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Vol. 15

Shaping the Exploration of the Planet. Environmental Turn in Children's and Young Adults Literature, Culture and Education

REDAKCJA / EDITED BY
TZINA KALOGIROU, DOROTA MICHUŁKA,
MAGDALENA OCHWAT, JUSTYNA ZAJĄC

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filoteknos@uwr.edu.pl, www.ifp.uni.wroc.pl/filoteknos/

Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe
ul. Kościuszki 142, 50-439 Wrocław, tel. 71 342 20 56
www.atutoficyna.pl, wydawnictwo@atutoficyna.pl

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TZINA KALOGIROU ORCID: 0000-0003-1116-4986
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

WOJCIECH P. MAŁECKI ORCID: 0000-0003-4768-713X
University of Wrocław

DOROTA MICHUŁKA ORCID: 0000-0002-7237-2618
University of Wrocław

MAGDALENA OCHWAT ORCID: 0000-0002-0178-165X
University of Silesia in Katowice

Can "Green Education" Save the World? Texts of Culture for Young Audiences in the Face of Contemporary Civilisational Challenges (from Empathy to Agency)

1. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND ECOPEDAGOGY

No one can deny we live in momentous times. Climate change is here. We see it in our everyday lives, we hear it all the more often in the news, worried experts sound the alarm about an impending ecological disaster. Yet still, there is a sprawling feeling that this dire situation somehow will not affect us or more audaciously, we feel that the media and scientists are probably exaggerating and overestimating the current situation. Our planet is literally going through a transformation as climate change alternates not only the climate but every part of the world. This exact apprehension can be quite unsettling as it is painful to digest that the world, as we know it, has taken a dramatic turn. We cannot compromise with the idea that our summers will be so hot that it will be unbearable to stay outside, or our seas, rivers and lakes will become so polluted that the water will be too dangerous for humans as well as the aquatic life. Thus, we try to obliterate this idea and pretend that this entrenched sense of uneasiness and loss will somehow go away.

The "breaking news" of this volume is that what we feel is real, what we experience and how we decide to tackle the 'climate change' issue is of paramount importance and it is ok to feel alarmed by the whole situation. However,

we should enter the conversation with great care as it may inflict in us big emotions, such as "eco-anxiety, climate guilt, grief, and hopelessness that cumulatively may lead to traumatic withdrawal" and ultimately, induce disengagement and shutting down (Oziewicz, 2022: 23). It is clear that without a foundation of resilience, we risk descending into turmoil with far-reaching implications. On one hand, we need to remember that it is natural to feel this way as "feelings are a signal that something's wrong and needs our attention" (Davenport, 2021: 11) and on the other hand, we need to stop oscillating between acknowledging the imperative of acting for the planet while adhering to unsustainable practices.

Undeniably, we live in the age of the Anthropocene. This is what life looks like in this era. Humans have altered the anaglyph of Earth in myriad ways and now we have reached a point when people need to find ways to address the magnitude of the environmental problems without feeling weak or disheartened. The relatively new name of this era precisely indicates the geological era in which man has left his indelible imprint in the geology of the earth and its ecosystems (Reno, 2022: 3). What gives us impetus to keep on spreading the word on the perturbing matter of climate change is the idea of successfully engaging in this task all kinds of people; not only the few, that is, scientists and humanists. Hence, two questions arise: "What if ordinary people – and not just specialists – were to embrace the Anthropocene in both our private and public deliberations about the environment?" (Reno, 2022: 14). Given the overarching importance of the accelerating climate change, how do we move beyond circulating desperate warnings to spark change? By summoning up 'literature' of course; by using narratives to prepare the next generation. To make our idea more specific, we shall also raise another crucial point. We consider that the best way to start raising eco-awareness in our societies is to first reach the children; the children which will be the citizens of tomorrow and we, as teachers, are obliged to equip them with all the necessary tools in order for them to become resilient, responsible and empathetic future eco-citizens. In this venture, we think that children's literature may prove an invaluable tool in our quiver as it may help young learners cultivate mindfulness and ecological awareness for a more sustainable future. If we manage to help children understand how to explore the environment with their senses and listen to their hearts, and if we manage to plant in their souls the seeds of hope and resilience, then, hopefully, they might become the adults of tomorrow who will probably conjure new pathways towards sustainability.

It has long been admitted that literature, first and foremost, bestows exuberance upon its readers all over the world – let alone, children – as they are given the opportunity to retreat to all kinds of fictional and non-fictional worlds and discover new aspects of themselves. All these mediated experiences emanating from literature's lap induce personal development and joy, as through literature children can learn about how people used to cope with their own problems in

the past, while in the meantime they become enabled to confront similar difficulties in life as well as acknowledge others' feelings. Another literature value is the much-needed nowadays growth of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, literature is an excellent tool for children to get aware of humankind's cultural inheritance. Thanks to its inspiring effect, children can get to know themselves, relate to experiences of the past, gaze future with an inquiring eye, learn how to manage their feelings, how to cope with anxiety in the most appropriate way and how to empathise the others. On top of this, non-fiction books impart solid knowledge to young readers on several subjects while keeping the element of fun throughout reading. Overall, literature acts like a bridge between the realm of fantasy and reality, thus offering children powerful stimuli of excitement, knowledge and empathy, whilst it strongly enhances their aesthetic development.

In this context, we can't help but raising our next point of discussion, which is highly related to the previous. For as long as humans have been writing and reflecting on what others have written, we have been considering the relationship that we have with our environment. This idea goes far beyond classic antiquity and it is clear that the idea of "nature" is an old and difficult concept to grasp. Literary responses to environmental concerns go back in time and seem to have tormented writers from the very beginning of time, when humans started to leave their imprint on the planet. Many years after, in the mid-eighties the field of environmental studies – that is, ecocriticism – was planted and in the mid-nineties it grew. "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 2015: 122). Delving deeper into this definition, what is understood is that ecocriticism "takes as subject the interconnection between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. […] As a theoretical discourse it negotiates between the human and the non-human" (Glotfelty, 2015: 123). It is an interdisciplinary field that requires cultural as well as scientific analysis because of "the interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection" (Garrard, 2004: 14).

Hence, in order to give answers to our original questions, posed at the beginning of this introductory text, we take a step deeper into ecocriticism by depicting the value of the key branch of ecocritical theory, ecopedagogy, as it combines theory with practice. Ecopedagogy "widen[ed] Freire's initial notion of reading of the world – defined as anthroposphere – to reading of Earth (defined as the planetary sphere, with the world as inseparable part of Earth)" (Misiaszek, 2022: 2297). "Ecopedagogies are grounded in critical thinking and transformability, with the ultimate goal being to construct learning with increased social and environmental justice" (Misiaszek, 2020: 1). Hence, reading literature with our minds set on the goals of ecopedagogy not only urges the reader to find the point of convergence between social, ecological, and

inter-species justice, but also necessitates the existence of inclusive praxis (Humes, 2008), which is our main desideratum now that humanity has reached the "age of its environmental limits" (Glotfelty, 2015: 123).

Because of this age of precariousness we live in, we need narratives that not only will they offer us a safe space to grieve within the safety net of literary readings. Still, we will also prepare the next generations by offering them a foundation of resilience and activation. This indispensable foundation may be established in multiple ways. However, we as literary teachers promote the idea that the power of children's literature can prove quite invaluable. Modern children's literature responds remarkably well with the issue at hand at all levels, that is thematic, values, representations. Children's books respond to the decrees of critical theory, and in the end, give hope and often ways through which one could get activated and act accordingly.

In the current volume dedicated to Ecology, one may find valid theoretical approaches to children's literature in a wide range of books and picturebooks, interviews with leading figures in the academic field of environmental children's literature, who struggle through their work to raise awareness of the climate emergency and promote climate literacy, and many many more. All the above is only a foretaste of what follows inside the vibrant pages of this volume. And maybe, after having reflected on what we just read, we might be able to start making small changes, to reverse this situation; by informing ourselves and becoming the change we need to see in the world. After all, we know that the future is being decided in the present. Many people may be overwhelmed by doom and gloom, but we have to believe it is not too late. We should work our way out soon.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF NARRATIVES ON CHILDREN'S AND TEENAGERS' ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES, PERCEPTIONS, AND BEHAVIOR:

An Empirical Ecocritical Perspective

While individual attitudes and behaviors toward the environment can change at any point throughout life, including well into old age, there are good reasons to think that their lasting core is formed in childhood and adolescence (Cole, 2014; Evans, Otto, Kaiser, 2018; Pillemer, Nolte, Cope, 2022). There are also good reasons to think that a key role in this process is played by narratives, ranging from the fairy tales we are told by parents and guardians to school-assigned readings, novels read in spare time, movies, cartoons, video games, and social media stories (Hsiao, Shih, 2016; Małecki, Sorokowski et al., 2019). To fully understand the impact of narratives on the environmental attitudes and behaviors of the public, it is therefore necessary to understand the impact they have on the attitudes and behavior of children and teenagers. An efficient way

to achieve this is through empirical research, the framework offered by empirical ecocriticism specifically (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). The aim of this paper is to provide support for these points.

The Development of Environmental Attitudes, Perceptions, and Behavior in Childhood and Teens

Available evidence suggests that stories fundamentally shape a variety of environmental attitudes and behaviors, including those that might otherwise be presumed innate. Speciesism, for instance, is a preference for one's own species over other species in situations of moral choice (Singer, 2009; Corbyn, 2023). It appears to be universal across cultures and might be seen as beneficial to humans in general, so it is easy to assume it to be an evolutionary adaptation (DeGrazia, Millum, 2021; Hill, Bertrand, 2020; Lafollette, Shanks, 1996)while individuals with nontrivial temporal self-awareness that falls short of narrative capacity have partial-strength rights. This account of moral status is neutral with respect to species, which means that membership in Homo sapiens is neither necessary nor sufficient for moral status or rights. The final three sections explore ethical implications for research involving human embryos, rodents, and great apes. We defend a very liberal position with respect to embryo research, a relatively restrictive approach to rodent research (granting equal consequentialist consideration to rodents' interests while permitting their use on utilitarian grounds. However, a recent study showed that when asked to choose which lives to save, human or animal, children participants valued the life of non-human animals over the life of humans more often than adults do. In particular, the children "often chose to save multiple dogs over one human, and many valued the life of a dog as much as the life of a human," while, in contrast, "all adults chose to save one human over even 100 dogs" (Wilks et al., 2021: 27). Another recent study showed that children aged nine to eleven years old had less speciesist attitudes toward a set of specific human-animal interactions than both young adults (aged 18 to 21 years old) and adults (aged above 21). In particular, they were less likely than adults to agree that "it is okay to test new medicines on animals that we wouldn't test on humans" or that it is right to eat meat and animal products (McGuire, Palmer, Faber, 2023). It is clear from both studies that speciesism cannot be presumed innate and is likely acquired sometime during childhood or adolescence or at least significantly increases during that period.

There is analogous evidence for other environmental variables, including pro-environmental behavior. For instance, a study showed that increased pro-environmental behavior at eighteen years of age is significantly predicted by whether one's mother exhibited such behavior when one was six (e.g., boycotting companies with poor environmental record or reusing shopping bags), but not by one's own behavior at that time (Evans, Otto, Kaiser, 2018). Again, our approach toward the environment as adults seems to be something that

we are socialized into as children and teenagers rather than something we are born with.

The Role of Narrative

An important role in this process of socialization is played by narratives. For instance, apart from some notable exceptions, classic Western fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm tradition and others tend to portray animal characters as significant only relative to either human characters (animals as deadly threats, useful tools, or as bodily forms into which human characters are magically cast) or human characteristics (animals as symbolic illustrations of specific vices and virtues) (Cole, 2014). Systematic exposure to such stories may lead children to develop a tendency to objectify animals as lacking agency or inherent moral value and as suitable for any kind of use by human agents (Cole, 2014). However, stories can also foster greater moral consideration and empathy toward non-human animals. A recent study showed that stories portraying snakes with agentic features such as intentions and emotions made children more likely to express willingness to help these reptiles compared to snake stories lacking such attributions (Reider, LoBue, 2024). This result is particularly important as snakes are typically seen as pests and threats, to be eliminated rather than protected, which most likely results, at least in part, from the negative and objectifying portrayals of snakes common in the media and popular culture (Ballouard et al., 2013; Geest, Knoch, Shufran, 2022; Knight, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2022)most conservation efforts focus on a few charismatic species and consequently neglect the majority of others under threat; many unpopular species are even killed in large numbers with little concern. Redressing this bias through educational programs is therefore important. Snakes are unpopular animals; they suffer from human harassment in most places and many populations have declined worldwide. Consequently, they provide suitable substrate to better improve conservation education in schoolchildren. Responses to a questionnaire administered to 2,570 schoolchildren (7–14 years old.

Other studies, conducted with thousands of participants, showed that literary narratives portraying human-induced plight of animal protagonists can make high schoolers care more about the welfare of dogs, horses, and monkeys, as well as animals in general, increasing agreement with statements such as "I feel personally responsible for helping animals in need" and "The low costs of food production do not justify maintaining animals under poor conditions" and decreasing agreement with statements such as "Basically, humans have the right to use animals as we see fit" (Małecki, Sorokowski, et al., 2019). Importantly, these results were obtained with stories representing various genres: literary journalism, detective fiction, and realist prose, including classic school readings such as *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky, 1993).

Still other studies provide analogous evidence for the influence of narratives on environmental outcomes beyond attitudes toward animals. It was found, for

instance, that preschoolers exposed to picture books portraying pro-climate behaviors such as switching off the light upon leaving a room were more likely to engage in such behaviors themselves than those not so exposed (Hsiao, Shih, 2016). Similarly, reading a story with a protagonist exhibiting sustainable behaviors led ten-year olds to make more sustainable choices when playing an economic game compared to the choices of their peers who read a story without such a protagonist (Ebersbach, Brandenburger, 2020). However, little is known about how universal such effects are across different cultural, national, ethnic, and economic groups, different media, and narrative conventions, and about the psychological mechanisms potentially underlying them, such as narrative transportation, identification, and empathy (Green, Brock, 2000; Cohen, Weimann-Saks, Mazor-Tregerman, 2018; Hammond, Kim, 2014; Małecki, Pawłowski, et al., 2019). Without this knowledge, it is impossible to adequately assess the potential of stories for shaping the environmental attitudes and behavior of children and teens, nor to efficiently use that potential in practice. It is here that empirical ecocriticism may help.

The Potential of Empirical Ecocriticism

Empirical ecocriticism is a branch of ecocriticism devoted to the empirical study of the impact of environmental stories (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023; Schneider-Mayerson, Weik von Mossner, Małecki, 2020). It emerged to fill a research gap resulting from how this subject is approached within the humanities and social sciences respectively. Humanities scholars typically derive their hypotheses about the social impact of environmental stories from consideration of their formal and thematic components as well as the cultural and historical conditions of their production and reception, but tend not to test those hypotheses empirically (Buell, 2001). Social scientists, in turn, do test their hypotheses on the impact of environmental stories empirically, but draw them mainly from psychological theories, which tend not to take into account the historical, formal, and cultural factors considered by the humanities scholars (Schneider-Mayerson, Weik Von Mossner, Małecki, 2021). As a result, the role of those factors in the impact of environmental stories, while essential, is rarely submitted to empirical scrutiny, with the available empirical evidence yielding a significantly limited picture (Slovic, Sarveswaran, Rangarajan, 2019).

Empirical ecocriticism aims to make that picture more comprehensive by integrating the two disciplinary perspectives. It does so by following a methodological circle. First, in formulating its hypotheses, it tends to draw from the humanities and social sciences alike. An example might be the hypothesis that animal stories induce ambassadorial narrative empathy toward animals and, through this, foster more appreciative attitudes toward animal welfare. The construct of ambassadorial narrative empathy was proposed within a humanities field, literary studies, and refers to the process of extending one's empathy toward the protagonists of stories to the groups they represent: from

animal protagonists to animals in general, from child protagonists to children, and so on (Keen, 2011)this essay shows Thomas Hardy's bounded strategic empathy for his fictional creations, Wessex countrymen and women; his ambassadorial strategic empathy for animals and select members of despised outgroups; and his broadcast strategic empathy for feeling humanity in an indifferent, Godless universe. Hardy's work demonstrates engagement with a variety of empathetic narrative strategies outlined in my Empathy and the Novel (2007. The idea that empathizing with a group influences attitudes toward that group, in turn, originates in social psychology (Batson et al., 2002; 1997; Batson, 2011).

The above hypothesis might be further nuanced through subhypotheses about the role of various cultural, aesthetic, and psychological factors in the postulated impact. These may include the effects of narrative techniques such as first-person voice (Deen, Mangurian, Cabaniss, 2010; Edmiston, 1989), stylistic devices such as metaphorical language (Underhill, 2011), personality characteristics such as openness to experience or agreeableness (Gosling, Rentfrow, Swann, 2003)researchers may be faced with the choice of using an extremely brief measure of the Big-Five personality dimensions or using no measure at all. To meet the need for a very brief measure, 5 and 10-item inventories were developed and evaluated. Although somewhat inferior to standard multi-item instruments, the instruments reached adequate levels in terms of: (a, ideological attitudes such as social dominance orientation (Dhont et al., 2014)and that individual differences in desire for group dominance and inequality may underlie associations between these biases. The present investigation directly tests these assumptions. As expected, the results of the current study (N=191, and others. Once an empirical ecocritical hypothesis is formulated, it is then tested with a social scientific method such as the randomized controlled experiment (Malecki, 2023), with the results interpreted from both a humanistic and social scientific perspective. While most experimental studies yield quantitative results, empirical ecocritics can and have used qualitative empirical methods as well: interviews, focus groups, participatory ethnographic observation, and others (Dirksen et al., 2023; Skiveren, 2023), including to study the impact of environmental stories on younger audiences (Helle et al., 2023). However, there are still very few such studies.

A stronger integration of the empirical ecocritical framework into studies on the impact of stories on environmental attitudes and behavior of children and teenagers would provide humanists interested in the subject with a means to empirically test their hypotheses. At the same time, it would allow the social scientists already investigating the topic empirically to consider more comprehensively in their research the role of aesthetic, ideological, cultural, and historical factors. In this way, empirical ecocriticism would facilitate a better understanding of how the influence of environmental stories on today's children

may extend to tomorrow's adults, thereby contributing to a more sustainable society.

3. CAN ECOCRITICISM SAVE THE WORLD? ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS, EMPATHY AND AGENCY

Motto:

"Ecocriticism takes on the responsibility of describing not only changes in the relations between the human and non-human worlds, but also of creating scenarios for recovery from the environmental crisis" (Wójcik-Dudek, 2020: 109)

Texts for young audiences with an ecological theme, or more broadly works relating to the emotional relationship between nature and humans, play an important role and allow the reading style to incorporate not only ecocritical poetics, but also more broadly the assumptions of ecological humanities. At its core, in the post-anthropocentric era, which implies the fusion of different disciplines (e.g. humanities, biology, earth and nature sciences), as Ewa Domanska notes, the inclusion of an account of the holistic shape of the organic system (of life on earth), counteracting the patriarchal view of the world (associated with the domination of man over nature), emphasising the value of local places, peripheries and provinces, and the ennoblement of 'indigenous knowledge' combined with the exploration of research based on a model of social inclusion (Domańska, 2013: 13–32; Buell, 1996; 2005). Ecological humanities has become an interesting research field also from the perspective of education, "it speaks of the necessity of shaping a humanistic imagination already in the youngest citizens of the world," Bernadetta Niesporek-Szamburska notes, "an imagination that mobilises actions aimed at stopping the destruction of the natural environment, preserving its balance in the context of everyday life and generation" (Niesporek-Szamburska, 2021: 90; Józefowicz, 2022: 64).

Literature for young readers, understood in the context of the ecological turn variously due to the variety of genres and the three levels of education corresponding to the different age ranges of the recipient of ecological books (early childhood education – pupils aged 7–9, primary school – pupils aged 10–14, secondary school – pupils aged 15–18) should also take into account the different levels of experiencing nature. This perceiving, understanding and solving of problems of an ecological nature by the young viewer of cultural texts (let us emphasise, a viewer of different ages), the building of environmental awareness and literary eco-education in the Anthropocene era, has already been convincingly discussed by Magdalena Ochwat. (Ochwat, 2020).

In addition to knowledge about nature, however, the dominant elements linking the reception of books on environmental issues and connecting different age levels of children and adolescents will be elements such as an ethical perspective, axiological issues, the issue of empathy and care, and the awareness that human solidarity with the natural world and the shaping of respect for all forms of life are necessary to carry out any action to protect the planet (Oziewicz, Saguisag, 2021; Środa, 2017; 1994)

Studies of literature (including narratives for young readers) with environmental themes are often framed within the context of confronting notions of nature and culture, and seem to combine three perspectives on conceptions of the relationship between humans and nature: 1/. Romantic, which treats the "Book of Nature as an anthropocentric system of symbols, and signs to be read" (Barcz, 2012: 58–59) , emphasises the peculiar identification of man with the world of nature, the empathic experience of nature, which allows for the revealing of human feelings and emotions, thus emphasising, "designing oneself into the world" 2/. modernist – combining the reception of reality with affects and experience (e.g. in the approach of Bolesław Leśmian), emphasising the beauty of the natural world, human fascination and enchantment with nature, its fairy-tale character and mysteriousness (Barcz, 2012: 58–59) and 3/. contemporary, oriented towards social action and causality, reflective, underpinned by solid knowledge, community of action, being an example of building ecological awareness and showing "ways of problematising responsibility for nature in literature" (Barcz, 2012: 58–59) .

As Wojciech Małecki, an expert on ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary issue, sees it, the awareness that we are living in the Anthropocene – a geological epoch characterised by man's destructive impact on the planet – is having an increasing impact on literary practice, also in Poland . We are witnessing a significant increase in the number of scientific publications on the subject and educational activities (also within the framework of non-formal education). We can even speak of a kind of ecological turn, in which ecocriticism – i.e. a field of research exploring the relationship between literature and the natural world/environment (Barcz, 2016: 58; Tabaszewska 2018: 156–165)[1], *animal*

[1] Barcz considers: "From an ecocritical perspective, looking for ways to make the relationship with nature in Polish literature more realistic, Romanticism is an important testimony, also due to the often described experiences of being alone with nature. However, at the level of nature representation, too little space in these narratives is devoted to the autonomous presence of the natural world, as Romantic authors do not set themselves up for reception from the natural environment, but for its projection in the form of their own experiences." (p. 58). In the context of the ecocritical interpretation of Prus's "Placówka" presented by Barcz, Tabaszewska writes: "The difficult art of finding and problematising literary texts that avoid the problem of over-aestheticising nature or reducing it to symbol or metaphor succeeds here. Nature, although not the primary focus of attention, is not subordinated to other human goals, nor is it an emanation or

studies and post-humanist literary *studies* – play a key role. These fields use tools and concepts developed by literary studies, philosophy, social geography, biology, anthrozoology, cognitive science, history, sociology or psychology to interpret literary works in terms of their pro-ecological and post-anthropocentric potential, to search for a new form of aesthetic sensitivity (Małecki, Woźniak, 2020), which will be open to experiencing the surrounding world and its non-human inhabitants, and to develop a new conception of the role of language and imagination (Bakke, 2007; Barcz, 2016; Szalewska, 2022; Baratay, 2024), especially in the case of "green education" or interdisciplinary humanistic education of children and young people.

The second decade of the 21st century has brought numerous narratives in children's literature highlighting the need to sensitise readers to the changes constantly taking place in the natural environment. On the publishing market, both at home and abroad, one can observe a veritable harvest of books in the spirit of anthropogenic criticism, writes Anna Jozefowicz (Józefowicz, 2022) discussing around 70 Polish book positions on environmental issues in the context of humanistic education (Józefowicz, 2022: 46) . When we take a look at the editions that Józefowicz has put in order, they will play an important role in this approach, especially the richly illustrated popular science books, which are educational in their function, but which also often skilfully combine didacticism with artistry, stories with a playful bent, books for the youngest readers (intended for children rather at an early age), paraliterary narratives, eco-reportages, eco-storytelling, eco-parables shaping ethical attitudes, interesting from the perspective of the relationship that occurs between the word and image, editions with an interesting graphic design, combining various conventions, styles and artistic concepts, from comic books and graphic novels, through collages, the use of photography, caricature, grotesque and satire drawing, fantasy convention (with particular emphasis on fairy tales), the visual layer explicating and interpreting the verbal narrative, but also narratives introducing images as a kind of impression for the story told in words. Nature-environmental themes, as shown by contemporary editions of children's books taking into account the roles of intersecting cognitive, aesthetic and artistic components, can also provoke social engagement and affective approaches . (Hogan, 2010; Miall, Kuiken, 1998: 328).

With such a broader view of the concept of ecocritical research and its transformations in understanding the relationship between literature, a text that is a product of man, and the environment, it will become important to "shift" from describing the representation of wild, alien, untouched nature to a discussion of the environment and nature conservation (Kolbuszewski, 1992;

reflection of the subject's inner state. It remains independent, unsubordinated to human schemes and aspirations' (p. 156–158).

Kolbuszewski, 2000)[2] , the shape of which can be influenced by man (the so-called second wave of ecocriticism) (Tabaszewska, 2018) . The concretisation of these concepts, however, is not straightforward, "nature can [add D.M.] be conceptualised <<in itself>>, while the environment is always imagined at first sight as what it is […]" (Tabaszewska, 2018: 13) .

Justyna Tabaszewska also highlights in this context of consideration that:

The widening of ecocriticism's circle of interest to include further research problems is therefore accompanied by a fundamental change in thinking about its aims: one of the main ones is no longer to be simply the study of abstractly understood relations between text and environment, but the search for such texts – and thus, more broadly, ways of speaking – that can respond to current environmental problems. It is therefore more than a discourse analysis, it is rather a search for a language of speaking about things, phenomena and experiences that are part of both the human and non-human environment, and that intertwine us – different but interdependent subjects – into a single whole […] this language, in addition to being communicative and doing justice to those on whose behalf it speaks, should also be causa. (Tabaszewska, 2018: 11)

The preferred "causality of language" would therefore suggest a kind of division into two wings of ecocriticism, "which could be somewhat simplistically described as 'academic' (oriented more towards discourse analysis) and 'activist' (oriented more towards making ecocriticism a tool and an engine for change)" (Tabaszewska, 2018: 12) .

In this second area of research – 'activist' – would therefore, I believe, also include contemporary texts for young audiences with environmental themes, particularly those that can be used in discourses on contemporary "green" humanities education.

Polish research on the broadly understood relations between nature and culture and ecological criticism, according to the findings of Jarosław Woźniak or Wojciech Małecki, has often distinguished between the Romantic tradition and the Romantic understanding of nature. The period of Romanticism exposing the issues of the philosophy of nature and its relations with human existence, as both researchers state, became, in a way, a precursor for the contemporary understanding of ecology (Woźniak, 2017) , about which Maria Janion convincingly wrote "[…] demanding that nature be treated as a specific, separate whole [and, D.M] […] defending the autonomy of nature" (Janion, 2001:64). Jacek Kolbuszewski also had an important voice in this discourse, with a particular focus on ecological realism (Barcz, 2016) and environmental issues. Addressing the issue of the relationship between the environment and literature, the researcher pointed to bridging the gap between research in the

[2] Kolbuszewski discusses on the example of literary texts the changes in human attitudes towards nature, indicating not only understanding of nature but also respect and care for it.

humanities and natural sciences, also indicating educational and practical solutions (Kolbuszewski, 1992; Czapliński, Bednarek & Gostyński, 2017: 182- 184) . An interdisciplinary look at images of nature in a literary text (Bartoszewicz, 1972: 256; Woźniak, 2027)[3] , "green education" and the formation of ecological awareness, ecological empathy and causality, as the authors of the articles, included in this volume, have shown, will also involve a special focus on the poetics of space (in terms of "wild heterotopia"), the space of the other ("in-between") (Foucault, 2005) , where diversity, differentiation, heterogeneity, multiplicity meet: "[…] that which is untamed and that which is domesticated, that which is feral and that which is cultivated" (Bartel, et al., 2021) , after all, it is the concrete place, the actual space in which we live that also determines a strongly childish and adolescent understanding of the world and influences certain actions.

4. "GREEN EDUCATION" − NEW CHALLENGES OF XXI CENTURY

Interest in environmental humanities, also referred to as ecological humanities, has significantly increased in Poland in recent years. Both research on environmental humanities education and academic education itself are developing dynamically – an increasing number of courses with an ecological focus[4], as well as degree programs[5], are emerging at universities in response to contemporary environmental and climate challenges. Incorporating this new perspective into humanistic research not only revitalizes and deepens scientific inquiry but also helps shape civic attitudes based on concern for the world, the Earth, and all beings – both animate (plants, animals) and inanimate (e.g., rocks, rivers). Recently, we have observed a rise in civic activism in Poland aimed at protecting forests from logging and rivers from further regulation, including concreting and taming.

Despite these civic activities, the lack of implementation of environmental humanities and, in general, climate education in schools remains a significant problem. This education is not systematically present in schools. To illustrate this thesis, one can cite statements from students in Polish schools who

[3] Woźniak writes: "For Polish literary studies and Polish literature, this may be of great importance due to the overwhelming dominance of Romantic literature in school didactics and the vitality of the Romantic paradigm" (p. 177).

[4] Cf. In 2022/2023, the university's offer includes an all-academic interdisciplinary module: "Yes to Climate. Why the Earth Needs Humanists." In the 2023/2024 academic year, one of the courses in the art of writing, creative writing course is titled "How to be of the world? Environmental Humanities in the Field" and was taught by a naturalist and a humanist.

[5] The course in question is Interdisciplinary Environmental Humanities Studies, recruited by the University of Silesia in Katowice. It is the first such course in Poland to combine the humanities, natural sciences and technology.

responded to the question of what they think climate and environmental education in schools should look like: "First of all, it should be said that climate change and global warming is a FACT and there should be no argument about it. Teachers do not address this topic and we are unaware of the scale of the problem. This should be discussed in lessons about how glaciers are melting, the Earth is warming, and the great impact of human actions. I'm sure that half of the students at my school don't know about the fact that the Earth is endangered by CO2 emissions, people and animals are dying, and we sit and watch this completely idly. There should be classes that also talk about how huge pollution is produced by the human species. I would like to hear about the island of garbage, the poisoning of water in India, and many others" (Ochwat, Guzy, 2021: 49)[6].

The school's silence on anthropogenic climate change is a serious problem in the Polish educational system, and it is not just an issue of Polish schools – similar deficiencies are observed in the educational systems of many countries (Kozłowska, 2021)[7]. Filling this gap has become a key challenge for contemporary humanistic climate education. The humanistic view of ecological issues is an invaluable complement to the so-called "hard knowledge" about the environment, which consists of data, graphs, numbers. The value of humanistic education also lies in its unique ability to influence young people through culture and the arts – elements that can influence values and attitudes more effectively than "dry facts", which in turn have a real impact on the choices and lifestyles of the younger generation. In the context of this causal potential of the humanities, it can be noted that literature and other forms of artistic expression have a unique power today.

Today, the task of creating a new stories in times of mass species extinction and the loss of biodiversity, one that inspires hope and strength for the ongoing fight for a better future, lies in the hands of writers, artists, poets, and cultural figures (Napiórkowski, 2022). This is why American anthropologist Anna

[6] In the main study conducted from November to December 15, 2021, a total of 2,181 students participated, with 1,227 questionnaires fully completed and subsequently subjected to detailed analysis. The average age of the respondents was 15.5 years. The largest group of respondents fell within the 15–18 age range. A significant majority of those who completed the questionnaire were high school students: 807 individuals (65.7 %).

[7] Climate change is absent from the core curriculum. Agnieszka Kozlowska examined core curricula in two countries, looking for key words in them. These included: climate change, global warming, enhanced greenhouse effect, carbon cycle / carbon footprint, fossil fuels., energy, climate crisis, greenhouse gases, greenhouse gas emissions, environmental impact of climate change, mitigation / adaptation, deforestation, reforestation, planetary boundaries / environmental limits, ecological transformation, sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, environmental awareness. Only 3 of the 19 keywords were present in the Polish core curriculum, while 5 of them were present in the English one. In both cases, the keywords showed no direct reference to climate change.

Lowenhaupt Tsing weaves a new story about matsutake mushrooms, and why Monika Rogowska-Stangret, in the Polish introduction to Tsing's newly translated book *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, writes: "Today, we are all yearning for new stories for the time of catastrophe, stories that can offer a non-naive hope, that […] will propose a way out of the logic of human privilege" (Tsing, 2024: 10).

School-based humanities education has extensive potential for shaping attitudes, modeling desirable environmental behaviors, and creating new, multifaceted stories – GEOstories and BIOstories. This happens by encouraging critical reflection in lessons, contesting established practices and traditions, such as hunting, exploiting of other species, exploitation of the land, the descriptions of which are still present in school readings, or by showing various relationships between humans and the more-than-human world.

So what might the much-needed ecological education for all of us look like (see Ochwat, 2024)? Olga Tokarczuk, the 2018 Polish winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, gives us a hint. In an interview with the monthly magazine "Wild Life", Tokarczuk emphasizes the need for an ecological framework for looking at the world that could permeate education at every stage of education. Such a framework, in which individual school subjects – from the natural sciences to the humanities – would be filled with content that promotes ecological awareness, should become a basic reference point in the teaching process. As the Nobel laureate points out, an "ecological framework" could be at the center of curricula. Tokarczuk points out that only through such a deep integration of pro-environmental issues will it be possible to shape the environmental consciousness of younger generations in a consistent, multi-dimensional, and relevant way to contemporary climate challenges: "Ecology before our eyes became more than a science concerning interdependence in nature. Today its paradigm can also be found in sociology, psychology, economics, geography, medicine, in every scientific approach… It is the mother of sciences. Ecology could show children something that is sorely lacking in modern education – an overall view of what we call the world as a great complex organism, all of whose components constantly influence and depend on each other. So it could give a kind of synthetic, general knowledge. It would create a framework, which only later would fill in the individual objects piece by piece. In this way it would build in the minds of children some kind of coherent and general map of the world in which they live" (Skubała et al., 2014).

Education on the climate crisis should be integrated at all levels of education and across all teaching disciplines, covering every subject. However, the idea is not to add another subject, but to create a common ground on which a new ecological awareness will be based.

It is worthwhile to expand Olga Tokarczuk's call for interdisciplinary education, which aligns well with the posthumanist idea of relationality, by

incorporating new perspectives that ease the traditional anthropocentric view of the world, including biocentrism and ecocentrism.

Furthermore, environmental education demands modifications in teaching methods at all educational levels. This could involve reducing the traditional classroom desk arrangement in favor of field-based education (Śliwerski, Paluch, 2021), increasing hands-on activities to counteract the deficit of contact with nature and excessive sensory stimulation. Such methods should strengthen young people's resilience in crisis situations. In these dystopian times of the Anthropocene, it is also essential to foster imagination, introduce speculative thinking, prototype solutions, and create new stories grounded in a non-naive hope.

We also advocate for the recognition of local education's importance in the context of the environmental crisis, aiming to foster agency, engagement, and responsibility for the immediate surroundings of the school, neighborhood, city, or village. The goal is for students to have a tangible impact on the future, acquiring skills in making responsible decisions and acting on behalf of the local environment.

An essential aspect of this approach is also cultivating and promoting cooperative attitudes and relationship-building to replace competition, allowing for effective responses to contemporary ecological challenges. Perhaps it is time to openly discuss a shift in the school's operating philosophy, which is currently dominated by harmful promotion-focused thinking – based on growth ideology and competition rather than on expanding sensitivity, attentiveness, and care for others and the Earth.

In this framework, climate and environmental education in the humanities could serve as a foundation for collective (interdisciplinary) and hope-filled thinking (new stories) about the future of our Planet and all beings that inhabit it (biocentrism).

* * * * *

Growing up in the uncertain climate challenges of the 21st century, experiencing pluralism and diversity, the child protagonists will therefore 'enter' into different relationships with nature: from confrontation and fear of the unknown, to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the laws of nature, to an emotional taming of nature.

The articles included in this volume only confirm the scientific insights we wrote about in the introduction to this edition, noting that literary images of nature interaction, provoking children's imagination, shaping ecological awareness, promoting agency (also from an educational perspective), would therefore have a clear connection to the existential-ethical dimension of the works analysed, reflections on empathy with the natural world, in-depth reflection on the meaning of life and relations between humans and non-humans,

educating and strengthening openness to learning about the world and reinforcing readiness for change.

As demonstrated in this volume, ecologically themed cultural texts representative of the post-Anthropocene era fit perfectly into social and educational discussions about building environmental awareness in young audiences, "organising contemporary imagination and stimulating action" (Bendyk, 2020) , they also encourage empathetic reading. Referring here to the results of research conducted by Mark Oziewicz and Lara Saguisag (Oziewicz, Saguisag, 2021) and Mathew Schneider-Mayerson, Alexy Weik von Mossner and Wojciech Malecki (Schneider-Mayerson, Weik von Mossner, Malecki, 2020), it seems that texts for young audiences due to the involvement present in the narratives, the often causal nature of the heroes/heroines, as well as the respect for science and knowledge of nature exposed in the stores (Harari, 2022), may shape an attitude of understanding and respect for the natural world, build an ecocentric vision of the world and influence the construction of conceptual nets indispensable for the realisation of a future aimed at actions protecting the vanishing planet.

Often, referring here to the Romantic tradition already alluded to, these would also be stories revealing not only the threat of annihilation resulting from the climate crisis, but also works showing images of a wild nature that is still beautiful and pure, texts about an authentic, affective experience of it, a polysensory, sensitive and empathetic reception, but above all stories about reinforcing the role of nature in the process of searching for one's own identity and finding oneself.

We invite you to reading!

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Studies

Humanistic Ecology – from Ecocentric Thinking to Agency

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ANNA BARCZ ORCID: 0000-0002-8687-5259
Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History Polish Academy of Sciences

After the Environmental Turn: Ecological Resilience in Children's and Youth Literature (Overview and Update of Issues)

Abstract: The aim of this article is to present an overview on the environmental turn in YACH literary studies on the example of predominantly Polish scholarship; and update the YACH research position on the future orientated studies. To achieve this, the article is divided into three parts. In the first, it conceptualises resilience as "ecological resilience" of the adolescent age and present references to other YACH literary scholars to develop the argument why are we redirected towards "after the environmental turn" within our cultures of adaptation; in the second, it illustrates "eco-resilience" in a leading example based on an intimate form of a fictional teen's diary, i.e. *The Carbon Diaries 2015* by Saci Lloyd; in the third conclusive part – it summarises this overview and update the position to explain why such a great epistemological potential for resilience studies in interpreting, teaching or just communicating global risks through YACH sources exist and can be developed further.

Keywords: eco-resilience; adolescence; Carbon Diaries; global risks

For my teen son, who like Laura Brown does music.

INTRO

It has been over a decade since we seriously debate the ecological turn in relation to young adults' and children (YACH) literary studies at Polish academy. One of the events which influenced the development of diverse ecological approaches in Poland was the Warsaw conference "Animals and Their People" subtitled with an open-ended question "The Fall of the Anthropocentric Paradigm?" in 2014. Other events (e.g. the series of conferences "Po człowieku [After the human]" at the Silesian University or "Języki antropocenu [Languages of the Anthropocene]" at Cracow's KEN University in 2022) and publications, which followed, include but do not exhaust the topicality of environmental concerns combined, for example with the philosophical posthumanism

quest (Rogowska-Stangret 2021) and the diagnoses and conceptualisations on the Anthropocene (Bińczyk 2018; Marzec 2021). The Wrocław conference "The Environmental Turn in the Study of Children's and Young Adult Literature" in 2022, of which this volume is partly an outcome, confirmed that the scholarship on YACH literature is present in the eco-debate from the beginning, stimulated by the human-animal comparative studies (Jarzyna 2020) and wider reception of ecocritical themes in YACH education in Poland (Czapliński, Bednarek and Gostyński 2017; Czabanowska-Wróbel and Zabawa 2017; Michalski 2022; Zdunik 2023) and planetary environmental humanities (Oziewicz 2022). Meanwhile, a specially dedicated research centre on ecological education started to operate at the Silesian University (https://www.icbeh.us.edu.pl/) and new eco-educational strategies are being developed for all sectors to address the global warming (e.g. Ochwat 2020; Niesporek-Szamburska and Przybyła 2021).

Observing how environmental perspectives evolve and infuse contemporary humanities, I come to the conclusion that the divide between what is ecological and what is not is just an artificial pact, which will soon evaporate. In fairness, all aspects of our life and work activities have environmental consequences and I really believe sooner or later we will not even add in our methodological design the prefixes "eco" or "enviro", "green" or "blue"; at the same time – all children and youth studies will not only be transdisciplinary but also ecological.

Because of how this article is positioned in the whole volume of the journal, its aim is to remind ourselves how much has been done in Poland. I, obviously, enumerated just few examples in relation to the international field of ecological education and theory of literature. This is also optimistic that ecocriticism and animal studies are used as frames but, going further, my primary goal here is to self-reflect on the stage we are at now. That is why I indicate my position as "after the environmental turn" and I am interested in the future theoretical lens and modes of ecological reading, communicating, and educating the youngest generations as if the ecological context was always implied, always real and employed as a task even through fictitious strategies. The key term to study these lens and modes is "resilience" as it feeds into the discussion on what kind of adaptation strategies we can already experience and practice with youngsters through literary sources.

Therefore, I divided this article into three parts: in the first, I will conceptualise resilience as "ecological resilience" of the adolescent age and present references to other YACH literary scholars to develop the argument why are we redirected towards "after the environmental turn" within our cultures of adaptation; in the second, I will apply it to my leading example on the basis of an intimate form of a fictional teen's diary; in the third – I will conclude and summarise this overview and update my position to explain why I notice such a great epistemological potential for resilience studies in interpreting, teaching or just communicating global risks through YACH sources.

ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

The concept "resilience" originates from psychological research where individuals were first statically described as "invulnerable" to life challenges and problems but later resilience evolved into a wider field of studies on "the dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment" (Rudd, Meissel and Meyel 2021). This vastly affects education and environmental studies providing new contexts for discussion, including literary field. Especially significant for developing what I would like to frame as eco-resilience is period of adolescence defined very early by psychologists of education and YACH development as a separate period of human development and characterized as challenging for its emotional intensity (Hall, 1904). Since then, many authors have stressed various challenges during adolescence, including mental health and socio-cultural aspects of their transition into adulthood (Tayfur et al. 2021) but not much has been so far acknowledged and researched in the transdisciplinary model to address both, the nowadays ecological crisis and adolescent anxieties. Here, particularly, I see a huge potential to push forward the eco-resilience as a concept for adaptation studies in cultures and societies in the Anthropocene and combine them with studies on YACH literatures.

In my view, it is worthy to differentiate the *eco-resilience* from other resiliencies. Although the eco-resilience involves knowledge-potential built up on the psychological studies that can be traced back in the semantic layers of health, strength, flexibility and ability to recover of an individual or a group, it also adds up the ecological stratum as a necessary component of one's development. Therefore, it should be particularly addressed how does it operate within the vast area of YACH studies. To understand better the eco-resilience, adolescence is not only constrained here by the biological age and youth developmental stage (Waddell 2018). It is also perceived as a wider term of storied and narrated life to analyse more possibilities in responses, which an individual can resiliently generate towards various eco-anxieties and challenges. YACH sources enable us to dive into the most vulnerable and emotionally triggering period in the human development not only because of pedagogics or psychology but because we are in urgent search for modelling our anthropological systems of knowledge in the time of ecological distortion. Imagine, as if we all were teenagers in the time presented to us rather apocalyptically grim, how would you respond? Some influential authors already diagnosed this ecocritical period within the human condition and would even maximise the adolescence by saying:

> But now we're basically all teenagers, being fucked over by an adult world that is repressing our transformative powers but that only really has death to offer us in exchange. So what we need is a strategy for breaking the loop. We need an escape trajectory. (Morton and Boyer 2021: 22)

In other words, poor ecological management around the world and related political challenges to mitigate warming climate push us further to study radical adaptation strategies and what is debated here as the eco-resilience.

Adolescents are also part of YA-centred turn in children's literature studies as Faulkner and Zolkos notice, since they are treated as "barometer[s] of social and cultural health" (in Deszcz-Tryhubczak 2016: 23) and where the greatest effort is put on inclusiveness and empowerment of their civic participatory practices (Deszcz-Tryhubczak 2016). Adolescent activism seems to be rising and real – the case of climate strikes, youth eco-anarchy and the influence of Greta Thunberg, of course – but a more universal approach to ecological resilience is needed to diagnose the period we are all in, both young and adult humans, in the lens of philosophical anthropology. What I mean here is an approach that will include also non-activist perspectives and will be more related to looking at YACH literature outside of a box to be studied not only by YACH scholars. The position of being (and reading!) "after the environmental turn" means that we investigate YACH texts to remind ourselves what an adolescent attitude is: for example, to develop the self, be happy and accepted, and experience oneself in this intensive dynamics of conflict and mitigation where the future-I is a flashing project in a blurred horizon of time and space. Eco-resilience is about not to resign of oneself where the future is objectively fragile and even lost, or is perceived always as part of this overcapitalistic, aggressively competitive world that does not give the YA individual skills to mindfully develop itself. What this text emphasizes anew is that we, adults, are ecologically repositioned closer to our YACH fellows or counterparts. We face the same problems as adolescents who were thrown into the world that is not theirs. There are no generational gaps to play out anymore. The meaning of lost planet is true and objective for all like in some Darkest Danse Macabre – now we look for strategies to dance a bit longer.

CARBON DIARIES, OR HOW TEENS PERFORM RESILIENT VULNERABILITY

This article does not pose didactic aims such as activating young students or engaging them in the climate debate. I want to come back to a very successful book for YA – *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (Lloyd 2008) – because of looking for ideas how through literature we can share and communicate the eco-resilience as a transgenerational project or as a planetary, consensual knowledge which we also recognize as living in the Anthropocene with warming climate and on the verge of extinction. How can we possibly rethink crossings and weird connections between generations of boomers and zoomers, Millennials and X-es and/or why the teenagers provide us with a model for epistemological retake to global risks?

In my attempt to understand better the eco-resilient approach to adolescence after the environmental turn, I follow Saci Lloyd, a well-recognized writer for young adults and teenagers' educator from East London who involves in creative writing workshops and promotes her students works (in different media of visual arts and literature) around the UK. Another, maybe more important inspiration that I personally heard from Lloyd (I met her at one of the conferences) was a question she is involved with in all her activities with young adults, particularly of less-privileged background, representatives of people of colour and various disabilities. Namely, how to amplify the weak and vulnerable teens' voice – the voice of the unheard side of our societies whose creative practice unfolds on the margins of the dominant discourses and silently disappears. And this need to include teens' perspective, not only in the climate politics but in how we simulate climate knowledge, was raised and debated by Lloyd before the climate strikes started to be organised by international youth organisations and Greta Thunberg. Now *Carbon Diaries* and their real fictious author, Laura Brown (who is my son's age-mate) perfectly problematises the world where the fundamental human rights are even more threatened by the global risks. A "normal teenager" who would just want to be happy and pass her school exams, and who can now redirect us towards asking about all adults' world and humans as endangered species. In fact, from the fictious *Carbon Diaries* we can follow such research and creative projects as "climate diaries" conducted around the globe with the most vulnerable and unheard communities (e.g. with people of colour in Senegal, see Giacomelli and Walker 2021).

A refreshed discussion over realism definitely helped to position fiction as contributive to ecological resilience. Literary scholars rejected the representational model of mirroring reality and empowered the intelligibility of techniques and devices which *make* the world real (Barthes, 1968; see also Kołodziejczyk and Michułka 2013/2014). This way, also very unrealistic, as imaginary and dystopic visions of reality – like the genre cli-fi – started to be part of the discussion how to communicate such complicated issues to youngsters as global warming. A term "cli-fi", coined by the journalist and educator Dan Bloom, was intensively debated a few years ago (Sheth 2023) and followed by many scholarly publications, for example by Adeline Johns-Putra (e.g. 2019). Other YACH literary texts in this genre can include Jacob Sackin's *Islands and Iglu*, Julie Bertagna's *Exodus trilogy*, Cameron's Stretcher's *The Water Wars*, Georgia Clark's *Parched*, and S. D. Crockett's *After the Snow* (Mossner 2017). In Poland, as a first cli-fi exemplification is considered *Brightness* by Maja Wolny (Piechota 2022). And although Saci Lloyd will also be included in this international cli-fi collection, I think her practical experience as a teacher and teens' instructor distinguishes her approach and enables to accentuate other layers of interpreting *The Carbon Diaries* or, more importantly, upgrade

the debate on addressing the global risks and challenges through fiction and the adolescent age.

Let me first recreate some arguments in the debate, which positioned *The Carbon Diaries* within the cli-fi and environmental turn before I will test some other arguments for going beyond and interpreting what does it mean "after the environmental turn" in this case.

Lloyd has been noticed by prominent ecocritics as part of a literary turn in addressing climate warming in her fiction (especially, Mossner 2013; Trexler 2015). And, what the empirical ecocritics recognise in the dystopic fiction of The *Carbon Diaries* as successful (e.g. Mossner 2013), this kind of literary mastery which is never "too depressing and overbearing" (70) to discuss living with the climate catastrophe here and now, and where the climate is a real agent. Or – what Adam Trexler noted as interrogating "the emotional, aesthetic, and living experience of the Anthropocene" (Trexler 2015: 6). Trexler who includes *The Carbon Diaries* in his *Anthropocene Fictions* points also to a particular context or climate in the global politics, namely the re-election of George W. Bush in 2004, when "there appeared to be little hope of American leadership on environmental issues" (8). *The Carbon Diaries* were published in 2008 and the author, Saci Lloyd, speaks of her political standing and contextualises some of her creative decisions in writing:

> […] a fictional notebook penned by the supremely caustic 15-year old Laura Brown, during the first year of carbon rationing in London. I too wanted to explore a society where denial and ignorance, this time about the effects of climate change, were pervasive. And believe me, stupidity was the order of the day back then. Dubya was leading the US charge against the Kyoto treaty, the Chinese were opening a coal-fired plant every two seconds and nobody seemed to give a damn, apart from some yoghurt-knitting hippies who hadn't paid taxes since 1973. (The Guardian 2015)

Trexler recognizes a new "eco-nomic" (2015: 26) dimension of climate warming and Lloyd's input into discussing new concerns of the Anthropocene and social tensions between different professional groups (206) through a teen character of Laura Brown who under the harsh conditions of energy rationing and disasters, has to "reevaluate the social structures that hold the world together" (106) and not forget to laugh.

To understand "Laura Brown's effect" within and beyond cli-fi genre dedicated for teens, I will focus on the first part of her diaries when she is 16 and she is trying to make a sense out of huge chaos that surrounds her at the beginning of some post big storm era and other hazardous weather events (massive snow drop, lack of rain), which accompany the UK's pioneering politics at a global scale to implement energy consumptions limits in an authoritarian style, centrally led by the state politics, like in communism rationing

economies, and envisioned by the "carbon cards". What Mossner names "enjoyable" for young readers (2013: 70) through Laura's case is managing or redirecting frustration and anger toward feeling serious about the disastrous conditions of their world (Mossner 2013: 71). It looks also as if Laura is the best informed about the nationwide carbon rationing (Mossner 2013: 74). Even writing a diary can be political and so it is a blender for her intimate, normal teen life to mix the private stories (updates on her boyfriend Ravi, friendships, passion for music, playing in a band, family and school matters), with humour and sarcasm (Trexler 2015: 203–204) but also Laura Brown's diary is a cautious, attentive filter of understanding the tricky historicity of the moment, to which I shall come back later.

In other words, such a diary is a powerful tool that can be used with your students when reading Lloyd's book and asking about the global risks stamp, like the past Covid-pandemics or climate events, on the teens' experience of everydayness. It is a tool that does not get old especially for young adults whose "narcistic" I-perspective should be accepted as their dominant way of narrating and interpreting world in the adolescent age. But what can be done more to preserve hope at young readers, which responsibility to give structure is handed over YACH writers as the biggest challenge in addressing climate warming according to Mossner (2013: 71, 79). I think, perhaps, what can we do further is to emphasise the way how teens structure reality and what is their "model" way of recognizing the reality even at the end of the world.

Rediscovering eco-resilient adolescence in the context of *The Carbon Diaries* and through Laura Brown's profile means to come back to negotiating popular needs with the cracking world as teens have, i.e. to feel normal and accepted, to balance and express emotions, to have fun, to stay in piece with the (adult) world, to love and be loved, to have deep friendships and experience deep connections, to practice own's passions and to be recognised as a creative human self.

Partly, it is the humour and playfulness as performatives that make this literary example a truly existential and eco-therapeutic tool for communicating culture of adaptation to global risks after the environmental turn. Lloyd is an author who sincerely confesses: "We've got to use humour more. It works! I'm not gothic enough as a person to write dystopia)" (Saci Lloyd, on Twitter in 2015). Humour and what the author expressed as her influence – one of Mark Twain's stories, i.e. about Huckleberry Finn, explains that to address serious problems, one does not need seriousness but a smart irony and a gist of creative authenticity:

> When I first read Huckleberry Finn at age 13 or so I laughed out loud at this audacious introduction, immediately falling in love with the sheer exuberance of an author who nailed his ironic colours to the mast in such a bold fashion. Here was a man who didn't take himself too seriously, I thought, and liked him on the spot. I still do, some 30 years later. (The Guardian 2015)

Therefore, first experiencing herself as a teen reader was a method to become the author of this popular and funny sequel narrated by young, female character Laura Brown in *The Carbon Diaries 2015* and *2017*. Moreover, hiding educational needs behind the priority of reaching her own London-based students, with such a serious topic as global warming, situates her books strategically among other successful books for YACH and not only within the rigid environmental perspective.

However, because of the direct ecological contexts described in *The Carbon Diaries* – the world is going through some major catastrophes, the Thames floods, people experience droughts, London is disabled by power cuts and a specially designed system for rationalizing energy consumption is undemocratically introduced by British authorities – Laura Brown's diary can be read as a post-apo cli-fi text and makes us laugh to distance ourselves from the all too encompassing problems which are beyond her control. And, without excluding these disastrous contexts, it is primary an initiative novel and this is where I position the eco-resilience, especially on the basis of *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (Lloyd 2008), to which I am referring here mostly.

The initiation in the adolescent age is a phenomenon described in YACH studies, especially after the feminist turn and redefinition of masculinity and femineity as constructs (Nosek, Chrobak 2022: 11). The scholars also point out that we do not refer to the traditional genre classification, as about female protagonists and for female readers but to "girls' narratives" (there). In the history of YACH literature, perhaps the first fully emancipated from gender constructs and pedagogical aims was Lewis Carroll's *Alice* (Misiak 2022: 172). Therefore, Laura Brown can truly embody an adolescent figure of a teen whose resilience is a developmental journey through constructs of reality in comparison to Caroll's Alice. And Laura's reality is also doubly challenged: by the global climate and energy crisis that affects her family and surroundings and by the "normal" teen problems how to deal with her sister, parents, friends, teachers and her first love and how not to lose her young and vulnerable self in the weird reality.

