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Burdensome Wanderings. The road and the border motifs in selected examples of recent children's and youth literature on migration

Abstract: The article reflects on the road and border motifs in selected examples of children's and youth literature about migration. The analogy between the experiences of child refugees and the experiences of children of economic migrants (referred to as "passive migrants") is outlined. According to the authors, the similarity of the experiences of the two distinguished groups presented in the prose promotes reader engagement and tames the audience with foreignness. Exposing in literary narratives the burdensome journey of migrants and the barriers they face, as well as the emotions (fear, helplessness, or despair) and problems they experience (such as loss of home, severed ties with family, a sense of misunderstanding and rejection by those around them, as well as the dream of having a "normal" life) can arouse empathy in the audience toward newcomers from distant continents, and thus help stop adiaphorization. Finally, it induces the addressees to take action, namely to assist those who need it.

Keywords: migration, refugee, home, family, foreignness, road, border, literature for children and youth, interventionism

Journey is a universal and timeless phenomenon. As Bartłomiej Kozera points out, "The history of humanity is the geographical dispersion of humans around the world" (2010: 65). However, wandering, in addition to its literal sense, has many symbolic meanings. On the one hand, the word is sometimes understood as a metaphor for human destiny, "the path of life" or the performance of independent acts intended to bring positive change to a person. On the other hand, it can mean "a risky venture, pursuing a goal along a road fraught with obstacles" (Kopaliński, 2015: 331). *Homo viator* thus sometimes leads to the

existence of a wanderer. During his forced travels, he experiences both happiness and dilemmas, loneliness, difficulties, and suffering. Nevertheless, each time he acquires knowledge of the world, he develops and discovers himself (Kozera, 2010: 65).

Nowadays, *homo viator* more and more often has the face of a migrant. The phenomenon of migration, widely understood as "a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence" (Lee, 1966: 49), especially the international one, is a pressing problem of the modern world. Everett S. Lee believes that in the process of any migration, it is possible to distinguish a place of origin and a place of destination. One of the main inconveniences that a migrant must overcome is the distance between these two points (Lee, 1966: 49). Another is the borders, which are delimitation lines, often artificially separating areas considered to be separate entities. They "always have two 'sides', subjectively – an external and an internal one, two borderlands – 'ours' ('ours', 'own') and 'theirs' ('foreign', 'other's') (…)" (Próchnicki, 2012: 35). The movement of the masses often takes on an out of control scale. In 1914 Leopold Caro indicated migration as a self-perpetuating force in his publication *Emigracja i polityka emigracyjna ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem stosunków polskich*. The economist compared population mobility to a surging river which, fed by its tributaries, quickly carries waters across the country (Caro, 1914: 1, cit. per Danilewicz, 2010: 58).

The reasons why people leave their current place of residence and seek a new one range from the need for education, economic factors, political instability and racial, ethnic, or religious persecution, to the outbreak of war or natural disasters. Undoubtedly, the complex relationship between state structures and the individual behavior of citizens – their micro-histories and the resources they have (O'Connell, Farrow, 2007: 17) – has influenced the occurrence of this phenomenon. Julia O'Connell Davidson and Caitlin Farrow note: "There are contexts in which people leave because their homes have been destroyed by war or natural disaster or because they face a stark choice between leaving home or certain and immediate death" (2007: 17). In doing so, both researchers emphasize that the decision made in such situations is usually well-considered, and driven by a desire to raise the standard of living and achieve a goal that, according to the knowledge available to the individual, appears to be obtainable (O'Connell, Farrow, 2007: 17).

The premise of this article is to show how contemporary Polish writers realize the motifs of the road and the border in literature for a young audience. We are interested in literary items that reflect the course of international migration, especially its reasons and consequences. The themes raised are not indifferent to European readers, who are witnesses, sometimes participants, to the ongoing population movements. According to a report prepared by SOS Children's Villages International, as many as 244 million people migrated between

countries in 2015, including 21.3 million refugees (2016: 1). The intensification of this phenomenon can be seen when we compare the above statistics with information from previous years: "On average in 2015, 24 people were forced to flee their homes every minute – four times more than 10 years ago" (SOS Children's Villages International, 2016: 1).

