a distinct logic, thus differentiating it from other publishing communities.

Previous studies on the perspective of these publishers (see Biernacka-Licznar, Paprocka, 2016; Biernacka-Licznar et al., 2018) emphasize their innovative contributions to the Polish children’s and YA book market, encompassing both artistic and editorial quality as well as the tackling of complex literary topics such as death, sexuality, and war – themes that have traditionally been considered too “difficult” or “problematic” for young readers. It is striking that the topic of migration has so far been neither a central motif nor widely thematized in Lilliputian publishing catalogues (Biernacka-Licznar et al., 2018). This draws attention to the question of how publishers deal with the (non-)presentation of complex topics and what considerations they make in doing so. As the analysis by Bożena Hojka and Elżbieta Jamróz-Stolarska (2023) shows, publishing decisions – whether in the selection, presentation or marketing of topics – can lead to social controversies. These arise above all when children’s and YA literature challenges the idealized (adult) notion of childhood, for example by addressing social taboos or through a discrepancy between the content of a book and the socially prevailing norms and values that are expected to be conveyed to young readers (Hojka, Jamróz-Stolarska, 2023). Migration can be considered one example of such a charged topic that has the potential for controversy in both media and political discourses – for instance in the context of anti-immigration rhetoric (Pietrusińska, 2020). These controversies are reflected not only in the public debate but also at the textual level. For example, literary representations, such as those of transnational families in children’s and YA literature, are interpreted as a break with the normative ideal of a “good childhood” (Jendrzey, 2025).

Given the social controversies surrounding both the topic and publishing activities, it is particularly interesting to explore the publishers’ perspectives on migration as a literary topic for young readers: How do publishers perceive migration as a (potential) literary theme? To what extent do they consider it relevant or (in)suitable for children and adolescents, and what arguments do they use to support this? These questions are analyzed in the context of how publishers’ interpretations are anchored in the social context and what implications this can have for literary and non-literary realities.

RESEARCH METHODS, ANALYTICAL REFLECTION, AND INITIAL FINDINGS

The results presented here are based on guided interviews with Polish publishers from the so-called Lilliputians, conducted in the period between 2020

and 2022. Based on the previously established definition, Katarzyna Biernacka-Licznar et al. (2018: 21f.) categorize a total of 16 children's book publishers under this label; this list was used for the following study. Representatives from 12 out of the 16 publishing houses agreed to interviews. The objective of the interviews was to gain insights into the publishers' subjective perceptions and constructions of the world, i.e., "how the individual experiences, understands and constructs the world for themselves" (Misoch, 2019: 7). Thus, the interviews were conducted in a narrative style and the interview guide itself contained only keyword-based topics, which were adapted to the conversational dynamics and focal points emphasized by the respondents. One thematic focus of the guide was on the publishers' interpretations of the literary topic of migration⁵.

The analysis is based on Strauss's (1998) methodological approach, whereby all twelve interviews were transcribed and subsequently analyzed. The initial coding of the material revealed certain commonalities in the use of arguments, with migration not considered a literarily established topic in the publishers' own catalogs. This largely shared assessment, which I have identified as a pattern of interpretation (Schwab-Trapp, 2008: 175), persisted even when I directly mentioned books (including from their own catalogs) whose representations could be labeled and understood as "migration" stories, for example, those featuring families and/or family members who leave their home country for various reasons, such as working abroad. Migration as a literary theme was consistently framed as "not a topic," which led to an analytical "irritation" (Charmaz, 2014).⁶ "Not a topic" was referenced in a general, even somewhat abstract sense. It was, therefore, unclear at this stage whether it was a question of relevance, of its suitability as a literary theme, or of the topic's attractiveness. Further analysis involved a targeted search for patterns and references to explain from the publishers' perspectives why migration is viewed in this way and not comprehensively addressed. Ultimately, it became clear that migration as a (literary) theme is interpreted as a "difficult narrative." Consequently, three interpretive patterns were identified that describe and explain why the topic is placed in this category and what exactly is meant by "difficult narrative."

⁵ The idea to interview these children's and YA book publishers arose during preliminary research for the binational (German-Polish) project "Dodzi," (DFG: 465048370), one part of which was devoted to literary representations of transnational families and migrations and the normative notions of good childhood embedded in them. To find out more, visit the project's homepage: www.uni-due.de/biwi/koenig/dodzi/; see also the guest interview in this collection.