Carroll's creation of a sense of weirdness and strange as nonsense – which is also one of the key repeating terms in *The Carbon Diaries* to grasp all incomprehensies and move further – is always as if ecologically inscribed in the critical conditions of the world. The weird is an eco-ontological concept to combine the intimate with the public and the absurdity of their messy connection. Timothy Morton, who keeps coming back to fragments from the *Alice* in his philosophical *Dark Ecology*, redefines this sense of strange and weird in the ontologically and epistemologically deepest way as an unescapable loop: "We begin to learn from the no-way-out-ness of Alice, trying to leave the Looking Glass House and ending up back at the front door" (2016: 148). And for Laura it is a process of discovering the doubly structured loop, how her messy teen

reality is interfered with the gigantic messy chaos of a falling world, as in this fragment from her diary describing another unexpected power cut:

> I've just had a strange thing happen. I was on my way home from practice, walking down icy Blackheath High Street when everything just died all around me. All the street lamps, the shop lights. It's the first time I've been outside when it's happened. I was by an internet zone and the monitors went black. The strange thing is nobody reacted for ages. It felt like I'd dropped into a dream. The cut went all the way across South London. Before, it's only been in a few small neighbourhoods. The power's back on now, but I still feel kind of shaky, like something's changed underneath. (Lloyd 2008: 26)

This experience is dark, heavy and deep for a young girl who just wants everything to be normal, not political (45) but she feels, like Carroll's Alice, as if "dropped into a dream". The form of a diary reminds us that the experience is contextualized in her individual self and at the same time – it is part of her I-teen-becoming journey. Morton would say that Lloyd grasped here the sense of "essential weirdness", a different kind of logic that affects the basic experience of time and space scales, and where being contradicts appearing (Morton 2016: 5) but in fact it is also a gap between these two (65). Laura, as other female characters in literature, recognizes herself in this strange aesthetic loop of being inside (the catastrophe) and appearing on the outside of it (as an individual). Alone, she is vulnerable to these weird features of reality, as we all are, but as a teen who resiliently repositions herself in a group, she is also empowered in reorienting her knowledge as a collective-I inside her peers. "There's no escape" – say Laura's friends, "for good or for bad, we're all in this together" (24).

The great amount of humour and playfulness in the whole narrative enables us to diagnose risks in the "weird" adolescent environment and how a resilient response can be produced beyond the catastrophic mode of the falling apart world. The comic elements, for example, include the construction of Laura's parents' figures and how their "hippie" generation is a mess, but all in all it is served in a warmhearted way. Laura's mother is an unreliable but not a toxic person. She has huge troubles in coping with the new energy consumption restrictions because from now on she can't drive her car and "is always lost on a bus somewhere" (Lloyd 2008: 15). Still, she is a mother of a teen and behaves like this, as in this extract from the mother-daughter conversation, which usually turns into the mother's monologue:

> 'I know I should be strong, but I feel so responsible for my generation – we're the ones who've messed it all up for you.' […] 'Don't bite your nails, sweetie. I mean, what's going to become of you young things? Woodstock, freedom, women's rights, the Magic Bus… Don't forget, I'm your mother and I'm always here if you need to talk.'

> I kept quiet. I once worked out that if Mum had actually been to Woodstock, she'd be about 70 by now, but there's no point saying anything. (12)

In this sense, Laura's teen perspective becomes an empowering model of risk narrative, where what is real, imagined and distorted by the cracking metropolis of London and Laura's status as a weak, vulnerable to intensive emotions and to the general conditions of the global crisis agent become the resource to strengthen her position as an adolescent subject in the weirdest reality of the world. This sense of weird brings resilient fun and sense of realness which she can put into creative form of her diary and included there drawings, or, for example, use it as an additional idiom to describe a schools teacher: "GPJ definitely needs more sex. She marched up and down the classroom, introducing this new enviro-presentation like she was having a really good time" (94). The world in Laura Brown's diary is not terrified like her parents, she accepts the challenges of the cracking reality and adapts to them in her own teen way, or as Morton adequately puts it: "The world it discovers is nonsensical, yet perfectly logical, and that is funny" (2016: 110).

CONCLUSION

Through *The Carbon Diaries* Lloyd says that creating an attractive piece for teens means primarily resigning from teaching them, maybe on the contrary – eco-resilience means even learning from them. This constructivist approach is close to me since I think it is not our task now to prove the environmental or climate problems since they all affect us and our individual experience. The reality sucks and we are all teens in it so let's find ways how to adapt. Moreover, this turn to adolescence is happening in the critical and attentive humanities after environmental turn: „Don't grow up. Grow down" – Morton and Boyer quote Chris Robertson in their book *Hyposubjects. On becoming human* (2021), while in the opening chapter "Think small" the authors speak like teens who read and continue *The Carbon Diaries* narrative under the identity of adolescent "hypersubjects": "A lot of what is happening here frankly doesn't make very much sense" (13). Hypersubjects are typically but not exclusively white, male, northern, well-nourished, modern in all senses of the term. They wield reason and technology, whether cynically or sincerely, as instruments for getting things done. They command and control, they seek transcendence, they get very high on their own supply of dominion (14). Hyposubjects are the native species of the Anthropocene and only just now beginning to discover what they may be and become (14). They are necessarily feminist, antiracist, colourful, queer, ecological, transhuman and intrahuman (15). And of course, they know that reality make more nonsense than sense. This is the Laura Brown's effect to find

a transgenerational side of humanity which is related to the adolescence and can produce an eco-resilient response by all age groups.

And lastly, we need to update that the deepest backlash to our planetary problems start with the overstimulated young brains. They will bring more demand for smart, playful and well written and informed literature. It will be practice of analogical mind in contrast to digital overstimulation, reading as deep reflection and experience to rebond with reality and material world. Humour is an old YACH literature tool. Within this tradition Jerzy Cieślikowski's concept of "great play" (1967) resonates with the most influential philosophical diagnoses of our times as expressed in *The Carbon Diaries* as well. Morton in his *Dark Ecology* also provided me with some patterns of catalyzing ecological awareness beyond the anthropocentric catastrophic scenario, including the sheer, sincere playfulness of the modern weird culture.

Now, we can observe the shifts of framing children's and youth literature after the environmental turn: from didactic/pedagogic, through artistic to ecological, the concept of "resilience" adds another level to this debate. It operates like a synthetic, umbrella theory for deciphering and filtering the texts on the basis of all these criteria at once: future cultures of adaptation demand to communicate with youngsters through all these layers with respect to how the health of the human brain should be put in the centre of resilient development, for example through laughing. And we adults are part of this process as well; we are in this "weird thing" together since "we haven't got a clue what's going on […] 'S'too surreal, man'" (Lloyd 2008: 90).

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JANA MIKOTA
University of Siegen

The Motif of the Environmentalist in Children's and Youth Literature in Germany[1]

Abstract: At the latest since the *Fridays for Future* movement, the child or youth environmental activist has been the focus of social debates. This article examines the environmentalist in German-language children's and youth literature since the beginnings of ecological children's and youth literature in order to identify differences and similarities: Different narratives of the motif can be identified, especially in current children's and youth literature, and correspond with the development of children's and youth literature since the 1970s in West Germany.

Keywords: children's and youth literature, child or youth environmental activist

Greenpeace, *Fridays for Future*, *The Last Generation* or *Extinction Rebellion*: on the one hand, these movements stand for environmental and climate protection; on the other, they are characterized by different forms of protest. While some have been campaigning for nature, environmental and climate protection since 1971, others are still young movements. They choose different actions, but what they have in common is that the focus is on child or young activists who help shape the debates. They act as knowledgeable people, educate others about climate change, organize themselves and plan actions. They are internationally networked and consciously use social media. German-language children's and youth literature has also known environmentalists in various facets since the emergence of ecological children's and youth literature. Have activists always been children or young people in literary texts for children and young people? What do environmentalists look like in ecological children's and young adult literature since the 1970s? The focus is on West German children's and youth literature and excludes East German literature. However, ecological children's and young adult novels have also been published in the GDR since the

[1] The text also appears slightly modified in: Jana Mikota & Carmen Sippl: Ökologische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Grundlagen – Themen – Didaktik. Pädagogik für Niederösterreich Bd. 15. Studienverlag, [2024]

1970s, featuring various forms of activism and combining environmental protection with socio-political criticism (cf. Mikota). It would be worthwhile to compare the ecological children's and youth literature of Central and Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1989.

The article distinguishes between child and adolescent activists in texts for children and young people. While children's literature embeds climate, nature and environmental protection primarily in the everyday lives of the characters, mixes genres and often embeds the plot in a crime story, youth literature endeavours to take an international view. The more topical the texts are, the more radically the characters act. The authors do not offer simple solutions.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

Lindenpütz describes ecological children's and youth literature as texts that "deal with problems of the natural, social and built environment under the guiding idea of the ecological crisis"[2] (Lindenpütz, 2000: 728). Lindenpütz differentiates between (1) texts on ecological enlightenment, (2) texts on ethical foundations and (3) texts with a radically sceptical tenor (cf. Lindenpütz, 2000: 732). The texts are oriented towards the childhood concepts of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Since the 1990s and increasingly since the turn of the millennium, literary hybridisation processes, genre shifts and intermedial concepts have been added. The texts tell of sustainability and responsibility as well as the ecological discourse – destruction of rural areas, climate, and species protection. Similar to general ecological literature, ecological children's and youth literature also aims to raise readers' awareness of the environmental crisis. The literature studied here is political on the one hand but can also be read as a moral warning literature. In research on childhood and children's and young people's literature, an "opposition formation of the child as a symbol of the natural versus civilisation, culture, the adult world" (Oeste, 2016: 395; cf. also Ewers, 2013)[3] is increasingly being noted here. Since the 18th century and with the emergence of children's and youth literature specific to children in German-speaking countries, the natural world has been constructed as an ideal space for children to learn, play and experience. If the childhood concept of the Enlightenment in a sense connects children with the books of nature and its sciences, a romantic-idealistic philosophy of nature views children as beings who "do not belong to the present age at all, but to a distant past"[4] and

[2] German: „in denen es um Probleme der natürlichen, sozialen und gebauten Umwelt unter dem Leitgedanken der ökologischen Krise geht."

[3] German: „Oppositionsbildung von Kind als Sinnbild des Natürlichen versus Zivilisation, Kultur, Erwachsenenwelt."

[4] German: „gar nicht dem gegenwärtigen Zeitalter, sondern einer weit zurückliegenden Vergangenheit""

are capable neither of "enlightened thinking"[5] nor of "modern observation of nature"[6] (Ewers, 2013: 2). Both concepts continue to shape so-called, ecological children's and youth literature to this day. In particular, the image of the environmentalist oscillates between enlightenment and romanticism, and only slowly are the two concepts merging in current actors in children's and youth literature.

This article separates the areas of children's and youth literature, first outlining the environmentalist in children's literature, then in youth literature, in order to work out differences and similarities: Different narratives of the motif can be discerned, especially in current children's and youth literature, and correspond with the development of children's and youth literature since the 1970s in West Germany. But it shows, and this is also what this article would like to address, that not only environmentalists but also ecological discourse has changed.

BETWEEN INSTRUCTION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

In the 1980s, children's literature emerged in the German-speaking world that sought to educate the child environmentalist with titles such as *Das Findelkind von Watt* (1980), *Lasst den Uhu leben!* (1985), *Die sanften Riesen der Meere* (1990) or *Eine Biberburg im Auwald* (1986). Such enlightenment already takes place on the paratextual level: in prefaces or epilogues, dedications or mottos, active and also prominent environmentalists have their say in order to draw attention to the relevance of the texts and also to offer readers a way of reading the texts. For example, in *Lasst den Uhu leben!*:

> "My dear young friends,
> The eagle owl is one of the many animal species that have become increasingly rare over the years and were already extinct in some areas. Especially in our country, much evil has been done to this shy night owl. Superstition, ignorance and blind hunting have led to its extinction. But energetic conservationists have worked to reintroduce the eagle owl to our country. This book tells how they went about it, how much work and difficulties were involved.
> However, nature conservation is not only the task of a few idealists. We must all learn again that nature is a wonderful big family in which every creature and every plant has an irreplaceable place. And we must act accordingly." (Rauprich, 2009: 7)[7]

[5] German: „zu aufgeklärtem Denken" „enlightened thinking"
[6] German: „zu moderner Naturbeobachtung „
[7] German original: "Meine lieben jungen Freunde,
zu den vielen Tierarten, die im Laufe der Jahre immer seltener wurden und in manchen Gegenden schon ausgestorben waren, gehört der Uhu.
Vor allem bei uns hat man diesem scheuen Nachtgreif viel Böses angetan. Aberglaube, Unwissenheit und blindwütige Jägerei haben zu seiner Ausrottung geführt.

Other party texts are advertising references to environmental protection organizations such as NABU. Such promotional texts for organizations explicitly ask the reader to take an active part. Although the accompanying texts refer to such organizations, most of the actions in the novels presented here take place in a private or school setting. Epilogues, dedications or explanations of technical terms partly cancel out the fictional content of the texts and formulate the objectives – i.e. the environmental education concepts – of the texts. Or formulated differently: The child actors must first be enlightened; environmentalists are adult figures and children are seen as learners. The focus is on environmental protection and species conservation in the immediate vicinity, because the children encounter people who save eagle owls, whales, wild cats or seals.

THE (MALE) ADULT ACTIVIST PERFORM

In the examples up to the 1990s, male environmentalists are predominantly attributed attributes such as ratio, while female actors save animals and plants with emotion. Both female and male environmentalists belong to outsiders, do not live in the community but in caravans or houses outside the village or small town. The different levels of knowledge are particularly interesting, as traditional role patterns can be found here and female environmentalists build bonds with animals and plants, while male environmentalists know the facts. In the texts after 1970, the environmentalists usually come from outside and draw attention to a problem: they are academics, especially biologists, who thus appear as authorities by virtue of their profession (cf., for example, *Lasst den Uhu leben!*), but without everyone accepting their knowledge. They meet the childlike characters who want to get involved, and these are thus provided with adults as teachers. They already have ideas for actions and also know possible solutions that they would like to implement together with the children. It is only through such an adult character that the child is confronted with the topic and in the course of the plot recognizes the necessity of acting responsibly towards its environment. In this way, children's novels *Lasst den Uhu leben!* and *Die sanften Riesen der Meere* correspond very well with other texts such as *Eine Biberburg im Auwald* by Andreas Fischer-Nagel or *Das Findelkind von Watt*, which were written in the early phase of ecological children's literature. These

Doch tatkräftige Naturschützer haben sich dafür eingesetzt, dass der Uhu bei uns wieder heimisch wurde. Wie sie dabei vorgingen, wie viel Arbeit und Schwierigkeiten damit verbunden waren, erzählt dieses Buch.
Naturschutz ist jedoch nicht nur Aufgabe einiger weniger Idealisten. Wir alle müssen wieder lernen, dass die Natur eine wunderbare große Familie ist, in der jedes Geschöpf und jede Pflanze einen unersetzlichen Platz haben. Und wir müssen danach handeln. (Rauprich: 2009, 7)"

texts imply that the child protagonist still needs to be enlightened and also guided by an adult. Environmental issues are thus not part of the child's world.

In contrast, the female environmentalist will be presented. It can be exemplified by the children's novel *Der Krötenkrieg von Selkenau* (1987). The novel centres on a family of four who have moved from Frankfurt to the countryside. Ala and her mother enjoy nature and want to live in harmony with it. It is therefore not surprising that they befriend Mrs Julmann, an elderly environmentalist. She saves toads, roses grow (wildly) in her front garden and her house is different from the other houses because flowers bloom everywhere. Ala wants to support Mrs. Julmann and thus Mrs. Julmann is the active and knowledgeable person. We also encounter these (adult) role models after 2000, because in the crime series *Die grünen Piraten* (2015ff.) readers also encounter an environmentalist, namely the chemist Miranda Mühlberg, who stands by their side and corresponds to a traditional pattern of the environmental activist in literature. She does not live in the midst of society, but on a houseboat. In the small town she is considered "a bit odd"[8] (Poßberg/Böckmann: 2015, 17) and is known to everyone, but without having much contact with her environment. On the houseboat she lives largely self-sufficiently: the roof of the boat has solar panels, she has a greenhouse and her own irrigation system (cf. Poßberg/Böckmann: 2015, 43–55). Miranda takes the children's activities seriously, treating them as equal partners in conversation. With Miranda, readers encounter a female character who possesses rational knowledge as well as empathy, supports the children and organizes her own environmental actions. Unlike Ms Julmann, Miranda also has scientific knowledge, has studied chemistry and also works in this field.

However, the authors of early ecological children's literature offer child readers overly simple solutions and do not manage to develop the child environmentalist as an independently acting being. The literature sees itself explicitly as socialization literature. It aims to enlighten and instruct. Knowledge is imparted via the characters; the children are the learners. Environmental protection is not seen as a global problem. It is also problematic that the environmental activists are often dropouts, hippies or intellectuals and are therefore perceived as outsiders. People who have not been involved so far meet them with prejudice. Environmental protection is not seen as a common problem.

THE CHILD ACTIVIST APPEARS – RESTRAINED, QUIET, BUT COMMITTED

The transition to becoming an independent environmentalist is documented in the text *Conni rettet Tiere* (2011) by Julia Boehme, which is aimed at younger

[8] German: „etwas sonderbar"

readers. Conni is a popular series in Germany, makes references to current issues and provides readers with solutions.

Here, a primary school class watches a film about endangered animal species and afterwards it is clear to the girl Conni that something has to happen:

> "The most pressing question is the one that Conni also asks:
> "What can we do to prevent more animals from becoming extinct?"
> "First of all, be more careful with nature," explains Ms Reisig. "Don't run water unnecessarily, use paper and notebooks made from recycled paper, avoid plastic waste …"
> "We know that," exclaims Conni. "But we want to do something that really has to do with animals!" (Boehme: 2011, 7)[9]

The impulse to become active comes from an adult, namely the teacher, but Conni and her friends want to get involved and join the nature conservation association. The dialogue makes it clear that children are enlightened and want to get involved. Conni finally joins the nature conservation society to help animals. In the first action, she has to learn to save toads by carrying them across the street. It is less about building a loving relationship with the animals than about saving animals. And this is another way in which current ecological children's literature differs from earlier texts. It is important to note, however, that the book does not rescue cute animals, but rather uses toads to take in amphibians, and thus the rescue plan also comes with certain caveats:

> "Conni, Anna and Billi stare wide-eyed into a plastic bucket full to the brim. Inside, fat, disgusting, warty toads crawl over and under each other. It's a tangle of twitching green and brown bodies and legs." (Boehme: 2011, 20)[10]

Unfortunately, the girls are still dependent on the help of adults, because they are not allowed to cycle to the collection campaign alone in the morning. Their parents recognize the sense of environmental protection campaigns but are not prepared to make sacrifices – in this case, getting up early. Only Conni's grandfather helps, and the girls even manage to motivate other schoolmates to join in. The enemy is not specifically named, but it is the car drivers who endanger the toads' lives. But the volume not only describes the rescue of the toads, it

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[9] German: Die drängendste Frage ist die, die auch Conni stellt:
„Was können wir bloß machen, damit nicht noch mehr Tiere aussterben?"
„Zunächst einmal sorgsamer mit der Natur umgehen", erklärt Frau Reisig. „Nicht unnötig Wasser laufen lassen, Papier und Hefte aus Altpapier nutzen, Plastikmüll vermeiden …"
„Das wissen wir doch", ruft Conni. „Aber wir wollen etwas machen, das wirklich mit Tieren zu tun hat!" (Boehme 2011, 7)

[10] German: „Conni, Anna und Billi starren mit großen Augen in einen randvollen Plastikeimer. Darin krabbeln dicke, eklige, warzige Kröten über- und untereinander. Es ist ein Gewirr aus zuckenden grünen und braunen Leibern und Beinen." (Boehme: 2011, 20)

also reflects on the treatment of wild animals, which are no longer touched and domesticated almost as a matter of course – as in numerous texts of the 1980s and 1990s. Conni finds an injured jackdaw, takes it to the vet with her grandfather and has to keep it in a cage until it recovers. But the vet admonishes Conni to release the jackdaw after she recovers.

Species-appropriate animal husbandry is an important theme in children's literature after 2000, whereby the examples selected here – *Brennesselsommer* (2012) and *PeterSilie* (2016) – follow traditional patterns of environmentalism. In *Brennesselsommer* Annette Pehnt addresses animal protection and follows traditional narrative patterns by introducing Fränzi, an environmental activist who does not conform to common role patterns and lives apart from society. Similar to Ms Julmann in *Der Krötenkrieg von Selkenau*, Fränzi also lives outside society. She moved "a few months ago"[11] (Pehnt: 2012, 5) into the immediate neighbourhood of the two girls Anja and Flitzi, who live with their parents, both of whom work, in a detached house. Fränzi moves into the dilapidated neighbouring farm, which everyone in the village calls "the ruin"[12] or the "eyesore of Lauterbach"[13] (Pehnt: 2012, 7). She wants to set up a sanctuary there and already tells Anja and Flitz at their first meeting that she has partially rescued the dogs from a killing centre. The two girls are fascinated by Fränzi and her ideas, visit her, take care of the animals and learn about species-appropriate animal husbandry. The two girls spend a lot of time on the farm, freeing animals from restaurants and farms with Fränzi. In this way, Pehnt follows the narrative of taking on an adult animal rights activist who explains ecological aspects to the child characters and introduces them to the subject of environmental protection as well as animal welfare. Unlike in the enlightened texts of the eighties and nineties, however, Fränzi is not a studied biologist and does not give the two girls lengthy lectures explaining the situation, but simply lets them work on the farm. She explains some things to them, some things the girls slowly understand and realise what Fränzi is doing. The naïve gaze and love of animals of a girl of about nine slowly develops into an environmentalist.

Antje Damm also takes up the question of species-appropriate animal husbandry in her novel *PeterSilie*. Similar to *Brennesselsommer*, an adult again appears as the knower who enlightens the boy Nick. Environmental and animal protection is initially embodied by Paul, who is introduced not only as a neighbour with a green thumb, but also as someone who sees himself as an environmental activist, has lived in a shared apartment for a long time and has finally inherited his parents' house. His garden and also his home are antithetical to Nick's living environment. Nick's family itself has no "real garden, just

[11] German: „vor ein paar Monaten"
[12] German: „die Ruine"
[13] German: Schandfleck von Lauterbach"

a front garden, but nothing grows there except grass and the dogs always poop there"[14]. (Damm: 2016, 16). The novel plays with contrasts and thus follows a traditional narrative of ecological children's and youth literature. It uses the familiar images of the environmental activist but changes him in such a way that he no longer appears as the one who wants to lecture and enlighten Nick. Rather, both act as equals, Paul takes Nick seriously as a conversation partner, although he explains his plan to him late in the story. Paul's garden and house represent a counter-design to Nick's home and can also be seen as a place of retreat. At the same time, Damm uses the image of the environmental activist who appreciates books, loves nature and places little value on material things. With Eveline, Nick then meets a friend of Paul's who lives similarly to Paul. Her front garden is already adorned with a "red garden fence, behind which it blossoms in all colours."[15] (Damm: 2016, 73). Her house is also different from Nick's home:

> Eveline's house is like a museum. It is so crammed with junk that you could spend hours just looking and marvelling. The furniture doesn't really fit together. There are old wooden cupboards, brightly painted chairs, a rather wildly painted fiery red picture on which someone has applied paint as thick as a finger, a chandelier dangling in all its glory from the ceiling, and white shelves with countless things, including many fossils. (Damm: 2016, 75)[16]

When Paul talks to him about climate change and the way people treat nature, Nick doesn't know what he can do about it. As in other texts, the question of guilt is asked indirectly, but Nick rejects it. Paul and Nick rescue two geese, give them a home and realize:

> It's quite a miracle, these geese have never seen daylight, a meadow, let alone a pond in their lives, but they behave like normal geese in spite of everything […] (Damm S. 126)[17]

During this statement, Nick also reflects on the fact that only two geese could be saved. But he thinks about further solutions:

[14] German: „richtigen Garten, nur so einen Vorgarten, aber da wächst außer Gras nichts und die Hunde kacken immer hin."

[15] German: „roter Gartenzaun, hinter dem es in allen Farben blüht."

[16] German: Das Haus von Eveline gleicht einem Museum. Es ist so vollgestopft mit Krempel, dass man stundenlang nur gucken und staunen könnte. Die Möbel passen alle nicht wirklich nicht zueinander. Da gibt es alte Holzschränke, bunt angestrichene Stühle, ein ziemlich wild bemaltes feuerrotes Bild, auf das jemand die Farbe fingerdick aufgetragen hat, einen Kronleuchter, der in seiner ganzen Pracht funkelnd von der Decke baumelt, und weiße Regale mit unzähligen Dingen, unter anderem viele Versteinerungen.

[17] German: Das ist schon ein Wunder, diese Gänse haben in ihrem Leben noch nie das Tageslicht, keine Wiese, geschweige denn einen Teich gesehen, aber sie verhalten sich trotz allem wie ganz normale Gänse […]

Thus the text also deals with different possible solutions: when Paul and Nick visit Eveline, she explains that several organizations have already failed. Thus, nothing could be achieved by legal means.

Despite an acceptance of the subject matter, the children's novels presented here show that environmentalists still live outside society, present themselves differently, and the different attributions regarding male or female environmentalists are also only slowly resolved. While the child environmentalists have been acting independently since 2000, the adult environmentalist is still stereotyped – for example, with regard to housing, clothing. Girls and boys act together in groups, have equal rights, and in contrast to adult environmentalists, the child environmentalists are not drawn in a stereotypical way.

Overall, it can be observed that the image of the environmentalist has changed since the 1990s in that child protagonists are becoming more active. And indeed, since the 1990s, a change in the motif of the environmentalist in children's literature can be discerned, which corresponds with the changed narrative instances and the view of the child. With the focus on the first-person narrator in children's novels, the child environmentalist also comes into view and suddenly it is children who act independently and do not always have an adult with academic experience at their side. The adult helper fades into the background and at the same time much of children's literature shows that environmental protection has now become an everyday object in children's lives. The narrative perspective reinforces this, because it is consistently told from the children's point of view. Translations from English may have influenced the changes in the child environmentalist. by the American author Carl Hiaasen have documented these changes since the 1990s (cf. Mikota 2024).

Instruction by adult experts is no longer in the foreground; instead, the child protagonists do their own research and adults only help when asked (cf. for example the series *Die Amazonas-Detektive* by Antonia Michaelis).

However, the novel examples also show that the child environmentalists deal with the issue especially in the countryside and during holidays. Thus, the action is also experienced as an adventure; sustainable behaviour, on the other hand, is hardly addressed. Environmental protection is considered too briefly and is merely reduced to saving the endangered species in the novel.

THE YOUNG ACTIVIST – RADICAL AND LOUD

Similar to children's books, environmentalists in the youth literature of the 1970s and 1980s are actors who stand outside society, have a good, mostly academic, education and are outwardly different from the general population. In the texts, not only does the spectrum of the environmental movement become even clearer, but the differences to the bourgeois population are also

highlighted. In the novel *Aktion Löwenzahn* (1984) by Hanni Schaaf, for example, it is said:

> Then there was the fact that we were tremendously united in the foliage colony. That's no wonder, of course. The people who live along the route are only inconvenienced by the coming traffic. But we are threatened by it. […] And we also benefited from the fact that a large proportion, at least of the younger colonists, are better educated than average. They were or are all students. Just look at how many teachers live there. Then there are a few economists who know their way around the law quite well and find it easier to get in touch with the right people. (Schaaf: 1984, 83)[18]

The quote makes it clear: The environmental movement can be seen as a movement that is supported by intellectuals as well as adults. Young people have yet to be sensitised to the issues and introduced to them by adults.

An important theme in youth literature is the anti-nuclear movement, which is taken up in novels such as *Der Neue* (Engl. *Goggle-eyes*, 1989; dt. 1989) by Anne Fine, *Für schuldig befunden* (Engl. *The Guilty Party*,1986; dt. 1989) by Joan Lingard or the well-known texts *Die letzten Kinder von Schewenborn* (1983) and *Die Wolke* (1987) by Gudrun Pausewang, which have become classics. However, while in *Goggle-eyes* an adult opponent protest and takes her daughters to demonstrations, in the novel *The Guilty Party* it is young people themselves who point out the dangers posed by nuclear power plants, protest against the construction of such a plant and are ultimately punished with prison terms. At the centre is the girl Josie, who mobilises in her town against the construction of a nuclear power plant, distributes posters and leads a protest group. It is not adults who explain the dangers, but the young people who seek to talk. However, the novel does not only address the dangers of energy, but also sketches proponents and, above all, those people who profit from the construction. Similar to other youth literature texts, it is also about questions of jobs. Pausewang, as is well known, treads other paths and in her texts sketches a world that must exist after a nuclear catastrophe. She shows what could happen if one disregards the warnings that Lingard and Fine's texts clearly formulate.

Another thematic area is the link between jobs and the clearing of (rain) forests. In *The Blooding* (engl. 1987, dt. *Eingekreist. Cols Geschichte* 1991) by

[18] German: Dann kam noch hinzu, daß wir uns in der Laubenkolonie ungeheuer einig waren. Das ist natürlich kein Wunder. Die Leute, die an der Trasse wohnen, werden ja nur durch den kommenden Verkehr belästigt. Wir aber werden dadurch bedroht. […] Und außerdem kam uns zugute, daß ein großer Teil, zumindest der jüngeren Kolonisten, überdurchschnittlich gut gebildet ist. Sie waren oder sind durchweg Studenten. Schauen Sie sich mal an, wie viele Lehrer da wohnen. Dann ein paar Volkswirtschaftler, die sich ganz gut im Gestrüpp der Gesetze auskennen und leichter einen Draht zu den richtigen Stellen finden..

Nadia Wheatly, for example, the deforestation in Australia is criticised. It centers around 17-year-old Col, who grew up in poorer circumstances in a small Australian town. Most of the men work in the logging industry, which has been heavily criticised for several years. Col is aware of the problem, loves the forest, fears and sympathises at the same time with the environmental movement that has suddenly appeared and wants to prevent the loggers from working. He gets caught between the fronts. Here, too, worlds collide: while the loggers and their families tend to come from the lower classes and have little schooling, the environmentalists are educated, wealthy and come from the city. At the same time, the environmentalists are disparagingly called "ecos" (Wheatly: 1991, 25) and given certain clichés. Col sees them as people from the city as well as beneficiaries who use unemployment benefits to demonstrate rather than work. A coexistence of the two groupings seems impossible and both parties hardly care about a peaceful coexistence. In addition to the conflict between adults – young people, intellectuals – workers, the conflict between city dwellers and country people is also discussed. It becomes clear that the city dwellers have an idealized image of nature, while the workers use nature to earn money. In this way, the "ecos" threaten their source of income. Since the 1990s, novels for young people have also been appearing that seek to highlight the global nature of the ecological crisis and do not exclusively report on specific endangered species. The place of action is also changing: the environmentalists now act in different places and are often networked with each other. Nevertheless, here too the environmentalist is not designed as a figure that is accepted; even in the texts since the 1990s, the environmentalist still embodies an outsider:

> "We live the way the rest of humanity should in order not to completely ruin the earth," Leah said with a mixture of pride and defiance. "We hardly need any energy. We recycle everything, nothing is wasted. We do without things we don't care about anyway." (Brandis: 2011, 271f.)[19]

With such words, a group of environmental activists is introduced in the novel *Ruf der Tiefe* (2011), which already has dystopian features in parts. The group fights against the destruction of nature but lives far away from civilisation on a deserted island and acts there. The group tries to live with new energies and

[19] German: „Wir leben so, wie der Rest der Menschheit es eigentlich auch tun müsste, um die Erde nicht völlig zugrunde zu richten", sagte Leah mit einer Mischung aus Stolz und Trotz. „Energie brauchen wir kaum. Wir verwerten alles wieder, nichts wird verschwendet. Wir verzichten auf Dinge, die uns sowieso nicht wichtig sind."
„Zum Beispiel?"
„Shoppingcenter, Einkäufe, die Berge von Plastikmüll verursachen. Wagenladungen von elektronischen Geräten in unserem Alltag."
"Like what?"
"Shopping centres, purchases that create mountains of plastic waste. Carloads of electronic devices in our everyday lives."

argues against the throwaway and consumer society. The "freedom of things"[20] (Brandis: 2011, 274) is important to them: the land, the sea and the sky. Humans should precisely protect this trinity. In such statements, the Gaia hypothesis is taken up, which – to put it simply – considers the earth and the entire biosphere as one living being. In fact, the environmentalists in the novel are in the tradition of the hippie movement. Technological innovations only mean progress to a limited extent. Leon, the main character in the novel *Ruf der Tiefe*, also argues against this:

> Leon wasn't sure what to make of it. "Maybe other people would like to live like that too. But alas, there is no idyllic valley near them where food grows on the trees." He looked up at a coconut tree towering above him, ready to thunder a nut on his head at any moment.
> "We on Big Island are only a small colony – but there are more and more of us, even in the cities." […] "We prove every single day that humans don't just destroy and exploit. That's why we call ourselves NoComs. From No Compromise – we don't make lazy compromises." (Brandis: 2011, 272)[21]

Similar to other ecological texts, a group of environmentally conscious people appears here who have also decided to live outside society and thus almost outside civilisation.

The approach to environmental protection is designed in a more complex way in current youth literature, but without always offering the young readers concrete proposals for solutions. The novels *Am Rande der Gefahr* (2009) and *Schatten des Dschungels* (2012), for example, attack the deforestation of the rainforest. In both novels, it is young people who are active in conservation organisations, organise demonstrations, distribute leaflets and criticise the adult world. Although enlightenment of society determines their actions, the young people also take up the question of radical resistance.

The novel *Am Rande der Gefahr* focuses on 17-year-old Jan, whose mother is building a holiday resort in Indonesia. Jan is involved in an environmental protection campaign in Hamburg against the cutting down of the rainforest, so it is not surprising that he repeatedly discusses her work with his mother during his holidays in Indonesia. The construction of the holiday resort and the resulting deforestation of the rainforests are justified by the mother as

[20] German: "Freiheit der Dinge"

[21] German: Leon war nicht sicher, was er davon halten sollte. „Vielleicht würden andere Menschen auch gerne so leben. Aber es gibt leider kein idyllisches Tal in ihrer Nähe, in dem das Essen auf den Bäumen wächst." Er schaute hoch zu einer Kokospalme, die sich über ihm erhob und ihm jeden Moment eine Nuss auf den Kopf donnern konnte.
„Wir auf Big Island sind nur eine kleine Kolonie – aber es gibt immer mehr von uns, auch in den Städten." […] „Wir beweisen an jedem einzelnen Tag, dass Menschen nicht nur zerstören und ausbeuten. Deshalb nennen wir uns NoComs. Von No Compromise – wir gehen keine faulen Kompromisse ein."

progress. Tourism secures jobs for the local population. The environmentalists in the novel, however, argue that Western European corporations want to enrich themselves. But in fact, deforestation means progress in the eyes of many Indonesians. Environmental protection, on the other hand, is seen as something "white" as well as Western European, brought into the countries from outside. This is what the novel *Am Rande der Gefahr* says:

> Ajip reacted harshly to this question: "You Europeans come here and want to tell us something about environmental protection? There is no virgin forest left in the whole of Europe. More forest is protected in Indonesia than in the whole of Europe. Germany has long since destroyed its forests or turned them into commercial forests. Indonesia also wants to develop. For that, it must use its natural resources. Anything else is a new form of colonialism."
> "Eco-colonialism!" my mother added." (Chotjewitz: 2009, 86)[22]

Nature is therefore perceived differently here. One part of the people sees nature as the basis of production, the other as an almost spiritual space that must be protected. The novel provides only limited answers as to which view is right and which is wrong.

Brandis & Ziemek go one step further in their novel *Schatten des Dschungels*: the action is initially set in Munich in the year 2025. The focus is on the girl Cat, who is a passionate environmentalist and campaigns for the rainforest at numerous demonstrations. Similar to *Am Rande der Gefahr*, it is statements such as "The rainforest belongs to everyone!"[23] and "Stop the deforestation Stoppt die Abholzung"[24] (Brandis: 2012, 9) that draw attention to the problem. At a demonstration, she meets Falk, who also stands up for the rainforest. They finally travel to the rainforest with an environmental organisation called Living Earth. But already there Cat notices that the group is leading a double life and realises that Falk belongs to the radical environmentalists. Together with friends, he has developed a biological weapon and distributes pathogens in the loggers' camps in order to stop the clearing of the rainforest. The enemy is thus the logger, without Falk reflecting that he is 'only' doing his job and wants to feed his family. Cat reacts with concern to her friend's eco-terrorist actions and leaves the camp. Eco-terrorism is framed in the novel as an act designed to save nature.

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[22] German: Ajip reagierte barsch auf diese Frage: „Ihr Europäer kommt hierher und wollt uns etwas über Umweltschutz erzählen? In ganz Europa gibt es keinen Urwald mehr. In Indonesien steht mehr Wald unter Naturschutz als in ganz Europa. Deutschland hat seine Wälder längst zerstört oder zu Nutzwäldern gemacht. Indonesien will sich auch entwickeln. Dafür muss es seine natürlichen Ressourcen nutzen. Alles andere ist eine neue Form von Kolonialismus."
„Öko-Kolonialismus!", ergänzte meine Mutter."
"Eco-colonialism!" my mother added."

[23] German: „Der Regenwald gehört allen!"

[24] German: „Stoppt die Abholzung"

In their epilogue, Katja Brandis and Hans-Peter Ziemek, inform about their motives for presenting a novel on eco-terrorism to young people: "We wish for a future without eco-terrorists and only portray this way of thinking in our novel to make them think"[25], (Brandis: 2012, 403) they write and show what an ecological youth literature aims at: it wants to make young people think. The novel refrains from painting in black and white.

If we look at the image of the actors of the environmental movement from their appearance since the 1970s within youth literature, we can see that they have hardly changed. They resemble hippies and live in harmony with nature. They are largely well-educated people who have recognised the dangers and do not want to exploit or destroy nature. Nevertheless, the picture is also changing in that the environmental movement is global and people are not only acting from common neighbourhoods, but from different countries. In *Ruf der Tiefe*, the NoCom group consists of Swiss, Germans or Americans who are committed to a common idea.

The environmentalist as eco-terrorist, who still had a negative connotation in Shadows of the Jungle, is transformed into a positive figure, for example in Erler's novel *Brennendes Wasser* (2014) or in Brandis' current novel *White Zone. Letzte Chance*. Here, the Antarctic in the year 2030 is at the centre of the plot. Six young people, all of whom have criminal records, are to spend three months in a disused research station learning social skills. They are looked after by two social educators, have only limited access to the internet and have to come to terms with their previous lives. However, they are dazzled by the beauty of the country and decide to become active. They spontaneously kidnap a Japanese manager who wants to dissolve the whaling law. Much more important, however, than the deed of the young environmentalists is the epilogue in the book. Here, on the one hand, we are told what has become of the young people, but on the other hand, we are also told that the whaling laws have been restricted. Inevitably, one wonders if it is connected to the act of the environmentalists.

Erler's novel Burning Water introduces Gary Warshinski, who storms the headquarters of National Gas & Oil with a gun and forces managers to drink water taken from the area where fracking is happening. Gary's father died of a heart attack, and he blames the company and fracking. The managers refuse to drink the water but are forced by force and then go to hospital for treatment. Gary argues that an expert report has proven that it is safe. It is precisely this clause that enables his lawyer to keep Gary out of prison. Although he threatens people, the readers only learn later that the gun was without ammunition, from the beginning sympathy is on his side and sympathy for the managers is non-existent. This is also due to the descriptions of the characters. Gary is introduced

[25] German: „Wir wünschen uns eine Zukunft ohne Ökoterroristen und schildern diese Denkweise in unserem Roman nur, um zum Nachdenken anzuregen „

as a "typical farm boy" in "jeans, T-shirt and trainers"[26] (Erler: 2014, 30) while the managers are red-faced, fat and "wear expensive suits and watches and sweat like crazy [despite] the air conditioning"[27] (Erler: 2014, 33). Erler works with opposites, creating the capitalist adversary of the committed boy who has not only lost his father but is also facing farm ruin. He gets support from environmental groups as well as a lawyer who specializes in environmental law.

If we look at the examples from youth literature, it is noticeable that active resistance has been a topic since the 1990s and that young characters are networking. Questions about illegal action are discussed and sometimes acted out. In novels like *Der Geschmack des Lebens* (2021), author Claudia Praxmayer has her heroine move to the countryside. In the home of her deceased godmother, she discovers a resistance movement that opposes genetically modified seeds and saves old varieties.

By means of the narrative instances, which are close to the young actors, an understanding for the actions is also awakened. Criticism comes only from adult characters, but the young people also experience sympathy despite the illegal patterns of action.

CONCLUSION

It is striking that at least in the ecological novels for children and young people studied here, the image of the environmentalist has changed, and environmental protection is becoming firmly integrated into the everyday world of children. Children and young people become active characters who have the knowledge and want to get involved. In this way, they also become role models for their readers. However, while current children's literature continues to place environmental protection on the doorstep and introduce action spaces to child readers, issues of globalization are being taken up in youth literature. In translations from English, the consequences of climate change are also increasingly becoming the focus of novels, which also tell of the threat to the Arctic, among other things, and what consequences climate change has there for people and animals.

The view of female environmentalists has also changed, because they also appear as natural scientists, possessing knowledge and empathy toward nature. It is this combination of knowledge and empathy that is particularly emphasized in current novels. What has remained, however, is that environmentalists are shown with certain clichés and also that at least the adult environmentalists nevertheless occupy an outsider position in the social fabric.

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[26] German: typischer Farmerjunge" in „Jeans, T-Shirt und Turnschuhen typical farm boy" in „jeans, T-shirt and trainers"

[27] German: „teure Anzüge und Uhren [tragen] und [trotz] der Klimaanlage wie verrückt"

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BEATA MYTYCH-FORAJTER ORCID: 0000-0002-0588-2087
University of Silesia in Katowice

To Calm Your Head: Environment- and Young Reader-Friendly Picture Books and Illustrated Books

Abstract: The article *To Calm Your Head. Environment- and Young Reader-Friendly Picture Books and Illustrated Books* is a proposal for a comparative reading of four works dedicated to children. On their example, it became possible to combine two models of writing about the environmental crisis. The first of them, activist, invites children to various forms of climate action, while the second emphasizes the need for reflection, shows minimalism in the use of resources and includes man on the list of endangered species, thus allowing them to abandon the building of ecological guilt the readers.

Keywords: ecological activism, climate anxiety, picture book

> […] parents seem to think that if they make their child be more active, he/she will learn more and develop faster. The intensity of the unconscious drive upwards, towards the head, the ego and the dominance, is alarming. Remaining "at the bottom", calming-down, giving oneself a time for experiencing and thinking is a lifestyle which is in decline. (Lowen 2012: 225)

We live under the shadow of the narration about the decline of the world we know. Everywhere we can hear prognoses, warnings, and doomsday scenarios for next decades, repeated like a mantra. Whether we want it or not, we invite children and adolescents to the stories lined with fear. Their representative is the Swedish 15-year-old environmental activist (today already an adult) Greta Thunberg. Since 2019, young people inspired by her protest have been organizing Youth Strikes for Climate, growing in popularity year after year, which proves that even the youngest participants of social life feel obliged to affirm their commitment to the issue of climate and the destiny of the world. However, before they get old enough to be able to participate in this form of activism, they will get access to numerous ecologically oriented publications,

illustrated books, and picture books, in particular. And the number of these publications is growing from year to year. That is why it is worth discuss how the ecological education project presented there is realized, which linguistic, visual, and material expressions are used and how they affect young readers, and their feelings and thoughts.

However, before I try to do so, I would like to reflect on Stanisław Łubieński's text, *Nerwica ekologiczna* [Ecological neurosis], published in his *Książka o śmieciach* [A book about garbage] (Warsaw 2020). The paper deals with the sense of guilt, characteristic of our times, that everyday – by taking a shower, buying, eating, travelling, and being – we contribute to the destruction of our world. Łubieński tells us about his ways of coping with a painful psychological burden, at the same time describing his daily routine, consumer habits, anxiety, and insomnia motivated in various ways. At the end of the text, he writes:

> It is dark, but not black, the light from the neighbor's TV set is getting through the window. All the obsessive thoughts slowly become silent, and I can only hear how the refrigerator is humming, and the diode of the bicycle lamp charger is blinking by the bed. The computer in sleep mode is twinkling under the bed. In the radiators, water is trickling, heated by the coal-fired power station. It is hard to sleep under the shadow of the disaster. Everyday new tests, prospects get more and more bleak. Everyday there is a clash between how it really is and how it always seemed to us. It is hard to keep up with the changes, sometimes one would like to cover one's ears, eyes, and mouth. Everyday I fall asleep, thinking that perhaps tomorrow something will happen which will make me have less reasons for frustration. I hope that, together with me, the world will wake up. (Łubieński 2020: 261–262) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

Obsessive talking about ecological issues gives rise to a compulsive need to change the reality and act, but also a sense of helplessness and grief felt at the world which is passing away, today called simply the climate mourning (see Mytych 2022: 153–180). Children's literature which, following the main trends, also frequently deals with ecological issues tells the non-adult audience about the changing world and the humans' obligations to it. Certainly, the narration may go in different ways, we may admonish and threaten young people, as well as encourage them to act. From the children's books shelf, I would like to take four publications, two picture books and two illustrated books; in each of them pictures are very important, they are closely related to the text, and in three cases these are large-format pictures. My choice resulted from the desire to explore different narrative strategies in books for younger (preschool) children. Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska (2023) and Helena Garczyńska (2023) wrote about the relationship between Norwegian and Swedish picture books with environmental issues. I will start with a book from the series about Basia by Zofia Stanecka and Marianna Oklejak. In the volume *Basia i śmieci* [Basia

and garbage], the main character, like Łubieński, is tormented by a feeling of guilt. The story begins with a situation description by the narrator:

> Basia left the kindergarten, deep in thought. She did not pay attention to Franek, who accosted her. She did not speak to her Mother. She was walking through the park silently, staring bleakly at the sidewalk. (Stanecka, Oklejak 2019: 2) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

What follows is Basia's dialogue with her mom who, concerned by the daughter's behavior, helps her understand it – the girl feels overwhelmed with responsibility for the world littered with plastic packaging. The daughter's hand is accusingly directed at her mother, who is carrying onions and potatoes in a plastic bag. The question, "do you want to kill a whale?" (trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska), helps the mother and the daughter to find compromise and remedial solutions. It turns out that the plastic bag may be washed and used many times; in addition, with her mother's assistance, the girl may sew a bag out of pieces of cloth and use it doing shopping. However, the bag problem in the story for kindergarten children constitutes only the tip of the iceberg. Soon Basia gets terrified by a prospect of the world without jellies packed in plastic and without plastic straws[1]. Once again, her dependable mother finds a solution to the problem, explaining:

> Jellies – we may make ourselves […]. – Or buy them by the weight and pack them in our own jar. And it is really better not to use plastic straws at all. Luckily, there are also reusable straws made of steel or those made of materials which quickly decompose. (Stanecka, Oklejak 2019: 7) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

Concerns for the condition of the world are voiced when Basia, going through the park or being in her own room, sees garbage scattered everywhere: foil, wrappers, disposable packaging. However, this time, too, a solution is found for the sense of helplessness, despair and weeping – a change of habits. Compulsive consumption should be replaced with more thoughtful behaviors, such as using a reusable fabric shopping bags, garbage sorting, and reasonable decision-making what to use and what to throw away. In the end of the story, there is a scene of sewing colorful fabric bags, the girl's dad provides a definition of ecology[2], collected waste paper is exchanged for an oak seedling which is

[1] "Does it mean that I will never be able to eat jellies and drink through a straw?! – terrified Basia wispered. Suddenly, the world seemed to her a completely different place than it used to be". (Stanecka, Oklejak 2019: 7) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

[2] "– Ecology is a study of how nature functions and how we influence each other. We [influence] other creatures, but also the Earth, air and water. [And it is a study] of how they influence us – Dad explained. When something is ecological, it means that it has been made out of concern for the good of the world and nature". (Stanecka, Oklejak 2019: 16) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

named Basia in spite of her elder brother's protests. The book has been sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature**,** Greenpeace, and the website ekorodzice.pl, which classifies it as literature engaged in nature conservation. It certainly supports pro-ecological attitudes among children, suggests how to turn despair into agency and what the youngest recipients of the narrative about the climate crisis can do. It is particularly important that Basia does not solve the world problems on her own, she is emotionally supported and gets practical ideas from her parents. The situation when the child's abilities and sensitivity clash with great challenges related to the climate crisis people face in the 21st century is realistically presented, without becoming too optimistic or falling into pessimistic defeatism.

The main character of the book by Joanna Krzyżanek *Maniutka ratuje świat* [Maniutka saves the world] is older than Basia. This time, the narrative strategy is completely different. The world is described neither by a third-person singular narrator nor by the book characters engaged in a conversation in which one of them has ecological dilemmas, like in *Basia i śmieci*, but here, it is made by the first person narrator, a dynamic and self-conscious girl, who is used to look for those who are guilty of misfortunes in her life, both great and small. When her garbage bag breaks, it turns out that a student is guilty. When she falls off her scooter, the fault lies with her neighbor, Mr. Gęborek. When her glass ball drops down the drain, her friend Tymek is found guilty, and her mom – when the girl's teeth becomes glued with a jawbreaker (sic!). The character learns of the climate disaster from TV, passionately watched by her neighbor, Ms. Koralewska. Listening to the words coming from the TV set, one may understand why Maniutka tends to say: "it is your fault". The eco-journalist, Framuga, speechifying on TV, appeals to the viewers in the following way:

> – The climate disaster is getting closer […]. It is just around the corner. All this is, among others, because of trash which is literally everywhere. It is a tree made of plastic bags. There are more bags than leaves. It is a bottle hill, but it is not called like that because of its shape. A straw labyrinth, in fact straw traps. A plastic wave, with plastic jellyfishes. And everything is your fault! Yes, your fault. (Krzyżanek 2021: 14) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

A careful reader can notice that the logic of the narrator who looks for the guilty among the innocent is used on TV, it is the strategy of shifting responsibility to individual consumers instead of implementing systemic changes[3]. However, the girl, like Basia in the previous book, feels the need to "save the world" and act ecologically in her own backyard. And in fact, she is quite successful, first, thanks to a library survey ("I have spent all the afternoon among books and papers"; Krzyżanek 2021: 26), second, as a result of the

[3] This theme requires a more detailed presentation, especially in the context of literature for children who are to solve the problems created by adults and previous generations.

information campaign among neighbors and friends. Thanks to Maniutka, Mr. Gęborek could buy a new TV set with the money he saved when he gave up buying plastic bags and began using a linen shopping bag. Her friend Tymek stopped using plastic straws and decided to construct a rain-draft instead of a straw-draft. The student Julia bought a reusable bottle and she successfully campaigned for an obligatory ecology course for all the students. Maniutka also introduced new rules at home, as she convinced her mom, an afficionado of plastic wrap, to change her habits, and succeeded in giving up small plastic toys. Everything has a positive ending: the girl hopes that the neighbor cooperation may help avoid climate disaster. In this way, the book reinforces the young readers' sense of agency and shows the power of local initiatives. However, as in the case of the narrative about Basia and her garbage problem, the effect of the book mainly depends on rhetorical argumentation and the presentation of possible paths.

A completely different effect on the readers have the two picture books: *Cztery zwykłe miski* [Four ordinary bowls] by Iwona Chmielewska and *Eko Song* [Eco song] by Justyna Zielińska. If asked what *Cztery zwykłe miski* are about, one may say that a little about everything; the rhythm that appears here is not accidental, as everything in the book is rhymed in some way, that is things are related and one results from the other. It is a book about modest housekeeping, managing what we have at our disposal; the bowls become a metaphor of change which is sponsored by imagination, the main 'character' in Chmielewska's works. Joanna Olech comments on the book in the following way:

> The author encourages the reader to find the application for four paper disks. They may be turned into a moon, an alarm clock, an umbrella… They may be used to make a tank or a baseball cap. Iwona suggests solutions and encourages the reader to create new compositions and interpret simple geometrical figures in different ways. (Olech 2013) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

These important comments may be complemented by a few words concerning ecological topics, which are not immediately visible. The book does not directly encourage the reader to sort garbage or reduce consumption, but it employs the tactic of playing with shapes – the readers may participate in a simple play concerning different uses of half-circles, which are either an umbrella or spectacles, or windmill blades, which is to make them ponder the mechanics of the world in which we live. At the end of the narrative, Chmielewska introduces texts dealing with more serious issues and the matching pictures. First, the motif of war appears – babies' bonnets are replaced with soldier helmets; next, the motif of emotional life is employed, expressed by a smiling face as well as its opposite – a sad face; all this is represented by means of the shape of four ordinary bowls. Finally, the motif of social injustice appears – the awareness

that some people possess too much, while others have too little. The ending is surprising as it is double. The narrator speaks first, commenting on injustice characteristic of human life.

> And although the book and the four ordinary bowls cannot change anything, one may think about it. (Chmielewska 2013) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

This reminds me of Basia and Maniutka, who immediately started to repair the world. Chmielewska shows another path, at first less convincing, as, one may say, mere thinking about human poverty cannot change anything (?). The second ending, which appears two pages later, shows that thinking is followed by acting, which gives us food for thought. The book *Cztery zwykłe miski* is ended with the note:

> To create the book, we have used waste paper and old books withdrawn from the library. No one wanted them anymore, now they can live a new life. (Chmielewska 2013) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

Similar notes may be found in other books by Chmielewska. At the end of the book *O tych, którzy się rozwijali* [On those who prospered], the information is provided about old threads bought in a secondhand shop[4], while the book *Gdzie jest moja córka* [Where is my daughter] is concluded with the commentary on cloth collected and bought for years in similar shops[5]. In this way, Chmielewska indirectly shows how to use discarded cloth and things. Literary texts on upcycling do not directly campaign for changing attitudes, but try to attract the readers, showing what creating consists in, how one may create a new world out of simple elements, how to play literature and art, and how such playing changes our attitude to the limited resources we have at our disposal. In an interview conducted by Katarzyna Kubisiowska for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Chmielewska said:

> I do not know how to organize charity, I am not a volunteer, I save no one – I can share my composure with others. (*Kłębek* 2020) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

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[4] "The old threads found in a secondhand shop were no longer needed and no one expected they would ever be unwound". I. Chmielewska, *O tych, którzy się rozwijali,* Wrocław 2013, bs. trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

[5] "White, translucent organza and all the pieces of cloth which have been used to sew the book were collected for years. They have come from secondhand shops. Organza was hanging somewhere, used as a curtain. Fragments of men's underpants, pillowcases, curtains, kerchiews, pajamas, large skirts and girls' dresses which were used by someone (we do not know who) somewhere (we do not know where) have been sewn together to form a book." I. Chmielewska, *Gdzie jest moja córka?* Wrocław 2020, bs. trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

Calmness characteristic of Chmielewska's books seems to me the most ecological message to the child of today – the times of excess, great number of stimuli and gadgets, precipitation and permanent noise[6]. The culture of constant stimulation, in which children participate, is put in the brackets in the book. It is expressed in the graphic layout of the described book. Shades of dim beige and warm yellow dominate; the author does not need to attack the readers with a glossy cover and harsh colors. We are in toned-down, hushed up, and thought-provoking aesthetics. One can immediately ask if the today overstimulated children would like it. Paradoxically yes: they are often tired of excess and confused by exaggeration. Carl Honoré wrote about this in his book *Pochwała powolności. Jak zwonić tempo i cieszyć się życiem* [In Praise of Slow] (2004: 259–284). Here, they have an opportunity to rest. And careful 'reading' of the pages of the book will compensate for the apparent lack of colors.

The last publication I would like to discuss is the small book (in comparison to the previously discussed ones) *Eko Song*, published by the niche publisher house Dzika Małpa. It has been written by Justyna Zielińska, an artist from Katowice creating picture books for children. The publication has a square format (14 cm X 14 cm), while all the books discussed above are more or less in the A4 format. It has been published in Polish and English versions. It is a thread-stitched book with a soft cover, printed on recycled paper, whose beige-grey color beautifully emphasizes colorful elements which constitute an integral part of the book message. *Eko Song* is an example of a poetic book which at the textual level is based on parallelism and the repetition of one sentence within which the subject is changed. The author enumerates the sentences:

Elephants can become extinct.
Whales can become extinct.
Gorillas can become extinct.
Walruses can become extinct.
Turtles can become extinct.
Butterflies can become extinct.
Tigers can become extinct.
Rhinos can become extinct.
Bears can become extinct.
Penguins can become extinct.
Animals can become extinct.
Protect them.