Among migrants leaving their own countries are also those who leave to counteract poverty. This group includes Poles who, to quote Wioleta Danilewicz, "Take advantage of new opportunities in response to the difficult economic situation in their place of residence, to the lack of prospects – in their opinion – in finding a satisfying job or looking for new life opportunities outside the country" (2010: 11). The researcher mentions three processes that encourage people to leave Poland for work, namely globalization, post-communist transformation, and European integration (Danilewicz, 2010: 11).

In addition, Poland, as a member of the European Union, faces a profound migration crisis that began in 2021: attempts by migrants from the Middle East and Africa to illegally cross Polish borders. The topic of relocating refugees from other continents on Polish land is recurring in the public debate. Finally, the solidarity attitude of Poles should be mentioned. Since 2014 they have been not only observers of the aftermath of the military actions waged between Russia and Ukraine, but also people involved in assisting (including shelter) war refugees, arriving in Poland massively, especially since 2022, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine took place.

According to widespread stereotypes, migration is mainly about men, while women and children are merely companions on their difficult journeys (King, 2002, cit. per O'Connell, Farrow, 2007: 20). These are misconceptions, as women and children have been (and continue to be) caught up in migration processes from the beginning, often seeking a better, safer place to live on their own. Subjectivity is restored to them (especially to children, who get away with being "invisible" [cf. Dottridge, 2013: 7]) by literature for young readers. This is because it presents portraits of "children on the move,"

> moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement, while it may open up opportunities, might also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence. (Dottridge, 2013: 7)

Zofia Kawczyńska-Butrym notes that "only in recent years has more attention been paid to children involved in migration in various ways" (2021: 24). This evaluation by Kawczyńska-Butrym is confirmed by the growing number of children's and adolescents' prose, whose frequent themes are precisely the burdensome wanderings of children as a result of escalating armed conflicts and economic problems.

CHILDREN "FROM THAT SIDE"

The reaction of Polish and global publishers to the migration crisis, particularly to politicians' statements against refugees, who were perceived as a threat (securitization of migration), was a dynamic increase in publications treating wartime migration (observed since 2015) (Pietrusińska, 2020: 48–49; Bednarek, 2022). Marta Jadwiga Pietrusińska argues that the literary narratives that have emerged (and are still emerging), depicting the image of asylum seekers in Europe, are part of the pro-refugee discourse. The literature studied perpetuates a dual image of the refugee in the minds of readers:

1. The Other-needy (portrayed in the "discourse of solidarity and compassion" as vulnerable and helpless),
2. The familiar-Other (presented in the "discourse of multiculturalism" as similar to Europeans, causal) (Pietrusińska, 2020: 59–62).

Pietrusińska exposes the duality of actual human attitudes adopted by members of societies in the face of increasing migration from the Middle East to Europe (2020: 56). Not all Europeans adopt a solidarity attitude. For example, this can be seen in *Wędrówka Nabu* (*The Journey of Nabu*, 2016) by Jarosław Mikołajewski, which the researcher mentions, or the recently published *Odysejki* (*Little Odessas*, 2023) by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala. In the open ending of Mikołajewski's work, some Europeans point the title character in two directions: half of the crowd, gathered on the beach, shows the little refugee the way to the land, while the others turn her back (Pietrusińska, 2020: 56). The reflection of diverse social attitudes in a literary text should allow viewers to analyze the presented situation and make their own choices regarding their behavior toward migrants. On the other hand, Combrzyńska-Nogala, touching on the extremely topical subject of the difficulties faced by people from the Middle East who are stuck on the Polish-Belarusian border, draws different profiles of border guards. She makes it clear that among them there will be those who ruthlessly carry out their duties ("mustachioed"), which involve chasing "intruders" out of Polish territory, and those who accept them – in accordance with the moral rights they feel – and try to carry out their support ("blue-eyed"). Such a division emerges from the conversation between the guards and Zora, an old woman who helps refugees. The border guards knock on her door in the evening and ask her if she has seen undesirables "hanging around" in the neighborhood:

> **– We are obeying orders!** [emphasis mine – J.Sz., J.Z.] – the mustachioed man said angrily.
> – Yes, yes – said the grandmother. – Orders are important. I've heard it somewhere when I was her age – she looked down at her granddaughter. – All soldiers say that.
> She said it firmly, with horror written on her face, until Nela swallowed her saliva with fear.