⁶ The publishers' argument that migration is "not a topic" irritated me, as it contradicts my own perception of Polish migration history and processes. Migration is deeply rooted in Polish identity and has been repeatedly recontextualized by historical upheavals, not least due to EU accession in 2004, which led to an increase in intra-European emigration (Kaczmarczyk, Okólski, 2008; Okólski, Salt, 2014; GUS, 2020).

MIGRATION –
“NOT SUCH A LIVELY, EVERYDAY TOPIC” IN POLAND

An initial pattern of interpretation that is repeated in the interviews is that the topic of migration is not relevant to Polish society. While in some cases, the topic is seen as something “completely, completely inappropriate for our [Polish] reality”⁷ (Pub. Purple)⁸, most interviewees were somewhat more nuanced. They drew comparisons⁹ to other European countries and emphasized that, “compared to Germany, France, and the rest of Europe, this is not such a lively, everyday topic in Poland (laughs). So, not in a daily societal discussion” (Pub. Violet). Poland is seen as an exception in Europe, with migration (experiences) having little relevance as either a phenomenon or subject of societal debate. Compared to other countries, the situation in Poland is described as “somewhat calmer” (Pub. Yellow), particularly regarding the immigration processes in Europe since 2015. Not least, the interviewees substantiate their observations and interpretations of the contrastive (social) dynamics of migration (on the textual level) by emphasizing that migration as a book motif “frequently occurs in foreign proposals” (Pub. Purple), and at the same time, they point to a lack of books and book proposals on this topic by Polish authors.

In some cases, publishers point to tentative yet possible changes regarding migration trends in Poland: “Perhaps this will change, because we are mixing thanks to the internet and the opening of borders” (Pub. Purple). Nevertheless, publishers do not (currently) view migration as an integral part of the normal state of society or everyday life in Poland, as reflected by the absence of significant social discussions about it. This is based on an understanding of migration that is defined almost exclusively as immigration. Simultaneously, emigration (including, for example, the increasing temporary emigration following EU accession) from Poland is hardly considered.

Regarding the absence of migration discussions, publishers also thematize a societal (un)willingness to address the topic. From their perspective, Polish readers are seen as recipients who are “not willing” (Pub. Blue) and “not interested” (Pub. Purple) in engaging (literarily) with the topic of migration. In short, “the Polish reader is not looking for such a thing at all” (Pub. Purple). In this context, Marta Pietrusińska (2020) speaks of a certain exclusion of this topic, suggesting a specific and narrow target group: Readers with an open and tolerant attitude who want to actively engage with the topic – although given

⁷ All interview excerpts were translated by the author.

⁸ Pseudonyms are used for the publishers to ensure their anonymity.

⁹ Such social comparison processes play an essential role in the subjective formation of opinions about external circumstances, i.e., in the perception and interpretation of the world, and can be observed on all three interpretation levels (Kopp, 2014: 602).

the limited supply and distribution of these books, they must search specifically for such content.

In contrast, the interviewees point to other societal events that were visible in society and public discourse at the time of the interviews (2020 – 2022) and accordingly incorporated as themes in children’s and YA books. They reference two topics in particular: first, the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in an increased demand for books to supplement and partially replace the lack of school lessons during lockdowns and for books about topics such as hygiene and physical contact; and second, the reckoning with the Catholic Church’s abuse scandals, which gained widespread public attention in Poland due to the release of a film on the subject¹⁰, and which publishers subsequently addressed:

When Sekielski’s sensational film about sexual behavior in the church came out last year. Suddenly many people were looking for books on sex education. [...] That’s how we choose our books. If there is a social problem, if there is an aspect [...] then we decide to publish it. (Pub. Red)

It becomes clear that literature does not exist outside of society (Dörner, Vogt, 2013: 2f.), rather that societal phenomena interact with literature by offering certain topics. However, there is no obligation to incorporate them, and it cannot be assumed that they will hold the same relevance for all (literary) actors. After all, what is considered a “social phenomenon” and how it is anchored in literature (also) depends on the interpretations and prioritization of the publishers themselves. In this context, the producers of children’s and YA books are actively involved (as literary gatekeepers) by wielding their influence over the design of literary works. The quote above ends with the interviewee saying: “All over the world, social issues influence what is created, but what is published depends on individual publishers” (Pub. Red). Therefore, certain topics and aspects may not be considered, creating blind spots in literary representations.