[6] Making the child and childhood part of the capitalist machine producing new consumers seems to be an important topic. Tomasz Olchanowski writes about it: "The consumer-citizen seems to be perfect, all the time cheerful, excited, with controlled hipomania interrupted by cyclic, slight phases of lowered mood, necessary to consume what makes the mood elevated: legal stimulants, products of farmaceutical industry and companies selling impressions and experience". T. Olchanowski, *Kultura manii*, Warszawa 2016, p. 22. trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

Forests can become extinct.
Protect them.
People can become extinct.
Protect them.
trans. by M. Skórka. (Stefańczyk 2017)

The mantra-like repetitions together with an appeal for different species conservation, including humans, are combined with an interesting artistic convention. Every two pages of the book constitute a background for an image of an endangered species, a small figure of a boy or a girl and a text fragment resembling handwriting. Toned-down colors, beautiful representations of animals in the gouache technique and the simplicity of the book as an artistic object contribute to the message coherence. Children get a work of art which appeals to them to protect the environment, encouraging them to act; in addition, it has been designed as an environmentally friendly production. According to Bettina Kummerling-Meibauer:

> A significant number of picture books attracts the reader to its material aspects by the acceptance of the production process and the physical character of the book. It is surprising that this tendency already appears in publications for babies and small children, usually printed on cardboard, sometimes on wood, plastic, cloth or other materials which are difficult to destroy but easy to wash. (Kummerling-Meibauer 2017: 83–84) trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

In the case of the book *Eko Song*, attracting attention to the materiality of the work of art is related to the coherence of the ecological message and the ecological production of the book Magdalena Howorus-Czajka wrote about this topic (2022: s. 453–463). A book with a glossy plastic cover and chalky paper, produced with a lot of water and various harmful chemicals, speaks to us differently from a book produced with waste paper, thread and a little paint. Certainly, the latter speaks to us more quietly, more modestly, less aggressively. In addition, one begins to think that in fact every object, a work of art as well, involves putting in circulation another object, which may become an environmental ballast. However, in the case of the discussed publication, ecological issues have been treated especially seriously, which was appreciated by the international jury of the COW International Design Festival in 2018. The idea of including humans into the list of endangered species is especially worth mentioning. The phrase: "People may become extinct. Let's protect them" (trans. by E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska), concluding the publication, seems to be slightly subversive. Both in the book *Basia i śmieci* and in *Maniutka ratuje świat,* humans have been presented as guilty of the approaching disaster, which made the two main characters feel the need to do something for the planet. If we become aware that humans are one of the species that may die, and they should be protected like tigers or elephants, we will start thinking ecologically, leaving

aside an unproductive schema related to answering the question, whose fault it is. The adjective *ecological* in this context would also mean satisfying the human needs of safety, relation, belonging, comfort and protection against civilization noise. We live in the XXL world as far as the number of stimuli is concerned, which we have to cope with from our birth. Tomasz Olchanowski in the book *Kultura manii* [Mania culture], analyzing the causes of psychocultural determinants of mental diseases in increasingly young children, has observed great hunger for new stimuli, characteristic of our cultural circle, which cannot be satisfied. Overweening ambitions, parents' excessive expectations, stories of future life success – all of them create a non-ecological environment for the development of another generation of depressive and obsessive consumers. We can try to stop this vicious circle by means of literature whose aim is not to encourage people in the first place to act in the first place but to reflect and connect across-generations, which may generate such an activity. The key issue seems to be the coherence of the message and means of expression. It is hard to believe in an ecological message of a book published non-ecologically, making children to be accustomed to a high level of color noise, visual effects, or even to aggressive rhetoric which leaves them frightened, with a sense of responsibility which they will not be able to cope with.

Fortunately, the activist mode represented by *Basia i śmieci* and *Maniutka ratuje świat*, and the contemplative-poetic mode, less popular, represented by *Cztery zwykłe miski* and *Eko Song*, complement each other. That is why we can find four books on the shelf, each of which responds to different children's needs. *Basia i śmieci* shows the ability of the family to work out children's anxiety concerning the end of the world we are familiar with and change their habits. The book *Maniutka ratuje świat* stresses the child's agency and the power of the local community, which can work on changing different habits. *Cztery zwykłe miski* offers an invitation to play and create the world out of simple elements, and use the power of imagination, social sensitivity, and the ability to modestly use the existing resources. The last of the books that have been discussed, *Eko Song*, shows a possibility to perform ecology without complaining about people and in accordance with economical management of plastic and material resources. The books also differ in number of colors, amount of plastic used to produce them and noise made by the narrator. It is worth putting them on the shelf together to compare the amount of information, anxiety, the sense of guilt, hope, and trust in the future, which we want to present to young readers.

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KAISU RÄTTYÄ ORCID: 0000-0002-2454-1472
Tampere University

Climate Anxiety and Hyperobjects in Two Picturebooks on Climate Activism

Abstract: This article explores the ways in which climate change is presented in texts and pictures as a hyperobject and what kind of climate anxiety is connected to characters in picturebooks. The analysis focuses on two picturebooks, *Greta and the Giants*, by Zoë Tucker and Zoe Persico (2019), and *Our House is on Fire*, by Jeanette Winter (2019). Both books present young climate activists solving problems that threaten the environment. Ecocritical content analysis (EcCA) was used to identify anxiety-related emotions in picturebooks connected to climate change issues and show how these emotions can be expressed in texts and pictures. The analysis was performed by applying the typology of ecological settings in texts and pictures and the taxonomy of characters' climate anxiety. The nonlocality, interobjectivity, plurality, and viscosity of the hyperobject exist in both books, allowing young readers to encounter it. Moreover, global warming causes sadness- and threat-related emotions in both books; Winter's picturebook even depicts strong depression-related emotions.

Keywords: climate anxiety, hyperobject, picturebook, affective ecocriticism, ecocritical content analysis

When we discuss climate change or the climate crisis, we encounter an enormous, multilayered problem that is intangible. As several researchers in the field of eco-criticism and ecological education have pointed out, climate change refers to a construct that is difficult to fully understand. Thus, it can be described as a hyperobject (Morton, 2013a, 130–135; 2013b; Oziewicz & Saguisag, 2021, p. vii). The term 'hyperobject' refers to entities that are intangible and indefinable in place, time, and causality. Hyperobjects have been described as viscous, nonlocal, interobjective (i.e., pluralities of different objects); temporally undulating (i.e., smoothly appearing); and phasing phenomena, one of which is global warming. In Timothy Morton's (2010; 2013a; 2013b) writings, hyperobjects are frequently connected to thoughts of anxiety, fear, crisis, and the end of the world.

Almost 60 % of children and young people are very or extremely worried about climate change, and 84 % are at least moderately worried, as a survey that included 10,000 children and young people (aged 16–25 years) around the world testifies (Hickman et al., 2021). Research concerning eco-grief, eco-anxiety, and climate-anxiety has investigated the feelings attached to global warming and climate change (e.g., Pihkala, 2020; 2022). Simultaneously, the ecological crisis, climate change, and eco-grief have emerged as trending themes in children's literature (Oziewicz & Saguisag, 2021; Duckworth, 2022). A part of this literature has explored the theme of eco-crisis and eco-anxiety through climate change activism[1].

The perspective of climate change and climate activism as a kind of answer to such anxiety has emerged and become an issue even in recent children's literature research, such as Clare Echterling's (2016) and Geraldine Massey and Clare Bradford's (2011) articles on environmental activism or Rachel Conrad's (2021) article 'Youth climate activists trading on time', which analyzed the rhetorical strategies utilized by climate activists. Several analyses (e.g., Axelsson & Källström, 2023; Conrad, 2021; Moriarty, 2021; Olsen, 2023) have been written on literature focussing on one young Nordic climate activist who has been the inspiration for several children's book authors and illustrators, namely Greta Thunberg.

In a previous article, we focused on children's books on climate change that were published in Finland. Using discourse analysis, we studied picturebooks[2] published from 2019 to 2020 (Rättyä, Hakala, & Matilainen, 2023) and found the discourse of anxiety-evoking climate change activism, among other discourses. The studied books included two picturebooks that were inspired by Greta Thunberg's actions, as indicated by their titles: *Greta and the Giants: Inspired by Greta Thunberg's stand to save the world*, by Zoë Tucker and Zoe Persico (2020), and *Our House is on Fire: Greta Thunberg's call to save the planet*, by Jeanette Winter (2019). In this article, I want to review how the climate crisis and anxiety into relation to concept of the hyperobject were constructed in these two picturebooks. For a deeper analysis, I read them while focussing on the types of anxiety, as well as the characterisations of climate crises. I was inspired in this work by Brianna Andersson's (2021) article 'Reimagining plastic pollution and climate activism'. In it, activism and Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP) were studied using the hyperobejct as an operative analysis tool.

In this article, my analysis concentrates on picturebooks and the relationship between texts and pictures representing climate activism, anxiety, and the hyperobject in picturebooks that illustrate young protagonists' actions in the face of the climate crisis. The books *Greta and the Giants* and *Our House is*

[1] Children's literature researchers had already written about environmental activism in the 1990s, for example, Carolyn Sigler's (1994) article 'Wonderland to wasteland: Toward historicizing environmental activism in children's literature'.

[2] Following William Moebius (1986) and Serafini and Reid (2022), I use 'picturebook' instead of 'picture book'.

on Fire are aimed at slightly different age groups. The illustrations vary from being in the mode of a fairytale to Winter's more realistic style. This article begins by presenting affective eco-criticism as its theoretical framework, as well as concepts – climate anxiety and the hyperobject – that can orient us towards understanding the climate crisis. Next, I offer a model of analysis for the close reading of the picturebooks. Finally, a discussion of the results ends the article.

ASPECTS OF HYPEROBJECTS AND CLIMATE ANXIETY

The affective eco-criticism that frames this research is grounded in eco-criticism and affect theories (Bladow & Ladino, 2018; Gaard, 2020). The purpose of affective ecocriticism is, as Bladow and Ladino (2018) explain, 'to identify the emotions that circulate around environmental issues today, to clarify how that circulation works, to acknowledge the powerful role environments themselves play in shaping affective experience, and to identify new affects emerging in our contemporary moment' (p. 3). To explore the affective experiences and environmental issues depicted in the chosen texts, the main concepts chosen for use in this study were the hyperobject and climate anxiety. In the current study, I left out a discussion of the different backgrounds of affective eco-criticism and the differences between the concepts of affect and emotion (see, e.g., Gaard, 2020, pp. 225–227; Weik von Mossner, 2020). The evaluation of the development of ecocriticism in children's literature research (see, e.g., Massey & Bradford, 2011) was not in focus in this study.

Children's literature research has seldom discussed the question of the hyperobject in the context of climate fiction. Only one peer-reviewed article focussing on the hyperobject and children's literature was found in ProQuest in February 2024. In addition to this, there is an introduction to a special issue on children's literature and climate change in *Lion & Unicorn*. Brianna Anderson's (2021) article connects the concept of the hyperobject with plastic pollution and the GPGP and explores the spatial vastness and non-locality of the patch in a picturebook by Rachel Hope Allison. Morton's concept is mainly understood through depiction of the GPGP as a growing, complex, and non-tangible object (Anderson, 2021). When Morton discusses the hyperobject in his philosophical monograph, the text style is discursive and subjective; the author's own experiences and feelings are highly present. The illusion represented by the quality of viscosity is presented using pictures of phenomena that linger in the social space and daily life, as well as the idea that there is no possibility of escaping them, for example, radioactive materials or global warming (Morton, 2013a, pp. 27–36). The elements of the hyperobject are connected to scale. The objects are massively spread out in space and time. They linger over oceans, like the GPGP, and over generations, like climate change; simultaneously, they are non-local and interminable. They are 'shared by numerous

entities' (Morton, 2013a, 40). These hyper-scale quantities are why hyperobjects are experienced as frightening (Morton, 2010, pp. 130–131).

Reviews of the prior research on eco-anxiety and climate anxiety have compiled lists and key characteristics of climate emotions based on emotionally charged terms (Coffey, Bhullar, Durkin, Islam, & Ushker, 2021; Pihkala, 2022). These studies of ecological forms of grief reveal how these emotions are reported among children and youth (Coffey et al., 2021). Lists of emotions, affects, or feelings related to eco-anxiety cover different forms of anxiety (fear, worry, grief, guilt, anger, enthusiasm, stress, and overwhelm) and mental states (confusion, shock, trauma, solastalgia, shame, excitement, expectation, and helplessness; Pihkala, 2020, p. 11). Based on the results of his review, Pihkala created a taxonomy of climate-emotions. It is extensive because it ranges over several scientific fields, from psychology to neuroscience.

In applying this taxonomy to studies of children's eco-critical and climate change literature, it will benefit from some simplification and restructuring. My application of the climate anxiety taxonomy to picturebook analysis combines emotions, feelings, and affects under the same term: 'emotions'. I attempt to make visible the different kinds of emotions combined in anxiety. I organise the emotions in terms of feelings toward potential action (e.g., sorrow and worry, which may result in hopelessness or even anger). Therefore, the taxonomy of the characters' climate anxiety consists of four categories (see Figure 1):

1. Sadness-related emotions: sadness, sorrow, and grief
2. Threat-related emotions: fear, worry, helplessness, and powerlessness
3. Strong depression-related emotions: depression, meaninglessness, and hopelessness
4. Effect-related emotions: anger, empathy, empowerment, and guilt

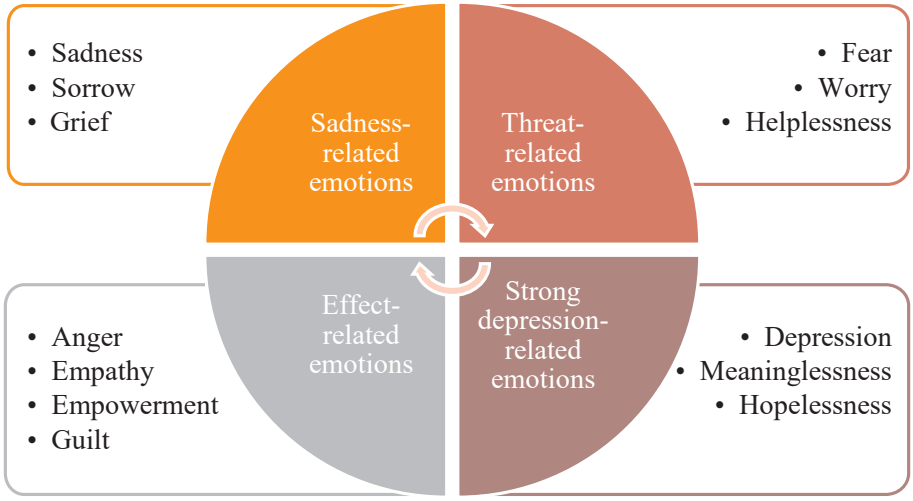

Figure 1. Taxonomy of characters' climate anxiety

METHODOLOGY

The discussions of climate anxiety and previous analyses of picturebooks that thematize climate activism convinced me to explore how the main characters are urged to act, what kind of climate change books depicted, and how the characters experienced the signs of climate change. My research questions were as follows: Which kind of climate crisis threatens the characters, and what types of climate anxiety do the texts and pictures depict?

I examined two picturebooks that thematize both climate change and climate activism. Each book features a young girl combatting a problem that threatens her environment. Additionally, the protagonists are linked to Greta Thunberg via the subtitles *Greta and the Giants: Inspired by Greta Thunberg's stand to save the world* (Tucker & Persico, 2019) and *Our House is on Fire: Greta Thunberg's call to save the planet* (Winter, 2019). The discourse regarding climate anxiety is exceedingly present in the books.

Greta and the Giants begins with the atmosphere of a fairytale but closes with double-spread paratextual information of Greta Thunberg. Humanized animals from the neighboring woods (e.g., a wolf, squirrel, and owl) come to Greta and ask for help because their home woods are 'broken.' The pictures and text emphasize the small size of children and animals; they are illustrated as notable smaller than adults, whom the title refers to as 'giants.' The Giants are destroying the woods by building smoking cities and polluting factories. After realising what was happening in her surroundings, Greta writes a one-word demonstration sign, which reads 'STOP.' One by one, other children and animals join Greta's protest, and they march to the Giants to tell them that their acts are not acceptable. The activist crowd explains what needs to be changed and how this can only be done if everyone works together. The giants' changed attitudes and more sustainable acts are depicted in the pictures. At the end of the book, Greta sees the changes that her demonstration and other actions have caused.

Our House is on Fire begins with a city scene. The realistic tone of the picturebook retells Greta's story, from weekly school strike Fridays in Stockholm to worldwide conferences, ending with a demonstration. At the end of the book, a direct question is posed to the readers: 'What would you do?' The illustrations focus on the main character, Greta. The other characters are typically presented as gray silhouettes. Other children's eyes, mouths, and facial expressions are hidden before they lift their posters and placards.

To analyse these picturebooks, I explored the ways in which they represent the milieu, which consists of physical, social, and temporal settings; how climate change, as a hyperobject, is presented in texts and pictures; and what kinds of anxiety the characters experience. I call my analytical process ecocritical content analysis (EcCA). It was inspired by Kathy G. Short et al.'s (2017, pp.

1–15) critical content analysis (see also Mathis, 2015; Stephens, 2015) and uses affective eco-criticism as its critical theoretical framework (Bladow & Ladino, 2018). The concepts of climate anxiety and the hyperobject are its theoretical tenets. To examine the characters' agency and power relations, we must understand how their social networks and the connections in their worlds are constructed. To understand the environmental issues they face, we must comprehend the kinds of physical settings presented in texts and pictures.

Frank Serafini and Stephanie Reid (2022) recognised three analytical frameworks that can be used to study the dialogical relationships between images and text in the context of picturebooks: semiotic, literary, and artistic. These frameworks are grounded in different theoretical and methodological foundations but all are intended to help understand the essence of picturebooks and their genres. The semiotic framework emphasizes semiotic resources, the literary framework stresses the relationships between narrative structures and story elements, and the artistic framework highlights picturebooks as aesthetic art objects through art criticism. As a literary scholar, I prefer the literary framework, which considers a picturebook to be a 'complex literary entity that must be considered holistically' (Serafini & Reid, 2022, p. 11). However, these frameworks do not include discussions of critical theories and their relationships to picturebook analysis. This kind of critical framework is presented in, for example, Kathy Short's (2017) article 'The right to participate: Children as activists in picturebooks' and Marianne Røskeland's (2018) article 'Nature and becoming in a picturebook about "things that are"'. While Short turns to critical pedagogy and childism, Røskeland draws on the Nature in Culture Matrix (Goga et al., 2018, pp. 12–14), which is constructed using an anthropocentric-to-ecocentric *x*-axis and a celebrating-nature-to-problematizing-nature *y*-axis; theoretically, it is based on ecocriticism. In the same article collection discussing ecocritical themes, I present another analysis typology, which is combined with the Nature in Culture Matrix and ecocriticism. My article 'Ecological settings in texts and pictures' (Rättyä, 2018) describes how nature and physical, social, and temporal settings are represented in a Finnish picturebook entitled *A Dog Called Cat*, by Tomi Kontio and Elina Warsta.

The present study applies Rättyä's (2018) typology, which employs Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, as an analytical tool for ecocritical content analysis and examining the representations of the environment and a character's social relationships. The ecological-settings-in-texts-and-pictures typology covers three system levels:

1. The microsystem, comprising the characters' immediate surroundings or settings;
2. The mesosystem, comprising several microlevels in which the individual participates; and

3. The macrosystem, containing the social, educational, ideological, or institutional patterns of a culture or subculture.

These system levels can be studied in social, physical, and temporal settings, which in this context, create the milieu of the studied picturebooks (see Table 1). Social settings can be divided into system levels based on the scale and intensity of social connections. The scale and distance from protagonists' homes construct different physical settings in the micro-, meso-, and macrosystems. Temporal settings extend from the immediate time of events to decades and centuries. (Rättyä, 2018, p. 161–163.)

Table 1. Ecological settings in texts and pictures

	Social Setting	Physical Setting	Temporal Setting
Microsystem	Active, daily social contact with family and friends	Immediate surroundings, where a person's activities take place (e.g., home or nest)	Immediate time of events (e.g., week, summer, or weekend)
Mesosystem	Connections, occasional contacts	Local areas and regions (e.g., hometown or home forest)	Period in a person's life (e.g., childhood, teens, or adulthood)
Macrosystem	Nationality, ethnicity, religion, ideology, species	National or global setting	Centuries, decades

I used Table 1 as a template to collect and document units of analysis from both texts and pictures in *Greta and the Giants* and *Our House is on Fire*. Notions and comments about settings and system levels were placed in tables for each book. After analyzing the ecological settings, I examined the emotions related to climate anxiety that the characters expressed in social and physical settings and reviewed the emotions that appeared in each system level. For this, I used the taxonomy of characters' climate anxiety (Figure 1).

RESULTS

Hyperobjects Threatening Characters

A young girl holding a demonstration sign in her hands and striking for climate change is pictured in both books. The reasons she is expressing her feelings are grounded in global warming. As Oziewitcz and Saguisag (2021, pp. vii) express, the challenge of climate change can be both 'psychologically traumatizing and conceptually daunting'. The signals of climate change in the analysed picturebooks are mainly depicted before the act of demonstration. The illustrations and texts convey a variety of fearsome and alarming notions about the changing surroundings being experienced by people and animals. In her picturebook analysis, Andersson (2021) focusses on plastic pollution, especially the hyperobjective nature of the GPGP. Andersson's interpretation of the

hyperobject can be challenged, while Morton's list of characteristics includes the idea of nonlocality, meaning that hyperobjects cannot be localized even though they appear as local manifestations (Morton, 2013, 40). *Greta and the Giants* and *Our House is on Fire* describe climate change as repeated, accumulating changes, expanding fires; and animals' shrinking living space, thus exemplifing the hyperobject as interobjective, nonlocal, and temporally undulating.

***Greta and the Giants* (2019)**

On the title page, Greta is shown marching alone and carrying a poster that says 'STOP!'. This indicates the forthcoming action in which the main character acts on her own, without adult support. On the next double spread, she is seen surrounded by animals of all sizes: a bear, a wolf, a fox, a deer, some smaller animals, and birds. Her immediate surrounding is the forest. The physical setting, on the microlevel, is depicted in both text and pictures, but her social setting, on the microlevel, is not presented. The animals around her do not appear to be daily connections; rather, they are occasional social connections that visit during the course of the story. However, the animals seem to have a close connection with Greta in the pictures, as well as a verbal one. Their spokesperson is the wolf, who appeals for help, saying: 'Please help us – The forest is broken, and we don't know where to go. The Giants are ruining our home' (Tucker & Persico, 2019, p. 7).

The next system level, the mesosystem, introduces the crisis. The animals recall the destruction that the Giants have caused: 'They chopped down trees to build homes… The houses grew into towns and the towns grew into cities. They built factories and shops and cars and planes' (Tucker & Persico, 2019, p. 8). With text and four images, the author and illustrator show a forest that was transformed into a large city with smoking chimneys, a busy motorway, and a blackening sky. The smoke in the sky overshadows the double spread (pp. 10–11) and phasing over the rest of the forest and its inhabitants. The series of pictures represents the macrosystem, with its physical and temporal settings, indicating a change over centuries and referring to a long timescale. The following message is expressed in the text: 'The Giants had always been there, for as long as Greta could remember, but now they were worse than ever.' The atmosphere of the twenty-first century is shown in the last pictures (pp. 9–11) of the picture collage. The text does not specify the pollution problem, but the illustration shows the forest disappearing until only a few leafless trees are left for the animals, who observe from the right-page corner, looking back in the direction of a motorway full of cars.

The animals' talk about the Giants alludes to fear: 'They didn't see all the little birds and bugs and butterflies and bears that trembled in the shadows. And no one told them to stop because everyone was scared of them' (Tucker & Persico, 2019, p.11). Here, the focus is on the mesolevel, specifically the point at which

the animals need help and approach Greta. The social microlevel cannot be determined, which reveals how alone Greta is in her actions, as well as the Giants' disregard of her. Even though other children join her demonstration, they do not converse or initiate a close connection with Greta: "A little boy who had been watching Greta made a sign and came and sat down next to her. He didn't say much, but Greta know he felt like she did" (Tucker & Persico, 2019, p. 17).

The number of people at the rally increases, but no social connections between them are indicated in the pictures or text. The only speech after the animals' plea to Greta is her manifesto and the crowd's shouts toward the Giants, such as 'The smoke from your fires is choking the air!' The protesters' signs have texts on them that reiterate the demands to act now, stop, and make change. The need to protect the forest, as the animals' physical living environment, is frequently repeated in various spreads, both in speech bubbles and signs, as well as in Greta's pronouncement that 'These animals are homeless and our forest is dying' (Tucker & Persico, 2019, p. 23).

The giants' actions are hastily explained, and their regret is mentioned in the text (Tucker & Persico, 2019, p. 26). Because the edges of the pictures seldomly depict the giants' faces, apologetic and sad emotions are not visible. Then, the attempt to slow down the pace is described and metaphorically indicated by hands knitting and figures picking flowers. The final picture shows the giants in restored, more colorful forest scenery (Tucker & Persico, 2019, pp. 30–31).

The climate crisis in *Greta and the Giants* is presented from the perspective of forest animals. This is understandable, as this fairytale-like picturebook is targeted towards a young audience. The phenomenon of a home forest dying is rather concrete. Furthermore, the text and pictures offer information about other dimensions of the climate crisis: industrialization; the disappearance of forests; and the appearance of towns, cities, cars, and factories.

The changes in Greta's and the animals' own microsystems are not visible. Even though the characters refer to 'our' forest, the forest is depicted quite onedimensional, different, and the nuances of the effects on flora or fauna are examined. The analysis reveals that the climate crisis phenomena are presented multifacetedly, indicating the crisis's hyperobjective nature. It is a question of making change, saving the forest, and stopping pollution. Climate change appears to be unescapable, all-around, and viscous. A climate strike is called, and action is requested on the part of the giants, but a detailed problem presentation is not provided. Moreover, some of the actions are aimed at saving the forest, but a sense of nonlocality is present, as well as the plurality of various objects. A smooth change is depicted by a series of pictures.

Our House Is on Fire

The front cover of *Our House Is on Fire* presents the main character facing the reader. Her eyes are directed towards the audience, and the book's title

is printed on the sign she holds in her hands. Behind her, colorfully clothed children have raised their own signs, with similar texts and pictures of Earth, symbolizing their collective concern. The children are not interacting with one another or Greta; they also face the picturebook's audience. The cover picture establishes the system level hierarchy of the book: the macrosystem is more important than the microsystem. This picture is repeated on the second-to-last spread of the book.

Although the microsystem is less noticeable, it exists. For example, Greta's dog, on whom her feelings are projected, is present in almost all pictures at the beginning of the book. Greta's parents are shown supporting her school strike and other actions, both in the text and the picture (Winter, 2019, p. 23). The illustrations introduce the parents as grey silhouettes, like the people from school or those passing Greta in front of the parliament building on her strike days. As in *Greta and the Giants*, adult figures are silhouetted, cut, and cropped so that only their torsos or legs are visible, or they are shown from behind. This design choice strengthens the sense that adults are part of a faceless, anonymous mass.

Global social and temporal settings are identified by the names of official global events, such as the United Nations' climate talks in Poland. A fact sheet at the end of the book lists Greta Thunberg's quotes, places where her manifestos appeared, and published sources on Thunberg. In the book, the children's actions around the world fit into the mesosystem level. For example, Greta launches her school strike in Stockholm, and Swedish children join it first. The macrosystem is connected to this via references to 'cyberspace' in the text and illustrations of people reading their mobile phones in various languages (Winter, 2019, p. 28).

The temporal setting, contemporary daily life, is clear throughout the book. Technological elements, such as mobile phones, orient readers to the 2010s, as do the historical documents about Greta's protest. The macrosystem is more detailed than the microsystem, even though seasonal clothing and snow imply the passage of time. At the textual level, more information is given about Greta's mental experiences: 'The sad days went on for a long time, each day more unhappy than the next. There might not be a world to live in when she grows up. What use is school without a future?' (Winter, 2019, p. 26).

The pictures in *Our House Is on Fire* illustrate the climate crisis as a hyperobjective, interobjective sum of many signals of global warming. The text tells how she listens to her teacher's talk, reads, and watches documents about climate change. The text demonstrates the plurality of the problems at hand, such as the warming of the planet, the melting of the polar ice, and threatens to animal species. In pictures, Greta and her dog watch black-framed screens. In the same way, the reader sees the repetition of the interobject: floods, dying coral reefs, and cracks in the earth. The image of a wildfire and burning trees is

replicated on several pages (Winter, 2019, p. 17, 19, 21, 32), and the apocalyptic themes in the picture series describe a nonlocal problem. The different modes of catastrophe identify a hyperobject that consists of not just one problem but several different crises. The quality of viscosity causes a negative reaction in terms of Greta's mood; the more she becomes aware of global warming, the greater her sorrow is.

Climate anxiety represented in texts and pictures

In *Our House Is on Fire,* anxiety is expressed on Greta's face, in her body postures, and in Roxy's eyes and poses. The dog invites the reader to worry with her about Greta and Greta's reaction to global warming. When they watch documentaries on crisis, Greta hugs her dog. She does so not only to seek comfort from Roxy but also to give comfort. Greta's expressions are seen in her face, her hand lifted to her cheek, and her posture. In this phase, the text does not explain her emotions; it only reports what Greta sees. This sense of anxiety is depicted by dark-toned illustrations and, especially, by focussing on the microsystem; sorrow and sadness are not apparent in the pictures that illustrate the meso- or macrosystems.

The repetition of global-level apocalyptic scenes fills Greta with negative anxiety-related emotions and symptoms; she is no longer eating or talking. Sorrow, hopelessness, and meaninglessness surround her. Her parents appear in one illustration in which they are told to support her during her school strike.

Because of her parents' support, she feels that she is being heard. Thus, she begins to talk and express her feelings. She accuses the people with power and urges them, instead of the children, to feel the anxious: 'I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day… I want you to act as if the house was on fire. Because it is.' (Winter, 2019, p. 33). Relief from anxiety is never given to the characters. In the end, large print reads, 'Can you hear us? What will you do?' (Winter, 2019, p. 35, 38–39). Thus, the anxiety is passed on to the readers.

In *Greta and the Giants*, the feelings of sadness, sorrow, and exhaustion that the animals who appeal to Greta for help have are emphasised. When the animals talk about their fear, their helplessness is shown in their body language. After Greta has taken control and received a positive response regarding her climate change actions, the animals' eyes and postures reflect higher expectations and hopes. Greta's enthusiasm is described with words, and though, at first, she works alone, her enthusiasm becomes a movement, even in the mesosystem of the social setting, and is presented in the pictures through the movement towards the right bottom corner and next page. Shame and sadness are later evident in the adult figures and written about in the texts below the pictures. Greta blames them for being greedy, and her fierceness and anger are

pictured (Tucker & Persico, 2019, pp. 18–19). At the end of the book, the giants change their behavior. Because of that, different future scenery is possible, which gives the readers the possibility of solace.

CONCLUSION

In this ecocritical content analysis (EcCA), I identified anxiety-related emotions in picturebooks related to climate change issues and showed how these emotions were expressed in text and pictures. Affective eco-criticism provided an inspiration for this study. Marek Oziewicz and Lara Saguisag's (2021, pp. vii–ix) view of children's ecocritical literature explored using the concept of the hypertext in analyses. Additionally, they call for further analytical tools with which to study eco-literature. This article implemented new analytical tools, and it utilised the typology of ecological settings in texts and pictures and a new taxonomy of characters' climate anxiety, combined with Morton's (2013a) concept of the hyperobject. Reading with this concept in mind revealed the authors' and illustrators' attempts to cover various aspects of climate change and global warming. The manifestations of the ecocrisis may appear to be a discontinuous and sporadic chain of actions, but books represent the nonlocal, phasing, viscous, and intersubjectivity characteristics that hyperobjects have.

One characteristic of hyperobject relates to notions of scale. How do large-scale global warming and vanishing nature affect the children and animals in books? The question of scale has been explored in children's books research in some cases. For example, Alice Curry (2017) and Sinéad Moriarty (2020) draw on Timothy Clark's (2012) scaled reading in literary or cultural criticism. For further research, a comparation of Curry's scale (small-scale personal transformation, medium-scale socio-political change, and large-scale environmental reappraisal) with this article's ecological settings in terms of text and picture typology would be interesting.

The enlarged burden of responsibility that protagonists in Greta books have may have the wrong proportions. The many effects that climate change has had globally are not easily resolved, and one person's cannot take on this responsibility alone. Even though Winter's picturebook has a quotion from Greta Thunberg on the page before the title page that reads 'You are never too small to make a difference', in my mind, the hyper scale connected to a hyperobject like climate change leads to a failed interpretation of responsibilities, which I term the climate change scale fallacy. This climate change scale fallacy connected to a young protagonist's attempt to make a change appears to cause anxiety. In *Greta and the Giants*, that anxiety is considered through animals' reactions. In *Our House Is on Fire*, it is explored in Greta's gestures, positions, and words. Thus, the books vary in their representations of climate anxiety. *Greta and the*

Giants has a happier ending than *Our House Is on Fire*. The sadness and threats caused by the crisis affect the animals, not the main character; the emotions are distanced from Greta's immediate surroundings. However, because of her empathy, Greta feels sadness- and threat-related emotions, which are also present, along with strong depression-related emotions, in *Our House Is on Fire*. Moreover, the dark colours correspond to disappointment and negative feelings, which can be interpreted as indicating meaningless and hopelessness.

The authors and illustrators skillfully solved the problem of picturing the hyperobjects. Nonlocality, plurality, and viscosity exist, but they exist in a way that younger readers can grasp it. Frequently appearing and repetitive images and symbols also help make the subject material easier to understand, although the plurality of the problem remains. Still, picturebooks show that a worldwide wicked problem requires many solutions and that children's voices can make others aware of such a hyperobject. Empowerment is not about placing the burden of climate actions on children but, rather, raising the awareness of adults and allowing them to carry this burden first.

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JUSTYNA TYMIENIECKA-SUCHANEK ORCID: 0000-0002-8709-9116
University of Silesia in Katowice
University of Warsaw

Bull Terrier – "Gladiator" Dog. Reflections on the Margins of Reading the Short Story *Snap* by Ernest Seton-Thompson

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to interpret the story *Snap. The Story of a Bull Terrier* by the Canadian writer Ernest Seton-Thompson from the perspective of the human-dog relationship within the context of a specific breed. I continue the previously explored topic of the bull terrier as an "other" Other and consider the problem of whether and how Seton-Thompson's work shapes the young reader's sensitivity towards this particular canine breed. I am trying to present the story *Snap* within a broader context, examining it against the background of the animal-themed works, predominantly aimed at children and teenagers, of this English-born prose writer. In essence, this article constitutes a contribution to the "second wave" of critical animal geographies, i.e. a certain type of cultural ecology.

Keywords: bull terrier, otherness, courage, Ernest Seton-Thompson, Snap.

If you dream of a dog waiting at your every beck, and of a blindly devoted slave, don't reach out for a bull terrier, because he will bite your hands off.
Tom Gannaway
(quoted after Janowski, 2018: 57)

Exhibiting bull terriers has a lot in common with the Roman circus: it's something between a gladiator parade and a clown show
Dieter Fleig
(quoted after Janowski, 2018: 123)

INTRODUCTION

It is not without fear that I begin to contemplate the issue outlined in the title. My scientific interests have been centered around animal subjectivity for over twenty years, more specifically, the phenomenon of animal subjectivity in

Polish literature (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2005: 151–167), and subsequently in Russian literature (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013). However, the topic chosen here still feels novel to me, despite my recent exploration of the "double" otherness of non-human entities, exemplified by the bull terrier in the article *The Bull Terrier as an Alien Other: Reflections on Jonathan Carroll's 'The Land of Laughs*[3] (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2021: 137–146). The selected work for discussion, *Snap: The Story of a Bull Terrier* (1915) by Ernest Seton-Thompson (1860–1943), a Canadian writer born in England, belongs to the literature of "my" epoch – the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, which is my area of specialization. However, it represents a distinctly different cultural and literary circle than the Russian Silver Age, situated within the realm of American-Canadian literature, where my engagement is less extensive. I am still at the beginning of my research journey devoted to tracing, analyzing, and interpreting representations of bull terriers in world literature. The initial reconnaissance I conducted confirmed my belief that the issue of the presence and simultaneous otherness of the bull terrier in culture and literature is novel and underexplored in *animal studies*. I have initially identified that, besides Seton-Thompson's story *Snap* and several novels by Jonathan Carroll, such as *The Land of Laughs* (1980), dogs of this breed appear in the works of several other writers and artists: for instance, in Victor Pelevin's story *Святочный киберпанк, или Рождественская Ночь-117.DIR [Xmas Cyberpunk, or Christmas Night-117.DIR]* (1996); Grzegorz Gortat's youth story *Do pierwszej krwi [To First Blood]* (2006)[4], honored by the jury of the IX Literary Competition of the Polish Society of Book Publishers (PTWK) in 2008; Waldemar Borzestowski's social novel *Bulterier Samson i ja* [*Samson the Bull Terrier and I*] (2008), and Sławomir Wierzchowski's song *Bull Terrier* from the album *Ćwierć wieku z bluesem [A Quarter of a Century with Blues]*.

There are certainly many more works where bull terriers appear, but I am still in the process of gathering and selecting literary materials. However, based on the selected texts from American, Polish and Russian literature that I have thus far analyzed, I can confidently assert that interpreting the literary images of these dogs, closely examining their distinctions through the lens of human-animal studies and the study of otherness, should yield intriguing research outcomes. From a human perspective, considering the bull terrier – dogs opposition, the bully stands out as different and alien among its canine counterparts. At the same time, humans perceive it as another "other", when the

[3] This article is a prolegomenon to the studies on the "double" otherness of non-human subjects on the example of the bull terrier. I am trying to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the bull terrier as an another "Other" based on an understanding of this breed, with reference to the novel *The Land of Laughs* by Jonathan Carroll – the bull terrier enthusiast.

[4] This literary work features a pit bull, not a bull terrier.

talk is about the bull terrier – human opposition. *Per analogiam*, the bull terrier among other dogs can be likened, in some respects, to a human post-face transplant among humans. People's typical fear of bull terriers is determined primarily by their different appearance[5], and only then by myths, stereotypes, and prejudices against this particular breed. The otherness of the bully becomes apparent when comparing it with both purebred and mixed-breed dogs, taking into account: firstly, its appearance, (particularly its distinctive feature – the egg-shaped head with a downward sloping muzzle – downface)[6]; secondly, its highly specific and unusual behaviors, often manifesting in two extremes (such as "freezing" – the dog remaining motionless with its head down, almost in a stupor, or engaging in characteristic "spinning," displaying exuberant joy, and other antics)[7]; and thirdly, the socially ambiguous perception of this breed, influenced by various cultural stereotypes and prejudices[8]. It is this additional layer of "otherness" inherent in the bull terrier that interests me the most. However, it is a topic for a separate interdisciplinary work, integral to the examination of antagonism towards both others and alien.

My concerns regarding approaching the topic of the article formulated in this way also stem from the extensive research that has already been conducted on Seton-Thompson's work by experts in Canadian-American literature. However, initial exploration into works centered around bull terriers has convinced me that this is a novel area deserving closer attention. Finally, these concerns are compounded by the fact that my expertise does not lie in children's and

[5] An interesting sociological and psychological phenomenon, not necessarily resulting from a lack of knowledge about breeds or Polish law, is the reaction to a bull terrier seen walking without a muzzle. Despite not being on the list of dangerous breeds, it often arouses both respect and fear. Conversely, the Moscow watchdog, though potentially just as hazardous, may be perceived as harmless due to its "cute" or "teddy-like" appearance, especially when tied in front of a store. This observation is drawn from years of personal experience and careful observation.

[6] The bull terrier was developed in 1862. However, during the 19th century, its head resembled that of other dogs. The characteristic head shape we now associate with the breed emerged as a result of breeding efforts in the 1950s. For more information about the history of the breed, refer to Janowski, 2018: 5–17. Compare Photo 1 and 2 with Photos 3, 4, and 5.

[7] Owners of bull terriers often view this "hanging" behavior of the dog with a certain amount of humor. However, a dog expert and attentive observer knows that it is mostly related to the physiology of the bull terrier. Due to its inflexible body structure, the breed may struggle to meet its basic needs, including hygienic and emotional requirements. The explanation of this phenomenon extends beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, this unique behavior, often referred to as "spinning" or "goofing around," can be observed in YouTube videos, commonly labeled as "pig hour".

[8] They are manifested both in the linguistic layer, such as the famous saying "Jacek Kurski jako bulterier braci Kaczyńskich [Jacek Kurski as the bull terrier of the Kaczyński brothers]," which has entered the language of politics, as noted by Magdalena Mateja (Mateja), or the term "Bądź jak bull terrier" [Be like a bull terrier], which has also entered everyday language and the language of advertising (Photo 6).

youth literature. This article is devoted to the short story *Snap*, which is part of the mainstream of children's and youth literature,yet, it does not intend to be strictly interpreted through the lens of animal studies. Nevertheless, it's worth noting here that literature aimed at young readers has been analyzed within this framework in Poland before (e.g., Mik, Pokora, Skowera, 2016; Rybak, 2023: 66–73). I have the impression that studies on children's and youth literature have long come out of the shadows in Poland, offering valuable insights, particularly within the realms of new posthumanist and ecocritical discourse. The portrayals of animals in Russian literature addressed to children, analyzed from the perspective of animal studies, are still awaiting their researcher, and little has changed in this respect since the publication of the monograph in which I cite the names of such writers as Konstantin Ushinsky, Vitaly Bianki, Yevgeny Permyak, Boris Zhitkov, and Vera Chaplina (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 341), who created images of animal protagonists that are worth rescuing from oblivion. The children's and youth prose of these and other Russian writers awaits a revitalization of its animalistic themes and motifs through the latest approaches and methodologies of biohumanities[9] and posthumanism.

ERNEST SETON-THOMPSON AND THE ANIMALS

Seton-Thompson was an outstanding writer, illustrator[10], and, at the same time, zoologist (specializing in mammalian anatomy), hunter, and co-founder of scouting. He was an undisputed expert and defender of wild nature. His first collection of animal stories, titled *Wild Animals I Have Known*, was published in 1898. In 1921, Kazimierz Świrtun-Rymkiewicz wrote the foreword to the book *Gawędy przyrodnicze [Nature Stories],* which included Seton-Thompson's work *Łobo, król stepów i puszczy Korrompo. Historia gromady wilków*

[9] On biohumanities, see: Domańska, 2021: 153–173.

[10] In relation to Seton-Thompson's work, questions are currently being formulated from the perspective of modern knowledge, namely: Can animals think? Do they have feelings? Morality? Surprisingly, these questions, subjects of contemporary social debate, were already under scrutiny at the beginning of the 20th century. In the United States, they were brought to a wide audience by the immensely popular illustrator and writer Seton-Thompson, who, alongside Jack London, championed a new perception of the animal kingdom. French researcher Thierry Laugée has recently produced an innovative work on Seton-Thompson, a writer revered in the United States and admired by Leo Tolstoy and Walt Disney (Laugée, 2022). However, these questions were equally intriguing and the subject of serious inquiry among writers and publicists in Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2015: 222–245), and even earlier, in the second half of the 19th century. I delve into this topic in the second chapter of my book, titled „Zwierzę jako osoba/rzecz/gorszy byt w literaturze rosyjskiej drugiej połowy XIX wieku. Fiodor Dostojewski, Lew Tołstoj i inni. [The Animal as a Person/Thing/Inferior Being in Russian Literature of the Second Half of the 19th Century: Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Others]" (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 67–143).

[Lobo, the King of Currumpaw. The Story of a Pack of Wolves]. The Polish advocate for scouting and forest conservation, Świrtun-Rymkiewicz sought to highlight Seton-Thompson's special love for Mother Nature, expressing great respect for the Canadian author.

> Kipling and Seton don't depict humans wearing animal skins, as is the case in Krasicki's fairy tales, instead portraying animals as they are, thus revealing the innermost secrets of nature. […] they introduce us to a realm of concepts and emotions – the wilderness. Here, the Law is individual freedom – on the one hand, with respect for the rights and instincts inherent in every creature – on the other. Each animal is free to do whatever it likes; the stronger one bites and even consumes the weaker, everyone saves themselves together and helps each other (Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, 1922: 6).

Furthermore, as rightly noted by Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, the aforementioned is "consistent with observation, because, in fact, during natural disasters such as floods, etc. animals forget about mutual antipathies and appetites, and only think about rescue. Then the Law of the Forest applies" (Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, 1922: 6). Therefore, the Darwinian metaphor of the "struggle for existence" was correctly interpreted then, which, according to Jan Wawrzyniak, is often falsely, since literally, understood as the ruthless "struggle of all against all in order to kill" (Wawrzyniak, 2000: 131). It is worth noting, that at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a focus on the issue of interdependence between organisms, in connection with the resurgence of organicism and evolutionism in the social sciences of Herbert Spencer, and revival of Peter Kropotkin's theory of mutual help as a primary driver of evolution. Kropotkin, followed by many other 19th-century Russian evolutionists, emphasized the cooperation of living organisms for survival (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 148)[11].

Seton-Thompson's animal stories have been translated into many languages, including not only Polish, but also Russian. They were published in Russia in 1979, in a highly regarded translation by Nikolai Chukovsky. Subsequently, in 1980, the works were republished (see Seton-Thompson, 1980) with a foreword by Russian writers and experts in children's literature, Nikolai Sladkov and Vitaly Bianki (Bianki, Sladkov, 1980: 3–6). In their foreword, the authors underscore Seton-Thompson's status as a pioneer in portraying real animals, noting that he was the first writer in the world to publish works whose characters were flesh-and-blood animals. They emphasized that Seton-Thompson's nature writings initiated a new realistic direction in literature about animals.

[11] For a broader exploration, refer to the chapter „Wokół podmiotowości osobniczej i gatunkowej zwierząt. Moralny status zwierząt na tle rozwoju myśli ekofilozoficznej [Around the Individual and Species Subjectivity of Animals: The Moral Status of Animals in the Context of the Development of Eco-Philosophical Thought]" which encompasses discussions (not only in Russian) (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 23–64).

In Seton-Thompson's nature stories, animals were meant to serve as models of behavior and virtues for young readers, particularly adolescent boys. It's worth noting the follwoing in Świrtun-Rymkiewicz's thoughts from the early 20th century, which focused on the revival of scouting as a social and educational movement within the Scout movement, emphasizing respect for the forest and nature: A Polish co-founder of scouting, deeply captivated by Seton-Thompson's work, believed that the nature writings of authors such as the author of *Silver Fox*, Rudyard Kipling, and Adolf Dygasiński, which depicted the lives of animals, "represented a new and rich branch of literaturę" (Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, 1922: 8). These works served an emotional, cognitive, and pedagogical purpose. As Świrtun-Rymkiewicz observes, it teaches the boy to love nature, acquaints him with it, and offers him many subjects that speak to his feelings and thoughts. Moreover, in these very nature tales we encounter strong animal characters. These are animals that are brave, energetic, and persistent; animals that trust in their own strength, able to cope under any circumstances without relying on the help of others – a phenomenon not often found in the human world, for in the 'Kingdom of Nature there are no nannies (1922:7).

In the works of the Canadian author, animals are depicted as they are – without masks, free from human allegory or symbolism. Seton-Thompson avoids anthropomorphizing them entirely. Through various stories and biographies featuring rabbits, bears, foxes, wolves, deer, and other forest inhabitants, these animals often serve as examples for young readers, embodying bravery, courage, and consistency. Undoubtedly, the bull terrier from the story *Snap* stands out as a model of such exemplary, not to say moral, virtue under the sign of "boys don't cry" for adolescent boys. Seton-Thompson's clear sympathy and admiration for this breed radiate throughout the narrative.

The described history of the bull terrier, a dog of the breed developed in 1862[12] through a crossbreeding of the bulldog and the terrier (with subsequent infusion of Dalmatian and other bloodlines), presents a surprising contrast to Seton-Thompson's narratives primarily focused on wild animals. The bull terrier, as an "artificially" bred dog, bears little resemblance to its ancestor, the wolf and has nothing to do with wildness. Magdalena Dąbrowska, following Donna Haraway, states that purebred dogs are a perfect of "natureculture" example (Dąbrowska, 2014: 198) because they exist at the junction of nature and culture, they have been shaped by humans during long-term breeding, which produces a purebred dog as a "product". "No other species – as Michał Pręgowski rightly emphasizes – has been so radically formed and changed by humans through artificial selection" (Pręgowski, 2014: 47). A purebred dog becomes a product of both culture and nature. Breeding, which is the subject of exhibitions, is even compared to art, and the purebred dog itself to bio-art

[12] The first attempts to breed bulldogs with white English terriers took place at the beginning of the 19th century (Janowski, 2018: 8–11).

(Dąbrowska, 2012). These are post-humanist considerations. In Seton-Thompson's time, purebred dogs were not perceived in this way, and the writer was greatly influenced and positively impressed by the bull terrier's capabilities and physical and mental predispositions, which are exceptional. As I have already mentioned, the dog itself, in the story *Snap*, has little to do with wildness. However, what connects this animal hero with wildness is the life-and-death fight he fought: the dog quickly attacks the wolf, defeats it, but dies. And so, a gladiator dog (a "product" of nature and culture, a living "killing machine" perfected by human intervention) bravely fights a wolf, a representative of wild nature, which, having caused great havoc among the cattle, has offended the local farmers. Snap serves with commitment, devotion, and obedience to his guardian, helping people in eliminating the pack leader and doing a great favour to cattle ranchers. The opposition bull terrier – wild forest inhabitant ("bloodthirsty and treacherous wolf") is very telling. In solving the human-wolf conflict[13], which represents the unequal struggle between farmers and the predatory wolf, Snap – the strong, agile, energetic, and above all, brave bull terrier, plays a crucial role.

BULL TERRIER SNAP – "GLADIATOR" DOG

> He has no parents. Taken from them when he was just a few weeks old. He forges the land he treads as his legacy, tethered more to a person than to a place, and subdues worlds with the depth of his soul. Deprived of the right to participate in divine power, he gains strength through his honesty. He possesses no riches; his sole wealth lies in humility. He doesn't believe in magic, thus crafting his inner self to rely upon. Unperturbed by matters of life and death, he is immersed in eternity. His body embodies courage; the flash of light is his eyes, his hearing replaces reason, his limbs are filled with zeal.
>
> He doesn't adhere to conventional laws but instead forges his own rules for own protection. He doesn't strategize before a fight; his entire strategy revolves around the freedom to choose between taking a life or sparing it. He harbors no specific intentions but seizes opportunities as they arise. He doesn't rely on miracles or establish any rules but rather embraces the world as it is. He transforms the void into a tactical advantage, relying on quick thinking rather than innate talent. Distraction is his enemy, intellect is his ally. Kindness and justice serve as his armor. With an unwavering spirit, he positions himself where defeat is impossible and exploits any weakness in his opponent. He never engages in

[13] We now know that wolves attacking domestic cattle can be dealt with in a humane manner. The "wolf whisperer" Shaun Ellis has written about this, but if not all farmers in Poland adhere to his advice today (see the chapter about Ellis's experiences in Poland, Ellis, 2001: 213–222), and hunters are eagerly awaiting permission to shoot wolves, it is not surprising that a century ago the "wolf problem" was resolved through incitement hunting. While hunting was once a necessity, today it is often viewed as barbaric, particularly when done for sport (Wężowicz-Ziółkowska, 2018: 53–65)."

> actions that might lead to self-doubt and accepts death as the inevitable conclusion of a warrior's journey.
>
> Bull Terrier Code, text from 1889, England
> (quoted after Borzestowski, 2008: 7)

The quoted passage, taken from the motto of Borzestowski's novel, vividly depicts the uniqueness of the bull terrier in an exaggerated, poetic, and even mystical manner. It portrays the bull terrier as possessing a "humanized" character and personality, presenting it as a courageous and honorable creature – a warrior dog, a gladiator. Without knowledge of the context or origin of this quote, a reader might easily mistake it for a description of a brave knight or samurai. This excerpt exemplifies the panache and aplomb, as well as admiration with which enthusiasts of this breed often speak, elevating the bull terrier's fight to the death and the life lived by a bull terrier into an advantage. While setting aside the ethical and moral implications of historical practices involving these animals – such as dog fights, bull fights, or rat-baiting, topics which I will not delve into here as they require separate examination – the quoted words stand as a beautiful literary description. Moreover, they echo with the apotheosis of the bull terrier depicted in the story *Snap*, confirming what has long been understood about these dogs: their intelligence, loyalty to their handlers, bravery in the face of the enemy, and innate fighting spirit (Nowicka, Boczula, 2001: 65).

The story unfolds in North Dakota, USA. It recounts the brief tale of a bull terrier named Snap. Despite his short life span of just one year under the care of the protagonist-narrator, an employee of a barbed wire trading company, Snap managed to accomplish an important deed. When a prowling wolf threatens the area and the pack has already killed several cows, Snap courageously eliminates the threat. This act not only helps the cattle farmers resolve "the Wolf question" without resorting to poison or snares but also initiates the practice of keeping of at least one bull terrier on farms as a defender. In the Wild West, bull dogs were indeed vital protectors of settlements and farms, confronting "various wild beasts as opponents" (Jendrasiak, 1996: 12–13). Bull terrier Snap is the main character of the story, a positive and tragic character at the same time. From the very beginning, Snap earns the admiration of his caretaker, and later, the respect of the Penroof brothers – cowboys initially skeptical of the dog's ability to hunt wolves. They didn't beleive that such a small dog could defeat an animal larger than itself – the wolf (Gray robber). The quoted Bull Terrier Code closely mirrors Snap's portrayal in Seton-Thompson's story. It is not without reason, that early in the tale, the narrator, upon receiving a tiny white dog as a gift, recalls Jack's telegram describing the puppy as wonderful and unique ("Lest we forget. Am

sending you a remarkable pup. Be polite to him; it's safer"[14]), emphasizing Snap's otherness/distinctiveness ("He differed from all other Dogs I have ever known". Seton, 1980: 214), a sentiment later affirmed by Gingersnap's robust personality and unwavering mental fortitude, portrayed as fearless. The narrator emphasizes the dog's courage, not to say bravery, many times, for example: "He seemed to be without fear… evidently fear had been left out of his makeup and its place supplied with an extra amount of ginger, which was the reason for his full name" (Seton-Thompson, 1980: 214). It is also worth quoting the following fragment of the story:

> The Hounds were swift and strong, but a Gray-wolf seems to terrorize all Dogs. They have not the nerve to face him, and so, each time he gets away, and my thoughts flew back to the fearless little Dog [Snap – J.T-S.] that had shared my bed for the last year. How I wished he was out here, then these lubberly giants of Hounds would find a leader whose nerve would not fail at the moment of trial (Seton-Tompson, 1980: 216).

The aforementioned quote highlights that only the bull terrier is not a coward and has that "something" in him. This breed possesses what can be called as fighting spirit, often referred to by breed experts as "fire," and a resolute determination. Known for their high pain threshold and reputed to have the strongest jaw grip among all dogs, bull terriers are the subject of legendary tales. Snap's courage is exemplified by his confrontational stance towards other dogs and even his feistiness towards horses

> We were off at dawn the next day-the same procession of fine Horses and superb riders; the big blue Dogs, the yellow Dogs, the spotted Dogs, as before; but there was a new feature, a little white Dog that stayed close by me, and not only any Dogs, but Horses that came too near were apt to get a surprise from his teeth. I think he quarrelled with every man, Horse, and Dog in the country, with the exception of a Bull terrier belonging to the Mendoza hotel man. She was the only one smaller than himself, and they seemed very good friends. (217)

and a brave attitude towards boys throwing stones at dogs. In such a dangerous situation, where other dogs acted cowardly and fled from hooligans, Snap taught them a good lesson. When a boy threw a stone at him, instead of retreating, the bull terrier charged towards the aggressor. If the tormentor persisted, Snap confronted them, earning their respect in the process. The narrator views this trait of the bull terrier as advantageous. In Seton-Thompson's narrative, Snap is not portrayed as an idealized animal hero but rather as a dog of

[14] This and all subsequent quotations from Seton-Thompson's *Snap* are sourced from the text of the story available on the website (Thompson). However, for citation purposes, I provide the page numbers in brackets based on the Russian edition of the work, as it was the only paper version accessible to me (Seton, 1980: 212).

flesh and blood. His physical description aligns with the breed standard, and his behavior reflects the actual mental predispositions of bull terriers. This is a dog that – once it attacks an animal – nothing will stop it because it goes all out[15]: it is brave, unyielding, and at the same time has "good sides of character" (214–215).