– Please don't get involved, or there will be consequences – the mustachioed man repeated.
– … It seemed to me that failure to help is punishable. Has something changed in our law?
The mustachioed decided not to discuss it and turned away angrily. The blue-eyed man showed them a discreet thumbs-up before following his colleague [emphasis mine – J.Sz., J.Z.], and they, after waiting a moment, hung up the green lantern again …. (Combrzyńska-Nogala, 2023: 93)

Combrzyńska-Nogala, by introducing the topos of the border to the *Odysejki* and creating the image of the "bad" and "good" border guard, breaks the negative stereotype of the border guard, which has been present in literature for young audiences up to now, as a border guard who blocks migrants' ways to a better world. This image of a law enforcement representative is found in *W*ędrówka *Nabu*. A lone migrant child is unable to get "from that side" to Europe:

– Which way can I enter the lake? – Nabu asked, swallowing tears.
– There is no such place. – replied the first [police officer – J.Sz., J.Z.].
– You can only enter the lake from that side – explained the second.
– But how can you find yourself on that side?
– You can't – declared the first one.
– One has to be born there – added the second.
– But I was born on this side! – the girl began to shout …. (Mikołajewski, 2016: non-paginated)

However, the protagonist traverses this seemingly impossible path, full of obstacles. She wanders through the great desert and finally arrives at a space fenced with barbed wire, separating access to the lake where she would like to swim. Nabu is weak, sore, and injured. In addition, she is thirsty and hungry. Marianna Szumal writes that "each of the barriers encountered is another stage of the journey and involves overcoming more and more of life's difficulties, which affect the heroine's development …" (2021: 358). These adversities are presented not only literally, but also metaphorically. For example, the protagonist bounces off a "wall" that does not exist in reality, which symbolizes societies' resistance to accepting "Strangers." However, despite this, eventually Nabu finds herself on the beach of a European country and – submitting to social judgment (Wójcik-Dudek, 2019: 45) – waits for the verdict on whether she will be accepted and allowed to stay in the territory of her choice.

Anna Józefowicz, interpreting *Wędrówka Nabu*, cites the words of Karl Schlögel. He claims that "most of the borders in the world are invisible borders, which run more on our internal maps, in our heads" (Schlögel, 2009: 136, cit. per Józefowicz, 2019: 122). It involves a different way of perceiving the world by a child and an adult. Nabu (like any child) understands neither her otherness nor the brutal rules that prevail in the adult world. She is determined and

hopeful that her fate will improve (finding a new and permanent home that will not burn down). In contrast, the adults (represented by policemen, customs officers, soldiers, and, finally, tourists who know these rules) are indifferent to the girl's suffering. They even show her resentment. The exhausting journey depicted in the work is an escape "from 'broken' reality and adults who build walls" (Józefowicz, 2019: 122). Describing Nabu's childlike imagination and perspective, Józefowicz raises issues of social segregation and exclusion, and asks fundamental questions: "How to explain to a child the boundaries that are not there, the administrative obstacles, the invisible prohibitions that block people? Who sets the boundaries? Is it possible to be born on the wrong side?" (2019: 123).

A refugee is "a person suspended between two worlds" (Łodziński, 2008: 10) – both literally and symbolically – who camps out at the border of countries and faces non-acceptance. An adequate term to describe this "piece of land" on which the immigrant resides is the non-place. Marc Augé calls it "a space that can be defined neither as identity, nor familiar, nor historical" (2008: 128). It resembles a transitory reality (constituted by movement, displacement), contrasted with the reality of residence (constant and secure) (Augé 2008: 136). Moreover, a refugee unwittingly takes part in "rites of passage" making the way from one world (engulfed in war, destruction, and chaos) to another (safe, full of order, and peace,[1] but – sometimes – closed to foreigners) (cf. Gennep van, 2006: 37; Łodziński, 2008: 10).