MIGRATION – NOT PART OF THE “WORLD AROUND THE CHILD”

According to the second interpretation pattern, migration is also seen as a literary theme that has no connection to the reality of Polish children’s lives. One interviewer formulated this as follows:

We try to publish books that show the reality, the actuality, the world around the child that they deal with, but that, that’s not... that’s not a problem that Polish families are facing now. That’s why we don’t have a book like this. (Pub. Red)

¹⁰ The film in question is by Tomasz Sekielski, whose works deal with the abuse scandals involving Catholic priests.

What is defined in the quote as “not a problem” is the topic of migration, which, as the quote illustrates, does not represent the reality, actuality, or world around the Polish child and therefore does not necessitate literary anchoring. Following this reasoning, a topic such as migration should reflect the immediate reality of young readers in Poland and must be “culturally close” (Pub. Purple). This stipulation is based on the sensualist idea that children can only truly internalize that which they can sensually experience and lies within their horizon of perception and experience (Ewers, 1995: 35f.). Consequently, the three aspects – reality, actuality, world – that are framed as a complex structure of children’s experiences and perceptions do not refer to representations of a “big world” in the sense of a broader societal context. Instead, the publishers operate with an idea of a child’s world that is limited to ethnic and cultural homogeneity within the national framework. This is particularly evident by the fact that publishers repeatedly emphasize the socio-cultural and national role of the context in which a book (about migration) for young readers must be located. Simultaneously, they argue that there is a lack of such books and stress that the foreign alternatives deal with “distant analogies” (Pub. Pink), which are deemed unsuitable for publication for young Polish readers. The following quote exemplifies why one publishing team ultimately decided against publishing a book on the topic of migration:

Maybe there are books somewhere that show this in a culturally closer context, the problem of migration¹¹. But that book was simply about migration from one country to another, [...] on the African continent, [...] and I think it was simply intended for a European child. It wasn’t interesting for a Polish child because they probably couldn’t identify with the hero. Anyway, when we were analyzing it at the time, it seemed to me that if the plot of this book took place here, preferably in Poland, then maybe yes [we would have published it]. (Pub. Purple)

The construction of different, European experiences becomes apparent again, with the experiences of Polish children contrasted with those of their European peers. In relation to (global) migration events, it is even implied that Polish children are not seen as “European children” (the interviewee explicitly says “for *a* European child” rather than “for *other* European child,” which would have included Polish children), highlighting the significance of a differing migration experience compared to geographic belonging.

As the quote suggests, it is not only the thematic field itself that is decisive but also the specific narrative structure and mode of representation through

¹¹ An aspect that has not been systematically examined in this article is the strong association of migration with “problems”: Migration is presented almost exclusively as a problem that requires intervention. Other possible perspectives, such as migration as an opportunity for a better life or as a path that enables access to intercultural relationships, are largely absent.

which this theme is conveyed. The narrative localization of migration processes remains outside Polish children's tangible frame of reference due to geographical and cultural distance and therefore cannot be integrated into their immediate lifeworld. The Polish child lacks points of contact and thus a certain "involvement" or possibility of identification¹². In this context, we can speak, as one interviewee put it, of migration's "spatial obligation" (Pub. Gray) as a literary topic: It should be anchored within the geographical and national borders of Poland as well as correspond to the image of society with which Polish children are familiar. This image, according to the interviewees, is one of a culturally and ethnically homogeneous society:

I lived abroad for a few years, in the USA. And actually, this multiculturalism and the fact that the world is so colorful [...] in general, the world is colorful, Poland is a very homogeneous society. Everyone here is white. (Pub. Blue)

Those who deviate from the "norm" of whiteness are interpreted as being outside Polish children's world of experience.¹³ Along the same lines, one interviewee formulates a hypothetical and almost provocative question regarding the possible publication of such a book: "But how can we publish a book in which the boy is dark-skinned on every page, and the book is for three-year-old children?" (Pub. Blue).

The example cited is just one of many in which interviewees refer to the skin color of child protagonists (see also below), particularly to the problem of depicting children as "black," when they talk about migration as a literary theme. Generally, migration is closely linked to the topic of racial visibility or visible minorities (Song, 2020), whereby external appearance comes to the foreground. Using the definition of migration presented in the first part of this analysis, it can be extrapolated that the interviewees interpret migration primarily in connection with the immigration of "non-whites."