It's no wonder that the first wolf hunt without Snap's participation ends in failure, just as his guardian had predicted. The narrator's deep belief in Snap's fighting spirit leads him to make him even bet Hilton Penroof, asserting that that the bull terrier will choose "death or glory" (218). The thought about the bet arises during the second wolf hunt in which Snap participates. Disappointed by Snap's performance, Hilton – proud owner of Dander, the pack leader – expresses doubt about Snap's potential to assume leadership. In a contemptuous tone, he queries the narrator, "Where's that there unsurpassable, fearless, scaired-o'-nort Tarrier?" (218). The farmer doesn't understand that the dog didn't notice the wolf, and continues to ridicule the bull terrier at every opportunity, likening him to a rattlesnake ("I'll let you handle your own rattlesnakes").

As I have already mentioned, the hero foresaw that the hunt would fail without Snap: "I knew we should fail without my Dog, but I did not realize how bad a failure it was to be" (220). It is worth quoting the following fragment of the work:

> The voice of Hilton, "Hu, hu," announced that he had sighted a Wolf. Dander and Riley, his rival, both sprang to the point of observation, with the result that they collided and fell together, sprawling, in the sage. But Snap, gazing hard, had sighted the Wolf, not so very far off, and before I knew it, he leaped from the saddle and bounded zigzag, high, low, in and under the sage, straight for the enemy, leading the whole pack for a few minutes. Not far, of course. The great Greyhounds sighted the moving speck, and the usual procession strung out on the plain. It promised to be a fine hunt, for the Wolf had less than half a mile start and all the Dogs were fully interested (220).

So, the first wolf hunt, conducted without Snap's participation, ends in failure. Subsequently, during the second hunt, in which Snap took part, the dogs mistakenly attacked the wrong wolf, not the one that the cowboys had been targeting for a long time. By accident, the young wolf perished after sustaining injuries from the bull terrier when the latter seized it by the nose while trying to lunge at its throat. Although this hunt also ended unsuccessfully, Snap

[15] Several years ago in Spain, a bull terrier saved his owner who was attacked by a bull. The dog attacked the bull, distracting the animal from the lying man, and emerged victorious and unharmed. Remarkably, the bull was also not harmed during the incident. You can find journalistic coverage of this event in the film *Bull vs. dog*, retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFwkc2qE35s. A comment under the video reads: "This is cruel, but you have to admire the English Bull Terrier's courage".

demonstrated his capabilities: thanks to him, the wolf was killed without the human intervention. However, a somber undertone colors the narrator's recount, reflecting his disapproval of thoughtless killing of young animals[16] and his sympathy for the dog that endured this unequal struggle.

> Now it was my turn to crow, and I did not lose the chance. Snap had shown them how, and at last the Mendoza pack had killed a Gray-wolf without help from the men.
> There were two things to mar the victory somewhat: first, it was a young Wolf, a mere Cub, hence his foolish choice of country; second, Snap was wounded-the Wolf had given him a bad cut in the shoulder (219).

Only the third hunt for "the ever wily and destructive Gray-wolf", with the participation of the dogs that acknowledged the bull terrier as their leader, proved successful. The wolf was killed. This was attributed to the bull terrier's dominant personality. Despite being the smallest and slowest among the pack, Snap assumed leadership, confirming the narrator's reflections on the unique strengths of different breeds. While greyhounds excel in speed, hounds possess exceptional scenting abilities, and Great Danes exhibit tremendous strength, ONLY the bull terriers demonstrate unparalleled courage, bordering on a form of canine leadership known as "self-sacrifice". The Penroof brothers trained various breeds of dogs to hunt wolves, primarily for practical purposes, but none of them was able to defeat the wolf due to a lack of appropriate jaw power and a strong, decisive grip – qualities possessed by the bull terrier. The strength of bull terrier's jaws is directly related to their length. According to Adam Janowski, "for a dog to have a strong grip and high strength in the two-arm jaw lever, the arms of this lever must be as long as possible" (Janowski, 2018:30). It is worth adding as a side note, that Snap's gripping ability is referenced not only by his name ("snap" means, among other things, snatching, grabbing) but also by the manner in which the narrator lifts the dog while mounted on horseback ("Here, Snap, take hold, "I said, and held my quirt to him. He seized it, and by that I lifted him to the front of my saddle and so carried him home. I cared for him as though he had been a baby" – 219). Here is another quote demonstrating the bull terrier's courage and leadership predispositions:

> And as the ten big Dogs were leaping round the silent Wolf at bay, there was a rustling in the sage at the far side of place; then a snow-white rubber ball, it seemed, came bounding, but grew into a little Bull terrier, and Snap, slowest

[16] The narrator cannot be equated with the immanent author of a literary work, let alone with the writer himself, but here the voice of Seton-Thompson, who vehemently opposed the unnecessary and senseless killing of wild animals, is clearly heard. We are aware that the writer organized something like a "forest studies" league in Canada (see Bianki, Sladkov, 1980: 6).

> of the pack, and last, came panting hard, so hard he seemed gasping. Over the level open he made, straight to the changing ring around the Cattle-killer whom none dared face. Did he hesitate? Not for an instant; through the ring of the yelping pack, straight for the old despot of range, right for his throat he sprang; and the Gray-wolf struck with his twenty scimitars. But the little one, if fooled at all, sprang again, and then what came I hardly knew. There was a whirling mass of Dogs. I thought I saw the little White One clinched on the Gray-wolf's nose. The pack was all around; we could not help them now. But they did not need us; **they had a leader of dauntless mettle**, and when in a little while the final scene was done, there on the ground lay the Gray-wolf, a giant of his kind, and clinched on his nose was the little white Dog (Seton-Tompson, 1980: 221).

However, the success of the final wolf hunt is only partial: while the farmers celebrate it as a victory, for the narrator, who has lost a faithful friend, it is a tragedy. The pain of parting with the dog is compounded by Snap's death in his arms. The scene of the animal's slow demise, as it stubbornly clings to the already deceased wolf with clenched jaws while simultaneously licking the hand of the man who inadvertently contributed to its demise, is deeply mooving.

> The Wolf was dead, and I hallooed to Snap, but he did not move. I bent over him. "Snap-Snap, it's all over; you've killed him. "But the Dog was very still, and now I saw two deep wounds in his body. I tried to lift him. "Let go, old fellow; it's all over." He growled feebly, and at last go of the Wolf. The rough cattle-men were kneeling around him now; […] I lifted him in my arms, called to him and stroked his head. He snarled a little, a farewell as it proved, for he licked my hand as he did so, then never snarled again (222).

The story ends with the poignant words of Penroof, who mourns the dog's passing as an irreparable loss, greater than the loss of a hundred oxen. Penroof deeply valued Snap's hunting skills and courage, to the extent that his sentiments toward the deceased bull terrier serve not only as an expression of gratitude but also as a profound tribute to his selfless sacrifice. It is worth quoting the following passage, which illustrates how the remarkable display of the dying dog's refusal to release its prey's iron grip moves hardened farmers to kneel before the dead Snap, with Penroof himself paying homage to the bull terrier's fortitude, strength, and unwavering determination.

> The rough cattle-men were kneeling around him now; old Penroof's voice was trembling as he muttered, "I wouldn't had him hurt for twenty steers." […]. That was a sad ride home for me. There was the skin of a monstrous Wolf, but no other hint of triumph. We buried the fearless one on a butte back of the Ranch-house. Penroof, as he stood by, was heard to grumble: "By jingo, that was grit-cl'ar grit! Ye can't raise Cattle without grit" (221–222).

The narrator consistently emphasizes the unique attributes of the dog that prove its uniqueness. Snap ignored small dogs, but when confronted by larger, stronger and more worthy opponents, he assumed a combative stance: his tail stiffened like a string, his hind legs poised, looking anywhere but at the opponent, emitting menacing high-pitched sounds. If intimidation failed, the fight was starting. Seton-Thompson's narrative compares the bull terrier to other dogs in terms of their experiences in establishing hierarchy, often involving skirmishes where dogs bit each other. The bull terrier most often won the fight[17], but if he lost it, the defeat did not deter Snap as it might other dogs; instead, it spurred him to repeat the fight. With Snap, no new bitter experience was accompanied by greater caution. The narrator's admiration for Snap's physical attributes offers insight into the praises bestowed by renowned enthusiasts and distinguished bull terrier breeders, such as Eva Weatherill, who deemed the creation of the bull terrier inevitable to fulfill the world's need for sporting beauty, and Francis J. Heaney, who lauded the deliberate construction of every aspect of the bull terrier for its specific function (Janowski, 2018: 5, 25).

The essence of the story *Snap*, a beautiful and touching tale about the difficult beginnings of a friendship between a grown man and a remarkable dog, finds resonance in the words of Dawid, the central character in Borzestowski's novel, *Bull Terrier Samson i ja* [*Bull Terrier Samson and me*] Dawid, the owner of a splendid male bull terrier, underscores the breed's ability to evoke ambivalent impressions in people: it worries some, attracts others, yet it arouses interest in everyone:

> When [a bull – J.T-S.] displays its powerful neck and chest, stretches its muscular legs, and holds its tail horizontally, it commands respect and captures attention. It's impossible to ignore it. Wherever it appears, the bull terrier is always in the center of events, quite naturally assuming that this is the place assigned only to it. It doesn't need to prove anything in advance, because, like every warrior, it fulfills its destiny through action. How could I not feel proud to have such a wonderful and devoted friend?" (Borzestowski, 2008: 284)

The narrator of *Snap* shares a similar pride in having such a dog, among other reasons, because of the strong emotional bond and true friendship he shares with the bull terrier. The dog is deeply attached and accepts only him. The protagonist, a great lover of the bull terrier, is captivated by its independent character[18] and the energy and power it exudes. Seton-Thompson's work of the two

[17] It is worth noting that Seton-Thompson does not write about dog fights organized by people, but about conflicts between dogs that lead to bites.

[18] A bull terrier is a rebellious, stubborn and smart dog that needs a calm and restrained owner, especially if he wants to teach the dog something. The bull terrier often tests the patience of its owner and checks whether the prohibitions are still valid. Marek

extreme opinions held by bully owners – that a bull terrier is either a "great family dog" or "a one-master's dog, forming a pact of male friendship with its owner and showing respect only to them and no one else" – confirms the former (Janowski, 2018: 50)[19]. The narrator openly admits that Snap hates the housewife, and this feeling is mutual. The woman's relationship with the dog is built upon two emotional pillars: fear and contempt. The woman is fearful of the dog, while the dog constantly disregards her. According to all cynological sources known to me, the bull terrier is described as gentle towards children, loyal to its owner, but inherently distrustful of strangers (though this can vary depending on the dog's upbringing), and "its reserved character makes it loyal only to its master" (Falappi, 2001: 109). Andrzej Jendrasiak points out that the bull terrier is a very emotional animal, a dog with a specific character. "The great – in the past – bravery they showed towards dogs went hand in hand with subordination to humans" (Jendrasiak, 1996: 77). The protagonist-narrator of the story *Snap*, an employee of a company trading in iron products, cherishes the friendship bestowed upon him by this "little despot." The following words convey the respect and admiration he holds for his dog, highlighting the strength of their unique inter-species friendship and the profound trust bestowed upon a human by an initially aggressive puppy, which proved challenging to train but evolved into a loyal companion, so the hero would not give him up to anyone for anything in the world:

> Only myself and the porter at the office seemed to realize his good points, and we only were admitted to the high honor of personal friendship, an honor which I appreciated more as months went on, and by midsummer not Carnegie, Vanderbilt, and Astor together could have raised money enough to buy a quarter of a share in my little Dog Snap (Seton-Tompson, 1980: 215)

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Snap. The Story of a Bull Terrier* by Seton-Thompson yields several conclusions. Firstly, the story carries a clear didactic and moral-ethical message aimed at young readers, particularly boys. This message is all too eloquent, as evidenced by the words spoken by the old farmer at the very end of the story: "By jingo, that was grit-cl'ar grit! Ye can't raise Cattle without grit" (221–222), delivering an impactful punchline. These sentiments can be generalized and extended beyond cattle breeding, applying to all human affairs which, devoid of courage, determination, and decisive action, lack purpose and are doomed for failure. The message conveyed to children and young people

Martyka, an experienced breeder of bull terriers from Opalplast FCI, compares raising a bull terrier to raising an autistic child.

[19] Adam Janowski acknowledges that both opinions are correct and justifies his position (Janowski, 2018: 50).

is that even someone small and inconspicuous can possess great spirit and has a chance to defeat an opponent bigger than himself. It encourages you never to surrender, be always consistent, remain resolute in the path once chosen, and to wholeheartedly pursue important and decisive for our lives. You should be like a bull terrier, but in the sense of a consistent life attitude, so the bull terrier is a role model here, but the bull terrier as such is embodied (real). Through the story of Snap, young readers learn about friendship and courage, developing respect and empathy towards dogs of this breed. Secondly, the story of Snap remains timeless, retaining the same tone it did a hundred years ago, with one notable exception: responsible owners of bull terriers refrain from engaging them in fights (illegal dog fights still take place), they are less used for hunting, especially wolves, which are now protected. Instead, they raise the dogs under the principle that while bull terriers may possess physical and mental traits that could make them potentially dangerous, the dogs themselves need not be aware of this. Although times and circumstances have changed, from the perspective of our "here and now", the story retains a universal dimension.

One could, of course, place the story in a broader context and interpret the attitudes of the wolf and the dog in terms of human attitudes, look for hidden meanings in them and assume that the characters of the wolf and the dog hide human characters. But why? And would it make any sense? Well, no. Seton-Thompson wrote about flesh-and-blood animals, so an anthropocentric analysis would inevitably lead to overinterpretation. In the story, we have two vivid animal oppositions: the wolf – the bull terrier (the former embodying negative traits, the latter positive) and Dander – Snap. The latter reflects the opposition between Hilton and the narrator, in the sense that each of them is on the side of their own dog, but not merely in the sense of the proverb "every wagtail praises its tail". It's about competition between people over whose dog will ultimately defeat the wolf: a greyhound or a bull terrier.

In the story, we are not dealing with a cultural representation of the bull terrier, but with an embodied animal, and as such this animal should be the subject of study from the perspective of animal studies. While including the bull terrier in the posthumanist context and the process of "creating animality" might seem anachronistic, it could also problematize the bull terrier itself (see Dąbrowska, 2018: 30), which could be the subject of a separate study. At first glance, it can be assumed that the above considerations are, to some extent, a component of the "second wave" of critical animal geographies, representing a certain type of cultural ecology. This is primarily because Seton's narrative highlights the significance of animal domestication processes – such as those involving cattle, purebred dogs, and notably the bull terrier – as a newly bred breed for specific utilitarian and entertainment purposes, and their impact on human life and the environment. However, Seton-Thompson's work could also be interpreted in a way that allows for partial its inclusion in the "third wave"

of animal geographies. In this context, the bull terrier Snap, although he does not yet have full subjective status and dimension, is perceived by the writer as an individual with his own history and experiences, albeit limited to social interaction with the narrator-hero. Consequently, the image of the dog does not deny the existence of a very significant difference between him and humans.

INSTEAD OF THE CONCLUSION

To put it very briefly, somewhat stereotypically, it can be said that Seton-Thompson's *Snap* can be described as a tale of a noble dog and a menacing wolf, and about the friendship between a man and a bull terrier who saved the livestock of farmers in the Wild West. Finally, it carries a didactic message, as previously mentioned, aimed at young readers, that one should never give up, that consistency and persistence in achieving a goal are important in life, and that a smaller opponent can defeat a bigger rival or persecutor thanks to appropriate tactics and cleverness; that what truly matters in life is not merely physical condition and appearance, but rather one's mental fortitude, self-improvement efforts, and belief in one's capabilities. Today, our reading of this story differs from the past, given the changes in time and place. However, its message still remains relevant. While an interpretation of *Snap* could be carried out through the lenses of animal studies and ecocriticism, this is a methodological task for a separate study. One aspect is worth emphasizing here: the Canadian writer challenges the myths, stereotypes, and prejudices surrounding the bull terrier, that have accumulated over two centuries. I believe this somewhat journalistic perspective is particularly needed here, especially amidst the ongoing campaign against dogs of this breed in Poland following the tragic event from several weeks ago[20]. An important task is to raise awareness about the necessity of thorough research before acquiring/adopting/taking any purebred (or non-purebred) dog. Prospective owners should familiarize themselves with information about the specific breed or dogs in general, to know how to prepare the dog for the appearance of a child at home and learning to recognize the signals dogs communicate (Rugaas, 2005). I will summarize the whole thing in the words of an expert of this breed:

> If a bull terrier bites a human, it should always be assumed that the human is to blame. If not the one who came into conflict with the dog, then the one who raised the dog and taught it to react in certain ways [and also the one who does not recognize the signals sent by the animal – J.T-S.]. Let's emphasize it again, the bull terrier was never bred to be aggressive towards humans.

[20] See for example, Zofia Brzezińska's interview with behaviorist Natalia Rostek published on January 5, 2024 in "Rzeczpospolita". (Brzezińska, 2024). Retrieved from: https://kobieta.rp.pl/styl-zycia/art39661391-bulterier-zagryzl-dziecko-behawiorystka-rasa-nie-jest-najwazniejsza.

Even two hundred years ago, when they were pitted against each other in arenas, they had to exhibit absolute obedience and gentleness towards people, especially their handlers and companions. Otherwise it would simply not exist (Janowski, 2018: 4).

Fot. 1. Photo 1. Mr Tom Gannaway with 'Robert the Devil' (English Bull Terrier). Downloaded from: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064447583874&__cft__[0]=AZWcXnFkSdpSersPSl0kzEgmoASSsnQTjqqaP4CMzHorGOgwjqnb7DfrApVQ2iiIkzsDfU8YdIi22moO_Fzr7njoXEN1hmNU_KMcPLwonN3SvMahBm527v7BPxImDJoFmLZ9w3TuczDn_SIuO2RqQUGQe1XLviLSAw0jtIvjFlATO_O_TmTKijWGC6gIRjHHPRbtKPq11MzaT897a4LB2bax&__tn__=-UC %2CP-R.

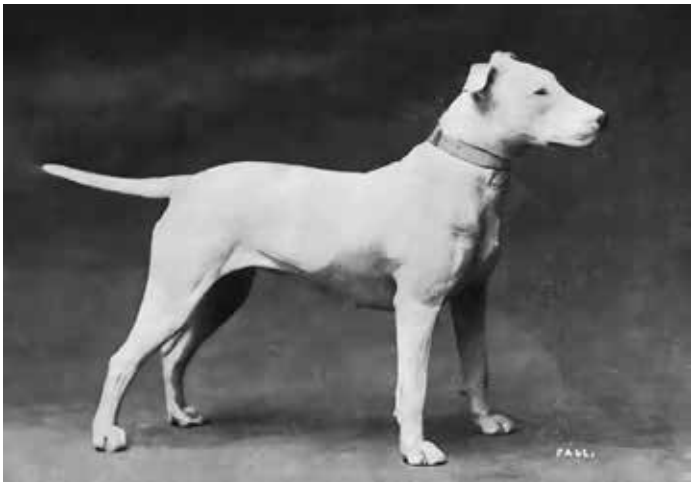

Photo 2. A bull terrier from 1915. Source as above.

Photo 3 and Photo 4. Modern standard bull terrier: from the left, female Saba (Bisurman Breeding) and male Harry (Opalplast FCI Breeding). Photo by J. Tymieniecka-Suchanek. Photos from the home archive.

Photo 5. Modern miniature bull terrier: Bąbel (Fitbull FCI breeding). Photo by Marcin Tarka. Photo from the home archives.

Photo 6. Cotton shopping bag. Photo by J. Tymieniecka-Suchanek.

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JANNEKE VAN DE STADT
Williams College

Cats, Kinship, and Community in Recent Children's Books about the Holocaust

> *The very fact that we want to tell children stories about the Holocaust suggests that there is a lesson to be taught. But what is the lesson we think they will learn?*
>
> Adrienne Kertzer, *My Mother's Voice*

Abstract: Animals of all kinds "people" children's literature. The picture-book genre is no exception especially in narratives premised on the Holocaust. Focused on the particular role and function of their respective feline characters, my essay compares three picture books and one graphic novel spanning the first decade of the 21st century – Patricia Polacco's The Butterfly (2000), Karen Hesse's The Cats of Krasinski Square (2004), Meg Wiviott's Benno and the Night of Broken Glass (2010), and Manuela Santoni's La lettera perduta (2023) – through what is a less-commonly utilized interpretive lens in Holocaust studies: indigenous cultural theories of human dependence on animals for psycho-social, spiritual, and existential survival. Through the key themes of shelter, bonding, nourishment, and interdependence, on both physical and metaphysical levels, I examine closely how these books broaden and complicate received notions of family and community. Often presented as points of disjunction or separation, in these books family and community emerge as deeply entwined socio-cultural networks. Rather than compete along an "either/or" axis, they stand out as "both/and" quantities, with cats serving as critical intermediaries.

Keywords: Holocaust, cats, family, community, interdependence, witnessing

Animals of all kinds "people" children's literature. While creatures have informed our myths and folk tales for thousands of years, in Eurowestern cultural and literary traditions animal stories have largely left the sphere of adult concerns and have come to reside quite firmly in the ambit of children. In a world governed by adult humans, children are often perceived as inferior and/or

primitive, much as animals. Still making their way to adulthood, they are not yet regarded as fully human and, in some theorizations, they constitue a different, not-entirely-human, species altogether (Nodelman, 168). This sharp disjunction in evolutionary and ontological hierarchy functions as a vital point of conjunction in many Native American socio-cultural epistemologies, where human reliance on animals extends well beyond food to include not only psychical, spiritual, and medicinal dimensions, but also deep existential identification, in other words, kinship (Morrison 26–27). More specifically, Ojibwe interpretations of existence confer peoplehood to animals and ultimately hold everyone – humans and nonhumans, adults and children – accountable to and mutually responsible for one another (Justice, 151–152). Among the Ojibwe, which is one of the largest indigenous groups in the United States and Canada, it is a person's actions, not their size, status, or appearance, that inform their world view, a view in which ontological similarity, rather than difference, is assumed from the outset (Morrison 25–26).[1] It is such an understanding of social networks and relationships among "people" that informs the premise for Daniel Heath Justice's Kinship Criticism, where kinship is defined not as "something that *is* in itself so much as something we do – actively, thoughtfully, respectfully" (original italics, 148). The notion that humans walk among and not above animals informs many Native American stories for children in which the centrality of the human to nonhuman relationship is consistently fleshed out (Harde 231). I propose that this lens can also provide illuminating interpretive possibilities for some contemporary children's books about the Holocaust in which socio-emotional networks between animals and humans are a fundamental narrative concern. In addition, the use of this lens to study books about suffering, resilience, and survival allows us to engage with the role and significance of animals with greater sophistication and rigor.

Since the 1990s, picturebooks[2] about the Holocaust have been growing in number and, more recently, have included with greater frequency elements that were typically elided or excluded in the past, such as the portrayal of roundups and physical violence (Haas and Haas, 123). So far, the new millennium has seen no shortage of armed conflict, including invasions and genocide, as well as intolerance, persecution, and extensive human displacement or forced migration. In light of this publication context, I read each of the picturebooks in my study through the thematic lens of community and kinship especially as these relate to both physical and metaphysical space. Cats, who play a key role in all the books I examine, exist as representative, unifying members of their living environments, both informing and enacting the kind of human to nonhuman interdependence that is central to the Ojibwe world view. These are not

[1] The Ojibwe are also known as Ojibwa and Ojibway.

[2] I use Maria Nikolaeva's and Carole Scott's term "picturebook" which highlights the centrality of the genre's dual levels of communication: the verbal and pictorial (1–2).

simply heartwarming child-animal depictions that are, often condescendingly, considered to be standard fare in Eurowestern children's literature, but rather serious and meaningful existential relationships that come into full view when read through a cosmological lens that operates from the premise that animals "are relations and not resources" (Norton 2). Spanning twenty-two years, the stories included here look back at the Holocaust with an eye to the present as well as the future and target Generation Z and Alpha audiences that can benefit from learning about empathy, solidarity, and accountability, as well as the effects of their absence, at a time when different communities, identity groups, and kinship relationships may feel threatened.

Set in Nazi-occupied France, Patricia Polacco's *The Butterfly* is based on the experience of the author's great-grandmother, whose work in the resistance included offering safe haven to Jews in hiding. The story's title notwithstanding, it is Pinouff, an organge tabby, who functions consistently as a vector of kinship. Pinouff lives in the village of Choisy-le-Roi with the main protagonist, a girl called Monique (Polacco's aunt), and her mother, Marcelle, who, unbeknownst to her daughter, has been hiding a Jewish family in their basement. One night, Sevrine, the daughter of that very family, finds her way to Monique's bedroom and they soon become close friends. Because a neighbor happens to catch sight of Sevrine through the window one night, Monique's mother decides that the best course of action is to move the Jewish family right away, in case its presence is made known to the the authorities, and to secure safe passage outside of France. When the two girls say their final goodbyes, Monique gives Sevrine Pinouff to accompany her on the journey.

As of the illustration on the first title page, the story's concern with Choisy-le-Roi as a physical place and community space is immediately evident: in the background, a neighbourly exchange through an open window is offset by the arrival of Nazi soldiers, the "Achtung Juden" sign, and the swastikas that increase in both size and impact.[3] The following page places the threat to the community – the two armed soldiers who have now walked all the way into town – in the foreground, as Monique and Marcelle prepare to leave this fraught public space and enter their home (figure 1).

In the picturebook genre, the page-turn holds great narrative and formal significance as we can see in the illustration that follows (figure 2). On the left side of the double-spread, Monique and Marcelle's front door has brought us inside their home and to a cluster of open doors – symbols of discovery, escape, and transition – that leads to a garden, while an image of domestic love and nurture takes up most of the right side, effectively eclipsing, both in character and in its visual superimposition, the disturbing effect of the soldiers on the page before it. It is also in the double-spread above that we first meet

[3] None of the picturebooks included in my study have page numbers.

Pinouff, her head illuminated by the sunlight as she lies almost at the threshold of the open door, foreshadowing her future role as a reverse psychopomp: Sevrine's guide not to the land of the dead, but of the living.

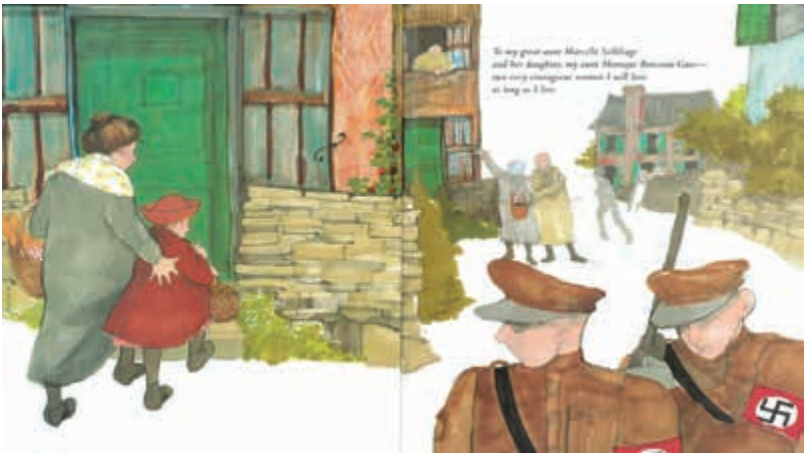

Figure 1

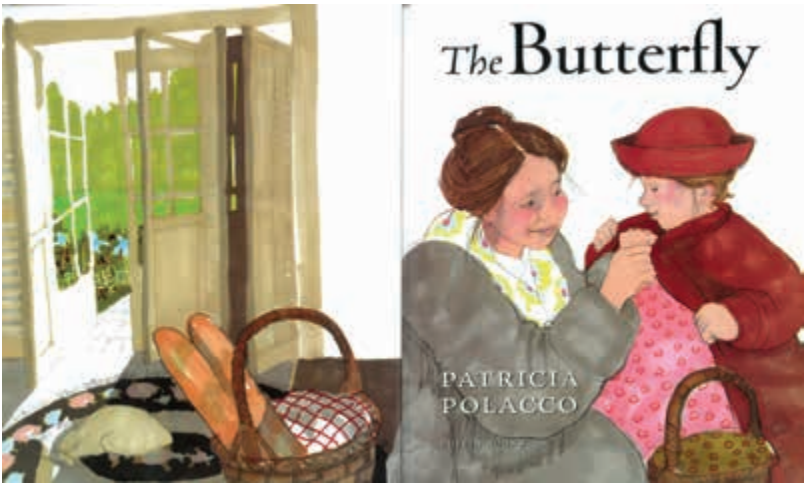

Figure 2

Cats are constant boundary-crossers, poised as they are between their domestic and feral natures, but also in their penchant for moving freely in and out of doors (Lewis, 5 and Jacques, 75). Pinouff's first, and deeply meaningful, act of crossing is along the length of Monique's bed when Sevrine makes her first clandestine visit outside the basement. Monique, who had fallen asleep with Pinouff beside her, awakens to see "a ghostly little figure sitting […] on the end of her bed. A girl about her own age. She was petting Pinouff." Polacco's illustration offers at once an elaboration on and a counterpoint to the text, for here it is Pinouff who is the agent of affection and Sevrine its recipient. The cat, who

appears to be hugging the Jewish girl with the "sad eyes," functions, from the outset, as a source of consolation and support for her. It is also Pinouff who physically traces the line of connection between Monique and Sevrine – they are both French girls, of the same age, living in the same house – by walking from one end of the bed to the other.

On the following morning, when Monique tells her mother about the "ghost" in her room, Marcelle, who does not want to involve her child in resistance work, maintains that "it was only a dream," effectively reducing the actual fact of Sevrine's existence to something illusory. A few pages later, it is the cat who confirms reality, as well as the girls' ontological similarities, by allowing Monique to recognize her visitor as a fellow human; not "the little ghost" of the previous encounter, but a living being: "Monique thought, 'This is no dream, I can hear Pinouff purring.'" The sound of the cat's interactions with another being not only corroborates Sevrine's physical presence, but also occasions critical visual acknowledgement from Monique herself: "'I see you there," she whispers to her visitor. Acts of looking and witnessing are a critical leitmotif in the picturebooks I examine and I will return to this in my discussion.

Pinouff's physical presence also facilitates Sevrine's recollection of her former life, before she was forced into her current fugitive nightmare. Holding Pinouff, she reminisces: 'I once had a cat just like this one.'" Writing about social intercourse among the Ojibwe, Michael Pomedli remarks: "If we move beyond appearances, we notice continuities in the actions of humans and animals" (xx). In other words, human and nonhuman actions can inform and even motivate one another. Polacco's subtle use of visual echoes makes this evident. In the illustrations below, Sevrine's second visit (figure 3b) restages her first (figure 3a) and this reshuffled chain of active affection, where one being holds another, now portrays Monique, who has moved closer, as the main purveyor of comfort for Sevrine. These are the early bonds of human kinship as first modeled by a nonhuman.

Figure 3a

Figure 3b

Polacco does not shy away from depicting the horror and tragedy of the Holocaust as meted out to humans and nonhumans alike. Before she befriends Sevrine, Monique and her schoolmate, Denise, experience the brutal round-up of Monsieur Marks, the Jewish owner of the local candy store who "loved the children in the neighborhood and always had small bits of brightly wrapped candies for them them in his apron pocket." While other locals "froze and tried not to look at the soldiers," and though both girls "wanted to run" from the scene, they deliberately remain and witness the ferocious attack of a fellow community member: "To their horror they saw Monsieur Marks being dragged from his shop by the Nazi soldiers" and "watched [them] kick him hard in the ribs with those tall black boots." The text makes it clear that looking is, in itself, a dangerous activity – "'Don't look for too long, Monique!' Denise warned. 'If we do, they'll come for us next.'" – but the girls do not avert their eyes from what is taking place in their village. They see it, just as Monique saw Sevrine.

There are no illustrations of the violence being perpetrated against Monsieur Marks, but this changes in a subsequent scene, when Monique and Pinouff are out in their garden. As Pinouff gets ready to pounce on a butterfly, Monique manages to stop her from causing it any harm, but she is unable to protect that very same creature from a Nazi soldier who reaches in over the garden wall. In a striking close-up (figure 4) Monique watches a large hand trap the innocent butterfly as it goes about its business among the flowers: "'*Joli, n'est-ce pas*?' He grinned […] then squeezed his fist."

Figure 4

Polacco's dramatic illustration is effective in various ways. For the second time, Monique is portrayed as an active witness to Nazi violence and her facial expression – a mixture of shock, sadness, and fear – recalls, now in stark visual terms, her response to the physical assault on Monsieur Marks. To be sure, these two events, which take place within a day of one another, are narratively and conceptually linked. Although Polacco adheres to the recent picturebook trend of including more explicit information, she has displaced the more graphic violence from a human to a nonhuman. This displacement and its accompanying visual cues serve to emphasize the kinship parallel: the black boots that had once kicked a community member so mercilessly are now transformed into the single black glove that doles out death to an unsuspecting butterfly moving about its natural habitat. Monique herself puts two and two together and asks her mother: "'did they do to Monsieur Marks what they did to the butterfly?'" Marcelle does not respond, but we are told that "Monique had her answer." The fact of witnessing the cruelty and hate taking place around her reinforces for Monique what her goals and responsibilities must be: "Now she understood the sadness in Sevrine's eyes. The fear that was in the eyes of her neighbors and friends whenever the Nazi soldiers came close by. She knew she had to protect her friend. At all costs she had to keep the secret that lived in her basement."

The Butterfly is not the first picturebook in which Polacco has probed how deep relatedness is born out of human-nonhuman relations. The conceit of *Mrs Katz and Tush* (1992) resonates with my discussion in significant ways: a grieving Polish-Jewish widow is visited by her neighbor's son, Larnel, with a kitten he finds in their basement. He tells Mrs Katz that nobody wants the creature because she's so ugly, to which Mrs Katz responds from a personal perspective: "My Myron [her husband] was ugly, too, when he was little, but he grew up to be such a person." The elderly woman, whose last name already betokens an affinity with cats, agrees to adopt the kitten, whom she gives "a good Yiddish name," Tush, but only if Larnel agrees to help. This he does diligently. Soon, Mrs. Katz, who cooks, knits, and reads to Tush, pronounces her to be "such a person." Larnel, whose own connection to his neighbor deepens and extends easily across generational, ethnic, racial (he is black), and religious boundaries, is similarly anointed: "'I know you're not Jewish,'" Mrs Katz tells him, "'but Myron would have liked you. You're such a person, Larnel!'" Over glasses of milk and slices of Kugel, Mrs. Katz tells Larnel about her vacations in the Catskills (!) "borscht resorts," which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s in response to a nationwide surge of anti-Semitism (Kanfer 7). Larnel's surprised "'You mean Jews couldn't stay anywhere they wanted to?'" kindles a memory in him: "'My grandma told me about places she couldn't stay either.'" Both of his grandmothers, biological and adoptive, have been victims of bias and intolerance: "'Your people and mine are alike, you know.' Mrs. Katz

tells him." Throughout the story, and just like Pinouff, Tush is a constant visual and narrative presence as well as a key facilitator of kinship despite presumed divisions.

The Yiddish word "Mensch" ("such a person") describes someone who is not only honorable and principled, but also a true friend. That Mrs Katz recognizes humans and nonhumans as "persons" resonates evocatively with Ojibwe thinking around the broad and fundamental ways in which living creatures, who are all confered personhood, occupy shared space and ineluctably depend on, and are accountable to, one another. By the story's end, she, too, will be formally recognized as kin: "As the years passed, Mrs Katz, Tush, and her descendants became part of Larnel's family. There were graduations, weddings, new babies and finally a kaddish. Larnel stood in front of the headstone […] Then he, his wife, and their children read the inscription together. MRS. KATZ, OUR BUBEE [grandmother]…SUCH A PERSON."

The final goodbye in the *The Butterfly* also describes an instance of mutual recognition. Since Sevrine's parents have to escape from Choisy-le-roi separately, Monique bequeaths her beloved Pinouff, the living symbol of the girls' personal bond, to accompany Sevrine on the dangerous journey to Switzerland: "Tears welled up in Sevrine's eyes. She folded Pinouff into her sweater, then reached into her pocket and pulled out a fine gold chain on which hung a star of David." In the instant that she takes Pinouff into herself, Sevrine reaches for something intimate and deeply personal with which to mark her feelings for Monique. It doesn't matter that one girl is Jewish and the other is not; they recognize one another as profoundly connected. Soon after this farewell, Marcelle and Monique make their way through the train station to return home. It is heavily guarded by Nazi soldiers, so "Marcelle [takes] her daughter's hand. In the other, Monique [clutches] the chain." This detail subtly fleshes out the essence of the girls' exchange: just as Monique is seen to rely on Sevrine's gift as an immediate source of comfort in the face of danger at the train station, readers can imagine Sevrine appealing to Pinouff in the very same way on her own treacherous journey out of France. Throughout the narrative, Pinouff functions as the main artery for the girls' experience and expression of their intimate bond, even though they may be miles apart. In the picturebook's closing note, the author tells us: "Within two years of the liberation of France, Monique and Marcelle received a letter […] Inside it said 'Je vis! (I live!) Sevrine.' Next to her signature was a paw print."

Inspired by actual events, and written in free verse, *The Cats in Krasinki Square* (2004) also features a young girl as the main protagonist. She lives in Warsaw with her older sister, and together they help Jews by smuggling food across the Ghetto Wall. As in *The Butterfly*, we can see that space and place are foregrounded right from the book's cover (figure 5), where Krasinksi Square, once the buffer zone between the Jewish Ghetto and the rest of the city, is

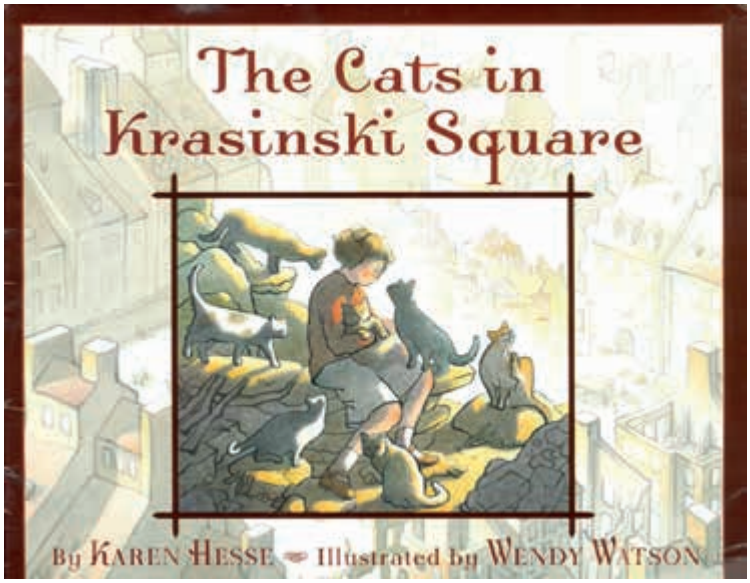

Figure 5

depicted as an area compromised by phsyical destruction and ideological occupation: rubble, crumbling buildings, and heavy military presence.[4]

It is into this square, as the nameless protagonist and first-person narrator tells us, that cats come "from the cracks in the Wall,/ the dark corners,/ the openings in the rubble." Unlike the singular Pinouff, here we have a community of cats, each of whom "once belonged to someone/ […] slept on sofa cushions/ and ate from crystal dishes." The narrator's description foregrounds the once rather human-inflected lifestyle of these nonhumans, for they benefitted from the same domestic comforts as their owners and, more importantly, enjoyed the affective intimacy of family members: "They purred,/ furrowed their chests,/nuzzling the chins of their beloveds." These cats cross through the Wall, from the Jewish side that now finds them orphaned and homeless, to the Polish side where they forage for food and affection. In the story's opening illustration the book's gutter, across which all but one cat have traversed, serves to highlight the rich and complex device of crossing that undergirds the story's concern with issues of separation and connection. It is worth pausing on the sole cat that remains on the left of the binding, caught in an evocative limbo, both about to bridge a rift over the rubble and yet never quite doing so; physically on one side of the gap, but its paw already hovering in the space of its intended destination. How living beings inhabit and negotiate physical and metaphysical spaces constitutes a primary theme of the story and it is beautifully encapsulated in Wendy Watson's illustration.

[4] Beyond the cover, I regret that I am unable to include any of this picturebook's remarkable illustrations as I never received a response to my request for copyright.

As a group, these cats are both like and unlike the Jews in the Ghetto from which they stem: on the one hand, they are also victims of segregation and hunger, but, unlike their confined human counterparts, they are able to make their way through the wall – to transcend. This is a trait that they have in common with the main protagonist, who consorts happily with these feline migrants. She explains that while she may "look like any child/ playing with cats/ in the daylight" she has rid herself of her Jewish armband, "burned with the rags I wore/ when I escaped the Ghetto." She, like the cats, moves "almost safe,/ almost invisible" through Krasinksi Square, wearing, as she tells us " my Polish look," and "[walking] my Polish walk." But while the narrator finds herself physically on the Aryan side of the Wall, she is metaphysically – socially, emotionally, and vis-à-vis her identity – still tied to the Jewish community suffering in segregation, a tension that plays itself out variously by way of her interaction with the cats:

> I whisper,
> "I have no food to spare."
> The cats don't care.
> I can keep my fistful of bread,
> my watery soup, my potato,
> so much more
> than my friend Michal gets behind the Wall of the Ghetto.
> The cats don't need me feeding them.
> They get by nicely on mice.

It becomes clear that one group, the roving cats, serves as a vehicle through which the narrator can both express and work out her feelings of kinship for another group, the Jews beyond the wall, whom the cats in some ways double, especially in the carefully elaborated discussion around domestic comforts and access to food. Like most, if not all, of the Ghetto inhabitants, the narrator's friend does not have enough to eat and, unlike the transient cats, they cannot find anything on which "to get by nicely" where they are. The narrator cannot cross in one direction, and Michal cannot cross in the other, but the cats manage to go back and forth and, in doing so, become conduits for and recipients of the narrator's feelings of kinship. Like the cat that was detached from the others in its group in the book's opening illustration, the narrator inhabits an existential limbo, for she both is and is not part of the Jewish community she was forced to leave behind. As we shall see, the cats' ability to permeate the Wall simultaneously stokes and alleviates her feelings of helpless separation.

When the narrator and her sister devise a plan to smuggle food inside the Ghetto, it is the cats' regular crisscrossing that provides the narrator with a way forward: "I know the openings in the Wall./ The cats have taught me." The feline trajectories out of the Ghetto will now serve as the pathways for food

distribution within it. Although the cats, and the openings they have uncovered in the Wall, cannot help the Jews escape, they do point out an avenue through which to extend their survival. In a real way, by enabling the feeding and nurturing of those humans who once fed and nurtured them, these nonhuman felines enact the Ojibwe notion of mutual behavioral responsibility among all living beings or "persons" (Morrison 27).

On the day that the contraband food is scheduled to arrive at the train station, the Gestapo, accompanied by teams of dogs, is poised to intercept its delivery. Once again, the cats impart the narrator with a means to remedy the situation. Moving through Krasinski Square "singing a nonsense song," the narrator sees the cats coming "from the cracks in the Wall,/ the dark corners, the openings in the rubble" and is immediately inspired: "I know what we must do." While it may be "nonsense" to others, the cats recognize the narrator's voice; to them her song signifies. After all they have a relationship; they are familiars, erstwhile members of the same community, who are either drifting or displaced. The next step, the narrator explains is to: "gather the cats,/ one by one […]/ we gather the cats into baskets," as though they were picking flowers or mushrooms. Then, the narrator continues, she and her fellow resistance workers head to the train station "where we spread out,/ […] behind the Gestapo and their straining,/ snarling dogs." Earlier in my discussion, I paused on the food-cat association and now, at the story's climax, the importance of this linkage is made directly apparent, for these basketfuls of harvested kitties will serve to distract the Gestapo and its dogs from the actual food arriving in Warsaw in similar bags and baskets. The "strong scent of bread, groats, and sugar" immediately attract the dogs, but before they "can reach their prey," the cats are (literally) let out of their containers to confuse the visual and olfactory plane: "The station explodes into chaos/ as frienzied dogs turn their wild hunger on the cats," who elude their pursuers by "slipping through the cracks,/ into dark corners,/ between openings." Wether in a concrete or abstract sense, the Wall erected to control, restrain, and divide, cannot withstand the enduring power of kinship as afforded, and enacted, by the boundary-crossing cats. Throughout the story, this oppressive brick-and mortar barrier has been undermined by its multiple cracks and fissures on which the narrator regularly insists and through which the cats travel back and forth, a fact that is underscored verbally and pictorially as the book comes to an end: "The smuggled food/ vanishes […] through the Wall, over the Wall, under the Wall,/ into the Ghetto." The accompanying illustration of the Wall puts into relief its compromised structure, with its holes and breachable barbed wire, and, given the visible pathways that the cats delineate as they approach its apertures, Watson's illustration also underscores the critical importance of human and nonhuman collaboration in the Wall's ultimate subversion.

Kenneth M. Morrison writes that for many North American indigenous groups "community is the constitutive measurement of selfhood," and we know

that for the Ojibwe, among others, it is a measurement that relies on humans and nonhumans alike (Morrison 26). By contrast, the Nazi project depended on the erasure of kinship bonds, not only among the Jews, but also other groups. The orphaned, homeless cats – themselves victims of the Nazi occupation – who seek out the narrator, her "gentle hand" and "tender voice," and provide the picturebook with its title, are specifically "in" Krasinksi Square, but not "of" it, just like her. They perform physically what she can only imagine: a return to her kin on the other side of the Wall. Thus, in addition to practical routes for the delivery of smuggled food, the cats provide alternative, metaphysical, routes for intimate connections to endure despite the physical and political limitations.

While *The Butterfly* and *Krasinski Square* offer little insight as to historical setting or possible violence in their titles, *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass* (2010) is more direct and far less rosy. The book tells the story of a community split apart by the events around *Kristallnacht* ("The Night of Broken Glass") and begins to tell this tale as of its front cover. On it readers can see Benno, the cat and main protagonist, exhibit the effects of *Kristallnacht* on his body, which is riven by a shaft of light that also illuminates a burning street reflected on a shattered storefront window. Space and place are again presented as a central concern in the book's front matter, but exclusively from a cat's street-level perspective as he moves comfortably among the humans on his Berlin street, rubbing up against their legs congenially (figure 6). By the story's end, however, the back matter presents an austere mirror image of how Benno experiences the very same space: it is cramped and beset by the presence of Stormtroopers with their unwelcoming boots, standing, immovable, in the way of daily life as he once knew it (figure 7).

Figure 6

Figure 7

Described on the book's back cover as "the neighborhood's favorite cat," Benno actually embodies his neighborhood's spirit and social disposition shaped by the manner in which its inhabitants, human and nonhuman, attend to and care for one another. Benno lives "at number 5 Rosenstrasse, just a few blocks away from the Neue Synagogue. He [has] a warm bed near the furnace" thanks to Hans, the Hausmeister, who also leaves him fresh milk every night. Benno regularly visits the Adler family in apartment 3B, where Sophie, the daughter, feeds him scraps of chicken after Shabbat dinner, and he also stops in to see the Schmidts who live on the very same floor in 3A, where little Inge sneaks him bits of Schnitzel on Sundays after church. Before *Kristallnacht*, the girls were friends: "On weekday mornings, Benno watched Herr Adler and Herr Schmidt leave for work. He waited as Inge came out of her apartment and knocked on Sophie's door. Benno purred when the girls knelt to wish him *Guten Morgen*. Then he followed them to school." The men's free movements and the girls' friendship constitute the organizing principle of Benno's daily life and this illuminating existential detail extends to describe the impact of his community on his existence overall: "During the day, Benno strolled around the neighborhood. Sometimes Moshe the butcher fed him scraps and Frau Gerber, the grocer's wife, scratched his ears." Throughout his forays, Benno, whose name holds both German and Hebrew roots, "is welcomed by all."[5] In a give-and-take of mutual regard and good will, Benno is narratively fleshed out by how his community members interact with one another and with him. "At night, Benno returned to his bed beside the furnace in the basement of number 5 Rosenstrasse. He drank his milk and fell asleep listening to the comforting

[5] Benno is short for both the Hebrew Binyamin (Benjamin) and for Germanic names beginning with the root "bern" (bear), such as Bernhard.

sounds of people above." In the image that accompanies the verbal narrative, the fundamental spirit of amity is tellingly extended to cats' presumed, and time-honored, enemy: a mouse poking its head around a wall.

This lullaby moment ends with a turn of the page : "Then things began to change. Moshe the butcher had no scraps for Benno. Frau Gerber, the grocer's wife, had no time to scratch his ears. And Mitzi yelled, 'Scat!' when Benno tried to nap in the window." In the visual portrayal of this moment, a precursor to *Kristallnact*, the sudden, fiery color palette is accompanied by images of tightly closed windows. For the first time, Benno experiences negligence and hostility from his community. And even though it is not exclusively directed at him, as the feline embodiment of the neighborhood spirit, Benno feels the effects of its dissolution actuely, when he witnesses new, disconcerting behavior: "Benno watched Inge leave for school without knocking on Sophie's door. He waited a long time before Sophie came out and walked to school alone. Neither girl wished him *Guten Morgen*." When he returns home later that same day, the door to the Adlers' apartment is locked. Benno immediately notices, not differences in his neighbors themselves, but in their treatment: "In apartment 3B, the mob was breaking the Adlers' furniture and throwing books out the window […] The Schmidts' apartment was untouched." Prior to this targeted violence, Benno and the social kinship he represented had been whole. Now some constitutive parts of that unit have either been destroyed or gone missing, as is evident in the illustration below bearing the cat's pale and incomplete reflection on the shattered storefront window (figure 8): "Benno could not find Moshe the butcher. He never saw Professor Goldfarb or Sophie and her family again."

Figure 8

Following the precursor to *Kristallnacht*, life on Rosenstrasse continues, but "people were no longer friendly" and "the neighbors and shopkeepers went

quietly about their business, their eyes lowered." We lower our gaze or look away for various reasons, for example out of fear of being targeted, as we saw in *The Butterfly*. In the given context, it can also be read as an unwillingness to bear witness to what is taking place. Community and kinship, however, require attention; to exist at all, let alone flourish, they must be attended to. In the case of *The Butterfly* and *The Cats in Krasinski Square,* humans and nonhumans make it through because they actively perservere in their mutually affecting relationships; they look and, therefore, see. Benno, who has long served as a dedicated eye-witness to daily life in his neighborhood, does not, and can no longer, channel the unity in "community" because the latter no longer exists as such. It is a grim reduction of what it once was, as the image on the right (figure 9b) – a foil to an earlier illustration on the left (figure 9a) – confirms.

Figure 9a

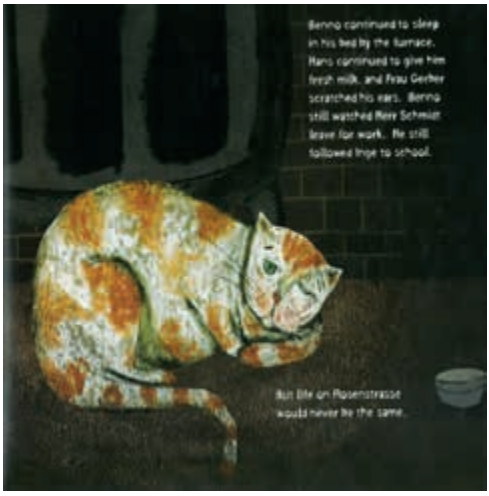

Figure 9b

Notwithstanding what the text on the right states, Benno no longer has a visible bed; he finds himself in a dark basement with a furnace that does not provide the light and warmth it once did, and the mouse who had shared his space has disappeared. While Benno's right eye is open, the left one invites multiple interpretations. On the one hand, and since an earlier illustration shows Benno's broken basement window, it might be injured and swollen shut; intolerance, hate, and violence, after all, affect the neighborhood as a whole and not just their intended targets, as we saw in previous picturebooks. At the same time, Benno's closed eye evokes the willfull blindness enacted by some members of his community.

To be animate, according to the Ojibwe, is to have intentionality, which comes with critical behavioral implications (Morrison, 26). In the picturebook's afterword, which provides historical background and photographs of the real-life events behind Benno's fictionalized experience, the closing paragraph

underscores both the importance of action in the face of injustice and the tragic results of its absence: "Only a few nations spoke out against the events of Kristallnacht, showing the Nazis that the world would tolerate the persecution of Jews on a mass scale." Following Ojibwe thinking, it's all about how groups and individuals, human and nonhuman, behave toward one another, a notion that has become paramount in the new millennium as world events – some of which hearken back disturbingly to the kind of thinking that led to the Holocaust – require constant attention and action. Perhaps this is why Benno's vigilant, open eye is directed so intently on us readers; it is a reminder, and maybe even a challenge, to act decisively so as to keep social networks strong and uncompromised, not just within themselves, but with the rest of creation.

In the picturebooks discussed so far, the feline protagonists are instrumental when it comes to both practical issues (safety, food) and attitudinal ones (cooperation, friendship). This is also the case in Manuela Santoni's *La Lettera Perduta* (*The Lost Letter*), a children's graphic novel published in 2022 that brings together a number of, by now, familiar elements. Set in the 1990s, the book combines the personal story of Emma, a nine-year-old girl who has relocated with her mother to the town of Montequadrato and leads a self-imposed, isolated existence, with the story of Pietro (or more accurately his ghost), who suffers from amnesia and who had once enlisted in the Italian pro-Nazi army only to desert and join the resistance. The first memory he recovers, with Emma's help, is that during the war he had hidden Tina, a beautiful Jewish woman, and spared her from arrest and certain death. Forced to part, they had promised to write one another, but Pietro dies heroically before being able to send his letter to her. Tina, who survives the war, spends her life believing that Pietro abandoned her. When we first encounter her, she has become an embittered and socially disenfranchised elderly woman who attends to a group of homeless cats.

From the outset, the fictional town of Montequadrato is presented as the story's main stage, placing community and shared space at the forefront once again. The account begins on an early summer morning with opening panels that provide a birds-eye view of the town as an indistinct, light-blue shape hovers above it (3). We eventually find out that this blue apparition is the ghost of Pietro, whose trajectory ends at the church bells. The accompanying illustration suggests that the ghost itself causes them to ring loudly, rousing the whole community, including Emma. However, it is not her physical but metaphysical awakening that the opening pages announce to the reader above all: an awakening into a deeper understanding of herself, her community, and its past.

The next series of panels continues to follow the ghost into the town park where a group of stray cats is being fed by the now elderly Tina. Only Malpelo, the novel's feline protagonist and Emma's sole friend in town, catches sight of Pietro's ghost and interrupts his meal to follow it all the way to its destination, setting the novel's narrative mechanism in motion. Without Malpelo, none of the

fundamental plot connections can take place. By noticing and tracking down the ghost, he ensures Emma's and Pietro's acquaintance and allows for their individual stories, as well as their respective personal projects, to become entwined. Thus, this supernaturally attuned tabby will not only facilitate Emma's developmental process, but also her engagement with the surrounding community and its history. That a nonhuman is made to serve as intermediary is, by now, hardly new, but Malpelo's liaising activity is peculiar in that it extends over space *and time*, allowing the past and its significance to inform the present.

Pietro's ghost admits that his partial amnesia may be the result of "perhaps [not wanting] to remember certain things" (50)[6]. This is an impulse he has in common with the elderly Tina, who, on the one hand, wears her mother's fur coat "in order not to forget…" (118) but, on the other, tears up a love-letter she once wrote to Pietro saying "this piece of paper holds everything I don't want to remember anymore" (152). Whether, and what, one chooses to engage with, especially if it's something painful or exacting, is a decision that constantly hovers over Emma's life as well. Indeed, she is guilty of similar acts of conscious oblivion and repression, not vis-à-vis the past or the Holocaust, but rather what she perceives as a threatening present: fearful of her swimming lessons, she prefers to hide out at home to watch TV; she resists the friendly advances of her human classmate, Caterina, in favor of her secretive games in the park with Malpelo.