The protagonist of *Hebanowe serce* (*Ebony Heart*) by Renata Piątkowska, little Omenka, makes a similar journey to that of Nabu. Unlike the protagonist, portrayed in Mikołajewski's book, the boy escapes from Africa to Europe (through the desert and the sea) together with other refugees, and above all his mother. However, the child experiences separation from his dad, who remained in the port because he was deceived by a smuggler. During the difficult crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, mother and child are exposed not only to stress, but also to death. Many of their companions die during a storm. In the end, the protagonists, abandoned by the helmsman but rescued by a coastal patrol guard, end up in a refugee camp on Lampedusa, which is – according to their imaginations – a safe haven. "This place," writes Piątkowska, "was to become their home **for a while** [emphasis mine – J.Sz., J.Z.]" (2021: 37). It can be considered that *Hebanowe serce* ends happily, as the characters manage to make

[1] Literary characters, who are war refugees, see Europe as an asylum – a place where they can find refuge. Such an assessment of Europe can be found in *Moje cudowne dzieciństwo w Aleppo* (*My Wonderful Childhood in Aleppo*) by Maciej Gortat, which tells of the daily life of a Syrian family living in a besieged city. One of the characters, uncle Husajn, while visiting his relatives, persuades them to leave their home and migrate to Europe. He is convinced that in Europe they will greet them with warmth and hospitality (Gortat, 2017: 44–45).

their way to a peaceful country. Nevertheless, the family's future is uncertain. Omenka and his mother continue to live in a state of suspension, they have no permanent place to live, nor do they know what fate has befallen the person closest to them, the boy's father.

The hopelessness of the refugees' predicament – that they are stuck at a point from which they can no longer turn back or go ahead – is also conveyed in other works, such as *Wojna w Kuropatkach* (*War in Kuropatki*) (2022) by Katarzyna Ryrych and *Chłopiec z lasu* (*The Boy from the Forest*) (2024) by Cezary Harasimowicz, which describe the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. In both narratives, the story is told from the perspective of a Polish child – a witness to the "imprisonment" of migrants, as Ryrych notes, "'on the border strip, in no man's land'" (2022: 71) and the various adult reactions and behaviors to the event.

The literary protagonist created by Ryrych, Mela, comes to visit her grandmother in the countryside. However, this time she cannot enter the forest, because there is a "war" going on in Kuropatki – "so special, so small, that no one knew anything about it" (Ryrych, 2022: 50). Soldiers can be found in the village, with an unfriendly attitude toward those around them. Both children and adults attempt to counter the drama of the refugees hiding in the woods (although Mela joins in helping the migrants in secret from her grandmother). Residents of Kuropatki engage in the "Green Light"[2] campaign, which involves signalling to refugees by lighting a lantern in which house they will receive support (food, clothes, cleaning supplies, and even toys for children, prepared by people). The initiative mentioned above of ordinary citizens and their disagreement with the decision on migrants made by the Polish government (the push-back procedure)[3] are also shown in *Odysejki* by Combrzyńska-Nogala. Both narratives, like all Polish books devoted to the lives of war migrants, belong to the circle of intervention literature (Pietrusińska, 2020: 61; Wądolny-Tatar, 2021; Bednarek, 2022: 84), socially engaged, "anthropologically sensitive" (Świerczyńska-Jelonek, 2011; Józefowicz, 2019: 116), as they aim to arouse readers' sympathy and empathy, and remind addressees of the most important moral principle – humanitarianism (Wawer, 2022: 205). Building the right attitude of the audience toward visitors from afar is facilitated by creating multicultural stories. Weronika Kostecka writes that this process involves, among other things, pointing out to readers the coexistence of different groups and

[2] Spontaneous actions under the banner of "Green Light" were undertaken by residents of eastern Poland in real life. (cf. e.g., *Zielone światło – tam uchodźcy mogą znaleźć pomoc. By nie tracili nadziei, żeby chcieli żyć [WYWIAD]*, https://oko.press/zielone-swiatlo-tam-uchodzcy-moga-znalezc-pomoc).

[3] Push-back refers to "the practice of actually returning people to the country from which they crossed the border (mostly illegally) without allowing them to apply for refugee status and without initiating other administrative procedures against them, including return" (Baranowska, 2022: 10).

opening up to otherness by "deconstructing the egocentric perception of the world" (2021: 146).