Regarding the avoidance of such representations and migration topics, it must be emphasized that a kind of (self-)censorship can be identified, which is often critically examined by the interviewees. In doing so, they distance themselves from their own decisions and problematize the associated emotions:

We wonder, but...I'll just say it, we're afraid. It bothers us [...], you know what's strange? What I noticed? [...] I didn't pay attention to it at all before, but when I ordered [book] samples, for example, and they were looked at by my

¹² Another example of how migration is perceived as abstract and distant from the (especially younger) Polish children's world of experience is the suggestion that, if addressed at all, it is best done in a metaphorical way, ideally "about the animal world" (Pub. Purple). Notably, the fictional world created here is perceived as less abstract and distant from the "real" experience of Polish children and adolescents than is the topic of migration.

¹³ For the lack of such representations at the textual level, see Kamińska, 2005; Fornalczyk-Lipska, 2017.

colleagues, sometimes the book was rejected because one of the characters had a different skin color. (Pub. Blue)

This highlights the susceptibility of children's and YA books – and of migration and its representation – to social controversies, characterized by contradictory polemics, judgments and views (Hojka, Jamróz-Stolarska, 2023: 11). At the same time, the social constraints¹⁴ (Bourdieu, 2016) to which publishers are subject as actors in the field and that influence their decisions become clear. These strong emotions, controversies, and constraints are linked in no small part to the social and political resistance the publishers address, which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

MIGRATION – “A RATHER RISKY WORD”

A third interpretation of why the topic of migration is a “difficult narrative” follows the reasoning that it is risky and can provoke resistance: “You know, we are afraid of this topic. So far, we haven't published anything [...] you know, but I will say it this way, we are afraid” (Pub. Blue). The subject is fraught with fear, highly problematic, and controversial – descriptors that publishers frequently use when explaining why they have decided not to publish a book with a migration story. They refer to the societal resistance that is inherent in conservative Polish society:

Unfortunately, as I have learned and our whole team has learned, we are a very conservative society, and we already know that certain topics don't resonate with us. Or, I don't know, you have to have great courage to present them. (Pub. Blue)

The statement that it requires “great courage” to choose migration as a book motif shows that there is not only a passive societal disapproval, but likely also active resistance. Building on the theme of societal unwillingness (see p.5 in this article) to engage with the topic, the implication here is that publishers are reluctant, if not categorically opposed, to embracing migration as a literary theme, fearing that it will trigger negative societal reactions and controversy – for example, when portraying “non-white” protagonists, as previously mentioned. In some cases, the topic is considered so controversial that publishers deem even using the word “migration”¹⁵ to be risky:

¹⁴ Bourdieu (2016) conceptualizes “constraints” as social forces that shape individual agency and limit decision-making freedom by prescribing and normalizing specific patterns of behavior and practice.

¹⁵ For a broader context, see also the article by Jakubowski (2018), which deals with the socially pejorative perception of the word “uchodźca” (Polish for “refugee”). The article demonstrates how certain words can also provoke resistance in other areas of society.

I think that the word “migration” still has a rather negative connotation in our Polish language. It could be that this is due to the fact that when the publisher writes (...) and when a blurb appears, that is, the note on the back of the book, he uses a rather risky word. Some publishers prefer to express this differently [...], leaving out the difficult word. (Pub. Yellow)

This avoidance tactic illustrates a kind of linguistic euphemism in which difficult or risky words and thus topics are not named directly. Such logic may explain why some publishers do not talk centrally about migration in children’s and young adult books. While discussing a book with a premise of family migration¹⁶, one interviewee explained:

This is not a book about migration. This book is about all sorts of things, a lot of different things – about growing up, about the search for love, about divorce, about losing love, about friendship, about different topics. About tolerance, about accepting oneself. (Pub. Orange)

Many aspects of the story are mentioned, yet migration as a possible theme is not even considered. Instead, aspects of growing up abroad in different societal contexts are emphasized. In this way, migration is approached indirectly without explicitly placing the topic in the foreground.