The act of "witnessing" that emerged as a critical concern in *The Butterfly* and *Benno*, resurfaces in *La Lettera Perduta* but now in auditory, rather than visual, terms. Emma, who spends much time alone in her room, also isolates herself when she's out in public by listening to the Spice Girls on her earphones. This makes important exchanges inaudible.

Figure 10

[6] All translations from Italian are my own.

In the illustrations above, only the English song lyrics in red provide constant input from one frame to the next; Caterina's chatter, which (as we find out later) includes a party invitation in the form of a question, is shut out and effectively becomes nonsense. Ironically, Emma does attend and listen to a talking cat, Malpelo, who admonishes her, after they flee from that same classmate: "Great, we escaped from a 9-year-old girl. Who am I to tell you, but…. you should find some HU-MAN friends" (80). Malpelo is well aware that Emma's reduced human existence is not good for her and tells her as much as he walks away in a huff. Kinship relations do not consist exclusively of positive interactions (Justice 2018, 97). Indeed, conflict may be essential for the benefits of kinship to emerge. Here, the fact that it is a nonhuman who sets Emma's human experience back on course is a defining element of the novel.[7]

When Emma finally visits Caterina, her classmate pulls out a photograph of her grandmother, as a little girl, standing beside her teacher. Caterina recounts how much her grandmother had loved that teacher who had simply disappeared one day. Heartbroken, Caterina's grandmother had made inquiries, but, after being beaten in response, had let the matter drop. This imposed silence resulted in local doubts "that [the school teacher] had ever existed at all," an enforced, community-wide amnesia (102). Unbeknownst to Emma, Malpelo and Pietro's ghost had followed her to Caterina's house and, when Pietro sees the picture in Caterina's hand he is hit by a crucial, painful memory: before joining the resistance, he had actively participated in the arrest and deportation of Tina's mother, the school teacher in Caterina's photograph. When the girls hear about this, their direct accusations, "Why is being Jewish a crime? […] Where's the sense in that? […] Why did you do it?" (105), reduce Pietro's ghost to tears. Attempting to defend his actions, he says "There were many of them… […] I was obeying orders […] I was forced!…I didn't want to!" (105). But Emma is not persuaded and screams: "'This is why you're all alone! Because you've hurt people!'" Sometimes, 'not doing' as one is told is the necessary course of action.

In fact, Emma comes to this very realization in the episode that immediately follows. Set, by no means coincidentally, at the "Community Pool," a terrified Emma is being cheered on by many, including her mother, to dive in the pool and perform with her team: "Jump in!" "It's up to you! It's your turn!" (107–108). A series of panels depicts a paralyzed girl, poised to jump and meet expectations, yet unable to follow through. Then a single image with swirling

[7] Santoni named her own orange tabby Malpelo, likely after the title character of Giovanni Verga's story "Rosso Malpelo" (1878), about the miserable and ill-fated life of a redhead toiling in a sand mine. His name, which translates to "Evil Redhead," reflects deep-seated superstitions of nastiness, devilry, and misfortune associated with that hair color and Santoni counters them directly in her novel by way of a feline Malpelo who is the linchpin in all positive narrative outcomes.

pieces of paper, interrupts the loud, insistent chorus of voices and brings about Emma's categorical refusal to do as she is bidden. "'No!'" she yells decisively, "'I don't want to do it'" (108–109). The visual and narrative intrusion by the spinning papers, which readily evoke Pietro's and Tina's letters traveling through space and time, is an echo from Pietro's story thread and, most immediately, of the preceding episode in which he submitted to others' orders. The effect of the intruding image is clear: it is an intervention from the past in the immediate present that brings about Emma's ultimate resistance to the unrelenting social pressure around her. This is a critical moment in the novel and Santoni has been building up to it steadily: the furious and pained refusal that Emma launches at her mother (figure 11) is a reprise of the enraged confrontation of Pietro a few pages earlier (figure 12):

Figure 11

Figure 12

From Emma's physical orientation facing left, to the opening of her mouth with its pointy tongue, to the throbbing heart beat and visceral reactions by both Emma's mother and Pietro, Santoni draws an unmistakable parallel that will culminate in a full-page illustration. Sitting by the pool with her mother, who has come to check in with her, Emma states: "'I'm a big girl. I don't want to do things that I don't want to do…Just to make you happy…So, no more pool…I don't know whether I want to keep going'" (112, figure 13).

Figure 13

By adopting a clear stance against Pietro's treatment of Tina's mother, Emma sets in motion her own ability to stand up for herself. Santoni's insistence on the confluence of Pietro's and Emma's experiences is also evident pictorially in the tell-tale aura surrounding Emma, which replicates the frequently amorphous shape and color of Pietro's manifestation as a ghost.

Emma's coming into her own takes place about halfway through the novel, at which point key plot elements begin to fall into place efficiently thanks to various feline interventions. When she hears a cat's miau behind a bush, Emma finds, not Malpelo, but his band of brothers. It is thanks to them that she meets their human protector, Tina, who arrives to feed them, and it doesn't take Emma long to figure out her identity as the addressee of Pietro's letters. Tina, who, like Emma, has curated an isolated existence with only cats for friends, does not want to be found and quickly disappears into the city streets. But the newly emboldened Emma, who had recently held Pietro's ghost to account alongside Caterina, takes another step out of her reduced social existence and reaches out to her classmate for help: "'I need you'" she pleads with Caterina, "'girlfriends help one another!'" (123). Together, the girls find Tina at the park and hand her one of the letters she had once written to Pietro, and that he had kept. As soon as Tina touches the letter, the story's orientation shifts to

a historical perspective narrated in news-reel fashion and with distinctly less cartoonish illustrations. This time, it is historical fact that interrupts the course of a fictional present in order to confirm, and highlight, the novel's foundation in reality: "There have been dark moments in our history…But they are part of us. The idea that there was such a thing as a superior Arian race…arrived in Italy during the war from Germany… affecting above all the Jewish population….with roundups all over the country" (135–136). The wording deliberately includes "us," a community of contemporary readers, in a tragic and shared historical moment. The army truck in the final news-reel panel becomes Pietro's vehicle in the opening illustration of the episode that immediately follows, in which he is ordered to find and arrest Tina. As we already know, Pietro's instincts prevail on this occasion for, instead of arresting Tina, he saves her life.

Santoni's graphic novel continues to unfold in largely predictable ways: Tina finally reads Pietro's letter and understands that he did not abandon her; Pietro tells her about his resistance work and how it led to his death. Now at peace, Pietro ceases to haunt his hometown, and Tina, who comes to realize that she has isolated herself for too long promises Emma: "no more hiding" (176), a decision that Emma also made for herself by letting a human friend, Caterina, into her life. And what about Malpelo, the feline intermediary who set in motion each of these personal and community projects? Much like Pietro, who ceases to be a ghost, Malpelo sheds his supernatural abilities. The novel's closing sequence restages its opening with Emma fast asleep on a Sunday morning. Now that her personal awakening and community mission have been accomplished, it is not the church bells that rouse her out of bed, but a loudly mewing Malpelo. No longer homeless, Malpelo has found permanent lodging in Emma's room and, more importantly, has stopped communicating with her in Italian. But they still understand one another. In response to his wake-up mews, she says: "'You're right! I have to go to the pool!'" (178). Now more closely resembling the non-verbal kinship relationships of *The Butterfly*, *Krasinski Square*, and *Benno*, Malpelo's duties as cosmic intermediary are over, but his profound influence, and their continuing kinship relationship, are confirmed in a final visual echo. Back at the community pool, the stage for Emma's pivotal act of individuation, we watch her jump fearlessly in the water. Instead of the earlier light-blue, ghostly aura around her head, a smiling Malpelo is depicted on her swimming cap – not physically there but symbolically present – taking the plunge right along with her.

Throughout *La Lettera Perduta*, individuals and community, the past and present, fact and fiction, are in constant conversation. In fundamental ways, this has been true of all the books discussed here and always under the auspices of nonhuman intermediaries. The insistence on the documented, historical underpinnings of these stories invests them not only with a certain *gravitas*, but also underscores the importance of memory, the notion that these events must

not be forgotten. Generally, when it comes to literature about the Holocaust, discourse centers on how trauma and atrocity are to be represented; on how we ought to write about "the unspeakable" (Shikhmanter, 2). These questions become more pedagogically and developmentally driven in the genre of picturebooks: should they convey hope or even happy endings so as not traumatize or overwhelm their readers? But then what does it mean to impart a positive meaning to any narrative of the Holocaust? Does it minimize and distort profound historical events (Lezzi 35–36)? Such questions, albeit important and germane, have a polarizing effect that can lead precisely to what the books included here seek to counter: silence and ensuing oblivion. With the exception of La *Lettera Perduta*, which ends on a largely upbeat note, *The Butterfly*, *Krasinki Square* and *Benno* do not secure the child at the expense of necessary complexity.

To varying degrees, these stories end on a mixture of resolution and uncertainty, for humans and nonhumans alike, and the ensuing tension might serve as an approach to Kertzer's question in this essay's epigraph. Writing about kinship and animals in indigenous children's literature, Roxanne Harde remarks: "there is something terribly wrong in forgetting who your relations are" (237), in other words, in neglecting to nurture and maintain ties across communities and shared space. This is what might have happened in *The Butterfly* and *Krasinski Square*, and precicely what does happen for Benno and his neighborhood, where people looked down and away from threats to the community. Kinship, Daniel Heath Justice insists, is fostered and contextual: "[it] isn't a static thing; it's dynamic, ever in motion. It requires attentiveness; kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun" (Justice 150). Feline protagonists may soften, both visually and affectively, the impact of this difficult material on young audiences, but, above all, they underscore relationships and relatedness, no matter the "people" involved, as values worthy of investment, sustainment, and protection.

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DOBRAWA LISAK-GĘBALA ORCID: 0000-0002-2442-5412
University of Wroclaw

Animalitas versus Humanitas: A Comparative Analysis of a Comic Book Series by Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski and a Graphic Novel by Gosia Kulik

Abstract: Regarding the context of the longstanding discussion about the status of nonhuman hominids, this article compares two Polish graphic narratives about a chimpanzee functioning in the human environment. The first case is Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski's comic book series *Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek* addressed to young audiences. Chmielewski presents the relations between the intelligent ape protagonist and his human companions in a playful and simplified way. Practices meant to humanize the chimpanzee named Tytus do not entail moral dilemmas. The second case, the graphic novel *Ta małpa poszła do nieba* by Gosia Kulik, is designed as a pseudo-prequel to celebrated series about Tytus. This serious narrative, addressed to more mature recipients, renders a complex network of events that precedes and succeeds the death of a little chimpanzee "adopted" by a human family. Kulik emphasizes not only what is "human" in the animal, but also what is "animal" in humans. In the article, her novel is interpreted through the prism of the concepts by Giorgio Agamben and Raymond Corbey.

Keywords: human-animal relations, nonhuman hominids, graphic novel, comics, Chmielewski Henryk Jerzy, Kulik Gosia

Over around four centuries, the tension between *animalitas* and *humanitas* has been a recurrent motif in the philosophical and scientific scrutiny of hominids – a family of primates which includes *homo sapiens* and other extinct human species, along with orangutans, chimpanzees and gorillas. Within the newer strand of "the metaphysics of apes", as Raymond Corbey calls the discussion about the status of nonhuman hominids (Corbey, 2005: 13), also literary pieces, films and comics have played an important role. This article proposes that the body of ape-centered works, which can be viewed through the prism of human-animal studies, can be expanded thanks to the inclusion of two Polish graphic narratives: the series of comic books *Tytus, Romek*

i A'Tomek (Titus, Romek and A'Tomek) by Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski (published since 1957) and the 2018 graphic novel *Ta małpa poszła do nieba* (This monkey has gone to heaven) by Gosia Kulik. What proves indispensable to grasp the specificity of these word-and-image approaches is a short overview of the most poignant dilemmas and persistent clichés in the discussion on the status of *hominidae*.

As Corbey surveys, in the mid-seventeenth century, when Europeans learned about the existence of orangutans and chimpanzees, the conspicuous similarity of these animals to humans seemed to be a potential threat to the human position within the hierarchy of beings (Corbey, 2005: 15–23). Nicolas Tulp (famously portrayed by Rembrandt during a lesson of anatomy) saw a chimpanzee as early as 1641 and described it. In 1698, Edward Tyson (also an anatomist) dissected another specimen. Soon, this experience prompted him to write the treaty *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris: or, the Anatomy of a Pygmie Compared with that of a Monkey, an Ape, and a Man* (1699). Following the typical anthropocentric bias, Tyson tried to define the human as superior than "the Pygmie" and proposed a revised hierarchy of beings with primates at the lower level, next *Pygma* (as the intermediate link), humans, and angels on the top. For his contemporaries, an additional stimulus for reflection about human-animal boundary was the knowledge about so-called "wild children" (sometimes, ascribed to the *homo ferus* genre), who did not speak. In the face of such borderline cases, the answer to the unsettling question about the *differentia specifica* of human beings remained unclear. What used to be interchangeably summoned to safeguard human dignity was the mind, self-awareness (Linnaeus), speech and soul. The debate reignited when Charles Darwin announced the "common ancestor" theory (1859). Also today, such features of nonhuman hominids as the bipedal posture, high intelligence and tool use, along with the proven genetic similarity to humans, prompt scientists and philosophers to pose the question about the border between *animalitas* and *humanitas*. Giorgio Agamben regards this longstanding pursuit for an adequate definition of the human as an anthropological "machine" which produces the differences between beings (Agamben, 2004: 26). Since over centuries – Agamben argues – this machine functioned within the in-between area, it has shaped not only the concept of the ape-man or the wild child but also of the barbarian, the slave, the foreigner – to put it shortly, each excluded "Other" (Agamben, 2004: 37–38).

The liminal status of nonhuman hominids proved to be a puzzle also for many writers who cast representatives of these species in the role of protagonists. For example, the famous *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912) by Edgar Rice Burroughs unfolds a story of a "wild child" raised by a gorilla-like ape Kala. In "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie" ("A Report to the Academy"), Franz Kafka went even further since a great ape called Rotpeter (Red Peter) is the narrator

of this 1917 short story[1]. Although Red Peter seems eloquent and well-educated, his humanization has not made him happy. Furthermore, the assumed monstrosity of nonhuman hominids began to draw the attention of artists. An archetypal example is the *King King* film (Cooper, Schoedsack, 1933) about a gorilla-like giant. Both Tarzan and King Kong became pop-culture icons and frequently appeared in movies, comic books and novels. The storyworld created by Pierre Boulle in his 1963 novel *La Planète des singes* (*Planet of the Apes*) proved equally popular. The book was soon followed by a plethora of film and comic adaptations. The exceptional quality of Boulle's idea is the role reversal: on a distant planet, human savages are fully subordinated to civilized chimpanzees, orangutans and gorillas.

It is precisely the outstanding pop-cultural career of ape protagonists that forms an indispensable context for the analysis of two Polish narratives about nonhuman hominids placed in human environments. First of all, the choice of the medium of comics perfectly fits into this tradition. Undoubtedly, Chmielewski's series and Kulik's graphic novel share many features. Both are single-creator hand-painted works. Both present the character of a young chimpanzee which seems a well-thought choice because the neotenous features of this animal encourage treating it as a child (see Małecki et alt., 2019: 24–28). In both graphic narratives, the chimpanzee's cleverness results in humanizing attempts on the side of surrounding people. Yet, these works differ evidently in such respects as the model recipient, the visual convention and – most importantly – the approach towards tensions between *animalitas* and *humanitas*. As a consequence, their degree of delving into entangled aspects of the hominid discussion varies significantly.

The playful series by Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski, initially published as comic strips in the magazine "Świat Młodych" (The world of the young)[2], is addressed to children and younger teenagers. Hence the original meaning of "comics" (as a pop-cultural work which foregrounds the humoristic facet) is definitely applicable in this case. Notably, Chmielewski's series is not the first Polish children's comics with a funny ape protagonist, for as early as 1935 Kornel Makuszyński and Marian Walentynowicz published *Awantury i wybryki małej Małpki Fiki Miki* (Adventures and escapades of a little monkey called Fiki Miki)[3]. This rhymed work about the adventures of a monkey befriended by African boy Goga-Goga soon spawned a trilogy, ensuing volumes appearing in

[1] Interestingly, Red Peter is recalled by J. M. Coetzee's character, Elisabeth Costello, in her lecture about animal rights (Coetzee, 1999: 18–30).

[2] For the full record of publications from the series *Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek* up to 2010, see: Rusek, 2010: 282–283.

[3] The second part of the monkey's name, "Miki", may have been designed to evoke Mickey Mouse (Sosnowski, 2005: 252). Similarly, a possible allusion to American pop culture in comic strip by Chmielewski is connected with the character of Dużuś, who resembles King Kong (Chmielewski, 2002: 31–33).

1936 (see Rusek, 2010: 67–68). Chmielewski's idea has become a far more developed enterprise – a series of comic books and their reeditions that has been released since 1966. It has always been designed as approachable for young audiences. Tytus and his friends travel through time and space and meet exotic creatures, yet even the most surprising adventures are told chronologically. Although the style of Chmielewski's cartoons has changed over decades, it is possible to recognize his stable predilection for legible lines and lettering, a rather regular panel grid, conventional speech balloons, cartoon jokes, and – in case of color graphics – a bright, cheerful palette.

In the same vein, the human-animal relations are presented in a simplified way. First of all, with regard to the assumed public, the casting of a chimpanzee in the role of the "team mascot" accompanying two teenage boys, Romek and A'Tomek, seems more than justified. Tytus, as an animal of short posture, is a bit childlike. However, he is often dressed in casual teenage clothes, uses youth language and has a tendency to tell "monkey" jokes, so he resembles an unruly adolescent who never grows up. The background story of this character is incongruent and ramified. In the 1957 comic strip, Romek and A'Tomek bump into a laboratory animal kept on a space shuttle and make friends with him (Chmielewski, 2002: 9). Interestingly, Chmielewski employs a motif of a talking laboratory ape which exceeds its natural condition prior to Boulle. What is more, initially, Tytus is not a genuine chimpanzee because in some panels he has a tail. An alternative story from the 4th edition of *Book One* presents the artistic origin of Tytus as created by Papcio Chmiel, the comic *alter ego* of Chmielewski, who formed a chimpanzee on the basis of a splash of ink (Chmielewski, 2009a: 52–55). Romek and A'Tomek called him "Tytus de Zoo" (based on the similarity between the word "tusz" – Polish for "ink" – and the name "Tytus"). In turn, according to one of the earliest stories, Tytus lives in a cage in the zoo and is regularly kidnapped from it by his human friends (Chmielewski, 2002: 52). Likewise, in another old comic strip, three protagonists meet a whole tribe of Tytus's talking relatives in Africa (Chmielewski, 2002: 63), who learn that their relative is being "educated" in the best European zoological gardens. Moreover, in the story "Sen Tytusa" (Tytus's dream), when the chimpanzee writes his resumé, he claims to be born in "the monkey grove" (Chmielewski, 2002: 86). This way or another, the status of Tytus is unnatural and impossible to explain in a rational way. Moreover, such properties as the ability to speak, developed emotions or the faculty of reasoning characterize many different animals presented by Chmielewski. Animals perceived as animals (non-humans) rarely appear in this storyworld. For example, the uneducated chimpanzees who cannot speak serve only as a backdrop against which Tytus stands out. As long as he does not utter words, he is indistinguishable from other exemplars of the same species. When he wants to hide, even the lineup that engages dozens of nearby chimpanzees cannot give him

away. Only the exact number of his hairs (2365205124!) is to confirm his identity (Chmielewski, 2002: 237). Tytus is cast as a being superior to an ordinary chimpanzee and inferior to his human companions. He functions somewhat as an intermediate link in the evolution of hominids – just like his ancient ancestor who "got bored of being an ape", so he became a Neanderthal (Chmielewski, 2002: 66, trans. D.L.-G.). Furthermore, before Tytus marries a female chimpanzee, he flirts with women; hence, there are no genre boundaries in this innocent courtship.

The likewise blur of interspecies boundaries underpins the motif of transgression which propels the scenario of many adventures[4]. Tytus is being humanized through many educational activities. For example, in *Book One*, he joins a scout team. This topic was imposed previously by Świat Młodych, issued by Scouts Publishing House Horizons. Tytus is also educated through sport, military training, reading books, music and art. Even the proportions of his body are to be changed, as if an accelerated evolution of species were to take place during one lifetime. Whereas this idea reveals scientific claims, the tool of a rolling pin meant to cause the change turns the whole experiment into a parody of torment (fig. 1 – "Enough! You rolled him into a pancake" – Chmielewski, 2009b: 5, trans. D.L.-G.).

From the point of view of human-animal studies, stories about the adventures of Tytus, humanized by the environment (and willingly humanizing himself),

[4] The issue of transgression in Chmielewski's series had not been raised by researchers until Jacek Kołodziej and Weronika Pisarska addressed it in their papers presented during the 2022 scientific conference "Z Tytusem przez wszechzbytki. Konteksty, tropy i motywy w twórczości komiksowej Henryka J. Chmielewskiego" (Toruń).

show a naive and playful anthropomorphization of the hominid. There is no clear demarcation line between *humanitas* and *animalitas*, and there are no moral tensions either. The only direction of possible change of status leads from animal to human. Thereupon, Chmielewski's humorous approach can only be loosely inscribed in humanistic-liberal tendencies connected with the idea of emancipation (see Wolfe, 2010).

In this context, Kulik's graphic novel turns out to be a compendium of possible tensions in the economy of the relations between a small female hominid and her human environment. Her intermediate, liminal position between apes and men is confirmed even by the fact that her adoptive parents, Janek and Krysia Harcerscy, call her "Małpgosia". This name is combined of Polish word "małpa" ("monkey") and the diminutive form "Gosia" derived from the female name "Małgorzata" ("Margaret"); which is also the name of the author herself. The complicated human-animal relations in Kulik's narrative can be captured through the prism of the concepts by Agamben and Corbey. Also the title recalling the afterlife alludes to the discussion on the hierarchy of beings and the topic of animal soul. What is more, the scene of the commentary on the *Planet of the Apes* movie also highlights a very conscious reference to the basic themes in the artistic reflection on the status of hominids[5]. This graphic narrative is definitely addressed to more mature audiences (young adults and adults), for the mere subject here can be drastic. The retrospective layer pictures the death of a chimpanzee adopted by a couple who could not have their own child. The scattered plot covers also the complex network of social and family relations which had led to this tragedy and the equally entangled composition of detrimental effects in the aftermath. In regard to the wide range of issues, one can label Kulik's novel "socially engaged", "psychological" or recognize it as "the animal story".

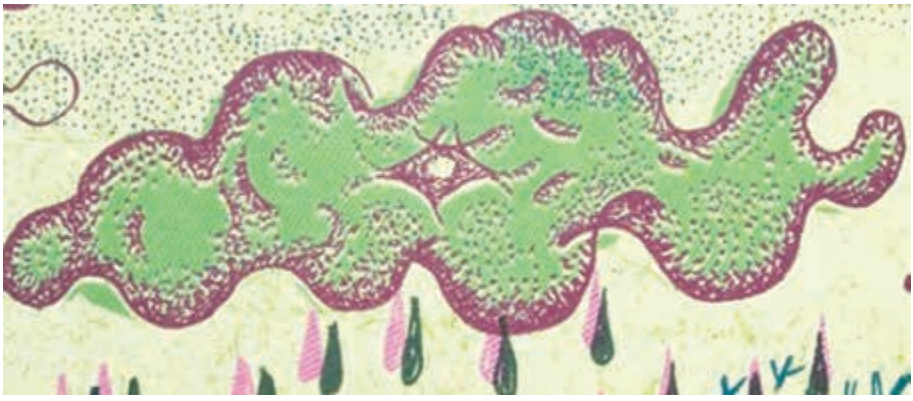
Also, the underground style of this work is intended for non-child recipients. It is highly congruent in its artistic form, which is based on an unrealistic palette and gutter-less panels, mostly arranged in a chessboard, quadriptych design. The volume features many chronological, narrative loops and enigmatic, quivering scenes. In particular, numerous panels without speech balloons, including three single-page spreads (Kulik, 2018: [54],[80],[143]), signal the serious character of the work. Subdued colors sometimes give way to an intense red of details emphasizing the private dramas (for example, in the opening panels picturing Janek's account, the red color accentuates the blood of a chimpanzee that allegedly wounded herself in an accident with scissors (Kulik, 2018: [8–9]). Kulik pictures violence, hallucinations, traumatic recurrences of images from the past or a distorted perception of the characters. All

[5] Within an intermedial reference, Kulik additionally emulates the recognizable lettering of the blockbuster's title (Kulik, 2018: [63]). Page numbers are given in square brackets because there is no pagination in the volume.

these elements enable one to call *Ta małpa poszła do nieba* a graphic novel not only in reference to its book-bound format, but also to its "high production value" and literariness (see Stein, 2015: 425), as well as its character of a piece that is "strange, puzzling, disturbing in its otherness" and undermines comic book conventions (Tuszyńska, 2015: 52, trans. D.L.-G.).

Notably, in Kulik's project, the topic of human problems is inseparable from the issue of animal distress, just like words are inseparable from images. This is why I will organize my analysis of tensions between *animalitas* and *humanitas* in this graphic novel around four iconotextual motifs that epitomize the following: Janek's "metaphysics of apes", the traumatic repetitions that haunt the adoptive father, the self-incrimination and depression of the adoptive mother and an idea of animalization as the moral development of a human.

The most emblematic for the first area is the leitmotif of a rain cloud. Its picture contains an internal figure resembling both the eye of providence and an unusually regular cell body of a neuron (fig. 2)[6].



This visual symbol, used on the book's cover, meaningfully conflates the metaphysical and biological facets, in accordance with Janek's private "metaphysics of apes". First of all, as an admiring – hence anthropomorphizing – "father" to a little chimpanzee, he resists the anthropodenialist pressure (see de Waal, 2006: 59–68) from a conservative, Catholic milieu. This environment, epitomized by a priest (Kulik, 2018: [15]), associates apes with sin and Satan, which reminds one about the traditional image of the monkey as *figura diaboli* (Corbey, 2005: 8)[7]. After somebody has left on Janek's door the "666" and "Sinners will go to hell" inscriptions, he creates his own hierarchy, or rather numerology, of beings, with 6 meaning Satan, 7 – God, 5 – human, and 4 – monkey. As four is separated from seven – he explains – monkeys are far from the devil,

[6] Kulik uses the almost identical symbol of God in her next graphic novel *Poczwarki* (Kulik, 2020: [47–48]).

[7] Tytus is also cast as a devil – but only in a nativity play (Chmielewski, 2009c: 27) or when he falls out of the chimney covered in soot (Chmielewski, 2009a: 18).

so his ape protégée must have gone to heaven (Kulik, 2018: [17], trans. D.L.-G.). Notably, the cloud is launched in panels depicting essential occasions in relation to Janek and his chimpanzee "daughter", when she transgresses the status of an animal. Janek mentions the rain cloud (the word "cloud" is underlined) in his retrospection of the moment when he stole a weeping chimpanzee orphan from a cage in the zoo, because he heard the most thrilling, although wordless, cry for help that suspended the difference between humans and animals[8] (Kulik, 2018: [94]). Since raindrops resemble tears, the cloud epitomizes the emotional resonance between equaled beings, which outclasses the verbal communication (so valued by defenders of *humanitas*). The said visual motif assists Janek's secret mourning ritual at Małpgosia'a grave under the park tree, which bears the inscription "07.07.07" (Kulik, 2018: [79–80]). These numbers – as we may easily observe – rather than denoting the date of death allude to God and heaven. Also the penultimate panel of the novel features the cloud symbol (Kulik, 2018: [142]), which is again connected with Janek's forbidden grief. In the finale, he learns that his abandoned lover gave birth to their child and passed away. The story closes with a narrative loop, for the baby boy turned out to be chimpanzee-like. Since he was covered with fur, the lice infected him with typhus. The orphaned boy was then called "Tytus" (because of the sonic similarity of this name to the word "typhus") and handed over to the zoo (Kulik, 2018: [140]). Undoubtedly, Kulik refers to Chmielewski's evergreen character of "Tytus de Zoo". Her intention of creating a pseudo-prequel[9] to the celebrated comic series is also linked to her protagonists' surname ("Harcerscy" can be rendered by the adjective "scout"). Therefore, we encounter a peculiar case of intramediality (one work refers to a different work using the same medium – Stein, 2015: 421), which completes the presumably omitted dark background, so typical of authentic life stories of the zoo animals.

Another area to be analyzed is connected with the traumatic repetitions that overwhelm Janek after Małpgosia'a death. They are transposed onto the whole series of disguised variants of the monkey motif. Janek seems to be persecuted by significant coincidences which bring back painful memories. For instance, when he goes to the cinema, he can only watch *Planet of the Apes* (probably Tim Burton's 2001 remake). Despite his recent anthropomorphizing tendencies, he mercilessly disavows the film: "Monkeys that live like humans?! It's madness!" (Kulik, 2018: [65], trans. D.L.-G.). Likewise, the intrusive homonymy seems to besiege him during everyday conversations (in Polish, the

[8] What is distinguished in Kulik's novel, as a feature common to monkeys and humans, apart from developed emotionality, is the possession of opposable thumbs (Kulik, 2018: [90]).

[9] I use the prefix "pseudo-" quite intentionally since Kulik's story is set in the imprecise, probably, postmillennial era of cell phones and cinema screenings of *Planet of the Apes*, while Chmielewski's plots were originally embedded in the reality of communist Poland.

word "monkey" also means a small bottle of vodka and the @ sign). What is more, Janek and Krysia's persistent question whether Małpgosia has gone to heaven becomes surprisingly mirrored in Janek's life. He meets the mute alcoholic Gosia, who drinks in a pub called "Heaven". Parents dehumanize her by calling her "monkey", nevertheless she can communicate by writing, for example, on a steamy mug (Kulik, 2018: [134–136]). Therefore, again, Kulik travesties the issue of speech as faculty separating humans from animals.

The less numerous word-and-image sequences that focalize Krysia's perspective are equally congruent due to a recurrent motif of the wounded monkey. Initially, the achronological narrative makes the recipient think that Małpgosia's accidental death and care about her afterlife were to cause Krysia's depression. Kulik pictures her endless crying that turns into a serious flood inside the flat (Kulik, 2018: [52–55])[10]. Then, the page that features Krysia cutting the stomach of a toy monkey previously owned by Małpgosia raises suspicions. Eventually, Janek discovers the truth. His toxic mother-in-law told Krysia that only liver transplantation could save her life (the woman was addicted to alcohol). Krysia surrendered to the attitude imposed by her disdainful environment and wanted to restore the "proper" hierarchy of beings, according to which human life is more precious than animal life. This is why Krysia tried to cut out the chimpanzee's organ for transplantation and then poisoned the howling animal. Meaningfully, in all panels presenting the dying Małpogosia, her complaint "Mum! It hurts! Ouch!" is included. Her words can only be treated as an element of traumatic flashbacks haunting the perpetrator, who feels as if she has killed a human being, or even worse – her own daughter. Due to the introspective character of these panels, even the question whether the chimpanzee actually spoke just before her death must remain unanswered. While in the context of (un)anthropomorphizing hominids, this is a key point.

The last motif of hair/fur brings us back to the dominant perspective of Janek. First of all, he grew a moustache to animalize himself and resemble his adopted "daughter", who liked it very much. The handful of hair, found behind a TV set, is the only relic of his lost "child" that he preserves with care. When he learns about his wife deed, he takes the murder weapon (scissors) and punishes Krysia with cutting down her hair. Hair means then an honorable index of parenting love toward an animal and a status of the victim, not the perpetrator. From this angle, conceiving a chimpanzee-like Tytus proves Janek's internal

[10] Although Kulik does not include images of the brain, her strategy seems similar to "neurocomics" and "neuroimaging" – experimental graphic narratives which present the inner perspective of people burdened with mental disorders, such as Ellen Forney's *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me* (2012) and David B.'s *Epileptic* (2006) – see Tougaw, 2018: 188; cf. Tuszyńska, 2015: 311. Also two other of Kulik's single-creator works can be connected with this current. See e.g. Kulik, 2012; Kulik, 2020.

moral transformation[11]. It is important also because he is definitely subjected to imposed animalization as a victim of his mother-in-law. She keeps on insulting him as an alleged impotent who could only give an ape child to her daughter. She compares all male humans to "apes", which – along with the parallel oppression of the mute Gosia being called "monkey" – allows the equating of all kinds of violence and discrimination with established attitudes toward defenseless animal "Others", in Agamben's terms[12]. On the other hand, a willful animalization of Janek means accepting the patient and martyr role of animals and standing for them. As a result, it may entail the moral development of a human. In a way, the author herself identifies with the chimpanzee character she created because, on the book cover, she uses the meaningfully adjusted signature "(Małp)gosia Kulik".

What makes Kulik's approach so original is precisely the disruption of the hierarchy of beings in the key, borderline case of a nonhuman hominid faced with humans. Kulik not only emphasizes what can be regarded as "human" in the animal, but also discovers "animal" dispositions in humans. Importantly, these dispositions seem to be highly moral, whereas cruel behaviors are ascribed to distorted social relations between human protagonists. In this sense, Kulik's graphic novel turns out to be fit for the contemporary dilemmas of animal studies researchers who raise the issue of posthumanism. As I have shown, Chmielewski's humorous series is set in a completely different mental horizon and lacks moral complications. While the status of Tytus and other animals is not always obvious and playfully intermingles *animalitas* and *humanitas* in changeable proportions, the position of human protagonists is never destabilized. Yet, technically, probably nothing stands in the way of introducing a non-anthropocentric openness (similar to the one which emerges from Kulik's serious graphic novel) in comics addressed to children. However, it is more than obvious that the authentic fate of so-called wild animals dependent on humans rarely fits into the comic aspect traditionally associated with comics for young audiences.

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[11] The last pages picture Janek as a bearded man.

[12] Interestingly enough, Krysia's father was killed in a hunting accident because he was wearing a cap with deer antlers meant to attract the prey (Kulik, 2018: [119]).

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Humans and Nature – Exceptional Relationships, Sensitivity and Concern

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DOROTA MICHUŁKA ORCID: 0000-0002-7237-2618
University of Wrocław

Discrete Presence. *Natura tutelaris et curans* in Ida Fink's Short Stories

Abstract: In the article, the author discusses the role, place and function of nature in Ida Fink's stories, presents the relationship between images of nature and the tragic history of the Holocaust. In the article nature entangled in the tragic history of humanity does not remain indifferent, it is seen as an autonomous and sovereign entity, revealed in a romantic-modernist and reflective perspective, entangled in a system of symbols and signs to be read. Such a message strategy allowed Ida Fink to frame the subjectivity of narratives (including images of nature) in an affective, experiential and empathetic form. Nature, in Fink's works, does not take on a "role" of natura devorans (devouring) and natura atrox (atrocity) in its contact with Holocaust depictions, instead – nature is a space of calm, shelter and care (sedatio naturae, curans naturam), sometimes being both friendly and tame, it reveals her discreet presence that is perceived by Jews in hiding, by showing that she is merciful, saving and salutary. The action of peaceful and quiet nature also has a clear connection with human existence, not only thinking about the meaning of life and its rhythm, coexistence with nature, a kind of symbiosis and coexistence with the world, but also exposing a kind of "aesthetic escapism".

Keywords: relationship between nature and Holocaust themes, empathetic reading, narrative poetics, existential-ethical contexts, silence of emotions, short stories, passage of time

Motto:
History is no longer simply the history of people, but is also becoming the history of natural things.
(Bruno Latour, 2011)

The issues of nature, landscape, the plant and animal world in relation to the Holocaust have been essentially absent from the horizon of previous research on Holocaust representations, although organic, ecological-environmental semantics seem an essential part of many canonical films or literary texts about the Holocaust. Suffice it to recall Claude Lanzman's image of the blood-red autumn forest around the Shoah extermination camp or the theme of primordial wilderness in Edward Zwick's The Resistance , the motifs of hiding in dugouts,

> bunkers, pits dug in the ground in the prose of Henryk Grynberg or Wilhelm Dichter, the role of organic matter in the paintings of Jonah Stern, Erna Rosenstein, Anselm Kiefer, the reportages of Rachel Auerbach, the poetry of Jerzy Ficowski, the novels of Piotr Rawicz. The symbolic presence of nature even imposes itself as an indelible element in many works dealing with the Holocaust (Ubertowska, 2015: 93)[1].

But unfortunately

> anthropocentric paradigm in the humanities […] did not allow nature to be seen as a causal factor in history, but even saw it as unmarked, passive, transparent"[2]. As some scholars noticed "environmentalism and Holocaust and genocide studies have a great deal in common; the research trajectories they set out intersect (or rather, could intersect) at many points where analogous historiographical and ontological problems are articulated using other vocabularies and methodologies.(Ubertowska, 2015: 94–95)[3].

In the subject of the relationship between nature and the Holocaust its worth mention e.g. Tim Cole (e.g. "Nature Was Helping Us': Forests, Trees, and Environmental Histories of the Holocaust") (Cole, 2014), John Roth (e.g. "The World Around Us: What Have We Learned From the Holocaust?" (Roth, 2013) and Eric Katz (e.g. "Nature's Healing Power, the Holocaust and the Environmental Crisis") (Katz, 2001) who argued

> […] that there were connections between the Shoah and environmental destruction: genocide and ecocide may be linked together by an analysis of the concept of domination. A comparative study of these two evils may point us in the direction of developing a harmonious relationship with both the natural world and our fellow human beings (Katz, 2001: 80).

An interesting interpretation of the issue of the relationship that occurs between nature and the Holocaust, especially in the perspective of considerations

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[1] This text is an expanded and modified version of the article by D. Michulka, S. Switala and L. Gregorowicz: *Czytanie pamięci: cisza, czas i emocje w opowiadaniach Idy Fink,* " Slavica Wratislaviensia" (2021). T. 173, p. 303–314.

[2] A. Ubertowska, *op.cit*., p. 94–95.

[3] See also: Tim Cole, *"'Nature Was Helping Us': Forests, Trees, and Environmental Histories of the Holocaust,"* Environmental History 19, no. 4 (2014): 665–86. Cole considers "what environmental history might contribute to the field of Holocaust and genocide studies (665). He adds that he seeks not only to contribute to Holocaust studies where forest hiding is relatively understudied, but also to the field of environmental history where the Holocaust and genocide remain largely unexplored despite more recent interest in environmental histories of war and environmental histories of Nazism […]. I am interested in forests as both material sites and memorial landscapes, both as lived spaces and remembered spaces. (667) His ideas were inspired by research on the role of nonhumans in the survival of those who hide in the forests. Cole's explorations are, in turn, an important inspiration for us and provide the starting point for our own thoughts outlined here.

of emotions is presented by Dominick LaCapra. Researcher uses terms "traumatropisms" and 'empathic unsettlement' and an affective response to a boundary event (LaCapra, 2009).

And this is exactly what happens in Ida Fink's short stories, in which nature entangled in the tragic history of humanity does not remain indifferent, it is seen as an autonomous and sovereign entity, revealed in a romantic-modernist and reflective perspective, entangled in a system of symbols and signs to be read (Barcz, 2012: 58–59). Such a message strategy allowed Ida Fink to frame the subjectivity of narratives (including images of nature) in an affective, experiential and empathetic form.

Nature, in Fink's works, does not take on a "role" of *natura devorans* (devouring) and *natura atrox* (atrocity) in its contact with Holocaust depictions, instead – nature is a space of calm, shelter and care (*sedatio naturae, curans naturam*), sometimes being both friendly and tame, it reveals her discreet presence that is perceived by Jews in hiding, by showing that she is merciful, saving and salutary (Cobel – Tokarska, 2012) .

The action of peaceful and quiet nature also has a clear connection with human existence, not only thinking about the meaning of life and its rhythm, coexistence with nature, a kind of symbiosis and coexistence with the world, but also exposing a kind of "aesthetic escapism". "It turns out that […] nature [can, D.M.] perform here the function of a makeshift 'home,' a familiar, safe space to which history has no access" (Ubertowska, 2015: 105).

Ida Fink is a Polish-language writer of Jewish descent, who in 1942 escaped with her sister from the ghetto. The experience of the sisters from this period (available Aryan versions obtained and a journey to the Third Reich) became the canvas for sending the novel *The Journey* (the author preferred the define of autobiographical fiction). She was born in Zbaraż in 1921 (the city belonged to Poland until 1945). In 1957 she went to Israel, where she lived until her death in 2011. She grew up in a secular family in which 'the religion of Moses was perceived […] only in terms of cultural value'. She worked as a journalist, accompanist at the University of Physical Education in Wroclaw, librarian in the music department at the Goethe Institute in Tel Aviv. In the years 1960–1971 at the Yad Vashem Institute, she dealt with the documentation of testimonies of Holocaust survivors. She debuted in 1958 in the Israeli Polish-language press. Although she decided to stay in Tel Aviv, her relationship with Poland was strong –she was involved in Polish cultural life in Israel, she was writing only in Polish (Famulska-Ciesielska, 2011: 369)[4].

[4] Ida Fink said about the beginnings of her writing in an interview: 'I tried before the war. In my early youth I wrote very bad poems. Then the desire to write disappeared – I thought – forever. […] In the first post-war years, one could feel great joy that part of the family survived, on the other – a terrible emptiness. These were years of growing up

The small-scale work of Ida Fink a Polish-language writer of Jewish descent (e.g., collections of short stories *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories* and *Traces: Stories* as well as the autobiographical novel *The Journey*), intended for young people and adults, falls within the circle of research on the culture of memory, the issues of the wartime Holocaust presented from the perspective of private and individual testimonies (Czapliński 2010) over the socio-historical contexts referring to the issues of Polish-Jewish relations (Bloński 1994) and people's behavior in the face of death. Her narrative was described as 'heartbreaking, although it rarely uses the word "death" and is devoid of grand adjectives' (Smoleński, 2019)[5].

'The events of the Holocaust are not only shaped *post factum* in their narration, but … they were initially determined as they unfolded by the schematic ways in which they were apprehended, expressed, and then acted upon' (Young, 1988: 5) writes James E. Young in his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust.* The American literary scholar articulates in his work the strong conviction, reinforced by the consequences of 'the narrative turnaround', that the experiences of the Holocaust survivors always reach us in the narrative structure, in the anthropological or cognitive sense of the term.(Ubertowska, 2007: 151).

Therefore, in the words of Bogdan Owczarek, they present 'a certain vision of the representations of mental processes occurring in the human mind'. (Owczarek, 2001: 15) Following in the footsteps of Aleksandra Ubertowska, one of the ways of 'describing a traumatic experience and its aftermath would be individual micro-incidents, micro-narratives, micro-stories (Domańska, 1999), not always cohesive and coherent, often fragmented and segmented. Such strategies of presenting the world are associated with the issue of inexpressibility and refer the reader to the category of deconstruction of language, subject, and reality.

This is also how nature is depicted in Ida Fink's stories.

Especially that the literary testimonies of extermination rooted in the poetic images of nature (as a "mental images") as presented by Ida Fink allow us

in the present, almost normal, and past in the past, which still persistence, has not become a thing of the past. The survivors had endless conversations about the occupation, this time was with us. Until one day I realized that what we are talking about is already adapted writing. I am already writing, but not on paper. Unexpectedly, the thought "Write, write" appeared again. I started late, but during these years of silence I had somehow written these stories' (Sobolewska, 2003: 14). The author received numerous awards for her work. In 1985, she received the Dutch Anne Frank Prize for *A Scrap of Time*. She also won the Yad Vashem Buchmann Prize (1995), the Italian Alberto Moravia Prize (1996), and a special award of the Polish PEN Club (2003). Her novel *The Journey* was included in 'The 100 Greatest Works of Modern Jewish Literature', a list announced by National Yiddish Book Center in New York. Fink is also the winner of the Israel Prize in Literature in 2008 (for the first time, it was awarded to an artist who did not write in Hebrew).

[5] Smoleński, 2019. Page not fund.

to explore the phenomenon of memory from a modern perspective (we should keep in mind that her stories were published in the 1970s), which enables researchers to take into account the changing and dynamic nature of memory (Ulanowicz, 2013)[6]. Thus, they assume 'discontinuity' of the narrative, its incompleteness, and lack of a logical cause-and-effect structure of the story, while highlighting poetic and mental images of nature, emotion, silence and time, ostensibly unrelated to the overall statement as a "writing in whispers" (Sobolewska, 2003: 14)[7].

The conceptualization of those all four elements of the depicted world is coherent in the stories and clear on a deeper metaphorical and existential level of reading the text.

The discussion of Ida Fink's act of creative consciousness becomes a classic shift, a semantic transformation of the uncertain, anxiety-laden world of man in the face of the Holocaust, the seemingly safe, sheltering world of nature, the beauty of landscapes and idyllic natural scenery as an escape from cruel reality, and the nostalgically created inner experiences of the characters of the pre-war world of the past through mental images of nature.

The prose of the Jewish writer is crystalline, cool and distanced, but at the same time poetic and fairy-tale-like, which allows, to carefully hide strong emotions and nightmare. Descriptions of nature are rooted in: 1/. convention of escapism; 2/. they are maintained in the poetics of sensual-emotional narrative (they are full of colors and scents); 3/. in arcadian aesthetics ("morning beautiful and pure", "beautiful and lush garden"), but also 4/. in shots of the confrontation of worlds: beauty and tranquility ("the afternoon was mild, the sun was lazy and golden"), safety and carefree (here: willows growing on the riverbank, an image of an garden of paradise where apples are ritually plucked, "heather smelled like a thyme" (*Zamknięty krąg*, p. 45)[8]), colourful flowers: bluebells, hazel, daisies (*Jean – Christophe,* p. 32), "the grass was yellow woth buttercups" (*Zamknięty krąg*, p. 29)[9] with fear and terror. 5/. Images of nature correspond with the narrative of the setting (poetics of setting) and is in fact,

[6] "[…] it is produced not solely by 'personal feelings but by rules and customs' that traditionally characterize pre-existing kinship relations…Such memory involves an individual's affirmation of, and sense of participation in, a given demographic's shared narrative of its past…it is characterized by a profound self-awareness…involves an individual's conscious recognition of the ways in which her present circumstances have been mediated and shaped by past events that she herself did not directly experience" (Ulanowicz, 2013: 4).

[7] In this context of consideration the case of narratives of Ida Fink, the cognitive approach also seems helpful, focusing on: 1/ understanding the narrative strategy; 2/ psychological perspective in presenting characters (e.g. resilience of the human psyche); 3/ emotional reader response; and 4/ visualising as a style of reception.

[8] Fink I. (2009). *Wiosna 1941.*

[9] Fink I. (2009). *Wiosna 1941.*

clearly superimposed in Fink's stories on the narrative of time and takes the shape of Bakhtinian space-time (cultural chronotope)[10].

I. SILENCE OF EMOTIONS, NATURE AND TIME

The prose of the Jewish author with poetical way carefully hides strong emotions and nightmares. The 'silence of emotions' reflects the unique anthropological sensibility of the narrative, which is expressed not in words but in simple gestures and glances. The dominant artistic features of the narrative are: the strategy of silence, instances of narrative stoppage during critical situations (K. Jaspers), and the category of time shown in works in the context of its duration (H. Bergson): from infinity to seconds extracted from snippets of memories. The time the characters feel/experience determines the meaning of their existence, it can be individual and psychological; it also takes the form of 'intersubjective specific time' (the term used by K. Bartoszyński), creating questions 'about continuity, permanence, and sameness in the time of the human individualand about the relationship of individual memory with the permanence of the self. (Bartoszyński, 1987: 220).

In addition to individual time, we deal with social time, which, according to Barbara Engelking,

> is not an abstract, spontaneous being, but is rooted in social events and relationships between them […] social time is discontinuous, variable, unstable, and subject to valuation. Its individual segments, which can be of unequal length, have value measured by events filling them. […] Its passage is not constant; it can be non-uniform, qualitative, repeatable, or cyclical (Engelking, 1996: 9–10).

In her short story 'A Scrap of Time', Ida Fink clearly outlines the image of time:

> We had different measures of time, we different ones, always different, always with the mark of difference that moved some of us to pride and others to humility. We, who because of our difference were condemned once again, as we had been before in our history, we were condemned once again during this time measured not in months nor by the rising and setting of the sun, but by a word – 'action', a word signifying movement, a word you would use about a novel or a play.' (Fink, 1988 *'A Scrap of Time'*, p. 3–4).

Fink clearly differentiates past from present ('old time' from 'today') and emphasises the perspective of socially created reality – the 'old' one (pre-war) and 'new' (happening now, during the nightmare of war). Pre-war everyday life is

[10] In this article I use the following editions of Ida Fink's short stories, 1/. *A Scrap of Time and other Stories,* transl. by Madeline Levine and Francine Prose, Peter Owen London 1988, 2/. *Wiosna 1941*, Wydawnictwo W.A.B. Warszawa 2009 and 3/. *Traces: Stories*. Translated by P. Boehm, F. Prose. New York: Metropolitan Books 1997.

not only idealised, but even sanctified (e.g. in 'The Garden That Floated Away'). The introduction of the past form 'used to' in the following fragment: 'We used to do the chores . . . we mowed the grass . . . painted the tree trunks' indicates ritual performance of the activities and the perspective of sacred time. The retrospective narrative of the story is written in the style of a fairy tale ('Once I saw a garden float away' (Fink,), in the poetics of a dream (Janion, 2007: 76), and clearly draws on the world of poetic of nostalgy and imagination (as defined by Bachelard).

Some people were determined to escape from the new time to the past, denied its existence, tried to cheat it, avoid it like Elzbieta from the short story 'The Threshold':

> They walked along the riverbank, just as in the old days, down by the little beach, and then across to the pastures. They bought apples from the farmer and ate nothing else all day. . . . Outside the window were lilacs, beyond the lilacs was the garden, and beyond the garden was the river (Fink, 1997. 'The Threshold'…, p. 11–12).

The new time was built by other times (Fink, 1995,'A Conversation'…, p. 49–52; Fink, 1997, 'Zygmunt'…, p. 26) and become a kind of hybrid of the past, present, and future because in different situations it is experienced as one of these three temporal dimensions or their combination.' (Kotarska, 2010: 284).

This three-dimensionality of the existence of the time of the Holocaust is present, for example, in the short stories "A Scrap of Time" and "The Garden that Floated Away").The signs and symbols of the book of nature (including colors, smells, sounds) and the silence of emotions reinforce the message (Hańderek, 2004: 227; Bartoszyński, 1987: 220).

The apparent calmness prevailing in the world presented in both of the stories, as well as the maximum focus on the characters and the reality around them *(sharpened vigilance)* creates a situation of peculiar "use to Holocaust" on the one hand, and escapism on the other, an escape into the interior, where they work out their own imaginary space of existence. Reinforced by imagination and ethically characterized, the "other" space of the protagonists (heterotopia in Michel Foucault's terms) "appears" in the text as a "place" uniquely saturated in quality.

Space and feeling of social time has "has different properties in the daily life and everyday periods, while it is felt differently in dramatic, critical, exceptional situations" (Brach – Czajna, 2006: 56–57) preparing Aryan papers for a Jewish family ("The Floating Garden"). The narrative of the story is maintained in a poetic and oneiric atmosphere, and begins with a description of a neighbor's garden, which the narrator-heroine is looking at and time has stopped in this point:

> I was sitting with my sister on the porch of the steps, and the two gardens – Wojciech's and ours – were right there in front of our eyes. They formed a single garden, for they were not divided by a fence. A fence, we said would be an intrusion. Only a row of evenly spaced currant bushes stitched the two gardens together. It was a peaceful afternoon. Te sun was lazy and golden. Wojciech stepped onto his porch – the houses, too, were twins – and called to us, – Let's go pick the russet apples! We used to do the chores in both gardens at the same time: we moved the grass on the same day, painted the tree trunks white on the same day, and so, out of habit, he told us about the apple picking" (Fink, 1988, *The garden that floated away,* p. 11–12).

The garden motif, ordinary, everyday life and the social context of events also play an important role in the story. These include Polish-Jewish relations and the behavior of the characters during daily interactions with their neighbors.

In this context L. Berger and T. Luckmann draw attention to literary depictions of reality from a sociological perspective, showing everyday reality as an 1/ objectified (existing outside the individual), 2/ ordered (functioning paradigmatically according to certain patterns and rules) and 3/ comprehensible (thanks to cognition of a colloquial nature, based on dialogue with other people, such as neighbors) sphere (Berger, Luckmann, 2010: 31–32) [11]. Jolanta Brach-Czaina characterizes everyday existence in a similar way, emphasizing its imperceptibility. The researcher emphasizes philosophical contexts in describing everyday life and states:

> Even when we ourselves are the perpetrators of everyday events, they seem to mean too little to be worth analyzing. They are peculiar and therefore too obvious for us to want to think about them. […] everyday events, by repeating themselves, ritualizing and accustoming us to themselves, give the impression of being empty, dead, devoid of deeper meaning, and so masked they slip by unnoticed by us (Brach – Czajna, 2006: 56–57).

The idyllic image of the garden is maintained in an affirmative, glorifying convention and its artistic creation refers to the aesthetics of arcadian idealization stylized as space of paradise (Tatar, 2013: 252) .

The story emphasizes the commonality of the space of the neighbors' gardens (the lack of a boundary between the gardens) and its real unity (the gardens are "welded into one"), expressed by the personification "currant alley

[11] "Everyday life as a reality interpreted by people, with which they associate subjective meanings, appears in the form of a coherent world[…] The world of everyday life is not only accepted unreservedly by ordinary members of society in their lifelong, subjectively meaningful conduct. It is a world that arises in their thoughts and actions and, through these thoughts and actions, persists as a real world" (Berger, Luckmann, 2010: 31–32).

sewed them together with an even stitch") and the epithet "twin" characterizing the neighboring houses. "The accumulation of so many terms," Anna Tatar concludes, "indicating the unity (togetherness) of the farms results in an expansion of its scope: it no longer includes only the spatial (physical) dimension, but also the existential (metaphysical) one." (Tatar, 2013: 252).

The impersonal grammatical forms of verbs introduced into the story ("grass was moved," "tree trunks were whittled") indicate the ritual performance of activities and the perspective of sacred time used in the quoted passage of the story.

In the story one can see the apparent calm and sense the tension in the narrator's account, noting that the reason for the emotional tension of the narrative is shown only in the last line of the story. During an ordinary activity – picking apples in the garden – a dramatic conversation takes place in the apartment of the Jewish heroine and her sister about preparing Aryan papers. At this point the heroine-narrator abandons the fairy-tale-poetic convention, "switching" abruptly to an informational narrative, she explains "straightforwardly": "so that we could lose ourselves, so that they wouldn't kill us" (Fink, 2002, *Odpływający ogród*, p. 56)

And here, maintained in a similar polysensory poetics, is an excerpt from the short story *A Scrap of Time*.

> "This beautiful, clear morning, that I am digging out of the ruins of my memory is still fresh; its colors and aromas has not faded: a grainy golden mist with red spheres of apples hanging in it, and the shadows above the river damp with the sharp odor of burdock, and the bright blue dress that I was wearing when I left teh house and when I turned around at the gate. It was then, probably at that very moment, that I suddenly progressesd, instinctively, from an infantile state to a still naive caution – instinctively, becpuse I wasn't thinking about wht I avoided the gate that led to the street and instead set off on a roundbout route across the orchard, along the riverbank, down a road we called "the back way" because it wound throught the out skirts of town. […] Alonge the way, I stopped and carefully picked out flat stones, and skipped them across te water; I sat down for a while on the little bridge, beyond which one could see the town, and dangled my legs, looking at my reflection in the water and at the willows that grew on the bank. I was not yet afraid then, nor was my sister [who] dangled her legs over the riverm which is called the Gniezna – a pitiful little stream, some eight meters wide […].
>
> The view of the marketplace leapt out at us from behind the building on the corner, that we suddenly stopped in our tracks. There was a square, thick with people as on a market day, only different, because a market – day crowd is colourful and loud , with chickens clucking, geese honking, and people talking and bargaining. Tis crowd was silent.[…] We suddenly stopped and my sister began ti tremble, and the I caught the trembling, and she said "Let's run away" and although no one was chasing us and the morning was still clear and peaceful, we ran back to the little bridge, but we no longer noticed the willows or

> the reflections of our running figures in the water, we ran for a long time until we were high up the steep slope nown as Castle Hill – the ruins of an old castle stood on top of it – and on this hillside, the jewel of our town, we sat down in the bushes, out of te breath and still shaking (Ida Fink, 1988: 5–6).