Breaking down the barriers that divide the protagonists, who represent different cultures, takes place during Mela and Frank's direct meeting with the Other (Sharo) depicted in the work, i.e., the meeting between the Polish children and their peer, located beyond the actual border, marked by the forest area. Karolina Wawer highlights that the "direct interaction has the character of an epiphany" (2022: 212), as it allows the children to understand that this Other is similar to them, while the characteristic to be followed in establishing a community should be humanity (2022: 212). Mela and Franek initially follow the trail marked by the red threads left behind by the refugee. The road leads them through a field of tall corn, reminiscent of the hostile, terrifying space familiar to them from horror movies. The fear accompanying the characters recedes, as they realize the similarity of the emotions they experience (including Sharo's), especially fear. The importance of affect in cognitive processes is emphasized by Andrzej Dąbrowski, who claims that "the emotional aspect makes our access to the world more complete and facilitates our understanding of our surroundings". Therefore, thanks to the emotions experienced by young people, there is a "revision of [their] beliefs" (2012: 322) and a rejection of negative thoughts about the Stranger they encounter.

A literary image of space, frightening but arousing curiosity, encouraging exploration, can be found in *Chłopiec z lasu* by Harasimowicz. The topography of the child's world of the narrator Ala, who appears in the cited work, consists of a safe house and a dangerous forest. Although the girl often crosses its boundary to bring the soup to her father, who works there, she is afraid because she has to "overcome the Fear of Darkness and seep into the forest" (Harasimowicz, 2024: 52). At the same time, she admits that the area, which is not entirely tame, causes ambivalent feelings in her, as the girl enjoys being surrounded by trees (Harasimowicz, 2024: 14). Harasimowicz uses the fairy tale convention and raises ordinary phenomena and emotions to the status of literary characters (through the use of personification; for example, the previously mentioned Fear and Darkness are personified, in addition to: Longing, Loneliness, and Anger. These are the emotional states that Ala feels most strongly). Moreover, the writer sets the action of the book in a significant place – the forest – which is an important stage of the journey undertaken by the protagonist of the fairy tale to reach his goal. It is an area that is a realm of darkness in which it is easy to get lost, and it is inhabited by unusual creatures (Brzeska, Wieszaczewska, 2018: 184–185, 191), associated with mystery and "what is unknown in man and worth discovering" (Rzepnikowska, 2002: 608, cit. per Brzeska, Wieszaczewska, 2018: 191). By introducing the figure of a boy separated from his parents, fleeing the war, and the motif of a metal barrier, the author alludes to what happens on the Polish-Belarusian border. This writing strategy

gives the story – which is an atypical moral-ethical primer[4] – a universal dimension and introduces timeless content, bringing the reader closer to issues such as fear, war, wandering, loneliness, and suffering. Moreover, it depicts the basic values, like selfless help, sacrifice, and friendship.

Ala's behavior (considered strange by her peers) indicates that the girl is characterized by sensory hypersensitivity. For this reason (similar to children with autism spectrum disorders), she feels overwhelmed by sounds and colors, makes repetitive hand movements (stims), and avoids contact with others, especially physical contact (she does not want to shake hands with new-found friends or for her parents to hug her). Instead, she "turns to other – equal – forms of existence" (Domańska, 2008: 32). She hears the cry of trees being cut down by lumberjacks, talks to plants (e.g., an old Oak tree), objects (the mascot Tobias and the damaged little Shoe found in the forest), and animals (the dog As, the mouse Hańcia, and the fox she encountered), which she gives special attention to and whose presence compensates for her perceived Loneliness.

This unpleasant emotional state is initially broken by her finding a sneaker, belonging to an immigrant, and meeting its owner, Elias (the titular boy from the forest). Thanks to the fantasy convention used by the author, a tattered object comes to the fore, and together with the refugee it travels a difficult road, experiences intense emotions, and finally the trauma of the struggle for life. It makes the protagonist aware of the history and experiences of refugees. The sentences articulated by it resemble a description of inner experiences and strongly affect the girl, who from now on begins to understand what Elias feels:

> – This someone is very unhappy. This someone has lost a Shoe. This sneaker is very worn out and this sneaker is crying for help. It has a torn sole, is soaked, cold, and lonely, and after all, every shoe must be a pair. I hid him on the hill to rest. (Harasimowicz, 2024: 46)

The importance of a little Shoe as a witness and co-participant in the migration undertaken by Elias' family is underscored by eloquent illustrations, which complement – following the principle of complementarity (Cackowska, 2017: 27) – the verbal message.