Regarding the avoidance of the topic and even the very term “migration,” publishers often refer to a sense of resignation on their part when it comes to wanting and/or being able to manage the possible consequences and challenges – such as economic losses or the risk of damaging the publisher’s image – if they were to address the topic of migration in books. In this context, they allude to resistance, especially political resistance:

Because it is well known that the attitude, at least in Poland, towards migrants – I am not talking about society, but about the government – is terrible. Therefore, the government will probably also impose a certain narrative here. (Pub. Purple)

The mention that the government is likely to “impose a certain narrative” indicates that political actors (may) try to control how migration is perceived. Migration is a topic in which political and social power relations become clear, especially when the social order and its associated expectations and norms are threatened. The interaction between literature and society, as outlined in the introduction, becomes evident here.

It is important to reiterate, however, that the publisher’s comment refers not to society as a whole, but specifically to the government, suggesting a possible discrepancy between general public opinion and the political agenda – at least from this interviewee’s perspective and with regard specifically

¹⁶ To preserve anonymity and avoid possible indications of the interviewee’s identity, the title of the book is intentionally not mentioned.

to Poland. Ultimately, the examples provided show the extent of social constraints in this area. As such, we can recognize the different interests of various actors, which are likewise associated with their respective positions and corresponding agency.

CONCLUSION

The reciprocal process of constitution and exchange between literature and society are clearly visible at the production level of children's and YA literature. The analysis shows, on the one hand, how literature addresses social phenomena by offering interpretations or omitting certain topics and, on the other hand, how it has a deconstructive character that can initiate social change and challenge existing structures. However, this transformative function of children's and YA literature has thus far been employed only to a limited extent. Despite positioning themselves as "drivers of change" (Biernacka-Licznar, Paprocka, 2016: 145), publishers have demonstrated a certain reticence in this area – mostly around the topic of migration. A specific interpretation of migration is used, understood by the interviewees as "visible" migration processes. In this context, they discuss in particular the immigration of "visible minorities," which is interpreted with regard to the (contrastive) social and political situation in Poland compared to other societies.

As the analysis demonstrates, migration as a literary topic is ultimately presented as a narrative that is difficult to develop and establish in a Polish context. Publishers interpret and justify this narrative based on the social order, which is challenged by this topic. The three patterns of interpretation, as developed in this analysis, illustrate why and how this order is challenged and understood.

The first two interpretations center around the argument that the topic is not sufficiently anchored in Polish reality: It neither concerns Polish society nor is representative of it. This also includes younger readers, children and adolescents, at whom such books are targeted. Migration is presented as an issue that does not reflect the experiences of Polish children. Society is generally perceived as disinterested in and unwilling to engage with the topic, young readers as unable to identify with migration. Both society and children are thought of as incapable of seeing that the world is different. At the same time, a distinction must be made here: Some publishers attribute the lack of willingness exclusively to adults, particularly parents as significant gatekeepers (Cackowska, 2013), whose decisions determine whether a book reaches a child, rather than to children themselves. This aligns with the Lilliputian philosophy of viewing children as competent actors.

The third pattern of interpretation refers to argumentations that consider migration a motif in literature with the potential to incite social and political

resistance. Accordingly, migration is seen above all as a controversial and potentially charged topic in the Polish (non-)literary world, making it difficult to establish the narrative of migration. This applies not only to the topic itself but also to its embedding and treatment in a highly contested medium, namely children's and YA literature. In this sense, Hojka and Jamróz-Stolarska (2023: 12) refer to a quote by Olga Buchina¹⁷ and summarize that the "power of children's literature is often underestimated, and at the same time it is often seen as dangerous and in need of controlling."

Finally, I would like to reflect on the presented results with regard to the social contexts and circumstances at the time of data collection and analysis. They are of great relevance, particularly in terms of the interactions between literature and society, as illustrated here, and the publishers' understanding of the interpreted social order. A central question arises: What happens when social conditions change? The significant political and social developments triggered by the war in Ukraine (which began after the interviews and analysis were conducted) have shed new light on migration dynamics in Poland. In this context, it is important to ask to what extent the publishers' interpretation of migration and its representation in literature may have changed since then. It is especially interesting given that current events have significantly changed a central element of publishers' interpretation of migration, namely as an immigration phenomenon, as well as the visibility of migration, both in society in general and in the world of (Polish) children. Examining these changes and incorporating them into future analyses opens up the possibility of gaining a deeper understanding of how political and social developments can shape migration narratives and offers the opportunity to grasp more comprehensively the dynamic discourses surrounding migration as a (non-)literary topic.

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¹⁷ For the original text, see: Bukhina 2019.

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