The polysensory narrative and poetic description of nature paradoxically reinforce the tension in the evoked situation. Literary representations of nature have a sensual and emotional character in this passage, the aestheticization of the narrative in the depiction of the image of a „beautiful and clear morning" allows the soft colors and scents of nature to be exposed („damp shadow," „tart smell of burdock," „golden mist," „red balls of apples"), which reinforce, as it were, the silence of emotions.

The apparent stillness and silence of the narrative prevail in this passage until the characters see from the hill a silent, black crowd in the market square. The shock of the image of people waiting to die, „although the morning was still clear and calm," also breaks the calmness of the perception of nature („we did not see the willows or the reflection in the water of our running figures"), the heroines are overwhelmed by terror, which is also reflected in the dynamics of description and „happening" expressed by the accumulation of verbs: the girls shake with fear, flee, run, climb the steep slope where the castle – the ornament of the city – stands, and take shelter on the hill in the bushes (so nature again shields from danger, protect, take care and guards). (Hańderek, 2004: 227; Bartoszyński, 1987: 220).

II. SILENCE OF NATURE AND SPACE

The social context of Fink's works, consistently emphasized in our deliberations, also allows for a more thorough examination of the poetics of setting in which the Jewish characters move. The spaces in the works of the Jewish writer are also socially marked: they are located outside the concentration camp and outside the ghetto. It can also refer to the interpretive context related to memorials *(Les lieux de mémoire)* in Pierre Nora's terms, or "not- places" of memory – in M. A u g é's terms, actual places where tragic events occurred, places that witnessed cruel and dramatic scenes (e.g., experiencing mass death, genocide, places associated with extermination: destroyed tombstones in forgotten cemeteries, empty uninhabited villages from which residents fled in terror or were murdered) (A u g é, 2010) also spaces associated with nature, which witnessed tragic event (e.g., the Gniezna river near Zbaraż, the ruins of the castle on the hill that the fleeing girls climbed)[12].

[12] In the study of memory, an important role is played by the poetics of space, the identification of the actual places where tragic events occurred. The literature refers to them as "Non-place of memory" because these places lack both a form of commemoration (e.g.,

Thus, they are open spaces, seemingly free, settings inscribed in images of nature, in which a significant role is played by ordinary people – Polish neighbors, acquaintances, friends and enemies, kind people, though equally terrified by the reality of war, sometimes offering hiding places. The heroes of the stories of open spaces, therefore, also include random passers-by, observers of events, witnesses, "bystanders" – they too become "carriers" of memory and pass on to posterity the dramatic "pieces of fate" and fragments of the lives of participants in wartime events.

Even if in Fink's stories there are many indifferent witnesses of dramatic events, bystanders, nature retains its independence, autonomy and sovereignty, is unmoved, behaves steadily, seems to be "stuck" in its beauty and silence of emotions, protecting the people hiding them from death.

Silence of nature which seems to be peaceful and friendly, is also reinforced by the seemingly insignificant, mute elements of the depicted world: 'The night was heavy, humid; one of those midsummer nights when not a single leaf trembles, and the asphalt, overheated during the day, exhales its steamy breath' (Fink, 1997, 'The End', p. 3) or in the story 'Behind the Hedge': 'The orchard is silent; the bees, so noisy at midday, have grown quiet; there is only the sound of crickets and the chirping of the sparrows stripping the cherries from the trees.' (Fink, 1995. 'Behind the Hedge", p. 21)

III. SILENCE AND ANIMALS

There were also silent conversations between the characters and animals that seemed to understand the tragedy of the situation took on the burden of responsibility for people (e.g. the 'Black beast', or Czing, a dog who ignores the questions of an SS-man about its Jewish owners (Fink, 1995, *'A Dog*", p. 28).

The short story 'The Black Beast' show an image of a cultural chronotope, internal escapism, and emotional 'suspension in time.The experience of time in this story is associated with the dramatic waiting of the hero for another hiding place.The world of the protagonist of the story is situated on the verge of reality, combining figural realism (White, 2004) and phantasmatic structure with dream elements. The focal point of the narrative is the image

plaque, monument, exhibition, local museum) and memorial practices (e.g., symbolic lighting of candles, anniversary celebrations, dedication of flowers). However, in the consciousness of the local community, these places are important, and the events that occurred there are remembered. Local, community, collective, social memory, intergenerational transmission will therefore be in this case an important element in maintaining the continuity of the history of the region. The term non – places clearly refers to the findings of Pierre Nora, discussed in his work on places of memory (French: lieux de mémoire) and the 1986 statement of Claude Lanzmann, who used the term place of memory (French: non-lieux de mémoire) to describe previously unmarked elements of the space where the Holocaust of the Jews took place.

of a dog (the title 'black beast'), who leads the hero through fear and terror towards safe worlds.

But it is not entirely clear if it is real.

The artistic creation of the literary figure of a dog refers to the world of emotions – the narrative tension of the story is intensified not only by the mental state of the hero (he is terrified both by the lack of a hideout and the unknown, mysterious animal) but also by the prospect of a long, dangerous path (in this case, the experience of time is associated with the will to survive) that he must walk to reach a place inhabited by friendly people.

In contrast, the image of the animal in the short story 'Dog' is realistically portrayed.

The narrator is exceptionally precise about the animal's attachment to its owners, its character and personality:

> Ching knew how to beg, how to shake hands, and how to fetch. He obeyed all our commends without enthusiasm or joy, but rather with sad air of resignation, kind of philosophical thoughtfulness, which Agata [Ukrainian housekeeper, D.M] was the first to notice. One day when she was carrying in the platter od steaming pirogi, she announced: "That Ching is a philosopher…". "Of what school?"- our well – read cousin joked. "A sad one" – Agata replied. (Ida Fink, 1988, *Dog*, p. 25- 26).

Faithful to the end, the dog, when questioned by the Germans about the owners' hiding place (even despite being fed sausage with words "where is your master?…mistress?…master?…mistress"(p. 28), he did not betray his family.

> Ching looked at them calmly (afterwords Agata swore that he shook his head no) and didn't even tremble. He just looked at them and sat there […] It is true that he was got kicked for this, but he bore tis blow in silence, alghough afterwords he trembled for thec rest of the day, just like person who, after some extraordinary effort cannot calm down for the longest time. (Ida Fink, 1988: 28–29).

In the end, however, Ching was killed: "They hung him from a cherry branch" (*Dog,* p. 29).

The figures of animals (dogs) in both stories can be considered in the context of theory of Dominick La Capra in his book *History and its limit. Human, animal and violence* (2010) in which issues of the semantics of nature are exposed. La Capra – a prominent theorist of post-traumatic culture confronting the legacy of the Holocaust – takes up the issues of animal studies and "again – this time partly in an ecocritical perspective, the issue of witness, testimony, art about the Holocaust , and more broadly in the essay *Traumatropisms* (2009) – exposes the figure of the secondary witness, whose essence is defined not so much by participation in or identification

with a historical event such as the Holocaust, but by «empathic unsettlement» , understood by La Capra as an affective response to a boundary event combined with a critical distance, an intellectual ability to pass judgment" (Ubertowska, 2025: 98–99).

It seems that – according to La Capra's theory – the figures of the two dogs (*Black beast* and *Chang*) fit perfectly into the area of affective responses to border situations.[13]

CONCLUSION

Ida Fink treats nature exceptionally, "humanly," empathetically and passionately, with care and attention to detail:

> Each apple must first be carefully-delicately removed from the branch, then carefully-delicately wrapped in a paper coat so that it doesn't get cold in winter, then carefully-delicately put into a wicker basket [*Odpływający ogród*…]. Fink treats words with the same tenderness[14]. Fink takes care that they do not hurt, there are not too many of them, but at the same time they appeal to the recipient. The apparent dispassion of this autobiographical literature inspires humility in the reader. […] After reading, one is left with an impression of warmth, clarity and intimacy. The focus on small things, objects, around which the entire story is built, creates the illusion of ordinariness, appreciated only when danger creeps into everyday life (Agnieszka Warnke, https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/osiem-lekcji-idy-fink)

This is perfectly evident in the descriptions of nature, which is a mainstay, practically the only indelible trace of old, pre-war life. This unchanging background is painted with velvety words, the softness of which contrasts with the sounds of war, fear, impending disaster:

> Tsarina's death would have remained one of a million anonymous deaths, if it were not for the fact that it took place on a beautiful and gentle day […], in the predawn hours, when the trees cast long shadows, and the air is saturated with a light bluish haze, growing darker and darker from moment to moment,

[13] "Particularly noteworthy here is Ida Fink's short story "The Pig," (a story about human indifference to tragedy) and especially five of her completely unknown children's books (the covers also bear the name of Chaim Mesing, who was de facto only the publisher, while his wife translated the stories into Arabic), which contain fairy-tale, though underpinned by natural science knowledge, stories about animals: an elephant, a beetle, a crocodile, a white fish and a snake. They were all published in two versions, in Hebrew and Arabic, in Israel in 1971 by the Ma'ariv publishing house. Manuscripts of them have been preserved in the writer's home archive. The most interesting aspect of these texts is the specific language of the narrative. They all tell of various forms of danger and can be treated as peculiar allegories of the Holocaust" (Krupa, 2017).

[14] I refer here also to Olga Tokarczuk theory of "tender narrator" who consider things emphatically and is emotionally involved in described events.

> although evening is still far away (*'Death of Tsarina')*. (Agnieszka Warnke, https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/osiem-lekcji-idy-fink).

The aesthetics of description are reinforced, as you can see, also by the ethical level of the narrative and silence. Poetic and fairy – tales scenes expressing the beauty of nature reveal in the narrative in the ritually performed activities recalled from pre-war times (*The Floating Garden*). Pre-war everyday life (including the image of the garden) is shown in this short story in the convention of a daydream, not only subjected to idealization and embellishment ("it happened once that I saw a garden floating away"), but even sanctified. Scenes depicting the natural world are also situated on the border of a story set: 1/. in the poetics of figurative realism (White 2009) and 2/. phantasmagorical construction with elements of oneirism (e.g. in *Black Beast*).

Fink's stories, thanks to the skillfully woven into the narrative, varying in terms of conventions, images of nature: 1/ clearly separate the happy past from the nightmares of the present, thus neatly 2/. combining the embodiments of nostalgia and melancholy with the topography of loss, and 3/. at the level of emotions – "cross" the sphere of uncertainty, horror, anxiety and fear (*A Scrap of Time*) with a strengthened faith in human kindness and hope (*The Floating Garden)*.

Nature soothes, protects and shields from danger, has a saving and merciful power. Thus, there is time in this prose for reflection and filling in the „blanks" with one's own individual reading.

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IWONA GRALEWICZ-WOLNY ORCID: 0000-0001-5508-9805
University of Silesia in Katowice

The Wishtree by Katherine Applegate – an Ideal Eco-critical Read?

> […] in the Anthropocene there are no
> non-committed observers –
> there are only participants.
> (Green, 2021)

Abstract: The bestseller book, published in more than twenty countries, entitled *The Wishtree*, by Katherine Applegate has been analyzed in terms of its usefulness in the promotion of eco-critical thought among young readers of literature. The analysis has been accompanied by reflections on desired features of a literary text aimed at making the young readers aware of the role they play in the world inhabited by other humans and non-humans. The article has also discussed the question of teaching considerateness and responsibility for other members of the eco-system. It will involve the type of education which builds the young people's sense of agency, without paralyzing them – as it often happens – with fear of an inevitable disaster of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: *The Wishtree*, Katherine Applegate, ecosystem, biopolis, literature for children

The doyenne of Polish children's studies Joanna Papuzińska, willing to provide parents with hints how to build home libraries for their children, called the second stage of "literary initiation" "The Stage of Seven Books", starting with *Księga natury* [The book of nature], i.e. a subset of books making young readers sensitive to the beauty and diversity of nature (Papuzińska, 2007: 42–43)[1]. According to the researcher, publications propagating the knowledge of fauna and flora take priority over guidebooks to Polish history, culture and tradition, collections of fairy tales and legends, and technical lexicons. Her decision may

[1] See also: Zabawa, 2017: 21–44 – the author presents here a large set of contemporary publications which introduce children to the issues of the environment and nature conservation in a modern way.

be considered obvious and related to the presence of the themes of nature and natural science in children's literature from its beginning, first of all in the animal character that, getting rid of the allegorical costume, has become an original, independent and exceptionally meaning-making inhabitant of the worlds presented in the literature[2].

It seems that we may fully appreciate the significance of the bibliological hint given by the author of *Nasza mama czarodziejka* [Our Mother Enchantress]. The choice made by the researcher remains in line with the current themes in academic, political and media discourses focusing on all forms of human activity in the world which – it is more and more clear – threaten the existence of the former as well as of the latter. Papuzińska's suggestion is addressed to those who will have to face the results of the activity; and their survival will depend on to what extent they will be aware of the importance of the relation between the humanity and nature. Before our very eyes, literary testimonials of this relation grow in importance, which is expressed in eco-critical reinterpretations of classical children's books[3] and an editorial avalanche of encyclopedic compendia of nature. While in the first case it is based on literary tradition, in the second case – on science, it is quite difficult to find an original, fresh, simply good eco-critical book for young readers beyond these two areas. "Good"? What does "good" mean here? This question – although it comes from an ecological rather than an aesthetic perspective – is important because it concerns a young recipient for whom the attractiveness of book is the main (and most often the only) argument for reading it.

The example I intend to mention here – the concept of the Anthropocene – requires discussing in a broader context. It can be found in the center of ecological discourse presented in congresses, conferences and panels, constituting the story of the man who – despite fairy-tale scenarios – turned his success into disaster, not completely aware what price he will have to pay for being in the position when he can do "everything". Scholars louder and louder alarm, but the effectiveness of the alarm seems to be doubtful, resulting from a slow rate of decision-making by particular bodies and high costs (also ecological ones) generated by their meetings. The issue is discussed by Ewa Bińczyk in the book *Epoka człowieka* [The epoch of the man], whose subtitle suggests both the character and the evaluation of human actions in the area of nature conservation: *Retoryka i marazm antropocenu* [The rhetoric and stagnation of the Anthropocene] (Bińczyk, 2018).

[2] A selection of articles devoted to examples of animal characters in literature is, inter alia, presented in Mik A., Pokora P., Skowera M. (eds.). (2016). *Czytanie menażerii. Zwierzęta w literaturze dziecięcej, młodzieżowej i fantastycznej* [Reading a menagerie. Animals in children's literature]. Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Bibliotekarzy Polskich.

[3] Cf. Mytych-Forajter, 2019; Gralewicz-Wolny, 2019.

Bińczyk's book is the key publication on the issues of the dangers of the Anthropocene; it is also a good example of reflexive narration on the language we use talking about the disaster which threatens the Earth. The topic undoubtedly requires to be discussed in categorical terms:

> I think that the moral condition of the Anthropocene is a condition of irreparable losses, lost chances, the loss of the planet and the loss of the future. The Anthropocene is a formation of irreparable changes from which there is no going back. (Bińczyk, 2018: 277)

The trenchancy of the message is inevitably related to the question: Does a statement formulated in the language of negation have a chance to reach the addressees and will it have a positive impact on their attitudes? A similar question is provoked by the quotation from the book by Dawid Juraszek, *Antropocen dla początkujących* [The Anthropocene for beginners], equally significant for the issues discussed here:

> If the truth about the future threatening us frightens people to such an extent that they will start frankly talking about climate and ecological disaster, the worst scenarios will not have to materialize. Thus, let's get frightened, because we have a reason – after what we have done, no stone will be left unturned. (Juraszek, 2020: 37)

The question is: Will the addressees of the message, paralyzed with fear, be able to act to save themselves and their planet, or will they come to the conclusion that they can only wait helplessly? The question seems to me justified as voices can be heard that pro-ecological enterprises are pointless, because we have already pronounced a sentence on the Earth, and the execution is being finished.

In this way, there is an impasse in communication as the ecological situation is not optimistic, and we need some positive reinforcement in order to act. As Ewa Bińczyk writes:

> […] focusing on the loss […] makes a paralyzing, narcotizing effect, blocking brave, optimistic reflection on possible futures radically different from what we know. (Bińczyk, 2018: 277)

In this situation, the key issue is a form in which the information about the condition of the natural environment reaches the audience. By now, catastrophizing which has dominated the discourse on the Anthropocene, resulting in the inevitable indifference of the addressees (partly caused by the defense mechanism), is combined with the scientific character of the discourse, understood only by participants of academic debates, and the lack of positive reinforcement of the audience who are constantly told that their activities are environmentally wrong, but are not praised for pro-ecological actions at all.

A solution to this situation seems to be provided by Lawrence Buell, an American eco-critic, (quoted by Julia Fiedorczuk in her book *Cyborg w ogrodzie* [A cyborg in the garden]) writing that "the ecological crisis is, first of all, an imagination crisis" (Fiedorczuk, 2015: 12). In this sentence, the researcher condemns people for commonly ignoring warnings about the consequences of reckless human interventions in the ecosystem, treating lack of imagination and inconsiderateness as equal. However, his words are worth pondering: we may find there not only a diagnosis but also hints what to do. In this context, literature, understood as an imagination exercise, constitutes an attempt to obviate the crisis described by Buell by means of subtle (and perhaps because of that more effective?) encouragement to revise our views and attitudes based on the Anthropocene. Following the trend, the literary scholar is obliged to check how the principle works on the literary ground where imagination is the basic and – what is most important – inexhaustible natural resource, i.e. in literature for children.

To do so, I have chosen the book I consider the best candidate for the laurels in the area of eco-critical literature for children and which – here I have every confidence – Joanna Papuzińska would without hesitation include in her project "The Stage of Seven Books". The book *The Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate, the number one on the bestsellers' list of the publishing house Dwie Siostry[4], is one of the inspiring examples of modern books for children which has undoubtedly deserved the compliments quoted in its blurbs, such as: "A beautifully written and inspiring story" (*The New York Times Book Review*), or "A lively, clever and tender story in which respect, courage and hope win" (*Kirkus Reviews*) (Applegate, 2021)[5]. It is addressed to young readers, above seven years old, it is attractive in many different ways, constituting an example of a competent use of the writer's tools for a good cause. The American writer's exceptional talent for writing has been confirmed by her impressive literary output – more than one hundred fifty fantasy books and books for children and adolescents. Although the bibliography, large in numbers, (in which we can also find Harlequin romance fiction) perhaps is not a proof of high quality, Applegate has, no doubt, constructed here an interesting story, aware of the power of the literary means of expression.

As the golden rule of creative writing says, in prose the first sentence is most important. The author of *The Wishtree* remains faithful to the rule, but enriches it with some subtle but impressive retardation twist. Although the opening words of her story, "It's hard to talk to trees" (Applegate, 2017: 8), seem to be

[4] https://wydawnictwodwiesiostry.pl/katalog/bestsellery [Accessed: 13.05.2022]. The text available on the publisher's website and on the back cover of the book provides the information about the high positions of *The Wishtree* on the *New York Times* and Amazon bestseller lists (in the category of "Children's book on tolerance").

[5] The quotations come from the back cover.

pretty obvious, the second sentence which follows, "We're not big on chitchat" (Applegate, 2017: 8), is a true opening of the story, consisting in impressive juggling with the human-plant perspective, i.e. a rapid change of a point of view, signaled by a possessive pronoun, which reminds me of the two verses from Wisława Szymborska's poem *Notatka* [A note]: "To be a dog / or to stroke its warm coat" (Szymborska, 2002: 40–41).

The beginning of the story is the first occasion to meet the narrator, and at the same time the main character of the book, whose name is the Oak, which stresses its unequivocally plant identity[6]. The two hundred years old Oak constitutes a true center of the story both in terms of the presented world and the plot happening there, as well as in terms of the pro-ecological message to the reader. Focusing on the latter, we should appreciate the choice of an oak as a representative of the world of plants, as a species recognizable by young readers, easy to find in their close environment, easy to draw (taking into consideration the characteristic shapes of its leaves and acorns, which together with chestnuts are the traditional purpose of autumn walks for preschoolers). Certainly, the young reader will not be aware of the rich sacred symbolism of the oak as a tree of pagan gods (Gieysztor, 1986), or the concept of *axis mundi* (a tree being one of its examples) introduced by Mircea Eliade (Eliade, 2017). However, it is good that the author has decided to discuss topical issues against the background of the motif rich in cultural meanings, increasing its semantic potential. The choice has been supported by the poem "Be Different to Trees" written in the 1920s by the American poet Mary Carolyn Davies, preceding the story:

> The talking oak
> To the ancients spoke.
> But any tree
> Will talk to me.
> What truths I know
> I garnered so.
> But those who want to talk and tell,
> And those who will not listeners be,
> Will never hear a syllable
> From out the lips of any tree.

The poetic motto is in this case both an indication of a source of inspiration and a clear gesture of connection with tradition. It is completed by the dedication

[6] In the modest terminology, I can see the resistance to the temptation to anthropomorphize by name, which can be exemplified by the oldest Polish *Quercus robur* (common oak) of great renown, called Bartek. The title of the highest tree in Poland belongs to the Douglas fir with a nice human name – Helena. Other examples of arboreal onomastics are available in the Polish Monumental Trees Register, see https://www.rpdp.hostingasp.pl/Default.aspx [Accessed: 17.05.2022]

with an intergenerational meaning, included in the book: "for newcomers and welcomers". The story of the wishtree, constructed para- and metatextually (to use Gérard Genette's terminology), is a perfect example of ecological thinking as a project of the intergenerational community in which those living today have to face the results of the activity of those living yesterday, having in mind the quality of life of those who will be living tomorrow.

The strategy of marking a relatively large field of vision, used by Applegate, also refers to the construction of the gallery of characters which appear in *The Wishtree,* intended to make the young readers aware of their place among other inhabitants of the Earth (including those who are not human). As has been mentioned, the key issue here is the centrality of the non-human main character, a tree, which involves taking a non-anthropocentric perspective and a shift from the human to the vegetable, which turns out not to be so distant from the human. Applegate successfully uses the magical as well as narrative potential of the motif of the talking tree, drawing a picture of the plant as a conscious being, manifesting its species distinctness, also in communication, where everything in the story starts (*vide* the opening lines of the text).

The oak appointed to be the narrator has undoubtedly all the necessary competences to perform the function. In the introduction it makes, it freely uses forms of collective subject and words of address. It is able to control the dynamics of talk by means of rhetorical questions and anaphoras. It carefully chooses words, not only considering their meanings but also their tone. It uses the rhetorical potential of short sentences, and gracefully interweaves academic terminology with colloquialisms, and skillfully divides its utterances in accordance with the syntactic parallelism. The oak's monologue has a theatrical potential, which should be more highly evaluated because – as the narrator itself claims – "Most trees are introverts at heart" (Applegate, 2017: 9). Thus, the oak goes beyond its nature, telling the story, in which communication constitutes an important issue, including its ethical parameter:

> Trees do talk to some folks, the ones we know we can trust. We talk to daredevil squirrels. We talk to hardworking worms. We talk to flashy butterflies and bashful moths. (Applegate, 2017: 8)

In the context of the same parameter, the man appears in the Oak's story, although the light shed on their relation is a little less bright:

> Trees have a rather complicated relationship with people, after all. One minute you're hugging us. The next minute you're turning us into tables and tongue depressors. (Applegate, 2017: 9)

Both quotations are a good example of the finesse of Applegate's ecological discourse. The main value of the anthropogenic narration is engaging the readers to connect the facts and draw conclusions concerning human behavior in the

eco-system. In the Oak's story, there are neither admonitions nor reprimands for irresponsible behavior towards the Other. The narrative strategy consists rather in constructing a nice image of the tree that, like the best friend, tells you its adventure, focusing on describing the events rather than complaining (which could be justified in the light of what has happened in the book). The atmosphere of literally understood co-feeling depending on the common place of residence is built from the very beginning:

> Name's Red, by the way.
> Maybe we've met? Oak tree near the elementary school? Big, but not too? Sweet shade in the summer, fine color in the fall? (Applegate, 2017: 10)

A sequence of simple rhetorical questions is a good way to attract attention to creatures living next to us, in our direct vicinity, often noticed by people only when they become troublesome (or at least they seem to be). The concept of vicinity will turn out to be the basis of the plot conflict which will have been solved only when people revise their attitudes. However, before the Oak finds itself in the center of the conflict which poses a threat to it, Applegate skillfully interweaves into the introduction the special terminology of natural science ("photosynthesize", "*Quercus rubra*", "Boojum"), and comic gossips about other trees, which effectively warm up the narration (for example, about an unfriendly maple tree growing in the corner, or about an eccentric California palm tree called Liliana). Having read the first two chapters, the reader finds the Oak a good old friend. In fact, it turns out that "our" Oak is an extraordinary oak, as it performs an honorary function of the wishtree, on which every year people hang pieces of paper or fabric, expressing their wishes.

Applegate gives the Oak a task of describing to the readers the tradition of wishtrees. It performs the task in accordance with the above-described strategy of narrative play in different tones. The wishes are diversified (from "I wish for an A on my geography test" (Applegate, 2017: 14) to "I wish for a world without war" (Applegate, 2017: 14)). The Oak's attitude to this original custom changes as well:

> It's an honor, all the hopes bestowed upon my tired old limbs.
> Although by the end of May Day, I look like someone dumped a huge basket of trash on top of me. (Applegate, 2017: 15)

Both the way the Oak tells its story and the idea of presenting a tree as having human desires show the difference which the American author intentionally juxtaposes with the concept of community to formulate the message about a possibility of their connection. This is not accidental, as the intersection of difference and community defines the situation of all those who are interested in saving the Earth. The Oak has, certainly, a suitable comment on this problem:

> We disagree sometimes, but that is the way of all friends, no matter their species. I've seen many surprising friendships during my life: a pony and a toad, a red-tailed hawk and a white-footed mouse, a lilac bush and a monarch butterfly. All of them had disagreements from time to time. (Applegate, 2017: 17)

In the Oak's narration, the motif of the commonality of differences is developing in accordance with the rule of retardation followed by the writer. Before we reach the climax of the interpersonal (and human-vegetable) conflict, we will listen to the fragment on the difference between the Oak and other trees, then on the difference between a crow and other crows. The fragment is only an introduction to the story about different creatures living in the Oak's crown and its roots, about which it proudly says: "I'm not just a tree, by the way. I'm a home. A community" (Applegate, 2017: 22), and later adds:

> […] I've hosted more than my share of raccoons, foxes, skunks, opossums, and mice. One year I was home to a lovely and exceeding polite porcupine family. (Applegate, 2017:22)

In the following paragraphs, the Oak's identity declaration, elevated in tone, oicological in nature, will, in accordance with the principle adopted by the author, be broken through by the quarrels of the house tenants. Certainly, the Oak will be a mediator:

> And certainly, there've been some disagreements. But I've made it clear that eating your neighbours will not be allowed while I'm in charge. […]
> Making others feel safe is a fine way to spend your days. (Applegate, 2017: 24)

The narrator's conclusions of that sort prepare the ground for the story which provides food for thought about people's attitudes to the concepts of community and difference. The local community observed by the narrator seems to be similar to the one which was staying in its crown:

> Over the years, many families had called those houses home. Babies and teenagers, grandparents and great-grandparents. They spoke Chinese and Spanish, Yoruba and English and French Creole. They ate tamales and *pani puri*, dim sum and *fufu* and grilled cheese sandwiches.
> Different languages, different food, different customs. That's our neighborhood: wild and tangled and colorful. Like the best kind of garden. (Applegate, 2017: 46)

When a Muslim family moves in, the bonds between people and between people and trees are put to the test, as the message cut in the Oak's bark, addressed to unwelcome visitors, *Get out!*, becomes a call for cutting the tree. The conflict is a theme of the moving and inspiring story, strongly existential, including the prospect of an inevitable end:

> In the sweet calm, surrounded by everything I loved – moonlight, air, grass, animals, the earth – I wondered, with a pang, how much longer I would be able to savor such moments.
> I wondered, too, if I'd done enough for the world I loved. (Applegate, 2017: 62)

As can be seen, the theme of bonds, so important in the context of environment protection, can be observed in the center of the above quotation. These are interpersonal bonds, the bonds people feel with nature, but thanks to the literature magic, also the bonds nature feels with people. At the climax, preceding the execution of the tree, "[s]even opossums, four raccoons, five owls, and six skunks" run onto the stage (Applegate, 2017: 147), they are joined by the man who will stop the execution. It turns out that what has finally saved the tree is the bond between human and non-human inhabitants of the community[7]. What is more, thanks to Applegate's writing talent, the readers enchanted with the Oak's rich personality, also "protest", together with the book main characters, against its death, practicing activism for the good of nature on the literary simulator. One may hope that they will transfer the joy of the happy end to the real world, and will not treat the words at the end of the story, "[…] it's *alive* […] This tree … It's like it's human" (Applegate, 2017: 131), only as an emotional metaphor.

The Oak, wise and funny, very convincingly plays the role of the advocate of the co-existence based on respect and openness to the needs of the Other, which constitute the foundation of pro-ecological thinking. The book *The Wishtree,* published in more than twenty countries, is children's literature which takes the responsibility for the tough reality in spite of the fact that it uses the fairy-tale imagery. Combining moods and changing registers, playing, deeply moving the readers, addressing them, making them reflect and building their sense of agency – Applegate and her assistant, the Oak, translate the differences in the presented world and the language they employ to tell about it into a clever and non-frustrating lesson of living in the community in which there is imagination and there are hard facts of everyday life. No one has to be convinced that an attractively presented example may be more effective in the just cause than an order or a ban.

The last issue which requires a commentary is a question mark in the title of my article. Well, in this case, it is an expression of my modest conviction that there is not a good book which could not be replaced with a better one. Having

[7] An authentic story (although with an ending which is not so optimistic as in *The Wishtree*) confirming the possibility of establishing a human-arboreal community has been described by Michał Książek (2019) in the reportage *Wszyscy płakaliśmy po Stefanie* [All of us were mourning for Stefan]. In the context of the affective relation between the man and nature, the story is referred to by Magdalena Roszczynialska, the author of the article *Drzewa i lasy – alternatywne przyrody w polskich księgarniach (w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku)* [Trees and forests – alternative natures in Polish book stores (in the second decade of the 21st century)] (Roszczynialska, 2020).

no doubts as to the eco-critical potential of *The Wishtree* – a book about the biopolis space, combining social and political issues with ecology, against the background of the urban scenery (Rybicka, 2018) – does not preclude us from hoping for other books, equally good, that will be published. We need them very much.

Translated by Ewa Bogdanowska-Jakubowska

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ANNA JANUS-SITARZ ORCID: 0000-0003-2730-7048
Jagiellonian University

It Sees, Feels, Tells… and Fixes the World. The Tree as a Literary Character for a Young Audience

Abstract: Nature in the young adult and children's literature is not just a set of events. It is inextricably woven into the fate of people, observes them, interferes: sometimes helps, admonishes them, allows to better understand the world around. One of such popular characters who actively enter the action is a tree. It communicates important values to human co-heroes and shows how to be useful (Silverstein's *Gift Tree*). However, this article puts the question what is the special function of books that perform literary vision of the scientific research proving the intelligence of plants. In the novels of Harasimowicz *Mirabelle tree* and Applegate's *Wish Tree*, the tree, drawing wisdom from many years of observations of the reality that changes around it, prompts the reader to reflect on how to fix this not the best world. Literary pictures of trees have a chance to convince young readers that nature knows more than we do. The analysis of literary visions of a tree in selected books for young people proves that such a way of meeting the literature presenting nature as a living, feeling, suffering organism can be of great importance in proecological thinking and ethical approach.

Keywords: critical plant studies, ecocriticism, tree, young adult and children's literature, Katherine Applegate, Cezary Harasimowicz

THE WISDOM AND USEFULNESS OF NATURE

Researchers of the „critical plant studies" trend point to direct relationships between the scientific interests of biologists, literary scholars, philosophers and a political movement that argues that the chance of our planet's survival depends on plant life. (Kokkola, 2017: 274–280). Within literary research, this argument is strongly emphasized, especially when the literature is analyzed, showing specific examples of human dependence on the world of flora. As Lydia Kokkola argues, the „critical plant studies" emphasize the central place that plants occupy in determining the future of life on Earth, and the presence of the thread of human-nature relations in works addressed to young audiences is

an expression of adults' concern for the environment that children will inherit from us. (Kokkola, 2017: 274–275).

Ecocriticism undermines discourses assuming the superiority of people over the surrounding nature and also proves how, in the Anthropocene era, man actively interfered with the order of nature, leading to the threat of an ecological catastrophe (Bińczyk, 2018, Fiedorczuk, 2015, Jasikowska, 2018). Showing the extraordinary importance of an ecosystem, in which human existence depends on clean air or unpolluted water, is often done through literary dystopian images of ecological crises resulting from a disregard for the role and power of nature.

Such a metaphorical picture of this crisis is presented in many books, for example, by Marcin Szczygielski in his novel *Czarny Młyn* (Szczygielski, 2010). The abandoned mill attracts hundreds of the electric objects – symbols of consumerism and the destruction of the environment – and creates dangerous monsters from them, and their adult users, perpetrators of a climate catastrophe (manifestation in the novel is, for example, the confusion of the seasons and the terrible asphalt highway where rabbits die). As a consequence of these events young people have to save the world from an ecological catastrophe.

Numerous similar dystopian literary examples are provided by Alice Curry (Curry, 2017). She analyzes the books for young readers that present apocalyptic visions of people fleeing to other planets because on their own planet they have disturbed the hierarchy: man – environment, preferring the realization of their own selfish desires over the fight against the threat of destruction of other organisms living next to them on earth.

However, the subjects of these considerations are not literary dystopian examples but those in which the positive power of nature can be found, resulting from its specific wisdom and usefulness. Both qualities are the subject of the research and description in scientific and popular science books addressed to adults or youth. Ecocriticism researchers say that denying the intelligence of plants is not based on scientific data but on prejudices held over the centuries. Meanwhile, biologists, referring to the criteria used in the study of animal intelligence, demonstrate that plant behavior clearly reveals the ability to feel, the ability to move, search for light, adapt to new conditions, and respond to sounds. (Kokkola, 217: 276)

Even stronger evidence of the wisdom of plants can be found in popular science publications recently published in Poland. In the book *Finding the Mother Tree. Discovering the wisdom of the forest* Suzanne Simard, professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia, introduces a reader to the secrets of trees, especially examples of their cooperation, communication through an underground network of mycelium, the ability to consciously feel, help other individuals, and maintain bonds with them (Simard, 2021). Similarly, Peter Wohlleben, a German ecologist, activist, and forester, writes

in his work *The Secret Life of Trees* (Wohlleben, 2016) about how trees communicate with each other, care for their offspring, and nurture their old and sick neighbors. The same secrets of trees' communication and their struggle for survival are described in a book intended for younger readers *What the trees rustle about* and published with illustrations by Diana Karpowicz (Wohlleben, 2018).

The second issue – the usefulness of flora, including trees – is taken up in the popular science book for children *The team to fix the world. How ten million species bend over backwards to save your ass*. Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson writes in it, inter alia:

> On a warm August day in 1962, a botanist found himself under a twisted eight-meter-long Pacific yew. As the tree was the 1645th plant he sampled, he gave it the simple and elegant name B-1645. Samples were sent for analysis. Paclitaxel, a substance that causes cancer cells to stop dividing, has been found in the B-1645 cortex. Today, this agent is one of the most economical anticancer drugs ever produced. And all started with a piece of bark. (Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2022; translation – A. Janus-Sitarz)

The meaning of a tree is not always as spectacular as that of a professor of natural sciences in the Norwegian book, but its special role in fiction may have an impact on children's perception of the world, its problems, relationships between people and their place in nature.

A SPACE OF FREEDOM AND FUN

It is worth considering which of biologists' findings regarding the intelligence of trees are implemented in the latest literature for young people, as well as what specific ecological and moral goals their authors set for readers. First, however, we will look at examples of earlier literary implementations of the tree motif in children's literature.

Some of the books for young readers are limited to presenting the tree as a special place: a space of freedom and fun, a territory reserved exclusively for carefree children, with the right to transform boughs and branches into castle halls, labyrinths, a mysterious island or simply a safe island by the power of their imagination. hiding place.

It plays such a role in 1975 Maria Terlikowska's classic, repeatedly re-published novel, *Tree up up to the Sky* (Terlikowska, 2015). It is here, when climbing a magnificent tree growing in the yard, little characters experience adventures, turn into knights, save the princess; they discover a secret garden. The tree becomes a great jungle for them, a playground, and a place to grow up. When the plans to remove the tree, which for the builders is an „obstacle", approach, all residents, including children and adults, fight for it in solidarity.

Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, in an article about Terlikowska's book, called one of the headings: *This is not an ecological book…* (Wójcik-Dudek, 2019: 224). Indeed, the residents' protest against cutting down the only tree growing in their backyard is actually episodic and does not translate into the ecological awareness of the little characters. For them, the tree is above all a great place to play, meet, observe, and mature. Playing in the tree is conducive not only to the integration of the participating children, but also to the rest of the backyard community. The threat that the tree will be cut down and resistance to this decision trigger a community spirit in the inhabitants.

Terlikowska's story conveys the value of social bonds. The tree is treated by the inhabitants as a symbol of community, children defend it because it is a place of integration in play and growing up, adults defend it because it probably embodies their childhood memories, it is also a „common good". However, it is not treated as part of a greater good, nature, rather, as part of their property, such as the yard or the houses around it.

A similar function is a territory of great fun, a metaphor for a carefree childhood, and a fodder for imagination in the series of books by Andy Griffiths, which began with the volume of the *13-story treehouse*. The trees in these works, however, are not the characters of the story. Although, as a space – they become a kind of *spiritus movens* of the children's characters' actions, they remain passive themselves.

THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE TREES

The situation is completely different in the works in which we deal with anthropomorphized the trees[1], which assume the role of beings endowed with wisdom and feelings, who address their words directly to the little child characters or, indirectly, to a child's reader.

Therefore, Shel Silverstein goes one step further to determine that the tree is not only a place to play and live for others in the *Gift tree* (Silverstein, 2017). In a short story about the friendship between the apple tree and the boy, we find a touching and instructive parable about the consequences of taking advantage of the good offered by a tree without getting anything in return. The apple tree fulfills all the boy's dreams and needs, first giving him a great place to play and eating fruit and then – as he grows up – branches, boughs, and finally a trunk for building a house and a boat. When he comes to it for the last time, it offers him a place to rest on its cut trunk. A child will probably read this wise story as a lesson about the boundless love and sacrifice that one friend gives to another. Maybe also about the boy's lack of gratitude and reciprocity, because he

[1] M. Kotkowska wrote about anthropomorphic representations of plants in illustrated books for children at the turn of the 20th century in the article *Rośliny – dzieci, płody Matki Ziemi w książce dziecięcej początku XX wieku*, (Kotkowska, 2019).

was guided only by his selfish desires. Whether the little reader will read something more will probably depend on an adult intermediary in the reading, that will direct reflection on the relationship between man and nature, on its exploitation, thoughtless, irresponsible use, leading to slow but inevitable death. The young recipient has the opportunity to understand that he is responsible for healing the world by caring for trees. What is more, the keys to saving the planet are in the hands of the children.

However, we deal with a particular representation of the trees in two novels for young adults: *Mirabelle tree* (*Mirabelka*) by Cezary Harasimowicz (Harasimowicz, 2018) and Katherine Applegate's *Wish tree* (Applegate, 2021). The books selected for analysis are united by a literary concept, which involves entrusting the role of a narrator to anthropomorphized trees, as well as the implementation of an ecological and ethical messages. The title characters: a fruit tree and an oak are not only a representation of the extraordinary usefulness of their species, a quiet and devoted plant, they are above all a wise voice of nature, endowed – according to the claims of previously mentioned scientists – with intelligence, the will to survive, the ability to feel and communicate. They are living beings who observe, feel, suffer, and tell about these observations, feelings, and fears because they are the narrators of the story. They tell the world.

In the novel by Cezary Harasimowicz the mirabelle growing in the courtyard of prewar Warsaw and then its offspring: first the daughter and then the granddaughter, tell the difficult history of Poland, the stories of the inhabitants of one courtyard, the fate of specific people marked by violence, intolerance, and the lack of acceptance for otherness.[2] The trees enjoy the quiet life of the Jewish district, the holidays of its inhabitants, and the smells of their dishes; they suffer when a district turns into a ghetto and its unfortunate community turns into ghosts; they feel painfully when successive beloved human friends leave the country that enslaves them.

Trees and people, particles of the same biosphere, are subject to the same laws of nature: they feel anxious about the processes taking place in their young organisms, they seek communication with others, they suffer when someone hurts them, they get sick, lose their strength, and die. Trees experience a special bond with people, they rejoice in their joy and despair over their misfortunes.

Sometimes these misfortunes are so great that sensitive mirabelles cannot bear them, they strain the trunk, tear their roots out of the ground, and prepare to flee. When mirabelle's mother stops comprehending the war reality behind the ghetto walls, she also stops bearing fruit and starts talking to her Lord God, the Big Tree. She asks him why the trees – despite their diversity – understand each other, give way to each other, share the sap of their roots, even when they

[2] Krzysztof Rybak writes more about the history contained in *Mirabelka* and the reflections on the passing of time, in his review *Niezwykła siła zamknięta w pestce. Recenzja „Mirabelki" Cezarego Harasimowicza*, (Rybak, 2018).

die, and „people… People … Every man is different and often turns this otherness into hatred" (Harasimowicz, 2018: 95[3]). Her numerous questions about the cause of evil, about the innocent death of the victims remain unanswered, and perhaps the most important ends them:

> „Tell me, Big Tree, what do these people owe other people except that they are different?"
> The Great Tree is silent. (Harasimowicz, 2018: 97)

Literary trees, however, do not stop at asking questions, which, of course, are also questions to the reader, from whom they expect to give an ethical answer, in line with Levinas' philosophy (Levinas, 1961). Mirabelles also give hints to people on how to fix this world. The first tip is about tolerance, acceptance of otherness, and enjoying diversity. It is therefore a lesson about relations with another person or another living being, with someone who has different customs, such as the Jewish inhabitants of Nalewki, or with someone who has a different social status, such as the families of Dorka and Chaim, or with the one who will always remain a child like Maciek with a big head, or with the one with leaves, roots, and fruit like a mirabelle.

The second lesson, on the other hand, gives hints on how to change yourself in order to live your life well; how to come to terms with the sadness and inexorable passing away, the leaving of loved ones, where to draw strength from, how to feel like a part of great nature and trust in its laws.
When the old mirabelle plum withers, she assures her daughter:

> – I will never leave you. My roots will remain in the ground. I will feed you with my juices. […]
> – You are an adult, my daughter. You bear beautiful fruit, give sweetness, and please the eyes of the people who live here. You can do without me. You have to be independent. (Harasimowicz, 2018: 124)

This belief in a constant relationship with ancestors who never really leave allows to survive difficult moments, to understand the meaning of one's duration and mission. The mother's words make the mirabelle draw strength from them many years later, despite the misfortunes:

> How could I escape here? After all, I grew up in the soil where my mother and my grandmother had their roots. I take juices from the remains of my ancestors. I am fine here. I draw strength from the sun and the happiness of people who make compotes and cakes from my fruit. (Harasimowicz, 2018: 157)

Mirabelle realizes that she is also absorbing the memory about that city, which she has not seen but it has been seen by her mother and grandmother. She

[3] All quoted fragments of *Mirabelle tree* and *Wish tree* are translated by the author of the article.

grows in memory, draws strength and wisdom from the experiences of her predecessors. This lesson on self-change is also a lesson on how to be useful and enjoy it.

The character of Harasimowicz's book gives the young reader a simple message that repairing the world must begin with ourselves.

Similar hints are provided to the audience by Oak, the protagonist of the novel *Wish tree* by Katherine Applegate. In tree's narrative, we find the same observations, wisdom, and messages as in Harasimowicz's novel, although told differently. Oak, like the mirabelle, is subjected to various adversities („I was threatened by axes, saws, diseases and pests") (Applegate, 2021: 36) and just like her, it becomes a long-standing witness of human kindness or unfriendliness towards others, here: newly arrived town inhabitants.

> At that time, as at many other times in history, hungry and desperate people traveled across the sea in overburdened boats to settle here. Many have moved to the area. The blue and green houses were brown then and full of people, new arrivals.
> Sometimes they were warmly welcomed. Sometimes not. But they still came, with hope and dreams, like all people. (Applegate, 2021: 110)

Oak, like a mirabelle, observes how successive generations of the inhabitants experience joy, emotions, but also suffering, intolerance, what desires they have and how easily others, including trees, are hurt.

Oak has easy access to knowledge of people's dreams, because it is a tree of wishes and it is there that the inhabitants hang cards written with their hidden thoughts, hope, and the need for love. Such trees, hung with cards, ribbons, scraps of fabric, can be seen all over the world: in Mjanmar (Burma), Turkish Cappadocia, European Lisbon. People everywhere are looking for happiness, while the literary trees argue that happiness depends on themselves. They show it on their own example. Just as the mirabelle was delighted that she could give sweet fruit to others, the Oak also derives joy from its own usefulness, although in the face of the announced cutting down it ponders whether it has given enough to others:

> I also wondered if I had done enough for the world I loved. The specter of imminent death provokes reflection.
> Yes, I was casting a cool shadow. I was producing oxygen that people breathed. I gave shelter to small and large. […]
> And yet… (Applegate, 2021: 70)

Full of kindness to people and responsibility for the world, Oak looks for a way, how to fix it, how to help people fix the world. He lays out his philosophy starting with his own example. And – just like the mirabelle plum – the Oak also shows that good relationships are the basis of happiness:

> […] I am not just a tree. I am home. Community.
> Various creatures live among my branches. They dig burrows and burrow the ground between my roots. They lay eggs on my leaves. (Applegate, 2021: 25)

And this community is bound by certain laws that allow it to live peacefully because:

> There is a lot of give and take in nature. Woodpeckers poke holes in my bark, but they eat harmful insects. The grass protects the soil from drying out, but it competes with me for water. […]
> For example, this spring exceptionally many babies were born, and I give shelter to the little owls, little possums, and little raccoons. […]
> Animals do not like tight spaces; they stick to their territories. In fact, they should argue and even throw each other out of their nests or fight for space.
> In fact, there are conflicts, but I immediately warned them that eating neighbors is out of the question as long as I keep the order here.
> Keeping others safe is a good way of life. (Applegate, 2021: 28)

Community, giving, taking, shelter, and care are the key words in a lesson about good relationships. Talking about the changing inhabitants of the nearby houses, Oak delights with their diversity, languages, cuisine and customs. For him, this variety is „the most beautiful garden". (Applegate, 2021: 51) This is not an ordinary lesson in tolerance; it is about enjoying the richness of sounds and smells. That is why the tree's patience ends when the words full of hatred are shouted out at the newly arrived girl and her family: „Get out!", „Muslims go home!". The basis of good relations is openness to others.

The wisdom of nature tells us that repairing the world must start with accepting yourself and others, because „Peace is beautiful, and accepting the world is full of charm" (Applegate, 2021: 32). Oak admits that it itself often wonders:

> What would it be like to be able to fly? Hop? To swim? Gallop?
> Certainly fantastic. Joy itself. Yet I would not give up even the smallest root for it.
> It is a great gift to know how to love yourself and who you are (Applegate, 2021: 42).

Letting go of unrealistic ambitions brings peace, as well as the ability to enjoy life, the stars, the touch of wings, calm meditation and living in harmony with nature.

The voice of the mirabelle in Harasimowicz's novel is heard only by children. The same happens in Applegate's book. For adults, it is „just a tree" that they want to get rid of, because it gives too much shade and the cards with wishes hung on it litter the street. For the child characters, „it is like a man" (Applegate, 2021: 145), and you only need to listen to it carefully.

IMAGINATION AND ECOLOGY

The authors of the School of Ecopoetics, established at the Institute of Reportage, in their manifesto refer to the words of Lawrence Buell, one of the early promoters of environmental humanities, who puts to the fore the question of the relationship between human beings and nonhuman nature: „The ecological crisis is primarily a crisis of imagination "(*Manifesto*, 2022). And then they declare:

> Ecology is not an escape from the world with its complexity and suffering; on the contrary, it is a confrontation, sometimes painful, with reality. On the damaged planet, however, life continues – human and nonhuman, and creation takes place alongside destruction. The School of Ecopoetics is our attempt to direct energy towards creation (poiesis). It is a collective action. It is a search for creative survival strategies.
> We are convinced that reflecting on how we tell ourselves reality is a key task today. Language sets the boundaries of the world in which we live – working with words becomes, therefore, almost the first-front activity in the fight for our future. (*Manifesto*, 2022, translation – A. Janus-Sitarz)

How Harasimowicz and Applegate tell us the world, making trees narrators of the stories, is precisely the way of preventing the crisis of imagination leading to the annihilation of nature, including our human species, the way of expanding the boundaries of the world and searching for survival strategies.

Such a way of meeting the literature presenting nature as a living, feeling, suffering organism can be of great importance in proecological thinking. Magdalena Środa, in a lecture at the GeoLogos conference (Środa, 2022) devoted to reflection on the paths that humanists should follow to save us from the climate catastrophe, spoke about the need for practical ethics based on empathy, care and responsibility for the future. She emphasized that in order to disseminate such ethical values and lead to their interiorization, unconventional methods of action are necessary, which must open the „third eye": „planetary eye", which will allow to see and understand problems from a much wider perspective. Literature, poetry, and metaphor can be useful in this „opening of the planetary eye". Reading books for children showing our world, the world of people from the perspective of wise, compassionate trees can make it easier for young readers to cothink with nature, of which they are a part, an endangered species.

Literary pictures of trees have a chance to convince young readers that nature knows more than we do.

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MAŁGORZATA LATOCH-ZIELIŃSKA ORCID: 0000-0002-2481-6683
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

Ada and Her Path to Freedom. Books *The War That Saved My Life* and *The War I Finally Won* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley in an Ecocritical Mirror

Abstract: The article is an attempt at an ecocritical interpretation of two novels by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley. Their protagonist is 10-year-old Ada, locked in a one-room flat in London since she was born. She knows the world around only from the perspective of looking through the window, she is illiterate and does not even know her name. Although it is difficult to believe, the reason why her mother decided to lock her up was Ada's deformed foot. The girl has to face not only her disability but also the sense of rejection and contempt from her mother. Everything changes after she and her brother flee from the city afflicted with bombings to the countryside, which appears to be the land of peace and safety. The contact with nature, human kindness and, above all, the courage and determination of the protagonist herself enable her to win a better future for herself and her brother. The proposed interpretation of Bradley's novels, with reference to ecocriticism, disability studies, and intersectionality, offers expanded possibilities for interpretation and practical use in school settings.

Keywords: ecocriticism, utopia, ethical interpretation, nature, war, disability, literature for a young reader, disability studies, intersectionality

INTRODUCTION

Education, according to many contemporary researchers, should enable the development of:

> sensitivity to the needs of other people and problems of the natural environment; tolerance towards the beliefs of others; responsibility for people and nature. It is essential to teach understanding and functioning in a world of multiple views, values, attitudes, and identities, also through the ability to conduct a dialogue. In the field of cognitive skills, one should develop the ability to think critically, learn and understand different perspectives, worldviews,

> emotions, attitudes. Education should also help one to adapt to the unpredictability of life and the world and prepare them for various, including complex, existential experiences by shaping the attitude of *resilience*, which is facilitated by developing broadly understood social and communication skills. Finally, it is important to raise hope – education should be not only reactive and retrospective but also proactive and prospective, shaping the sense of agency (Michalski, 2021: 29–30).

Among the many books of contemporary literature for the young reader, those that "teach an open attitude towards multiculturalism, empathy towards the Other, especially the weaker one" (Janus-Sitarz 2021: 502), respect for every life, and an empathic attitude towards nature and all its inhabitants are particularly valuable. This category of works certainly includes two of Kimberly Brubaker Bradley's novels *War That Saved My Life* and *War I Finally Won.*[1]

Lucyna Sadzikowska accurately observes that

> At present, children's and young adult literature is not only studied through the lens of traditional references, but it is also interpreted in the light of poststructural research methods such as hermeneutics, deconstruction, gender, feminism, and postcolonialism. In the school setting, students' openness to multiple interpretations of the text is a vital postulate. They cannot be confined to a single proper research paradigm (Sadzikowska, 2017: 360–361).

Reading these books from an ecocritical perspective opens up opportunities to consider Ada's history as a meeting with otherness or the place of the Other in the environment and the relationship between the human being and the environment.

Reading these books from an ecocritical perspective opens up opportunities to consider Ada's history as a meeting with otherness or the place of the Other in the environment and the relationship between the human being and the environment. For my considerations, I will refer to the critical findings of ecocriticism, one of the vital contemporary proposals of literary research.[2] Ac-

[1] It is worth noting that both books gained the status of bestseller according to the New York Times, the title of the best children's book of the year according to the Washington Post and Wall Street Journal, and the best book of the year according to Kirkus.

[2] As a literary studies trend, ecocriticism is represented in world literature by numerous significant monographs and other scholarly texts. It is worth mentioning, among others, Buell L. *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Blackwell, Malden, MA 2005; Knickerbocker S. *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language*, Universityof Massachusetts Press, Amherst 2012;; Garrard G., *Ecocriticism*, Routledge, Oxon and New York 2012; . *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook*, ed. By P.D. Murphy, T. Gifford, K. Yamazato, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago 1998; Clark T., *Ecocriticism on the Edge. Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, Bloomsbury Academia, London–New York 2015; Murphy Patrick D., Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies. Fences, Boundaries and Fields, Lexington Books, Plymouth 2009; Huggin G., Tiffin H., Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Literature, Animals, Environment,

cording to Anna Barcz, this approach emerged from the interest of humanists in "the problems of environmental protection and reflection on the changes in human attitudes towards the surrounding nature and related cultural phenomena" (Barcz, 2012: 59). Ewa Domańska, characterizing the new scientific paradigm – *ecological humanities*, emphasizes that the world is one system of equal elements. Therefore, there is a need of

> submitting to the laws of ecology and regarding humanity as a part of a larger whole of a living system […] [it is necessary to refer to] an ethics of respect and interspecies solidarity, which is of considerable significance for the consideration of the idea of social justice and opening it up to non-human beings. (Domańska, 2013: 21) [English translation: http://rcin.org.pl/Content/59981/WA248_79763_P-I-2524_domanska-ecological_o.pdf].

The essential statement about the considerations undertaken in the article is that of Przemysław Czapliński, who notes that

> Ecocriticism is an interpretive trend oriented towards texts (not only literary) as a source of knowledge about the relations between human beings and their environment. Ecocritics recognize that every text presents and designs the relationship between a human being and nature, so everything can be read and interpreted from an ecocritical perspective (Czapliński, 2017:11).