Illustrator Marta Kurczewska used the hyperbolization of the little Shoe, which in the picture (Harasimowicz, 2024: 50) is much larger than the girl standing next to it, to emphasize the complexity of the problems faced by refugees, as well as the secret hidden by the protagonist involved in helping the

[4] References to characters from Marian Falski's textbook for learning to read and write are present in Harasimowicz's work. The characters in *Chłopiec z lasu* have the same names as those in the primer – Ala has a dog named As and an imaginary friend named Ola. The association with an uncomplicated children's book also brings to mind the enumeration, which contains several parallel simple sentences beginning with the words "it is".

stranded boy. For Ala, an inconspicuous object has great significance, while someone else would most likely have thrown in the trash. The amplification of the magnitude of the migration phenomenon is expressed verbally and visually. Asked during the lesson to calculate how much four times four is, the girl begins multiplying "destroyed," "poor and unhappy," and "crying from pain, longing and suffering" shoes. The result of her memory calculations becomes "an army of wounded shoes … that have escaped fire, debris and rockets …" (Harasimowicz, 2024: 154–155). Finally, the protagonist – under the influence of an unusual gesture of a classmate (Andżela's donation of colorful sneakers to refugees) – sees that it is possible to increase the scale of assistance to war migrants. So, Ala multiplies again, this time "shoes that did not have to flee the war" (Harasimowicz, 2024: 160) and concludes the calculation with the sentence: "That would be a whole army of donated, happy shoes" (Harasimowicz, 2024: 160).

The meeting with the Other initiates a series of changes taking place in Ala. The girl recognizes the dramatic situation of the child and steps out of her comfort zone: she contacts the boy and tries to take care of him, so she first brings him food and later tries to provide him with warm clothes. He gives Elias her most precious toy – a teddy bear, Tobiasz. Handing this mascot over to a new friend involves a sacrifice from Ala, who only hugs Tobiasz daily. Therefore, the several-year-old extends her hand to Elias – both metaphorically as giving someone a helping hand, and literally as she is the first to shake his hand in greeting. Eventually, she brings him home.

The help that Ala offers Elias is not limited to material support. The girl, overcoming her fear again, ventures into the woods to search for the boy's parents. However, her wandering is interrupted by a fence, which "is moody with sharp, steel teeth, looking like a monster from a menacing fairy tale" (Harasimowicz, 2024: 106). Harasimowicz does not explain the reason for building the steel structure, he leaves this up to the adult reader accompanying the child in the reading. Instead, the author captures the astonishment of the protagonist and her dog at the sight of the unusual and unfriendly wall (an astonishment that will most likely also be shared by the young viewer of the book) and the serious consequences of its presence at the border. It turns out that the dreaded barrier cut the migration path of people and animals.[5] It separated Elias from his parents and disrupted the natural habitat – isolating a pair of foxes from each other, condemning them to helplessness and despair.

[5] Polish and foreign ecological and scientific circles, opposing the build of a barrier along the border with Belarus, used arguments about the devastation of the Białowieża Forest (including cutting down trees for construction) and the negative impact of this investment on the mobility of animals (especially predators) (cf. e.g., *List środowiska naukowego do KE ws. budowy muru na granicy polsko-białoruskiej*, https://naukadlaprzyrody.pl/2022/01/31/list-srodowiska-naukowego-do-ke-ws-budowy-muru-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej/.

The title page of *Chłopiec z lasu* states that it is "a novel for children and adults." The role of the caregiver is still to supplement the child's knowledge with the socio-cultural context, and to provide answers to the usually not easy questions troubling the young man, who is just getting to know the world in all its shades (including the dark ones), often giving rise to surprise, fear, or sadness. Hiding facts from a young person, proving the injustice of human actions and the existence of evil, is not the right way to form his identity and cope with problems (Wawer, 2022: 211). However, in the subtitle of Harasimowicz's book, as well as in its content, there is an emphasis on the need to maintain equality in the adult/child relationship while reading the story, and to achieve what Magdalena Bednarek calls co-presence and, citing Joanna Papuzińska's words, co-experiencing the story (2022: 90; Papuzińska, 1981: 49).

Significantly, the reading model described by the researcher concerning refugee works implies that both types of audiences adopt the attitude of fellow citizens. The result of the partnership is supposed to be – in addition to the exchange of reading impressions, the disclosure of emotions – the initiation of a conversation about how to change reality for the better, and the initiation of concrete actions (cf. Bednarek 2022: 90–93; Wawer, 2022: 203), to "arrange [the world – J.Sz., J.Z.] equally"; so that it is not a "sad mess" (Harasimowicz, 2024: 141). Harasimowicz, through his exceptional primer, teaches that one should not remain indifferent to the tragedies of others, which do not take place far away at all, but happen right behind our closed, even barricaded doors. It activates audiences of all ages, but – believing in their power to make things happen – does not impose ready-made solutions on them:

> – Don't look away – says Darkness in a firm tone.
> I fight with myself. I look straight into the Boy's eyes. In his pupils swirl still black balls of fear and pain.
> – What should I do? – I ask.
> – I won't give you a hint – replies Darkness. – You must decide for yourself. (Harasimowicz, 2024: 54)

THE EXPERIENCE THAT CONNECTS

The key topos that appears at the beginning and end of *Chłopiec z lasu* is home, symbolizing, among other things, permanence and shelter (Kopaliński, 2015: 64). The framing narration tips the idea that every human needs a safe place to live. Both the fox family and the human family manage to reunite, and Elias and his parents settle into their new home. The illustration next to the text accentuates that the refugee family is taken care of and is "wrapped in cotton wool,"[6] away from danger. Therefore, the happy ending of the novel provides a glimpse

[6] The illustration of the house under a lampshade symbolizes protection from evil.

of how, despite many obstacles, the process of taking root in a new place is possible. Unfortunately, refugees do not always bond strongly with the place where they settle. They feel excluded and alien, like the Ukrainian child protagonists of *Teraz tu jest nasz dom* (*This Is Our Home Now*) (2016) by Barbara Gawryluk. Some of them (e.g., Weronika, who does not want to live in Poland) have a feeling of temporariness and uncertainty. Others (e.g., Romuś and Mikołaj), while showing some difficulties resulting from their unfamiliarity with the Polish language and harassment from their schoolmates, try (with their parents' persuasion) to adapt to the new reality, "because this war is not a movie, it's not a game, it's not a computer game. This war is real" (Gawryluk, 2016: 45).

Similar problems faced by migrant families (difficulties in adapting to the culture of the host country, speaking a foreign language, finding an affordable place to stay, etc.) are faced by transnational families, "whose members are separated physically between two or more nation-states but maintain close ties and relationships" (Shih, 2016: 1). In Polish prose works devoted to migration, many titles describe labor migration. However, among these books there are no images of happy transnational families that do not suffer the negative consequences of separation. The world shown in the aforementioned novels is populated, in addition to the generally perfunctory descriptions of parents going abroad, by distraught child characters left behind in Poland (Zając, 2023: 285). Literary creations reflect the real situation of Euro-orphans. The children's perspective adopted in literature prompts the reader to discuss the psychological condition of young people who experience separation. They often end up in the care of people who are unable to look after them (e.g., ailing grandmothers in need of care; such a situation is described in *Zielone martensy* [*Green Dr. Martens Boots*, 2016] by Joanna Jagiełło or *Samotni.pl* [*Lonely.pl*, 2011] by Barbara Kosmowska) or intentionally causing them harm and forcing them to run away from home (the fate of Cyryl and Nikodem from the novel *Pisklak* [*Chick*, 2017] by Zuzanna Orlińska). Although they do not travel to other countries, they are sometimes stuck between two worlds. They indulge in spirited wanderings, following foreign news and weather forecasts (e.g., Wiktor from *Samotni.pl*) or imagining themselves traversing the road behind an absent parent (e.g., Iwo from *Czarny Młyn* [*Black Mill*, 2011] by Marcin Szczygielski and Lidka from *16.10 do Bergamo* [*16.10 to Bergamo*, 2017] by Piotr Rowicki). "An abandoned childhood," Danilewicz explains, "is usually filled with grief, sadness, longing and – often – rejection of the parent who failed. This childhood is entangled with adult problems" (2010: 118). Alone, deprived of adult support, children are unable to overcome the growing crises. They perceive their youth as a time marked by suffering, and the baggage of their acquired experiences as a borderline position (Leszczyński, 2010: 22). The consequence of the disruption of their bonds with loved ones residing outside the country, among other things, is that they engage in risky behavior (Więckiewicz, 2011: 18), which

goes beyond the accepted social norms and sometimes threatens their health and life (e.g., the protagonists of *Ma być czysto* [*It Has to Be Clean*, 2016] and *Rozpływaj się* [*Dissolve*, 2021] by Anna Cieplak).