A similar position is taken by Julia Fiedorczuk, who emphasizes that, according to ecocritics of the so-called second wave, "every or almost every text can be read from an ecological perspective, because every text, consciously or not, is somehow staging the relationship between human being and the natural environment" (Julia Fiedorczuk, 2015: 27–28). Such a way of reading is referred to as *green reading*, during which questions are asked, among others, about the way of representing the natural environment in the work or the presentation

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Routledge, London, New York 2010. In Polish academic circles, the study of ecocriticism is undertaken by, among others, Ewa Domańska (Domańska, 2013), Anna Barcz (Barcz, 2016), Julia Fiedorczuk (Fiedorczuk, 2015), Włodzimierz Tyburski (Tyburski, 2013), Przemysław Czapliński, Joanna B. Bednarek and Dawid Gostyński (Czapliński, Bednarek and Gostyński, 2013), Wiesława Tomaszewska (Tomaszewska, 2018), Anna Kronenberg, (Kronenberg, 2015), Aleksandra Ubertowska (Ubertowska, 2020). Contemporary literature dedicated to researching literature for young readers is equally rich. See also e.g.: Beauvais, C. *The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015; Joosen, V. *Adulthood in Children's Literature*. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2018; Nikolajeva, M. *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*. London: Routledge, 2010; Waller, A. *Rereading Childhood Books: A Poetics*. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2019; Review of Polish research by Sadzikowska Lucyna, see *Mapa współczesnych badań nad książką dziecięco-młodzieżową*. In: K. Tałuć (ed.), Literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży. Vol. 5 (pp. 360-378). Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, (2017).

of a specific place, as well as the problem of the relationship with a specific inhabited "green" place. *(*Kronenberg, 2015: 29–31) *Green reading* (as well as *green writing*) can be referred to as "the content of literary works themselves"; ecological humanities broadens the perspective on literature, on a literary work […] the analysis of a work can also reveal ecological content ". (Tomaszewska, 2018:84)

According to Anna Kronenberg,

> green reading and writing (or relationships between literature and the environment) consist of many fields of research, including geopoetics, ecofeminism, indirectly ecophilosophy and ecocritics […] in geopoetics, the focus is on the natural environment: the entire planet and specific geographical places. A human being appears in relation to the place. There is a shift of perspective from anthropocentric to bio/geocentric (Kronenberg, 2015: 45).

It is crucial to address critical principles of disability studies and intersectionality theory when considering the persecution and exclusion that the disabled protagonist experiences. Disability has been and continues to be the subject of numerous theoretical studies and interdisciplinary research. Especially significant in the reflection on disability are the so-called disability studies, pioneered by Simi Linton, the author of the 1998 book titled Claiming Disability. Knowledge and Identity.

> According to Simi Linton, disability is a social, political and cultural phenomenon […] In her opinion, this approach enables disability studies to have numerous points of intersection with other research perspectives […] She also describes oppressive mechanisms present in everyday and scientific English language and societal divisions, evident through the arrangement of public space. According to Simi Linton, the objective of disability studies is to engage in a critical self-examination of various categories such as independence versus dependence, aesthetic preferences that exist in a particular culture, the concept of health and its definitions, and the issue of ableism. Ableism refers to the irrational bias against disabled individuals, particularly in its subtle forms, and its influence on the wider social fabric. (Fidowicz, 2016: 112)

Incorporating intersectionality, an interdisciplinary research perspective[3], into the discussion of the causes and forms of discrimination faced by Ada can

[3] Intersectionality is one of the most important concepts in the social science. The term was introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in the article Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8. According to the Encyclopedia Brittanica: Intersectionality, in social theory, the interaction and cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination affecting the daily lives of individuals, particularly women of color. The term also refers more broadly to an intellectual framework for understanding how various aspects of individual identity

provide a more comprehensive approach to the observations. In intersectional analysis, various social categories that shape the identity are taken into consideration. (Crenshaw, 1989) By following the principles of this research approach, we can discover the intersection of different forms of persecution and oppression that the protagonist experienced. This can help us understand the impact of these on her perception of herself and the world. Furthermore, this approach can broaden the interpretation of the story and open up new possibilities for using it in educational practice.

THE START OF HITLER'S WAR SET ME FREE[4]

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley's novels can be read from many perspectives. We are dealing here with works embedded in the reality of World War II. Katarzyna Wądolny-Tatar believes that

> Narratives aimed at young children about World War II often focus on individual experiences of characters who are portrayed as peers. These stories also pay attention to the child's position within the family, and take care not to expose them to too much cruelty. Instead, these narratives aim to inspire compassion and empathy in young readers. (Wądolny-Tatar, 2017: 113) (Wądolny-Tatar, 2017: 113)

As Beata Mytych-Forajter aptly writes, the books by Brubaker Bradley, narrating the wartime experiences of the Smith siblings involved in the Pied Piper evacuation – the relocation of 800.000 children from London to the English countryside – stand out against the backdrop of

> Polish wartime prose for young readers who grew up reading 'Czterej pancerni i pies' (Four Tank Men and a Dog) and other stories of World War II, concentration camps, and the post-war Sovietization of Poland […]. The works mentioned above provide an opportunity to explore a unique perspective on

– including race, gender, social class, and sexuality – interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression […] Crenshaw introduced the concept to address experiences of oppression that could not be adequately understood as the result of ordinary patterns of discrimination". Intersectionality | Definition, Kimberle Crenshaw, History, Applications, Criticism, & Facts | Britannica, dostęp: 2024–01–15. See also K.W. Crenshaw, Ch.L. Harris, A Primer on Intersectionality Booklet. African American Policy Forum, Vassar College, Columbia Law School, Poughkeepsie 2009, http://aapf.org/tool_to_speak_out/intersectionality- -primer/; L. McCall, The Complexity of Intersectionality, „Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society" 2005; P.H. Collins, Reflections on the Outsider Within, „Journal of Career Development" 1999/2000, vol. 26 (1), pp. 85–88. vol. 30 (3), s. 1771–1800; K. Davis, Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful, „Feminist Studies" 2008, no. 9, p. 67;

[4] See Bradley, 2017: 13. [English original source (p. 10) https://archive.org/details/thewarthatsavedmylifebykimberlybrubakerbradley1/page/n9/mode/2up]

> portraying wartime trauma […]. The wartime context is essential, but the forefront is given to the psyche of an abused child, subjected to the cruelty of an inept mother with sadistic tendencies (Mytych-Forajter, 2021: 2).

Ada's story is about toxic relationships in the family, about the difficult experiences of siblings, whose lives were complicated by the war on the one hand. Still, on the other hand, it changed them dramatically. It is about the search for their identity and sense of value, about regaining trust in people and the world, and rejection and exclusion of otherness and others. We can also try *green reading*; then, in reflecting on the story of the heroine of Bradley's novel, it will be essential to examine the relationship of this character with the places where she happened to function and the impact of the environment on her life. We meet Ada when she is ten years old and lives with her mother and brother in London in a one-bedroom apartment on the third floor. She tells her own story. It is June 1939, England, Europe, and the world just before the World War II outbreak. But the prospect of global conflict does not arouse fear in her, as opposed to most people at that time, as she says:

> […] while I'd heard of Hitler – little bits and pieces and swear words that floated from the lane to my third-floor window – I wasn't the least concerned about him or any other war fought between nations (Bradley, 2017: 9). [English original source (p.8) https://archive.org/details/thewarthatsavedmylifebykimberlybrubakerbradley1/page/n9/mode/2up]

Such a statement may be surprising, but we cease to be surprised when we learn the context. Ada is disabled from birth, and that makes her struggle to move around. Therefore, it is justified to look at the girl's story from the perspective of disability studies.

> My right foot was small and twisted so that the bottom pointed skyward, all the toes in the air, and what should have been the top touched the ground. The ankle didn't work right, of course, and it hurt whenever I put weight on it, so for most of my life I never did. I was good at crawling. (Bradley, 2017: 10). [English source: p. 9]

The mother was ashamed of her daughter's disability, which was why she forbade her from leaving the apartment,

> "You're nobbut a disgrace!" – she screamed. – A monster with that ugly foot! You think I want the world seeing my shame? (Bradley, 2017: 10). [English source: p. 8]

The woman did not attempt treatment or rehabilitation, which would be a chance for a normal life for her daughter. The apartment was a prison for Ada. She knew the outside world only from the stories of her brother, Jamie,

and from the observation through the window. The girl associated the four walls of the tiny room only with fear and pain. The mother often threatened her daughter that she would board the window up for disobedience and thus deprive her of one of the few joys of life. The woman often punished her daughter by locking her in an even smaller space – a cabinet under the sink.

> The cabinet was a cubby […] The pipe dripped sometimes, so the cabinet was always damp and smelly. Worse, roaches lived there. I didn't mind roaches out in the open so much. I could smash them with a piece of paper and throw their bodies out the window. In the cabinet, in the dark, I couldn't smash them. They swarmed all over me. Once one crawled into my ear (Bradley, 2017: 18).[English source p. 13]

It seems that it is no coincidence that cockroaches appear here, as we can refer to the stereotypical perception of these insects. On the one hand, they repulse people – in dreams, they are a symbol of sadness and adverse and unfortunate events, but on the other hand, their view may herald positive life changes.[5], as we see in the further parts of the novel.

Ada, although she was a disabled child herself, had to take care of her younger brother. […] the pub where Mam worked nights.

> In the mornings Mam slept late, and it was my job to get Jamie something to eat and keep him quiet until she was ready to wake up. Then Mam usually went out, to shop or talk to women in the lane; sometimes she took Jamie with her, but mostly not. In the evenings Mam went to work, and I fed Jamie tea and sang to him and put him to sleep, and I'd been doing all that for as long as I could remember, from the days when Jamie still wore diapers and was too small to use the pot. We played games and sang songs and watched the world out the window […] (Bradley, 2017: 9–10). [English source: p. 8]

However, Jamie went out more and more with his mother's permission, and Ada was left alone. Initially, at his sister's request, he remained in her sight, but quite quickly, the area of playtime with his peers grew, and the girl lost sight of him.

> […] he […] went running out of sight all day. He came home with stories about the docks on the River Thames, where big ships unloaded cargo from around the world. He told me about trains, and warehouses bigger than our whole block of flats. He'd seen St. Mary's, the church by whose bells I marked time. As the summer days grew longer he stayed out later and later, until he came home hours after Mam left. He was gone all the time […] (Bradley, 2017: 11). [English source: p. 9].

[5] See https://senneo.net/sennik-karaluch. The motif of a cockroach as a symbol of transformation also appears in the short story the Cockroaches by Bruno Schulz and *The* Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka. In Franz Kafka's story, the central motif is Gregor's transformation into a worm, a cockroach, and then his death, which is interpreted as a symbolic image of the devastating impact of the family on his life. Ada's mother also had a destructive effect on her daughter, but her actions became an impulse to change, to fight for a better future.

Ada's loneliness was terrifying; she tried to force Jamie into the house. Another concern was the prospect of her brother starting school in September, which involved an even longer absence from home. For Ada, it became an impulse for change; she decided to learn to walk, and it involved much suffering:

> Maybe it wouldn't have been so bad if I'd been walking all along. Maybe the little curled-up bones in my ankle would have been used to it. Maybe the thin skin covering them would have been tougher. […] I let go of the chair. I swung my bad foot out. I pushed my body forward. Pain stabbed my ankle like a knife. I fell down. Up. Grab the chair. Steady myself. Step forward. Fall down. Up. Try again. Good foot forward first this time. A quick gasp, a swinging of the bad foot, and then – crash. The skin on the bottom of my bad foot ripped. Blood smeared across the floor. After a while, I couldn't take it anymore. I dropped to my knees, shaking, and I got a rag and wiped up the mess. That was the first day. The second day was worse. The second day my good foot and leg hurt too. It was hard to straighten my legs. I had bruises on my knees from falling, and the sores on my bad foot hadn't healed. The second day all I did was stand, holding the chair. I stood while I looked out my window. I practiced moving my weight from one foot to the other. Then I lay down on the bed and sobbed from the hurt and from exhaustion. (Bradley, 2017: 14–15). [English source: p. 11)

Ada was sure that thanks to her walking skills, she would be able to leave her prison and, above all, she would gain the sympathy of her mother, who would stop being ashamed of her. This belief allowed her to endure pain:

> After a hard day, when I was holding my leg on the bed and shaking from the effort of not crying more, I thought of Mam taking my hand to help me walk down the stairs. I thought of her leading me out on the street, saying to everyone, "This is Ada. This is my daughter. See, she's not so hopeless as we thought." She was my mother, after all. (Bradley, 2017: 16). {English source: p. 12]

At the end of the summer, it turned out that due to the threat of bombing, the evacuation of children from London to the countryside was ordered. Mytych-Forajter emphasizes that for the characters in Brubaker Bradley's work, this forced journey was a redemption and, at the same time, opened up entirely new interpretative possibilities.

> This unique intertwining of personal and historical events offers a fresh perspective on stereotypes linked with World War II. Suddenly, relative turns out to be what hurts the most. It's not the bombing raids and the terror of death at all but the pathological relationship with an adult caregiver that serves as the matrix for all other relationships (Mytych-Forajter, 2021: 4).

This became the beginning of Ada's new life and her journey to freedom. The mother flatly stated that the daughter would never leave London because the parents

> sent their kids to nice people. Who'd want you? Nobody, that's who. Nice people don't want to look at that foot. […] You can't leave. You never will. You're stuck here, right here in this room, bombs or no. (Bradley, 2017: 20–21), [English source: p. 14]

Ada then made a dramatic decision to flee the city with her brother. She stole her mother's shoes (she never had hers) and went outside on her own for the first time. Limping and walking on all fours, she went with Jamie to the train station, from where the train was to leave upcountry. She's not worried about the war, about the prospect of bombing, because paradoxically, it freed her from the influence of a toxic mother. Hence the title of the novel – *The War That Saved My Life*.

ANYTHING TO GET AWAY FROM MAM

The escape was an act of extraordinary courage because the girl did not really know where she was going or even what the word "country" meant. Even before getting on the train, she learnt that everyone thought she was retarded from what Jamie's friends were saying. The children could not believe that she was imprisoned by her mother and deprived of access to education only because of a deformed foot.

The outside world delighted Ada and aroused her curiosity; everything was new and exceptional to her. She noticed seemingly insignificant details, e.g., the blue haze hovering over the roofs in the pink glow of the rising sun, which made everything seem nicer, according to her. From the perspective of her London apartment window, the world was small. "Already the world seemed huge to me. If I looked up at the tops of the buildings I felt dizzy" – says Ada (Bradley, 2017: 24). [English source: p. 17]. And that was only the beginning. The buildings ended and

> suddenly there was green. Green everywhere. Bright, vibrant, astonishing green, floating into the air toward the blue, blue sky. I stared, mesmerized. (Bradley, 2017: 30–31). [English source: p. 21].

Ada didn't know that the green in the fields was grass. The trees, which she compared to giant celery stalks, were also a complete surprise to her. She fixed her eyes on the green, absorbing its scent in her imagination. This emphasis on the green commonly associated with hope can be interpreted as another sign of a change in the heroine's life, of her being reborn soon. The absolute euphoria, however, was triggered by the sight of a girl racing with a train on a pony.[6]

[6] It is not surprising that a pony appears here. The motif of the horse, pony is deeply rooted in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture. It is worth adding that the pony has been popularized by the generation of My Little Pony toys, the accompanying animated se-

> The girl was laughing, her face wide open with joy, and it was clear even to me that she meant to be on the pony. She was directing the pony, telling it what to do. Riding the pony. And the pony was running hard. I knew ponies from the lane but had only seen them pull carts. I hadn't known you could ride them. […] I saw a stone wall ahead of them. I gasped. They were going to hit it. They were going to be hurt. Why didn't she stop the pony? They jumped it. […] Suddenly I could feel it, the running, the jump. The smoothness, the flying – I recognized it with my whole body, as though it was something I'd done a hundred times before. Something I loved to do. I tapped the window. "I'm going to do that," I said. (Bradley, 2017: 31–32). [English source: p. 21].

The observed scene awakened in Ada a hidden dream of arising from the disability. The unity of human and horse surprised her; she admired their mutual understanding and harmony of movements. Earlier confined within the dead space of the apartment, in which the only living creatures besides mother and brother were disgusting vermin, she suddenly experienced an encounter with nature. The ponies she knew from London were in a situation similar to hers, enslaved by men and used for hard work. Obviously, horseback riding requires earlier animal training, but Ada did not notice anything inappropriate. In her eyes, the animal did not experience harm. Galloping, it was as happy as its caretaker; they had complete confidence in each other, so it followed her instructions.[7] It was a liberating experience for her, inspiring her to act, and fight for herself, her health, her education, and better prospects for her brother.[8] In the rest of the novel, it seems we would receive an idealized, idyllic image of the English province and its inhabitants, who gladly welcome refugees from London to their home. Ada very quickly disillusioned the reader.

> The teachers herded us down the street into a big building and lined us up against one wall. Men and women from the village filed past, looking to see if we were sweet and pretty and wholesome enough to take home. That they didn't think many of us were good value was clear from the expressions on their faces and the things they said. […]They're filthy! My bit don't extend to a pack of dirty street rats […] This lot looks like they'll murder us in our beds. (Bradley, 2017: 37). [English source: p. 24,25]

Ada's observations were confirmed; she and Jamie as the only ones from the whole group, were left out; a cripple and a small boy, both dirty and neglected,

ries, and so-called licensed products (clothing, office supplies, and small gadgets primarily aimed at girls).

[7] Bernard Rollin believes we can assume a similarity between animal and human experiences. As he writes, "if animals were not beings capable of thinking and feeling, they would not be tamed or able to work with us" (Shollenberger, 2016: 206).

[8] According to Carl Jung, horses symbolize personal power, things a human being can achieve. It seems that the appearance of the girl on the pony triggers in Ada these hidden layers of strong will and stubbornness in pursuing the goal.

would be too much of a burden.[9] However, the author provided a happy solution, although not everything was perfect from the beginning. The children found themselves at Miss Susan Smith's in Kent, who is single and reluctant to welcome refugees into her home. Despite initial fears and mutual distrust, they eventually came to an agreement. Ada and Jamie's stay with Susan was the best thing that could have happened to them. Thanks to their caretaker's help, the girl learned to read and write, and her deformed leg was operated on. She made some real friends in the country. The benevolent adults helped her free herself from the custody of the toxic mother and win a private war for her wellbeing, symbolized by the second volume's title – *The War I Finally Won*.

As mentioned above, for the discussion about Ada, it will be crucial to examine her relationship to the places she lived in and the impact of the environment on her life. It was shown that the family home was a prison for the girl, and her health issues made it impossible for her to leave the apartment. Mistreated by her mother, she felt humiliated, ashamed, and painful loneliness. Her attempts to contact the world through a closed window were perceived as the incomprehensible cries of a retarded person. Therefore, it is evident that until the time of evacuation from London, the protagonist did not have the opportunity to feel nature, admire its beauty, or identify with a "green place". Hence her reactions to common elements of the natural environment: trees, grass, and animals.

Nature is undoubtedly one of the key elements of the represented world. So let's look at how the author builds an image of nature in the text, its position in it, and what elements it consists of. Most of the action takes place in the English province, so it is not surprising that the landscape/environment is completely different from the one Ada got used to in London. There, nature was not really present; here, it is the arena of the most important events, and its inhabitants – plants and animals – influence the decisions of the heroes, especially the protagonist. So let's point to specific milestones on the way to the freedom of the main character. Certainly, such an event was the appearance of a pony near Miss Smith's house. When the children overheard Susan refusing to accept them, they decided to seek help elsewhere, and that's when

> everything changed. To the right side of the sleeping house, a bright yellow pony put its head through the bushes and stared at me. I could see that it was standing behind a low stone wall. It had a white stripe down its nose and dark brown eyes. It pricked its ears forward and made a low whickery sound. […] It was like something I'd imagined come true. I felt again in my gut the feeling I'd had on the train when I'd seen the galloping pony and the girl. […] If the pony didn't live with Miss Smith, it at least lived next door, and wherever it was, I was staying too. (Bradley, 2017: 41–42). [English source: p. 27].

[9] This is where the deep-rooted stereotype of rejecting a person with a disability due to their physical defects, irrational prejudice against disability, or otherness came into play.

The animal, which evoked such emotions in the girl during the train ride, became a catalyst for action. Since it personified Ada's dreams, she decided to do everything to live near it. Already at the first meeting with Buttler, as this was the name of Miss Smith's pony, the girl described him in an idealized way. He and everything around him were magical for her. Ada treats the pony as a reward for her courage, for walking so long, and for leaving her mother. Buttler triggers in her a solid resolve to fight: "I got to keep walking forever." (Bradley, 2017: 52) [English source: p. 33]. The protagonist, although she had never had contact with nature before, perceived it with all her senses and noticed even the smallest of its elements in harmony with each other: moist grass pricking at her feet, soft soil that was *squishy, like new bread*, tree crowns swaying in the sun, singing birds. The pony had a soft, warm snout, snuggled up to Ada confidently, and smelled fresh butter. Ada was so happy that she forgot about her bad leg, cruel mother, escape, and the uncertainty of tomorrow and fell asleep in the meadow. This image evokes idyllic threads from the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau[10], who saw in nature the source of all good, happiness, harmony, and peace, or the utopian vision of the world described by Isaiah Berlin:

> A society lives in a state of pure harmony, in which all its members live in peace, love one another, are free from physical danger, from want of any kind, from insecurity, from degrading work, from envy, from frustration, experience no injustice or violence, live in perpetual, even light, in a temperate climate, in the midst of infinitely fruitful, generous nature. (Berlin 2004: 18). [English original source: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v20/n23/christopher-hitchens/moderation-or-death].

A return to a not-so-miraculous reality was awakening. However, it should be emphasized that for Ada and Jamie, leaving London turned out to be highly beneficial, as already mentioned above. People living in the town were mainly kind to visitors from the capital, even though they were an additional burden for them, not only financially. Children need to be provided with a roof over their heads, food, clothing, and above all, care and support. For Ada, leaving home was not traumatic at all; she left her prison and her abusive mother with relief. However, she perceived every gesture of help from strangers with great distrust as she had never before met with kindness and care and had not become accustomed to such treatment. At the beginning of her stay at Susan's house, the only place she felt comfortable and carefree was in the garden.

> The field was fascinating. Grass, dirt, flowers. Little flying bugs. I rolled onto my stomach and stroked the grass, sniffed it, pulled it out of the dirt. Scooted

[10] The Enlightenment philosopher often emphasized that to achieve true happiness and a sense of fulfillment, a person needs nature.

> forward to examine a white flower. Eventually I felt a whoosh of breath against my neck. […] it was Butter. He sniffed my head, then stepped aside, grazing. I watched his feet and how he moved them, and how his long yellow tail swished flies away. (Bradley, 2017: 72–73). {English source: p. 44].

Jamie missed London, his home, and his friends, especially when some of them came back to town. Ada firmly declares that she has no intention of returning there ever again because her family home brings about only bad memories. – *Everybody thinks I'm nasty, back home They think I'm some kind of monster […] There's nothing good at home […] I was hungry, and I was alone, and I was trapped […].* (Bradley, 2017: 89–90). [English source: p. 53]. They both had problems understanding the words used by the caretaker and other town residents, including the names of things. Their origin, inappropriate upbringing, and lack of education made their vocabulary extremely poor: *[…] I didn't have the words for the thoughts inside my head.* (Bradley, 2017: 162).[English source: p.95]. It's hard to believe they didn't know what bedding, tablecloth, velvet, robe, birthday, perseverance, and kindness were. Ada and her brother did not experience their mother's love, so they did not understand what it was. When the girl accidentally damaged Susan's sewing machine, she inflicted a similar punishment on herself as her mother did. For Ada, it was the end of the world; she was sure Susan would send her back to London. The caretaker had to explain to her that nothing had happened, that it was only minor damage that could be quickly repaired. She locked herself up because, as Jamie explains, *Mam puts her in the cabinet […] whenever she's really bad.* (Bradley, 2017: 182). [English source: p. 106].

Susan and other town residents showed Ada help and support, but it is difficult for the girl to believe their sincere intentions. The anger accumulated over the years prevented her from cutting herself off from her old life. The heroine was paralyzed by the fear that the war would end and she and her brother would have to return to their mother. She was trying to remember that her current situation was only temporary. She didn't want to get used to Susan because she was temporary, *someone we have to live with for a while.* She treated the friendship offered by Maggie very suspiciously because she did not deserve such feelings; she did not deserve love, care, or interest. Such an attitude is proving that

> Ada suffered not only physically (problems with her foot and walking), but above all mentally. She could not feel safe; she was flooded with feelings of panic and rage; she was morbidly distrustful and over-responsible; she constantly wondered why her mother could not love her. As a victim of abuse, she often escaped from reality and her feelings into the world of her dreams and thoughts (Mytych-Forajter, 2021: 4–5).

The mother appeared many times in the memories of the children. Despite the harm she had suffered, the girl tried to justify her mother's actions by blaming

her own disability, believing that monsters like her should not have been born at all. Constant feeling of rejection and low self-esteem did not allow her to receive even the slightest positive attention from others; she was convinced that people were lying. It was most evident when she got a dress, a Christmas gift from Susan:

It was so beautiful I couldn't touch it. I just stared. […] "Come," Susan said. "Let's see if it fits." "It's perfect. Ada. You're beautiful." She was lying. She was lying, and I couldn't bear it. I heard Mam's voice shrieking in my head. "You ugly piece of rubbish! Filth and trash! No one wants you, with that ugly foot!" My hands started to shake. Rubbish. Filth. Trash. […] –"I can't wear this," I said. […] "I'm different, I've got the ugly foot, I'm – " My throat closed over the word rubbish. (Bradley, 2017: 223–224). [English source: p. 128,129].

MAM HAD NEVER LOVED ME[11]

When the mother arrives from London to pick up her children, they forget for a moment their suffering, but very quickly find out what was the reason for her decision: *First I get a letter says now I have to pay the government for taking my kids away, nineteen shillings a week and the government wants me to pay.*" (Bradley, 2017: 299). [English source: p. 171]. The woman hit her daughter and jerked her son around, even in front of Susan. She took the kids back home. She was violent and vulgar and forbade Ada from leaving the apartment:

> 'Cause I don't need the world shaming me for having a crippled girl. I don't care what you did somewhere else. You're with me again, you'll do as I say. You disobey me, I'll make you wish you hadn't. You're a cripple. That's all you are. A cripple, and nothing but a cripple. You've never been anything else. […] […] "Disobey me," she said, pointing at Jamie, "and I take it out on him. Got that?" (Bradley, 2017: 307–308).

It seems that Ada lost everything she managed to build during her stay with Susan; she would give up and be forever only a cripple whose mother was ashamed of. However, the love she had just experienced, learning what normalcy was, and the hope of operating on a deformed foot were stronger than the fear of the mother. She decided to talk to her. This conversation was another traumatic experience for the siblings, who learnt from their mother that she had never wanted them, that if possible, she could get rid of them forever without paying a penny. The children left the house a second time and decided to return to Susan, who at the same time went to London to take the siblings back to her place. When they took the train back to Kent, Susan's house got hit

[11] See Bradley, 2019: 174. [English original source: https://www.onlinereadfreebooks.com/en/The-War-I-Finally-Won-757680/1]

by a bomb, and she and the kids became homeless. But at the same time, Ada was breaking her distrust of Susan for the first time.

> A strange and unfamiliar feeling ran through me. It felt like the ocean, like sunlight, like horses. Like love. I searched my mind and found the name for it. Joy. (Bradley, 2017: 228). [English source: p. 187].

The children's mother died soon in the bombing of London, which did not cause Ada great despair. The information reached the girl when she was in the hospital and had an operation on her foot.[12] The only concern for her was what happened to them now, whether they could stay with Susan. However, after a successful operation and removing the plaster, she is filled with sadness and grief for the woman: *"A couple of months in hospital fixed it?" All my life I'd been miserable because of that foot.* (Bradley, 2019: 37). [English original source: https://www.onlinereadfreebooks.com/en/The-War-I-Finally-Won-757680/1] The girl believed that her mother did not treat her intentionally because she had to have a reason to hate her. That's why Ada also feels the same way about her mother: *Of all the things I hated my mother for, that was the worst. That I could have had a regular foot all along.* (Bradley, 2019: 78). How deep Ada's psychological trauma was could be seen when everything seemed to be back on track.

> I was standing on two feet, without crutches, wearing two shoes. I could read, and I could sing. I had walked to church even though it was a long way. I needed to remember that. I tried to force myself to feel happy, but underneath the happiness I felt prickly, like my skin was stretched too tight all over. I might not be a cripple, but I didn't know who I was. (Bradley, 2019: 81). [English original source: https://www.onlinereadfreebooks.com/en/The-War-I-Finally-Won-757680/1]

All her short life, she was nothing, a hideous cripple whose mother was ashamed of, a monster who didn't know her name or how old she was. When physical disabilities were overcome, all she had to do was to enjoy her health, especially since she and her brother gained a loving caregiver and their place on earth. However, it was not that simple; mental wounds were still bleeding, and the girl was still emotionally unstable and looking for her identity. She was still unable to feel safe. Despite Susan's assurances that her mother can never hurt her again, she feels the pain of rejection will stay with her forever: *Mam*

[12] The second part of the story begins with Ada's hospital stay and the news of her mother's death. This can be seen as foreshadowing the changes that will occur in the siblings' lives. Mytych-Forajter considers this sequence of events as a symbolic coincidence. According to the researcher, the death of the mother and the recovery of the girl mark the end of their abusive relationship. Thus, Brubaker Bradley's novels are a part of the therapeutic literature trend that offers hope for overcoming challenges and starting anew.

had never loved me and never would. That would hurt forever. (Bradley, 2019: 174). [English original source: https://www.onlinereadfreebooks.com/en/The-War-I-Finally-Won-757680/1]

In addition to the criticism of the heroes' mother, the text makes several remarks depreciating the poor people of London as those who do not think rationally and take their children home:

> At least a dozen of them have gone back already. I've told their parents over and over that it isn't safe. London will be bombed. But it's no use. Those simple-minded women prefer their present comfort to the long-term safety of their children. (Bradley, 2017: 82). [English source: p. 49.]

On the other hand, the English province is presented as a friendly place, and its inhabitants, despite some drawbacks, as people full of compassion and willingness to sacrifice. It's a small community that cares about each other and the common good. Taking care of evacuees was not treated as an opportunity for additional income because childcare was paid as an allowance but as a civic, human, and Christian obligation. It would be too much to say that the place of residence made these people like this, but the content of the work shows exactly this perception.

FAITHFUL FRIENDS[13]

The critical figure in Ada's story is the pony. The desire to learn how to ride him triggered the girl's perseverance, patience, and resourcefulness. For this dream, she endured pain and repeated falls, working at Lady Thorton's stable in exchange for Fred Grims' care of Buttler and valuable riding tips. One can risk saying that the animal received from Ada everything that she did not receive from her own mother. It repaid the girl with friendship and affection,

[13] The relationships between the animals and the characters in Bradley's novels can be examined by considering the principles of animal studies. According to Dariusz Piechota, 'Animal studies researchers draw inspiration from works featuring animal characters to interpret human-animal and animal-human relationships. The attempts to delve into the world of animals and describe humans from a non-anthropocentric perspective seem intriguing' (Piechota, 2015: 169). Undoubtedly, it would be interesting to analyze how animal companions transform the characters. Hanna Mamzer writes that […] animals play a colossal role in children's socialization processes, both through their direct presence and metaphorical existence in cultural contexts […]Animations depicting the 'human world of animals' are often used to teach children about the human world. The presence of animals in poems, rhymes, and songs reinforces the cultural message about human traits, shaping acceptance or aversion towards them. It teaches about the relationship between good and evil. The real presence of animals is supposed to primarily impact a child's emotional development by expanding the spheres of empathy, responsibility, and shaping prosocial attitudes (Mamzer, 2015: 157). However, this is a topic for separate considerations.

> Whenever I called him, he'd come galloping, ears and tail alert. He would slide to a stop just in front of me and gently lower his head. He never once knocked me down, not even in the beginning when I was weak and afraid. (Bradley, 2019: 45). [English original source: https://www.onlinereadfreebooks.com/en/The-War-I-Finally-Won-757680/1]

It is worth noting that Jamie also made his animal friend in the countryside. [It was] the ugliest cat Susan and I had ever seen. *Its filthy, matted hair might have been any color at all beneath the dirt. One eye was swollen shut.* (Bradley, 2017: 184). [English source p. 107]. Jamie brought him home from nowhere, called him Bovril, and since then the cat accompanied him almost everywhere, it was his own onager.[14], *Every night after that, Jamie fell asleep with Bovril curled in his arms. He never wet the bed* again (Bradley, 2017: 185) [English source: p. 108].

Thanks to the animal, Ada felt that she had become who she wanted to be. When riding Oban, Lady Thorton's horse, it was as magical as when she left the London flat:

> Mist rose with the sun over the green-gold fields. The broad leaves of potato plants stretched far and wide, and in the hedgerows birds sang loudly. Oban walked beneath me with a marvelous loose swinging stride. I gathered the reins until I could just feel the edges of his mouth, and he softened his neck and relaxed into my hands. I let my hips swing and made myself breathe quietly. […] Suddenly my fear fell away. Oban was flying, and I was flying with him. Flying. I was flying! t was the best, most joyful feeling in the world. I dropped my hands to Oban's mane. I let the reins run out, let my hands surge with the movement of his mouth. Instead of pulling him in, I kicked him forward. He bunched his hindquarters and ran harder. […] His speed increased until his stride began to feel as smooth as rushing wind, as effortless as flowing water. I moved with him, effortlessly. On the day I was evacuated, I'd looked out the window of our train and seen a girl galloping a pony, racing the train. Now I was that girl, galloping, laughing, my head thrown back, the wind tugging my hair. (Bradley, 2019: 230–232). [English original source: https://www.onlinereadfreebooks.com/en/The-War-I-Finally-Won-757680/1]

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

The interpretative suggestions provided can serve as a starting point for a deeper analysis and preparation of detailed proposals to introduce these issues into educational practice. In the opinion of both critics and readers of Bradley's novel, these are works primarily about courage, care, love, selflessness, stubbornness in achieving goals, breaking barriers and limitations, and fighting against rejection and otherness. Green reading directs our attention to the role

[14] Onager was an animal from " The Swiss Family Robinson", a book Susan read to her siblings. *[…] onagers were like donkeys. You could ride them. They were nothing like cats*. (Bradley, 2017: 184). [Englis source p. 108].

of place in Ada's life and the importance of fascination with nature and animals in her quest for fitness. Indeed, nature does not serve Bradley as the background to the story told. Without Buttler and Oban, there would be no victory for Ada, no release from the trauma of her family home. The road to freedom was not easy, and the fact that the girl walked it was undoubtedly due to the English province. There, she established ties not only with the residents but, as Kenneth White puts it, with a specific inhabited, "green" place. She finally felt safe, loved, and needed in Kent and called this place her home.

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AGNIESZKA MIERNIK ORCID: 0000-0002-1365-8560
Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce

The Transformative Role of Nature – *The Nightingale* by Hans Christian Andersen and *The Lost Soul* by Olga Tokarczuk and Joanna Concejo

Abstract: This text attempts to present the symbolic role of nature in *The Nightingale* by H.Ch. Andersen and *The Lost Soul* by O. Tokarczuk and J. Concejo. Referring to the multi-layer character of the discussed texts, the key functions of nature in exploring the meaning of existence by literary protagonists are emphasized. Interpretation of the works from the perspective of depth psychology indicates that when the ego ceases to function as a controlling instance, a symbol is necessary as a bonding element. And at this stage of life, nature turns out to be the leading psychopompos, participates in the reconstruction of the parabolic road to the lost meaning, transforms the consciousness of the characters, and acts as a therapeutic catharsis opening to metaphysics, leading to the process of individuation.

Keywords: archetype, symbol, fairy tale, nature, depth psychology.

Those who reach for Olga Tokarczuk and Joanna Concejo's book *The Lost Soul* and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Nightingale* will not be able to resist the impression that what unites the works is the aspect of searching for the meaning of existence in the eternal beauty of nature, in the consolidation of human being with the beingness of all existence. The displaced image of the Garden of Eden becomes in both texts an expression of the eternal longing for what is lost, vanished, squandered, and what can be described in psychological terms as the search for oneself "through", "towards" and "with" the realm of nature. The thematic view of the image of nature proposed by Northrop Frey, is linked in the present discussion with Carl Gustav Jung's (Frye, 2012) psychological view, (Jung, 1981, 1998, 2010). The human psyche positioning itself towards itself and other beings speaks the language of symbols, as Jung argues, "the world and the experiences it brings about are symbolic, […] in essence they reflect something hidden deep within the subject himself, in his own

transubjective reality" (Jung, 2013:157). To put it in Jungian terms, man's vocation is to discover in the depths of the unconscious that infinite state of innocence, imagined in the literary representations of interest to us as an image of uncontaminated, life-giving nature, a longing for a harmonious state of coexistence of all beings. The rhythm of birth and death, the act of circulating in the eternal wheel of cosmic laws, swimming in the Buddhist infinite stream of "mutually contingent events, arising and perishing" (TKU, 2013: 11) is embedded in the cyclicity of the laws of nature. This "pattern of return to death and rebirth" (Frye, 2012 : 179) is present in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which is a primordial, mythos. The book, considered in the light of psychological commentary (Jung, 2013) and related to the literary texts under discussion, leads through liminal situations to finding the meaning of existence in the archetype of the self.

1. TENDER NARRATOR IN THE WORLD OF NATURE

As I pointed out in the book *Domains of Imagination Andersen and Jung* referring to the archetypal view of *Fairy Tales and stories*, the two creators are connected in a special way by the year 1875, which is the date of death of the Danish fairy tale writer, an artist bestowed with special abilities to coexist with psychic reality, and the year of birth of the Swiss psychiatrist, discoverer and researcher of contents inaccessible to direct cognition. The prominent figures are united by a fascination with the sphere of the collective unconscious, in case of Andersen it is an artistic passion expressed in the work, whereas in case of Jung it is subject to scientific cognition, psychological understanding (Miernik, 2015: 5). Following this thread of thought and referring to common places in the lives and works of the two prominent figures, it is worth quoting two statements: the first is Jung's reflection, while the second is the view of a character from Andersen's fairy tale *The Snail and the Rose Bush*:

> At times I am as if scattered in the landscape and in things: I live in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds, in passing animals and in objects. […] In Bollingen, silence surrounds me; one lives there in modest haromony with nature. Ideas emerge that reach the depths of centuries, therefore anticipating the distant future. Here the anguish of creation wanes; the creative proces resembles having fun (Jung, 2019 : 258).
> I blossomed with joy […]. The sun was warming, the air was so fresh, I drank pure dew and intense rain, I breathed, I was alive! I drew strength from the earth, I drew it from the air, I felt happiness, always new, always great, and that's why I continued to bloom (Andersen, 2006:449).

Jung spent several months a year alone at the lake in Bollingen. He built and decorated the famous tower, did gardening and simple activities. Deprived of access to electricity, he lit fire and brought water from the well. He considered

erecting the tower, arranging and tending the garden as a psychological activity, reffering each stage of the work to the successive progress of inner development. Spiritual growth could only take place and express itself in its fullness through a relationship with the surrounding nature. The time of fascination with nature also took place in Jung's life during his school years, and recalling this stage he confesses:

> Plants also interested me […]. For reasons that were incomprehensible to me, I did not approve of picking and drying them. They were living beings – the meaning of their existence was fulfilled in the fact that they grew and blossomed – a hidden and secret meaning, the meaning of God's thought. They had to be viewed with a certain trepidation, wondered at, wondered in a philosophical manner. And while it was noteworthy all that biology had to say about them, that was not the point. I failed to grasp the point. In what relation, for example, did they stand to the Christian faith or to the negation of the will? This I could not figure out. They were apparently existing in a state of divine innocence, and it was better not to disturb this state (Jung: 2019: 102).

This state of "divine innocence" discovered in the natural world corresponded with the inner life of the future scientist, for whom the discovery of psychological completeness and the completion of the individuation process, was not possible without the presence of the natural world.

In Andersen's depictions of nature, we find an analogous message. The plant and animal world is a part of the cosmos, it is alive, soulful, has its own language, ability to empathize, a huge potential for empathy. Ewa Ogłoza noted that "the names of plants appear in about twenty titles of Andersen's stories (e.g. *Snowdrop, The Last Dream of the Old Oak*). Plants are also present in the depicted world, even if they are not mentioned in the title (e.g., *The Snow Queen, There Are Differences*), becoming speaking characters. In brief descriptions of flowers or trees, Andersen points out with delight the most important components of their appearance. The described object is, for example, an apple branch, blossoming dandelion and thistle or buckwheat" (Ogłoza, 2020 : 77). Flowers play a special role in Andersen's garden, they express many symbolic and metaphorical functions[1], as the main characters of the fairy tale they often reflect the position of the author – as the rose bush quoted above. Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz aptly compared Andersen's work to a rose bush, "which is so often the acting person of his pictures" (Iwaszkiewicz, 2001: 98). It seems that Andersen was able to perceive beauty and depth in what was small and inconspicuous with extraordinary tenderness, he was able to "pierce through the surface of phenomena, to see what lies beneath things – and at the bottom of the flower cup the whole vault of heaven

[1] E. Ogłoza writes about it in her book *Wokół opowieści H. CH. Andersena: o radości czytania* as well as K. P. Morensten in the foreword to *Baśnie i opowieści* translated by B. Sochańska.

can be revealed to us" (Lurker, 1994 : 226). Noticing in oneself this "tender narrator", mentioned by Tokarczuk in her Nobel speech, allows one to see the world in all its fullness, to show its beauty and nobility, to move towards universal, archetypal meanings:

> In this way, a non-religious young woman, my mother, gave me what used to be called a soul, and thus equipped me with the world's best tender narrator […]. For she elevated my existence beyond the ordinary materiality of the world and randomness, beyond cause and effect and the laws of probability. She placed it, as it were, outside of time, in the sweet vicinity of eternity. I realized with my childish mind that there was more to me than I had previously imagined (Tokarczuk, 2019).

The story of the "tender narrator" is complemented in *The Lost Soul* with an iconic layer and thus we get an iconotext project, a picturebook dedicated to a young audience[2]. Concejo confessed in a private conversation that the inspiration for the paintings came from the depths of intuition, born in silence and attentiveness to the minutest details of the of everyday life (a notebook brought by her daughter from the attic, potted plants, the surrounding nature)[3]. The author's images that deepen the world presented in the text (the context for the narrative), encourage multidimensional perception, to try to find meaning in the beautiful, soothing, benevolent voice of nature.

2. THE WORLD OF NATURE VS AN ARTIFICIAL NIGHTINGALE AND CHECKERED NOTEBOOK

The turning point in the lives of the characters in the works of interest to us is a psychological condition that Jung referred to as loss of soul. In Andersen's fairy tale, it is expressed in symbolic images: an oriental palace, a nightingale, an artificial bird, illness and miraculous recovery. In Tokarczuk and Concejo's work, it refers to: the main character's loss of memory (plot layer), the moment of separation of consciousness from the unconscious realm (iconic layer: the scene with gloves), the gradual recovery of memory by returning to childhood memories and finding oneself in the original sensations. The fusion of spirit and thought, corporeality and metaphysics, finding oneself in the archetype of the self becomes possible through a return to the world of nature, a space without which, as the authors of the works in question argue, personal completeness, happiness and a sense of existence are unattainable. Nature makes it possible to find oneself anew in the configuration of events, and inscribes the universal time that Tokarczuk mentions.

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[2] The Lost Soul, published in 2017 by Format Publishing House, has been ranked among the top 100 picturebooks in the world for 3 consecutive editions.

[3] Agnieszka Miernik's telephone conversation with Joanna Concejo conducted on 01.10.2020 on the genesis of the work "The Lost Soul".

In the fairy tale *The Nightingale*, an oriental ornament plays an important psychological function, allowing to express the peculiarity of the inner world. The reader embarks on a kind of journey to the East, deep into the unknown land, towards the unconscious areas with which the Easterners have a special relationship (Miernik, 2015 : 164). The attitude of the Eastern man is oriented towards spiritual work, towards cultivating a relationship with nature, and non-living parts of the ecosystem, which is expressed most fully by the philosophy of Tao, manifested in the unity of "the laws of all things and the totality of being, […] in the impersonal order of nature" (Slósarska, 1994:19). Tao, which is "the hidden treasury of all things" (Lao Tzu, 2016:141), arises if beings complement each other and achieve unity; it is born from the union of opposites, from the ability to contemplate (the correlation between feeling and thinking). Purity, tranquility, mystical power, fertility, mastery over the world are made present in the achieved integration (Lao Tzu, 2016 : 93).

Inner fullness is also manifested in the Taoist principle of constructing a Chinese landscape. Looking at Andersen's landscape, we notice correlations with the principle of feng shui: the fairy tale landscape is built by configurations: castle (center), flowers (garden), trees (forest), wind (symbolized by bells on flowers), water (sea) (Miernik, 2015:163). This is because the Tao manifests itself in nature through eight basic components: sky, earth, wind (tree), thunder, fire (sun, lightning), lake, mist (water, cloud), mountain (boulders, stones) (Slósarska, 1994: 19). The image of nature is complemented by the singing of a nightingale. The bird's music foreshadows the mystery of transformation and the new face of existence, as expressed in the scene in which the emperor, hearing a nightingale for the first time, experiences a state of catharsis.

Unfortunately, he fails to fully trust nature and halts personal development – he ties the nightingale's legs, locks it in a cage and allows it to go out for a walk "twice a day and once at night" (Andersen, 2006 : 270). Beauty is put under control, the creative content symbolized by the bird and its singing has been blocked, placed in old paradigms of thinking and feeling. Internal stagnation is expressed by the stage of fascination with the artificial nightingale. It can be inferred that the protagonist fell into a trap set by the Japanese emperor, whose gift was a mechanical nightingale. Thus, the Japanese emperor would represent that side of the protagonist's personality that is resistant to change, responsible for stagnation and does not want development. An artificial mechanism made of gold and adorned with expensive stones, reproducing schematic sounds is at odds with the laws of Taoist play, does not lead to the path of self-improvement, and because of its predictability and finiteness is the opposite of transcendence. A mechanical toy is only a poor substitute for the spiritual experiences accompanying great art, and half-heartedly satisfies aesthetic needs. In the above attitude we can find parallels with the behavior

of modern man, susceptible to ideological and consumerist manipulations imposed by corporations dominating the world.

Mass culture that promotes unlimited materialism, kitsch and trash, appeals to the lowest emotions, disregards spiritual needs, and completely loses the idea of order of the art of living based on the ethical dimension (Dudek, 2019 : 17). Jung warned in his works and statements against the consequences of leading a makeshift existence. The thinker argued that turning to materialism, looking for signposts only outside, without directing attention to archetypal images, results in neuroses and depression. Leading a predictable existence may seem easier and better on the surface, after all, as the maestro of Andersen's fairy tale argues, "when it comes to a living nightingale, it is impossible to predict what it will sing, while with the artificial one everything is predetermined. It will be this way and no other. Everything can be explained, you can take it apart and show the thought of man: how the waltzes are arranged, how they play, how one follows the other" (Andersen, 2006 : 271). In a strictly planned, concretized world, there is no room for creativity, spontaneity, surprise, doubt, one must fit into the printed lines of a school's checkered notebook. This is exactly how the protagonist of *The Lost Soul* lived, as the narrator informs us, "he moved along the smooth page of a math notebook, a page covered with even and ubiquitous grids" (Tokarczuk, Concejo, 2017)[4] . The continuation of a superficial, monotonous existence away from the inner voice caused a morbid condition. John lost his memory, woke up one day in a hotel room in a foreign city and forgot who he was.

The illusory makeshift existence of the Chinese emperor also crumbled. The artificial nightingale mechanism broke down and no one in the state could fix it. The emperor fell so ill that he could die. Both protagonists experience a disease process, which is a clear sign that their mental structures have become disordered and require "putting together", the help of a specialist. Chinese doctors proved helpless in the face of their emperor's illness, and his death was basically expected across the country. Tokarczuk's protagonist seems to have more luck. He meets an old and wise doctor, who apparently remains faithful to the Hippocratic principle, saying that there is healing power in nature itself, "dormant benevolent, healing powers, healing power (vis medicatrix naturae) (Szczekilk, 2008: 79). The doctor recommends a kind of psychotherapy: "you must find a place of your own, sit there quietly and wait for your soul"[5] (Tokarczuk, Concejo, 2017).

[4] The Lost Soul is a book conceived in the format of an old notebook with missing pages (incomplete page numbering).

[5] Zenon Waldemar Dudek, a Jungian physician and psychiatrist, points out that the modern pharmaceutical industry offers only a rich array of drugs in the process of returning the patient to the original state of consciousness: "the most severe disorders and conditions requiring chronic care are attractive, because they generate the greatest material

3. BAR-DO – DYING AND BECOMING

Stuck in a state of "waiting", the protagonists find themselves in an intermediate situation, between health and illness, life and death. It can be hypothesized that they are in a position resembling bar-do (that which is between two, in-between) "it concerns a person who is parting with this life, and has not yet entered a new form of existence"(TKU, 2013 : 9). According to the recommendations of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the first and most important task to be performed by anyone passing to the other side is the rejection of consciousness, for a mind polluted by earthly experiences will not allow one to recognize the truth, and will delay the process of liberation from samsara. The frightened and confused consciousness will begin to produce "hallucinations," "angry, terrible and frightening visions" (TKU, 1984 : 12). From a psychological point of view, the nightmarish figures appearing in bar-do are "essentially projections of the subject's mind and symbolize various powers, contaminations and subconscious inclinations of that mind." (TKU, 1984 : 5). A displaced image of the above process is found in Andersen's fairy tale, in a plot event depicting visions of impending death: "The poor emperor breathed with difficulty, as if something were sitting on his chest; he opened his eyes and saw that it was death sitting on his chest in his own golden crown on her head[6], in one hand she held the emperor's golden saber, in the other his magnificent banner, and strange heads looked out from the folds of the veil, some disgusting, others kind and gentle" (Andersen, 2011 : 273).

The Emperor finds himself in a state of profound abandonment, experiencing the stage of the "dark night of the soul," overwhelmed by fear and panic he desperately calls for help like a dying person who, without the instruction and invocations of the Guide, is doomed to repeat the manifestation of wrathful deities and will never achieve liberation (TKU, 2013 :74). Ursula Wirtz notes that people in a state of trauma experience a state of death in their lifetime, feel dead, believe that they have lost their souls, that they have fallen "into the deepest and darkest regions of being, where one is forced to reevaluate basic assumptions about life and death" (Wirtz, 2021 : 154).

The protagonist of Tokarczuk's story also had to face the above challenge. The reader learns that one day he no longer had "anything to breathe" and felt that "there was no one anymore inside his body" (Tokarczuk, Concejo, 2017). The rationality that had been built up for years and not connected to the inner

benefits. In this model, the impact of the environment, prevention and psychological support in the early stages of disorders are ignored, and exceptional and difficult cases are relegated to the field of rehabilitation. Developmental and preventive thinking is not supported by the biological model, which suggests a deterministic attitude" (Dudek, 2019 :18).

[6] Here we find a displaced image of the fear of Yama, the Lord of Death (TKU,1984 : 10).

world finally disintegrated, the thin thread of self-deception and self-justification could no longer keep him alive. John experienced an inner death only to realize that it was worse than the outer one. Jung writes about this experience in the Red Book: "That night the knowledge of death came to me. I entered the inner death and saw that the outer dying was better than the inner death. And I decided to die on the outside and live on the inside. I turned around and looked for the place of inner life" (Jung, 2019 : 34). On the path of life, John just reached that moment when the ego alone is no longer enough, ceases to be the guiding instance and disintegrates. It is time for a paradigm shift, perhaps this is the stage when the intellect must be abandoned in favor of the heart, and as Jung argues, "the knowledge of the heart cannot be found in any book and cannot be received from any teacher" it grows from within, "like green grain from black soil" (Jung, 2019 : 134). And it is only in the complementarity of heart and reason, thinking and feeling, that life can be ordered and given meaning.

4. „NOBLE SON, LISTEN CAREFULLY!"[7]

The protagonists in the works of interest have found themselves in a liminal (transitional) situation, which is inherent in the initiation structure of the instructions of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. According to the Book's protocol, at the bar-do moment, there should be a Guru, a brother in Drahmā, or ultimately someone able to recite well, watching by the adept's side. Liberation is accomplished by listening to the advice in the Book. In his psychological commentary on the Book, Jung writes about it as follows:

> And indeed, the instructions contained in Bar-do T'os-grol are meant to remind the deceased of the experience of his Guru's initiation and teachings, for in essence the instruction is nothing more or less than the initiation of the deceased into the life of the bar-do, just as the initiation of a living person is a preparation for the journey to the Other Side. […] In the case of living people, however, the "That Side" is not the afterworld, but a change of mind set and point of view, "the other side in the psychological sense" (Jung, 2013 : 148).

Jung's view that the Book, although written for the dead, nevertheless concerns life, is shared by translator Francesca Fremantle. In her words, the book teaches how to fulfill one's vocation, and reminds us of how to act during our lifetime (TKU, 1984 : 1). And if we read the fate of the literary characters in the context of the Book, in the aspect of leaving the state of death and transitioning to new forms of existence, we will notice that the role of conducting and commenting has been assumed by nature. It is nature that instructs about lightness and meaning, shows how to achieve liberation, speaks of beauty and patience, and

[7] (TKU, 2013 : 55).

restores the memory of existence. The protagonists of the works under discussion overcome separation, pain and inner death thanks to the presence of a fellow-feeling nature. Gradually, a process of return to the disregarded, suppressed and forgotten elements of being, lost meanings and senses takes place in their lives.

The protagonist of *The Lost Soul,* following the advice of an old doctor, takes refuge in the province, locks himself in a deserted house and undergoes a process of therapy. And this is where the narrative gets suspended and the story is filled mainly with Concejo's iconic design. The illustrator focuses her attention on her attempts to find the lost soul, and the space of expectation is filled with an essential character – nature. Saturated with an atmosphere of contemplation, the paintings direct the viewer's attention to the beauty of nature, the delicacy of floral ornaments, colorful flowers. Even the glazed door, behind which John's silhouette is drawn, is engraved with plants. Subsequent views present John's figure in a state of inner silence, tranquility, meditation. The protagonist, who faces the window and is now shown with his back to the reader, is accompanied by potted plants and simple everyday objects (also decorated with plant motifs). One of the plants grows directly from the table, another from the window sill, expressing man's special relationship with an intelligent, compassionate and ready to serve nature. For wood carries the germ of rebirth and participates in the dao of heaven, earth and man. The plant growing out of the wooden table and window introduces the Buddhist attitude of Ch'an unification, the idea of unity "in contemplation, achieved by the way of rejecting sensory impressions and quieting the mind" (Slósarska, 1994 : 19). Concejo's protagonist, if he wants to find his soul and achieve enlightenment, should reject sensory impressions and quiet the mind, for as the ancient wisdom argues, "do not listen with your ears, do not listen with your brain, listen with your spirit" (Slósarska, 1994 : 19). The process of tuning into the order of nature is particularly expressed by a plant with "heart-shaped" leaves reminding a nasturtium. Originally, it stands on a television whose screen displays a frame of a couple in love in a kiss of rupture. In subsequent shots, the plant appears accompanied by John holding it on his lap. The nasturtium obscuring the protagonist's silhouette seems to abide in union with the hero. John and the plant form a whole, a community of experience, a kind of mandala, a prefiguration of Totality.

John, awaiting the return of his soul in the company of plants, is visited by forest and domestic animals: deer, hare (rabbit) and cat – and each of the animals present carries deep symbolism. The deer, as the Buddha's animal and an expression of his teachings, pictures the soul itself, wisdom, asceticism, aspiration of the spirit. Rabbits and hares, on the other hand, bring the gift of alertness and attentive listening. The cat as a guide can prompt the search for inner powers and life purpose, help overcome fears and problems, and provide inner

healing (Miernik, 2021 : 32). The aforementioned animals fit, according to archaic notions, into the circle of power animals. They appear "when a person loses power," and a shaman or shamanic advisor embarks on a spiritual journey to bring the power animal and restore strength to the lost one: "power animals are simply a source of vitality. They come to us because we seek them, and their intentions are always good, never bad. They are there to help us" (Baghramian 2018 : 149). They bestow qualities necessary for the journey into ourselves.