It seems that the most significant experiences that war migrants and passive migrants (children of parents who went abroad to work [Kawczyńska-Butrym, 2021: passim]) have in common are the loss of home, the breaking of ties with loved ones, the feeling of alienation, the lack of understanding by those around them, and the dream of having a "normal" life. As Zofia Kawczynska-Butrym notes, "In the course of parental migration, the family home, which gives the child and young person a sense of security and support during the difficult period of adolescence, 'disintegrates'" (2021: 34). Authors of recent children's and adolescent prose recognize the universality of migration. Polish children are almost daily participants in it (either as Euro-orphans or companions in their parents' departures) or observers, thanks to the conversations they hear (on the street, at home), the stories of their peers, the headlines they read in the press, or the television news programs they watch (cf. Bednarek, 2022: 83). To explain the reasons why refugees undertake the burdensome wanderings, writers juxtapose their motivations and experiences with the personal motives of economic migrants for leaving the country, to build a community of experience and influence the misperception of newcomers as enemies.

For example, the recipients of *Chłopiec z Lampedusy* (*Boy from Lampedusa*, 2015) by Rafał Witek have the opportunity to get acquainted not only with the fate of Tandżin who – as an illegal immigrant – arrived on the Italian island from Eritrea, but also with Andżelika, the daughter of a migrant from Poland who is there legally.[7] The situation is similar in the analyzed *Wojna w Kuropatkach* by Ryrych and *Odysejki* by Combrzyńska-Nogala. Wandering is inscribed in the life stories of the characters we meet. In the first of the aforementioned books, a grandmother, trying to explain to her granddaughter the plight of refugees camping in a nearby forest and the complicated motivations of their wandering, tells the teenager the story of her son. In the past, he was illegally employed in Sweden to get money to build a house in Poland. The man – who despite having a higher education, took an illegal job abroad – did not have to flee the war to save his life, unlike these refugees. As the grandmother supposes, some of these people believed the promise that a better future awaited them in Europe. Labor migrations and wartime migrations are also juxtaposed in *Odysejki*. Combrzyńska-Nogala first presents the odyssey of the Polish woman Petronela Wapno and two girls, the Jewish girl Ryfka and the Romani girl Zora,

[7] Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, analyzing children's literature about overseas migration of children with their parents, notes that it depicts the Polish child as the Other ("*homo migrans*"), who has to find his way in a foreign reality after going abroad. This literary strategy of role-swapping, e.g., putting him in the role of the Stranger, allows the reader to empathize with the situation of war migrants (Wójcik-Dudek, 2019: 46).

who try to save themselves from death at the hands of the Nazis at all costs. On the other hand, the third part of the book shows Zora's fate as an old woman who, because of the tragedy she experienced (the murder of members of her stock), helps refugees on the Polish-Belarusian border. Moreover, Zora's family continues the Romani tradition of nomadic life, as her granddaughter's parents usually wander the world with their child, currently (this time without Nela) on a contract abroad.

Recent literary works include examples that testify to the portrayal of war migrants multi-dimensionally. Male and female creators try to help readers understand the individual stories of refugees. By appealing to emotions familiar to everyone, they neutralize the fear of foreigners in the addressees. Therefore, the mission of literature becomes – in opposition to the politics of securitization – to counteract adiaphorization, "that is, to exclude migrants and what happens to them from moral evaluation" and thus place them in space for compassion (Bauman, 2016: 43). This literature teaches not only young audiences, but also those adults experiencing co-reading (Bednarek, 2022: 90) with their children. Moreover, like their children, they are co-experiencing what befalls the depicted child protagonists, to overcome the boundary of Fear of the Other, and take prompt action – to give help to those who need it. He further shows that "Each of us is an Odysseus" (Staff, 1978: 120), but not everyone has the opportunity to return to his Ithaca.

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