In Andersen's fairy tale, the role of the instructor is taken over by a forgotten and rejected nightingale. It appears to cleanse from sadness, lead out of emptiness, terror, loneliness, helplessness, "dissolve" all the negative aspects of the psyche. The song of the bird brings joy, restores a sense of beauty, order: "Thank you! Thank you! – exclaimed the emperor. – You heavenly bird, I know you. I banished you from the empire, and yet you drove all those evil spirits from my bed and death from my heart with your singing!" (Andersen, 2006 : 274). Writing about the healing power of art, Aristotle argued that "some people, under the influence of melodies that put the soul in a state of rapture, find solace as if they had taken a medicine or a palliative," for "music heals by spiritual purification" (Szczeklik, 2008 : 84). Thus, catharsis as a natural psychological and biological process is accomplished by finding oneself in the order of nature, a reminder of the lost truth that "man is a microcosm made of the same elements as the macrocosm, or universe" (Szczeklik, 2008 : 18). This regularity is the basis of all health, and that is why we must remember that "genetic constellations are of celestial provenance, so perhaps learning about them will restore the lost connection with heaven, show the way back, restore the lost harmony" (Szczeklik, 2008 : 28). Andersen's nightingale, as a link between heaven and earth, seems to transcend the three-dimensional world of everyday life and move us into extraordinary states of consciousness (Carpa, 2019 : 186). And that is why, enchanted by his new recognition of himself and the world, the emperor asks the bird: "Stay with me forever." Experiencing the non-intellectual state of oneness of all things, attunement to the Cosmos remaining in a state of unification, brings the protagonist inner balance, restores simple joy.

In Tokarczuk's book, the experience of unity is expressed by a lush, floral garden that reaches almost to the sky. Man and nature remain in a state of joyful symbiosis. In cultural imagery, flowers have been chosen to represent the self, spiritual intelligence (especially the lotus flower and the rose). Spiritual intelligence is the inner ability to know the essence of being, it is "unifying thinking" that unites different areas of the psyche, gives a sense of meaning. As a result, it leads to a fuller understanding of ourselves, to "reformulate our experiences or put them in a new context" (Zohar, Marshall, 2001: 74). Equipped with the above predispositions, a person undoubtedly possesses a deep connection to the soul. In Concejo's illustrations, the soul is imagined as a child, and interestingly we find parallels to Jung's Red Book, which is a record of the

author's visions and dreams in the face of a mid-life crisis. In a conversation with his soul, Jung confessed: "I wandered for many years, so long that I forgot that I possessed a soul. Where have you been all this time? What other worlds were hiding you and giving you space? […]. Who are you, a child? My dreams depicted you as a child, as a girl"(Jung, 2019 : 132).

The psychological process, described by Jung a century ago, has found a continuation (as a displaced thematic image) in the literary work of Polish authors, and points to the universality of the issue, to the work of the artist who persistently collects all the crumbs, trying to glue the universe of the whole back together from them" (Tokarczuk, 2020: 280).

SUMMARY

In Andersen's *The Nightingale* and *The Lost Soul* by Tokarczuk and Concejo, nature acts as a guide – a psychopmpos, participates in the reconstruction of the parabolic path to the lost meaning. It is co-present on the path of transformation and spiritual growth, proves to be an indispensable element introducing the path of contemplation and realization of inner needs. Selfless beauty, this "good for free" (Kulmowa, 2018: 34), is the most effective remedy, and if only the seeker of fulfillment opens himself to cooperation, he can change his consciousness. Embarking on the path of coexistence with nature gives knowledge of the spiritual relationship of all things to each other (more geometrico). It makes the Universe a living being, concerned about man. It seems that nature is able to wait patiently for a "touch", and when the encounter occurs it bestows its catharsis. A return to the scattered Eden is a necessary condition for settling into oneself and the world, a guarantee of meaning and happiness. In light of the above readings, there seems to be a timeless reflection coming from the philosophical thought of Omraam M. Aivanhov that all nature is intelligent, and if man denies that he is surrounded by intelligent beings then he denies life, begins to experience blindness and condemns himself to a slow death. Nature turns out to be the buckle that binds fate together, shows who we are without it, and who we can be by uniting with it.

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HANNA DYMEL-TRZEBIATOWSKA ORCID: 0000-0002-7753-5463
University of Gdańsk

Reality, Fiction and Fantasy: *Landet som icke är* by Kristina Sigunsdotter and Clara Dackenberg as a Multiple-Address Picturebook

Abstract: Edith Södergran (1892–1923) was a legendary Swedish-speaking modernist artist. Today regarded as Finland's greatest poet, she was barely recognized in her lifetime largely because since her poetry – replete with ecstatic, mystical undertones – broke from the lyrical conventions of her day and was a challenge to the reading public. Södergran's enduring popularity inspired the Swedish artists Kristina Sigunsdotter and Clara Dackenberg to produce an oneiric picturebook titled *Landet som icke är* (2020). The article shows the complexity of the book, whose language imitates Södergran's stylized idiom, and whose iconotext is intricately narrated, peppered with references to Södergran's poetry and life, and interwoven with a range of intertexts. The study concludes that reading *Landet som icke är* requires a range of competencies and is an interesting proposition for children, provided that they are supported by experienced readers.

Keywords: Edith Södergran, multi-address, picturebook, intertextuality, fiction, reality

Edith Södergran (1891–1923)[1] was a pioneer of Finnish-Swedish modernism, credited with a leading role in the turn-of-the-century revival of Scandinavian poetry. In her avant-garde and symbol-laden verses, she sought self-definition and also prophesied a new era and reflected on the inherent limitations of language. As Ebba Witt-Brattström, Södergran's scholar and her biographer, points out: "The inability of language to articulate the lesson of the new century – that God has died, taking with him man as woman's master – is plain for all to see. Södergran offers a formula for an age of transition, in Nietzsche's words" (Witt-Brattström

[1] In 2023, the centenary of Södegran's death was celebrated, among others, by publications focused on her work as a photographer. See *Världen är min: dikter och fotografier* (Rahikainen, Sillanpää 2023) and *En annan Edith* (Ulmaja 2023).

2011). Anticipating her time, the young poet appropriated Nietzsche's figure of the Übermensch (overman) to create her own vision of a new woman, strong and independent of men. She believed that her second volume of poetry, *Septemberlyran* (*The September Lyre*) from 1918, "embodied a new creative spirit that would call forth a new kind of individual into being" (Lindqvist 2006: 813).

Echoing Södergran's tragic life story,[2] her poetry has long inspired researchers and artists. Her ecstatic and ambiguous works have been described from a biographical perspective with an emphasis on her illness, from the perspective of influences of modernity, and from feminist, psychoanalytic, and queer-studies viewpoints (e.g., Tideström 1949; Witt-Brattström, 1997; Reenkola 2004; Häll 2006; Toftegaard-Pedersen 2011; Rahikainen 2014; Mier-Cruz 2021). Her poems have been involved in intermedial transfers for years, with these practices expanding their audience and showcasing their enduring potential.[3] *Landet som icke är* (The Land That Is Not),[4] a recently published picturebook by Kristina Sigunsdotter (text) and Clara Dackenberg (illustrations), vividly exemplifies this trend.

This hardcover, 16x22 cm book includes 86 numbered pages. Its content is divided into 8 short chapters, followed by a factual afterword, whose two sections provide essential information about the poet's biography and her work. The generic classification of the book presents a certain challenge, as it teeters on the thin line between an illustrated book and a picturebook. Aware of the ongoing debate around differentiating between these two literary forms (Bird and Yokota 2018), I classify *Landet som icke är* as a picturebook, although some of its features, such as the number of pages and the possibility to comprehend a coherent story through the text alone, may controvert this decision. However, I argue that Dackenberg's illustrations are not merely decorative additions, but rather a significant contribution to the reception and interpretation of the book. I subscribe to the theory that a distinctive feature of picturebooks is the evocative and poetic role of images, which may create its mood, metaphorically refer to its theme, or poetically depict the essence of a situation (Bird and Yokota 2018: 282).

IN THE WEB OF INTERTEXTS

Landet som icke är narrates an iconotextual story of a girl named Edith who wakes up in a sanatorium from a feverish dream and follows a silver thread that

[2] The poet died of tuberculosis at the age of 31.

[3] Södergran's poems have been set to music, for example by Kerstin Jeppesen, Anne Kruse, Ellen Hall, the Arosa Ensemble, and Molly Sanden (https://sodergransallskapet.fi/edith-sodergran/tonsattningar/).`

[4] The book has not been translated into English. However, since Sigunsdotter took many names and phrases from Södergran's poems, I use the published English translations of her verse here.

leads her to a golden-yellow cat, Luck Cat. Accompanied by this extraordinary guide, she passes through a mirror into the wonderful, heavenly Land That Is Not and is welcomed by her sister, who is waiting for her in a hall where the huge Strange Tree grows. The girls wander through twelve rooms, where Edith is promised to find everything, she has ever desired. However, the cat warns Edith not to go to the Tower Room, where an ominous lady called Dice Caster lives. Yet Edith finally meets the lady and rolls a dice that is to decide her fate and the future of the Land That Is Not. The red color means the destruction of Dice Caster and her kingdom, and the white color entails the continuation of her rule. All sides of the dice turn out to be white, and it is only the girl's strong memory of her beloved mother that makes it turn red. Dice Caster disappears into an abyss, the Land That Is Not is saved, and the sisters play together for the last time. Afterwards, Edith returns through the mirror to the sanatorium, where her mother is waiting for her. This story is narrated by a homo-intradiegetic narrator, a device that enhances readers' engagement, brings them closer to the protagonist's perspective, and thus promotes their greater identification with her. At the same time, the visual narrator is heterodiegetic, showing the character through the eyes of an external observer, which generates distance and offsets the potentially painful content.

The plot of this story follows the circular pattern typical of fantasy literature (Nikolajeva 1988),[5] in which the protagonist leaves the primary world (the sanatorium) and enters a secondary world (the Land That Is Not), where they experience fascinating adventures with elements of horror, before returning to the primary world (the sanatorium). This pattern is redolent of Astrid Lindgren's numerous works, in which characters suffering from deficiencies in health, happiness, parents, or friends, venture into a fantastical fairy-tale realm, where their deficits are compensated for. In some cases, the magical world is pictured as a pure arcadia, while in others, children are exposed to evil and must face it on their own. Strengthened by this experience, they return to reality, which they are better equipped to confront. These works, which can be classified as therapeutic fantasy (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2004, 2014), include the novels *The Brothers Lionheart* and *Mio, My Son*, and the short stories "In the Land of Twilight, "Most Beloved Sister" and "Junker Nils av Eka."[6] In each of them, the passage to the secondary world is rendered dually: as a genuine event for novice readers and as a (day)dream for experienced readers. Edith, who wakes up from a dream and experiences adventures in the Land That Is Not, strongly resembles Lindgren's three sick characters: Nils ("Junker Nils av

[5] In this model, the world of reality is referred to as the primary world, while the world of magic is called the secondary world. The transportation to the magical realm empowers the child.

[6] This fairy tale has not been translated into English. Its title might be literally translated as "Nils, the pageboy of the Oak."

Eka"), Bertil ("In the Land of Twilight"), and Rusky (*The Brothers Lionheart*). Like the boys, she is first bedbound and feels wonderfully healthy after crossing the magical passage.

The name of the secondary world in Sigunsdotter's text – the Land That Is Not – is in sync with the parallel designation of the Land of Twilight in a story by Lindgren ("In the Land of Twilight"). This is not a coincidence since Lindgren deliberately used the title of Södergran's poem as a recognizable metaphor for the afterlife[7] among adult readers in Scandinavia. This makes for an original intertextual circle: Astrid Lindgren was familiar with Södergran's poems and, fascinated by them, she collected quotes from them, as reported by her biographer Jens Andersen (2021: 26). Lindgren also incorporated certain elements from these poems into her works, which eventually themselves became the hypotext of a pictorial biography of Södergran.

Besides the basic compositional similarity between *Landet som icke är* and Lindgren's books, there are other elements that interrelate these works as well. Many motifs from Lindgren's short story "Most Beloved Sister" recur in *The Land That Is Not*; for example, Barbro travels to Salikon through a wild rose bush, and Edith, upon opening the door in the secondary world, enters a rose garden. In both stories, the protagonists meet their respective sisters, who are their kindred spirit, and both play with small animals, with Lindgren's rabbits replaced in *Landet som icke är* with kittens, animals that were present in Södergran's real life, as evidenced by her letters and numerous photographs. Anthropomorphized nature is another parallel in the construction of the fantasy worlds. Specifically, in Lindgren's short story, flowers sing and streams whisper, while in Sigunsdotter's book, water hides secrets, the forest whispers, and flowers tell tales of love. Both writers also draw from Södergran's color palette and use gold and silver in their idyllic landscapes; in Lindgren's work, Barbro's sister lives in the Golden Hall, and her horses have manes and horseshoes of gold and silver, whereas in Sigunsdotter's work, Edith follows a silver thread and is called the "golden sister," the cat has golden fur, and a golden gate opens the first hall.

Some elements in the *Land That Is Not* evoke associations with *Mio, My Son*, where the main character receives a red apple that becomes his ticket to the world of fantasy; Edith is also offered an apple by her sister as a greeting in the Land That Is Not. Both books feature a bird of sadness that foreshadows misfortune, and the antagonists (Knight Kato and Dice Caster) inhabit a high castle and tower, respectively. Also, both works include a metaphorically pictured motif of storytelling. In Sigunsdotter's story, Luck Cat weaves a morning tale, and elves weave silk clothes embroidered

[7] The presence and readability of this intertext have already been pointed out by researchers of Lindgren's works, such as Per Beskow (1987: 60) and Vivi Edström (1997: 78–79).

with fairy tales. In Lindgren's novel, a mysterious weaver creates fabrics from tales and dreams.

Besides alluding to Lindgren's books, *Landet som icke är* contains a range of intertextual references to other authors' works. The passage through a mirror positions the text in the context of Lewis Carroll's classic *Through the Looking-Glass*. Prior to the protagonist's entry into the secondary world, the text conjures the popular motif of thread, which symbolizes the spinning of stories and was used in classic Scandinavian picturebooks, such as *Historien om någon* (The Story about Someone, 1951) by Åke Löfgren and Egon Møller-Nielsen and *Den röda tråden* (The Red Thread, 1987) by Tord Nygren. In a similar vein, venturing into the realm of fantasy in a cat's company is reminiscent of *The Dangerous Journey* (1977) by Tove Jansson. The anti-heroine Dice Caster, who is depicted by Sigunsdotter in terms of ice and cold, brings to mind a range of iconic characters, from H. Ch. Andersen's eponymous Snow Queen (1844), to the White Witch from C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950), to Lady of the Cold from Jansson's *Moominland Midwinter* (1957). Sigunsdotter openly admits that "there are others who have snuck into the text as well, authors I grew up with, books that have shaped me since I was little, that are there and whisper. Like, for example, my and my father's favorite book, Astrid Lindgren's *Beloved Sister*" (Landet som icke är, 16).

As can be seen, the popular circular journey pattern borrowed from fantasy literature acquires a particular value in *Landet som icke är* through dialoguing with numerous children's books, which embeds it in a dense intertextual context typical of modern picturebooks.[8] Its expression and novelty are further enhanced by its interrelations with Södergran's poetry and life.

EDITH'S POEMS, EDITH'S LIFE

The verbal text of *Landet som icke är* is closely intertwined with Södergran's poems, which Sigunsdotter employed in various ways. She drew on their titles, phrases, recurring symbols, colors, and language, employing them under the artistic license to fashion a tale of a potential, albeit fictional, episode in the poet's youth, based on facts from her biography. Södergran's oeuvre surfaces most explicitly in the names that were the titles of her poems: "The Land That Is Not," "Luck Cat," and "The Strange Tree."

Landet som icke är, the title of both Södergran's posthumously published volume (1925) and one of her most famous poems, has been widely interpreted as a symbolic land beyond death, where the I-speaker longs to be reunited with

[8] Contemporary picturebooks are variously labeled as postmodern, crossover, controversial, and fusion texts. These monikers often reference intertextuality (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2020) in its expanded meaning, encompassing not only literary works but also other media and art forms.

her loved one, and where her dreams will be fulfilled. In the poem "Luck Cat" (1916), the titular character spins a thread of happiness, and the I-speaker asks it to foretell her future and grant her a golden ring that will bring her happiness, a mirror that will show her beauty, and a fan that will dispel her cumbersome thoughts. The amalgamation of the content of both poems in the picturebook sends a clear signal to the readers familiar with them that Edith's future predicted by the silver-thread-spinning cat lies in the land of death. In this story, the girl visits it briefly during a feverish dream, as evidenced by her final return to the sanatorium. However, the story ends with an explicit prediction that one day she will rush back to the Land That Is Not. In Södergran's third poem, "The Strange Tree" (1916), the tree invites the "golden daughter" to place her hands upon it so that she learns where happiness comes from and where it leads. Transplanted into the picturebook, the tree welcomes Edith by paraphrasing the words from the poem and adding a warning of Dice Caster, whose garden is full of shards of glass.

The body of phrases originating in Södergran's poems and recurring in the picturebook includes, for example, "wherefrom happiness came and whereto it goes," the designations of Edith as a "golden daughter," an "autumn wanderer," and a "forest listener" (from "The Strange Tree"), and the expressions the "thread of luck" (from "Luck Cat"), the "moon's dew" and a "sparkling crown" (from "The Land That Is Not"). The book's climactic episode of dice rolling reverberates with lines from Södergran's poem "The Reflecting Fountain": "Fate said: white – you shall live or red – you shall die! But my heart decided: I shall live in red." Such phrases and references abound, and in the background of the text, there are also echoes of other poems, such as "In the Great Forests," "The Day Cools," "The Imprisoned Bird," and "Nocturne." The book also resonates with peritexts, passages from Södergran's letters, and her famous statement that "The inner fire is the most important thing that a person possesses," expressed in her 1918 letter to the Helsinki newspaper *Dagens press*, in which she presented her informal poetic manifesto.

In addition to references to Södergran's poems, the picturebook also contains numerous analogies to the poet's life. The protagonist, who bears her name, suffers from a lung disease[9] and is staying in a sanatorium, much like Södergran herself, who, afflicted with tuberculosis, was often a patient of sanatoriums in Finland and abroad, as documented by her biographer Gunnar Tideström (1960: 60). In the Land That Is Not, there are twelve rooms in which the girl finds what she has always longed for. This is an explicit reference to Södergran's family home in the Finnish village of Raivola, where she spent most of her life with her caring and devoted mother. As noted in Södergran's biography, the villa where the women lived indeed had twelve rooms (Tideström

[9] The book does not explicitly state that Edith's illness is tuberculosis. This is implied through the metaphor of a crow flapping its wings against her chest.

1960: 18). It was surrounded by a beautiful garden, which also found its way into Sigunsdotter's text through the poems.

The beloved sister with whom Edith plays in the book can be interpreted in two ways. Tideström's biography of Södergran mentions an adopted girl named Singa, who was supposed to keep little Edith company, but who died tragically (1960: 16). Sigunsdotter repeats this information in the factual chapter "Once upon a time" (Sigunsdotter, Dackenberg 2020: 84), implying that this story inspired the sister motif used in the book. However, this bit of information is challenged by Witt-Brattström, who claims that there is no convincing evidence for the existence of the girl (1997: 27). The presence of the beloved sister in the picturebook can be linked to Södergran's authentic and corroborated relationship and friendship with Hagar Olsson, a Finnish journalist, editor, and writer. The women shared a special bond, both championing modernist ideas and believing that it was time to revise the concept of femininity. As Reenkola states: "She called Hagar by the nickname 'gyllene barn,' the golden child and describes her 'golden locks' with tender words" (2004: 15). Their friendship resulted in a rich correspondence and has been explored by a number of researchers (e.g., Tideström 1960: 171–179; Witt-Brattström 1997: 226–238, Reenkola 2004). Many years after her friend's death, Olsson decided to publish those letters (Olsson, Södergran 1955), which served as one of the sources of inspiration for Sigunsdotter. Södergran also expressed her feelings for Olsson in a series of seven poems called Fantastique in the volume *Septemberlyran* from 1918, which resonates in the picturebook *Landet som icke är* as well, in the sentence "Did we not live in the fairy tale, where everything impossible is possible."[10]

IMAGES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The images created by Dackenberg enter into a subtle interaction with words, imparting an oneiric tone to the entire story. The visual text accentuates the double-address mode of the book, suggesting that Edith's adventure takes place in the realm of fantasy. Furthermore, the illustrations establish relationships with the extratextual reality (Södergran's biography), both intertextually (text – image) and interpictorially (image – image), as well as metapictorially (image as an act of writing/drawing a book) (Cabo, Suero, Campos 2018: 108–93).

Dackenberg crafted an original mindscape with features typical of psychological picturebooks, where the immersion in the irrational world of the psyche is visually expressed through different modes of communication (Nikolajeva, Scott 2006: 102). In her pictures, the chromatic differentiation between the primary world – the sanatorium – and the secondary world – the Land That Is

[10] The same words were used in one of Olsson's letters to Södergran (Lehtonen 2009).

Not – is striking. Featuring depressing visualizations of empty corridors and bedbound patients, the former is rendered in a realistic style and depicted in white, blue, and gray, the faded colors corresponding to Edith's sickly and pale state. As the girl embarks on her fantastic journey, details in colors suggestive of health, play, and hope, such as yellow, green, and red, gradually appear. The red color is a vehicle for specific imagery and abounds in Södergran's poetry, frequently juxtaposed with white, such as in "The Day Cools," "The Unspeakable Is on the Way to Us," and "Vierge Moderne," where "the color red signifies consciousness and affirmation of life, Eros, and creativity, while the white color symbolizes innocence, purity, tranquility, death, and purification" (Packalen Parkman 2019: 167–168).

In Dackenberg's illustrations, red first surfaces after Edith's passage to the Land That Is Not in the form of red flowers. It further emerges in the visualization of the sister, who is wearing a brightly red cloak. In this way, the red color becomes a metaphorical confirmation of the life that the pallid, dying Edith desires so much. Interestingly, upon returning to the sanatorium, Edith is pictured in the final illustration with her hand resting on a white sheet of paper with a red pencil. The hand is wrapped with a "thread of luck," which is intended to convince readers of the veracity of the events in the secondary world, while the color red stands for hope for the afterlife. The conclusion of the story gives it a metafictional dimension by suggesting that the book we are reading was written by Edith.

The composition of the surrealist illustrations reflects the content of the text and, at the same time, interprets it by employing certain elements that reinforce readers' belief that the events occur in the domain of dreams. The girls float in a bathtub among trees, birds, flowers, and mysterious statuesque figures, or hover over a dark sheet of water. Although the text depicts an idyllic scene, the images signal a lurking danger; for example, dark tree trunks have no leaves, and large surfaces, such as the floor or water, are rendered in the ominous black color. The dark color palette of brown, black, and ashy tints is at its most pronounced when Dice Caster appears in the illustrations, visualized as a gaunt, long-haired woman dressed in rags. As readers are told, she was once beautiful but gambled with dice and lost her life. After Edith's victory, a sequence of four images depicts the distorted figure disappearing into a symbolic red abyss. In the final illustration of the secondary world, when the girls play for the last time and evil has been eradicated from the Land That Is Not, a full range of colors symbolizing the arcadian nature of this space appears for the first time, as the girls run happily hand in hand against the backdrop of a meadow in bright shades of yellow, green, and white.

The illustrations in the book contain interpictorial references: Edith resembles the figure in the photographs of young Södergran, and the house she enters has a characteristic veranda that appears in the authentic photos of her

family villa in Raivola. Remarkably, Edith and her sister are visualized as almost identical girls of the same height and with the same facial features, differing only in their hair color and clothing. Throughout the journey, Edith wears the nightshirt she had on in the sanatorium, while her sister is dressed in pajamas and a red coat. These outfits reinforce the idea that Edith has not really left her bed, and that her beloved sister is her projection, her own longed-for healthy self. At the same time, the remarkable similarity of the characters, which the text does not mention, again brings to mind Lindgren's "Most Beloved Sister," where Barbro and Ylva-Li are twins.[11]

In the layer of images, Dackeberg sought to balance out Sigunsdotter's interpretation of the text, facts, and her own imagination. As she explains, her way to the final form of the illustrations took some time to evolve:

> In my initial sketches, I was quite faithful to the historical person. I drew Edith in period clothes and at the same age that Södergran was when she first fell ill with tuberculosis. But as the work progressed, Edith became her own, younger figure, and I let go of almost all claims to historical and biographical accuracy. It is the principles of poetry and dreams that apply within the covers of the book. […] However, there are some visual references to Södergran's real external environments. I closely examined and also took some factual elements from her own photographs. (Landet som icke är, 16)

FICTION, FACTS, AND FANTASIES ENTANGLED

Landet som icke är is a sophisticated narrative picturebook in which two artists weave a story of the life and work of Edith Södergran, including references to her poems in the verbal and visual text. Moreover, the language of the book imitates the style of Södergran's poems. As Sigunsdotter points out, her idea was that Edith was both the protagonist and the author of the book. She read a lot about and by Södergran, and when she started writing, it was a feverish tale that came out. She imagined that Edith could have fantasized this way in the sanatorium in Nummela and used her words and her language as a kind of ghostwriter (Landet som icke är, 16).

Another layer of meaning in *Landet som icke är* is formed by intertextual references to the classics of Scandinavian and international children's literature, which are braided into both the verbal and visual narratives. The structure of the picturebook raises it to the heights of intersemiotic connectedness, and the interplay of reality and fantasy adds even more complexity to the world it conjures up. In her poetry, Södergran not only expressed her prophetic visions, personal fears, and enthusiasms, but also commented on the realities of the first decades of the 20th century. Her poems were published, read, and

[11] The text of *Landet som icke är* does not mention this similarity.

criticized, becoming an important fact in the history of Finnish and Scandinavian poetry. In the picturebook *Landet som icke är*, they serve as a starting point for a narrative story of the poet's life, which also belongs to the domain of reality.

However, it is not a traditional biographical picture story based on a linear plot with key facts from the protagonist's life. It is constructed in a particular way, based on an imaginary episode, enveloped in an oneiric, dark mood, and filled with symbolic textual and visual images, the recognition of which, premised on the knowledge of Södergran's poems and her biography, opens up the possibility of their full, synergistic reading. The book requires a considerable reading competence in both intertextuality and interpictoriality and can be counted among those that need "re-reading, since a multiple reading of the same picturebook gradually reveals several layers of references to other art works and texts" (Cabo, Suero, Campos 2018: 100). This knowledge is probably not accessible to children, nor to all adults, either. *Landet som icke är* is one of complex, hybrid picturebooks that blend genres, facts, fiction, and fantasy. It presents facts and imparts knowledge, engages emotionally, entertains, and inspires. It is a hybrid biographical picturebook that exemplifies the subcategory of biographical picturebooks known as art fantasy, which is defined as "fantasies that bring to life past masters (and their works) in new, exciting – even surprising – contexts" (Nikola-Lisa 1995: 35, cited in von Leirop-Debrauwer 2018: 83).

All these aspects, particularly the intricate relationship between reality and fiction and the sophisticated play of words and images with Södergran's poems, make the reading of the book challenging, and the suggested age range of 9–12 seems underestimated. However, if novice readers encounter this book in and through shared reading, it can be an intriguing meeting with Edith Södergran for them. An adult can guide a child's reading in the privacy of their home or in classroom.[12] In this way, Sigunsdotter's intention can be fulfilled. When asked what children can find in Södergran, she answered: "She feels extremely current. I believe that there is a yearning for spirituality and nature among young people today, and in that regard, I think Edith Södergran can be a gateway, a guide to forests and meadows and poetry" (Landet som icke är, p. 16). Indeed, this kind of experience seems particularly relevant when, facing the challenges of the Anthropocene, we seek to make children grasp and embrace the symbiotic bond between humans and nature.

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[12] As exemplified by the inspiring lesson materials developed by Tove Frankow Crivellaro.

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Ecocritical Reading – Eco-Centric Awareness and Eco-Pedagogy

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VASSILIKI VASSILOUDI ORCID: 0000-0001-9647-9586
University of Crete

Environmental Participatory Fact-fiction and Eco-pedagogy: *Planet Agents*

Abstract: Based on a popular fiction series in Greek, that is the *Planet Agents* (2014–2020), this study seeks to contextualize its publication in terms of genre and educational deliberations both at the national and global levels by tracing its convergence or deviance from the national curriculum on environmental education and the UNESCO agenda 2030. It further explores the discourse that underlies the series under study which fosters the child's individual responsibility and action, thus leaving untouched the question of political liabilities; what is more, by presenting children across the globe as a collectivity responsible to save the world, it reinforces a neo-colonial view that avoids discussing the impact of Western politics on populations outside the West, rendering them subservient to western green priorities.

Keywords: fact-fiction, popular fiction, ecopedagogy, environmental education, ecoliteracy, politics

INTRODUCTION

This contribution looks into a Greek award-winning fact-fiction book series entitled *Planet Agents*, written by Helen Andreadis, an author with a background in environmental studies. The series, built as a hybrid, comprises five books published between 2014 and 2020: Book 1: Become a Planet Agent (2014), awarded the state book award in the category of information books in 2015; Book 2: Planet Agents. The Revenge of Pooh (2016); Book 3: Planet Agents: The Ocean Monsters (2017); Book 4: Planet Agents: Piranhas on Land (2018); and Book 5: Planet Agents: Commander D Kidnapped (2020).

Built on the formula of the detective story and treasure hunt, these fact-fiction books set up the child-reader as a heroic secret agent participating in the mission to save the planet from various threats posed by human action, greediness, and indifference. Anita from Bangladesh, Jason and Artchou from Greece, Ben and Maverick from America, Marcella, an aboriginal from the depths of the Brazilian Amazon, and Marie-Louise from France make the squad of planet agents fighting against villains who seek to wreak havoc on the planet.

Picture 1: The front covers of the books in the series

Selecting child heroes from across the globe establishes from the very beginning of the series the rescue of the planet as a collective mission that presupposes individual action. Yet, in a series that consciously tries to avoid racial and gender stereotypes by selecting male and female heroes from across the world, it strikes the reader as curious that Africa is not represented as if neither is it affected by the climate change nor is it entangled in the environmental crisis. Each book in the series presents pressing environmental problems such as climate change, depletion of energy sources and water, the greenhouse effect, the plastic soup, landfills as well as their causes such as intensive factory farming, extensive use of fossil fuels, inconsiderate use of plastic, extreme consumerism, irresponsible consumption, along with the steps individual children can adopt to efficiently counteract these problems.

Part of an ongoing educational project launched by the non-profit organization *Planet Agents* set up by the author herself in 2009, the series aims to raise eco-critical awareness among primary school students and thus secure a sustainable future through their instruction and action. Central to this educational endeavour are the notions of child initiative, decision-making and active involvement in securing sustainability both locally, regionally, and globally (see the webpage of the series, http://planetagents.org/el/). The series invites child readers to assume the identity of a secret planet agent, much in the fashion of a detective story, and get informed about the planet's unrelenting destruction, all the while having fun in attempting to solve environmental mysteries and eliminate the environment's enemies by actively undertaking (real) hands-on environmental missions. Enhanced with QR codes, the narrative has the child reader constantly oscillate between text and screen, between the fictional and the factual, while the Planet Agents website provides both educators and readers with educational material and fun pages. Thus, these texts seem to have "one foot in literature and the other on Earth" (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996), one foot in education and the other in entertainment, elevating this series into a form of edutainment, "a hybrid mix of education and entertainment that relies heavily on visual material, on narrative or game-like formats, and on more informal, less didactic styles of address" (Buckingham and Scanlon, 2005: 46).

Apart from contextualizing this seemingly novel venture in the Greek book market and exploring its educational implications (i.e., the involvement of non-profit organizations in domains traditionally controlled by state education stakeholders), this contribution seeks to explore how the child is set up as an "eco-warrior" or "eco-hero" (Bradford et al, 2008: 90; Van der Beek and Lehman, 2022) to save nature, largely depicted as the Other to humans, not in its own right, but for the benefit of humans. In this respect, the paper looks into what kinds of roles nature in its diverse forms is assigned with and what kind of environmental ethics the series constructs for its potential readers. It further explores the discourse that underlies the series under study; this discourse constructs an environmental ethics that places the child's individual responsibility and action at its core, thus leaving untouched the question of political liabilities; what is more, by presenting children across the globe as a collectivity assigned the responsibility of saving the world and securing sustainability, it implicitly reinforces a neo-colonial view that avoids discussing the impact of Western politics on populations outside the West, rendering them subservient to western green priorities.

GENRE ENTANGLEMENTS: A TOOL FOR APPEAL

Neither entirely informative nor exclusively fictional, the series is indeed a hybrid per se as I hope to elucidate in the analysis that follows which focuses on narrative forms, narrative structure, genre and narratorial address. In respect of narrative forms, the books host a plethora of different types of texts; they feature dialogues, open letters, e-mails, instructions for experiments, text messages, rap poetry, encyclopedic entries to mention just a few of the writing modes deployed in order to spark and maintain the interest of contemporary readers. Accompanied by QR codes dispersed throughout the narrative, the series encourages the use of smartphones and tablets to divert the reader outside the text, directing him to YouTube pre-recorded messages supposedly sent by the fictional planet agents or to websites with real photos or videos of places across the globe inflicted by severe environmental problems so as to enhance environmental knowledge about the issue under scrutiny. According to Eve Tandoi, "hybrid novels in which a degree of narrative complexity is displaced from the semantic to the iconic level, make it impossible to read and respond to the story without attending to the visual elements [which might include] comic strips, diagrams, ephemera such as newspaper articles or screenshots, photographs and design elements including typography, layout and paratextual material" (2017: 329). The accompanying webpage where the reader can resort to, to play, explore and learn, further renders these books a hybrid info-fun-fiction tool used for the immersion of the reader in eco-pedagogy, an issue which will be explored in the final section of this paper. All these elements

along with the seriality of the books which is based on repetitiveness and familiarity as well as fulfilling readers' expectations (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2017: 171) could possibly serve as a tool for appeal.

The intersection of the series with popular culture accounts also for the hybridity of the series as narrative and plot devices are ostensibly derived from the latter's comprehensive inventory. With regard to narrative structure, the series displays a blatantly formulaic structure, pertinent to much popular fiction, especially in such genres as adventure, mystery, romance and melodrama (Cawelti, 1977: passim). Their structure is reminiscent of successful serialized children's formula fiction such as the *Goosebumps* by Robert Lawrence Stine (1992–1997) or the *Secret Seven* by Enid Blyton (1942–1963). In other words, we trace in the series the structure of popular literature, derived from folk-tale, as proposed by Propp (1968), and summarized by Zipes (2007: 3–4). Their plot rests on the manichaestic distinction of heroes into goodies and baddies, the hero's struggle against an evil antagonist, the hero's patience, wits, and strength being put to test in relation to an urgent environmental problem calling for action, and the victorious closure with the defeat of the antagonist and the restoration of the unsettled equilibrium in nature despite all adversities.

Popular culture links go above and beyond the structure of the series; the connection is also prominent when considering the genre classification of the books under study. The detective or mystery story constitute obvious intertexts as readers are invited to solve environmental problems in the form of mysteries while provided with clues as the plot gradually unravels; science fiction books as well since the planet agents resort to the use of all kinds of odd-but otherwise environmentally-friendly vehicles and tools to accomplish their missions. Information books is another distinct category they mingle with; the fictional plot alternates with pages seemingly copied from an encyclopedic entry on various environmental issues, reflecting "the nonlinear, nonsequential characteristics of digital media and promoting a hypertextual approach to thinking and reading (Pantaleo, 2008: 296). Popular culture film series such as *Lara Croft*, *James Bond* or even animation films such as the *Smurfs* or *Inspector Gadget* can be seen behind certain characters of the series. For example, the appearance of Ivan Fon Vampower (a pan with vampire), the traditional villain in the series, and its residence resonate with Gargamel, the villain in the Smurfs. Strikingly, both the title of the series and its content are reminiscent of the well-known American popular animation series *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, originally broadcast between 1990–1992, which became part of an educational campaign with planeteers' clubs set up across America "taking action for the climate and the planet" (https://planeteeralliance.com/). Superhero films also resonate with the series while popular video games also inform both the narrative and the illustration (see picture 2). Characters bear all the typical traits of animation heroes while the plot is divided into different levels, quite similarly

to video games wherein the intended gamer allegedly has to complete a level before proceeding to the next one.

Picture 2: Planet Agents: The Ocean Monsters.

The series boasts an activist slant and preserves an agentic role for the child reader trying to render them members of a glocal community of planet agents, seemingly cutting across race and gender divisions. The child is placed at the center of an anthropocentric environmental campaign as according to the text adult indifference has made Commander D of the Environmental Squad to turn to children: "Our planet needs no one else but YOU! Our planet needs you to transform your home, school, neighborhood before it is too late" (*Planet Agents*, book 1, p. 14, emphasis in the text). The emphasis in the capitalized you along with the proposed transformation of spaces in close proximity to where the child lives reduce the environmental problem to simply an issue that can and must be tackled with individual action. Reflecting on the emphasis of individual (voluntary) action, Clare Echterling suggests that "the discourse of individualism and self-sufficiency – i.e., taking responsibility for your own problems and solving them yourself – manifests here in a way that erases the responsibility of external forces ("others") and the government, placing environmentalism solely in the hands of individuals" (2016a: 89; 2016b: 291). The narrator addresses the reader, always with an emphasized you, which aims to render him/her an advocate who will not only fight against all environmental ills but will also pave the way for other less enlightened children to follow suit and change their living and consumption habits.

> The real secret is that you cannot save the world at one go! We must save the planet every day again and again! We save it each time we turn off the lights or our devices when not needed, thus saving energy. We save it each time we choose a local product instead of one that has travelled thousands of miles, or we plant a tree, each time we devise a new idea to avoid producing CO_2 and CH_4 and reduce our carbon footprint on Earth… Your mission does not end here. You have to promulgate the super guns (reforestation, responsible consumption and reduction in our carbon footprint) to others and find ways to put

> them in effect every day … The Environmental Squad needs your assistance. It requires you to be a hero every day (book 2, 86).

Though the books attempt to create a glocal community of child advocates, it is always individual action on behalf of the child that is stressed upon as the answer to the planet's deteriorating problems. The seemingly simple structure and plot, and repetitive narratorial address serve the purpose of walking the reader, allegedly the newly enlightened planet agent, through vignettes that work as an apocalypse of various environmental issues from the greenhouse effect to depletion of water, the plastic soup and the destruction of coral reefs. In short, these books take the reader on a journey across the globe so as to make them understand the local, glocal and global implications of the environmental problem but always in relation to the role the individual plays in contributing to or curbing the problem. As Gerry Canavan posits

> This is a particularly troubling feature of such texts as they position children as paradoxically the agents ostensibly capable of preventing the necrofuture that is already set in motion by adults. The drama of threshold and transformation into adult […] is implicit in hearing the apocalyptic narrative itself that shatters the child's innocence, and thereby hails them instead (and immediately) as the responsible adult who is now called upon to act (2017: 84)

EC(G)O-LOGICAL/EC(G)O-CENTRIC AND IDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite recent theoretical calls for an emphasis on the posthuman, be it animals, plants, inanimate objects or even cyborgs that partake in the symbiotic environmental network (Jaques, 2015: 10), the children's reading matter under discussion draws the readers' attention to environmental issues that call for urgent action to restore order in nature and the environment by combining the scientific, the humanistic and the ludic, but only for the sake of humans. The main concern is to engage readers in everyday practices and help them make informed choices so as to become planet agents, as the title of the series implies; that is, activists that seek to reverse the course adults have set for the fortune of the planet which leads steadily towards destruction. The child heroes are presented as constantly battling in various fronts but what strikes the adult co-reader is that the planet must be saved at all costs and saving the planet is – not surprisingly– mostly in the best interests of humans in the West.

A close analysis of this series reveals its shortcomings, not-withstanding the well-intentioned educational propaganda. The series fails to acknowledge, apart from humans, other elements that partake in the environment; even when it does, these elements are always presented as second and subservient to the human species. Secondly, even in the rare cases that the reader takes

a glimpse in the lives of peoples living, for example, in the Amazon Forest, obviously miles apart from the western capitalist consumerist paradigm, their appearance in the narrative supports the dominant discourse which celebrates the planet as home to Westerners. For instance, it does sound peculiar to be listening to a small Kamayurá girl in the Brazilian Amazon, supposedly outside the realm of Western culture, to address the readers and advise them to recycle paper, instead of fully exposing the detrimental impact of the Westerners' choices on her tribe's everyday life. And even when she does so, by citing the depletion of fish which used to be a staple for her people, she seems to adopt the hegemonic western discourse of nature as subservient to human: "Anita (another planet agent) told me that forests have another important role to play! They produce oxygen for the entire planet, clean the atmosphere in cities and reduce the temperature around them" (book 2, p. 48). As Noël Sturgeon argues "the multicultural kids' teams" who feature in books such as the above "present all cultures as equally responsible for environmental problems, and their enemies are never corporations, or the military, or governments" (2004: 264).

Taking into account the tripartite classification suggested by John Stephens (2006), that is fiction that reiterates the human mastery over nature, fiction that displays awareness of environmental issues, and third fiction that has affinities with "deep ecology" which emphasizes the inherent value of all beings, avoiding their instrumentalization in the service of human needs, one can argue that the series under discussion is an amalgam of the first two categories. Despite being thoroughly informed at the scientific level, this series corroborates the truism that much environmental fiction is ego-centric in the sense that revolves around the impact of the environmental issues on the human rather than on all living and non-living entities that work to make up the complex symbiotic network that our planet is.

Another issue that seems to be at stake here is that the child is still set up as a more apt advocate of the cause against climate change than its adult counterpart as is taken to be closer to nature and animals. Thus, this series reiterates the Rousseauian perception of the child as closer to nature and less corrupted by society who can still envision a better world mostly to the benefit of humans (Rose, 1984: 43). But here lies the paradox: while the adult-child binarism is maintained in many sectors of life when it comes to environmental issues, books as the series under discussion seem to suggest that it is indeed possible to throw into question adult power and authority and work against it. Yet, the economic and political implications of doing so, which means going against adult interests are not explored, thus rendering this kind of fiction really problematic in the sense that serves as mere wish fulfillment.

As already hinted at, the series discusses problems, their causes and preventive or restorative action. Yet, causes and action are only explored in relation to the individual out of fear for their own fortune. In doing so, two problems

arise: first, individualism both at the level of action but also at the level of interest not in nature per se but as an entity of unacknowledged instrumentalization for the benefit of humans, and second, the avoidance of questioning the politics behind the present state of affairs environmentally wise. If children are requested to be the ones to be put in charge in the crusade of changing the world towards a sustainable future for all – humans and non-humans alike – a political stance in its own right, no longer can we sweep the political motives behind the environmental crisis under the carpet, pretentiously arguing for the shielding of children against politics. Greta Gaard, hinting at this problem, dismisses "environmental education that seeks accommodation within a neoliberal framework, championing 'sustainable development' without challenging the unsustainability of an economy advocating endless growth" (2009, 326). In other words, the child is asked to become an activist, a political claim in its own right, but without being informed about the political, social and economic implications of the environmental problem which is seen as brought about only by individuals, thus erasing the role states and corporations, themselves an adult construct, have long played in it. Seen in this light, the series under discussion fails to advocate for environmental justice; instead, it endorses an anthropo-western-centric modus vivendi.

EDUCATIONAL/PEDAGOGICAL/POLITICAL ENTANGLEMENTS

In this section, an attempt is made to explore the educational, pedagogical and political entanglements of the series under study. Approved by the Greek Ministry of Education, the programme *Planet Agents* has reached, according to the respective website, 12,000 Greek primary school students. Thus, the series is promoted as an educational tool that combines the empathic, the scientific, the childlike and the ludic, all in the service of allegedly molding conscientious planet agents. In this respect, of particular interest is the kind of ecopedagogy they promote for their readership. To tackle this issue, I look into how the series intersects first with the National Curriculum for Environmental Education in Greece and the Unesco 2030 educational agenda for sustainable development, and second with the tripartite ecopedagogy suggested by Gaard's scholarship (2008; 2009).

In the following chart you can see the four systems which the National Curriculum for Environmental Education, revised in 2014, sees as interconnected in the deliberations of environmental studies. Studied from this perspective, the books fail to get across their potential readers the complexity of the environmental problem as they limit themselves to contextualizing the environmental crisis only in connection with the natural systems and organisms as service mechanisms for the well-being of humans. The importance of the economic, social and political systems that themselves produce

Natural systems	Economic systems	Social systems	Political systems
These provide vital support to all living and non-living entities.	*These shape and are shaped by production processes and define the resource models for humans.*	*These provide humans with resources to live in peace, with equality and respect to humans.*	*These take decisions as to the ways the social and economic systems make good use of and interact with the environment.*

Table 1: The four systems approach to environmental studies proposed in The National Curriculum for Environmental Education in Greece, 2014, p. 5.

the environmental crisis but also environmental injustices across the world do not fall within the underlying debate. Therefore, though ambitious and well-premised on the scientific, these books fall short of their mission. Besides, seen in the light of the UNESCO 2030 educational agenda for sustainable development (see chart below), it transpires that these books are aligned with certain goals put forward in the agenda; for example, goals 6, 7, 11 and 12 are well-pursued in the series which focuses on matters such as energy, clean water, urban environment, leaving out social and economic discrepancies as well as avoiding to address injustices stemming from the different pressure diverse communities put on the planet. Yet, it should be stressed that the series is aligned with the UNESCO agenda to the extent that focuses on the goals that can be attained mostly by individual action, omitting objectives that see the environmental crisis connected with, for example, class and gender inequities or with political issues.

Figure 1: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action
for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, taken from
https://www.sdg4education2030.org/education-2030-framework-action-unesco-2015

In educational practice, goals set by the curriculum are pursued by various classroom methodologies and activities. If we proceed to compare the methodological approaches to environmental education suggested in the Greek

curriculum for primary education with the way environmental issues are dealt with in the series, the similarity of the underlying pedagogy becomes more than evident: the curriculum suggests four levels in the teaching of environmental problems: first, the provision of basic knowledge to students, in other words, informational knowledge, second the detection of a problem, third its exploration, and fourth suggesting counteractive action. It has already pointed out that the narrative in the book series is structured as such: it starts with identifying a problem, then proceeds to providing basic knowledge about it, with the exploration of the causes and the effects of the problem coming next while solutions are offered at the very end. Notwithstanding the methodological convergence, which lends a pedagogical veneer in the series, wrapped up in a fictionalised scenario, the series falls short in exposing children to the complexities of the environmental issues.

Focusing on matters of ecopedagogy, Greta Gaard distinguishes three varieties of ecoliteracy, that is "basic environmental literacy […], cultural literacy […] and a critique of the anti-ecological effects of industrial capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, and ruling-class culture; the third dimension of the ecopedagogy involves visionary and activist dimensions as well, striving "to mobilize people to engage in culturally appropriate forms of ecological politics and movement building" (Kahn qtd in Gaard, 2009, 326). Seen through this lens, the series under discussion limits itself to the first dimension, informing readers about pressing environmental crises at the regional, local and global levels while at the same time maintains the activist vision for building up a collectivity of children across the world to engage in ecological action but dispensing with the critique. This is in itself problematic; first, because not all cultures perceive nature and the environment with the same mentality – let us note the western mentality of nature's instrumentalization in contrast with more spiritual perceptions that occur in African or First Nations cultures; and second, because not all cultures contribute to the same degree to the environmental crisis. Yet, these books invite children of all walks of life to bear the burden of reversing the situation, thus blatantly erasing the social, cultural and economic disparities among them, not to mention the different degrees of liability for bringing about the environmental crisis.

Finally, another issue which is only addressed in passing for lack of space is the stepping of non-profit organizations into education, a domain traditionally controlled in the last century and in the new millennium by state stakeholders and education experts. I do not argue for the monocracy of the latter, but I think that the politics of this venture have to be thoroughly scrutinized, especially when as my analysis hopefully has shown only half of the story is told. This is an open call for all of us to think through the muted implications of various (dubious) but most importantly homogenizing pedagogies finding their way into classrooms. By equally dividing the responsibility to save the

planet between children in the West and children in less consumerist parts of the world, a neo-colonial hierarchy is mutedly put in place.

CONCLUSION

Though modern in terms of form and genre, the books discussed here are intrinsically traditional in that they reiterate first that the child should become an apostle of change to restore the balance between culture and nature, between the human and non-human, all the while living and acting within the same hierarchical system that sets up these polarities without even questioning it as a source of the problems the children are invited to resolve; second, that the child is responsible for undoing the "necrofuture" (Canavan, 2017: 84) created by adults and already lived as a dystopic present, and third that all children are equally responsible for undoing the harm to nature. And this is the challenge environmental info-fiction books should take to address the above fallacies by being fair(er) to the child and to the Other, be it human or non-human, be it living or non-living.

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OLGAHAN BAKŞI YALÇIN ORCID: 0000-0002-5527-9200
Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University

Ecoliteracy and Sustainability in *Moana* (2016) and *We Are Water Protectors* (2020)

Abstract: The survival of humanity depends on understanding ecological systems and adjusting accordingly, to build a more sustainable world. To this end, we must recognize the significance of the cultivation of emotional, social, and ecological intelligence which would lead us to engaged ecoliteracy for the future of our planet. Thus, with the help of engaged ecoliteracy, children and young adults can develop strength, hope, and resilience in the face of ecological catastrophes and crises, instead of coping with fear, anger, and hopelessness Both the eponymous heroine in Walt Disney's movie *Moana* (2016) and the young girl who fights to conserve the water of her community in Carole Lindstrom's picturebook, *We are water protectors* (2020) are examples of eco-literate individuals who can inspire young minds to live in harmony with nature. Although these environmental texts belong to different genres, their shared emphasis on the significance of water is obvious and they not only promote an awareness of the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world but also instill a sense of responsibility for environmental stewardship. Therefore, this paper seeks to conduct a critical content analysis of the environmental themes portrayed in both the film *Moana* (2016) and the picturebook *We Are Water Protectors* (2020). Through this analysis, the study intends to raise awareness and promote potential ecoliteracy among child audiences and readers, to influence their perspectives on sustainability for the well-being and sovereignty of all communities worldwide.

Keywords: children's activism, ecoliteracy, ecological intelligence, *Moana,* sustainability, *We Are Water Protectors*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding and adapting ecological systems to create a more sustainable environment are essential to human life. Thus, we must realize how ecoliteracy – also referred to as ecological literacy and first coined by physicist and systems theorist Fritjof Capra in 1997 – plays a crucial role in our existence on this planet. As Capra famously puts it, the survival of humanity depends on "our ability to understand the basic principles of a connected Nature and how to live

accordingly" (2009). This calls for the development of ecoliteracy as a crucial skill for decision-makers in government, business, and other fields. In light of this notion, ecoliteracy must be stressed as the most important aspect of education at all levels, from elementary and secondary schools through colleges and universities, as well as continuing education and professional development. In the foreword to Michael K Stone and Zenobia Barlow's *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World*, David W. Orr asserts that future generations must become "ecologically literate" and learn how to adapt natural systems to build a more sustainable world (2005, p. x). Stone and Barlow also highlight that "Implementing lasting change in schools can feel like turning around an ocean liner. Stopping the ship takes a long, long time. Then you need more time to turn it around and yet more time to develop momentum to go in the new direction" (2005, p.251). However, a slow but lasting change, to protect the Earth's resources from environmental degradation and so maintain sustainability, is the only way.

Daniel Goleman, Lisa Bennett, and Zenobia Barlow in their work, *Ecoliterate: How Educators Are Cultivating Emotional, Social, and Ecological Intelligence* (2012), also foreground the necessity of teaching children to care deeply about the environment. Ecoliteracy aims to foster learning that genuinely prepares children and young adults for the ecological challenges presented by this entirely unprecedented time in human history. Therefore, raising eco-literate students requires a process in which they can expand "socially and emotionally engaged ecoliteracy" into "ecological intelligence" (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012). The definition of ecological intelligence derives from Goleman's earlier research on social and emotional learning, which is the fusion of empathy, cooperation, and comprehension of others' viewpoints with an appreciation for and respect for natural systems. Thus, with the cultivation of emotional, social, and ecological intelligence, children and young adults can deal with feelings of fear, anger, and hopelessness that can result from inaction. Instead, they can develop strength, hope, and resilience in the face of great ecological catastrophes and crises, just as do both the female protagonist, Moana, in Walt Disney's movie *Moana* (2016) and the young unnamed girl in Carole Lindstrom's picturebook, *We are water protectors* (2020) illustrated by Michaela Goade.

Disney's *Moana* was inspired by the real heritage and history of Polynesian Islands such as Hawaii, Samoa, Tonga, and Tahiti (Caldwell, 2017) and thus, it depicts the life of people who belonged to Polynesian culture in which the primary occupation of the people was seafaring, oriented towards the exploration of oceans. Moana, daughter of Tui, Motunui Island's Polynesian Chief, displays some extraordinary courage and determination when she embarks on a journey with the legendary demigod Maui to save her island from an environmental disaster and restore ecological balance. In this sense, the movie can

be read as an allegory of Pacific Islanders' struggle against climate change and as a message to remind all of us that we must co-exist in harmony with nature since we are only a part of a bigger picture. Likewise, Lindstrom's *We are water protectors* sends a rallying call to protect the Earth's water from ecological degradation. With the use of straightforward language, the book conveys this crucial lesson in a lyrical, child-friendly approach, inviting the reader to take action. Although they are completely different mediums, the environmental narratives of both texts focus on the importance of water and contain similar messages: the urgent need for environmental stewardship. This paper aims to present a critical content analysis of the environmental narratives of the movie *Moana* (2016) as well as the picturebook *We Are Water Protectors* (2020). By doing so, this study hopes to create an awareness that helps to foster ecoliteracy in child audiences and readers thereby aiming to shape their attitude toward sustainability for the security and sovereignty of all communities in the world.

2. "IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS ONLY OCEAN UNTIL THE MOTHER ISLAND EMERGED"

From the first scenes of the movie, *Moana*, the audience readily deduces that they are about to watch a tale of deep greed and exploitation of nature for human gain, leading to a story of environmental understanding, and connectivity. The plot opens with a tale told to Moana by her grandmother Tala, about the mother island and her people's long-standing tradition of seafaring. Grandma's story, as an oral narrative, foregrounds several Pacific Island traditions while also illustrating the connection between strong women and the environment (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2018; Sebring, 2021). The island is the perfect idyllic representation of an Indigenous Pacific paradise characterized by its vibrant colors, smooth cinematography, and pristine textures, all of which are enhanced by its animated format (Taylor, 2022). For example, placid pans of semitranslucent waves present a vibrant aquatic ecosystem to the viewer, suggesting to the audience that Moana's ocean is unachievably idealistic and free of the dangers that can be associated with the real ocean. The exploitation of the female body as the embodiment of nature (Hernawati, 2021) and the commodification of Indigenous cultures and Pacific lifestyles (Dittmer, 2021) are highly debated themes in the movie. Yet the focus of my study is only to foreground the relationship between environmental degradation and human systems in the movie, which engages the cultivation of emotional, social, and ecological intelligence. This would hopefully create a degree of awareness as per the significance of environmental understanding and thus, provide an opportunity for the development of ecoliteracy in the child audience.

As in many indigenous cultures, creation myths concerning the origin of life on Earth pass down orally from one generation to the next, serving as

foundational stories that preserve the cultural identity and present the worldview of Indigenous communities (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2018). These myths provide explanations for both natural phenomena and human existence by incorporating elements of spirituality, nature, and the supernatural. They might include gods, spirits, animals, and other mythological creatures, all of whom are important to the world's formation and order. Accordingly, Grandma Tala recounts the creation myth in the opening scene of the movie when she relates that life begins with the ocean, which means that water is the source of life both for the islanders and the planet: "In the beginning, there was only ocean until the mother island emerged: Te Fiti. Her heart held the greatest power ever known. It could create life itself. And Te Fiti shared it with the world" (*Moana*, 2016, 0:00:57). Te Fiti is the heart of all the islands: there are lines that go across the ocean from her heart, a brighter green circle in her chest, to unite them all. She is also shown outstretching her arms as in an embrace, while the life flows out of her in a flurry of green and blue to the islands. Her sole purpose is to spread life across the ocean – she is a creator and provider for all. Te Fiti represents the source of life as a living organism that provides a home for not only humans but also all the other living species. This portrayal emphasizes the crucial function of water in maintaining life and emphasizes its significance for both the islanders' way of life and the planet's overall health.

However, when Te Fiti falls asleep, forming the shape of an island, the music intensifies and at this point, Grandma Tala's voice deepens ominously, explaining the evil motives of those who have desired the heart for their own interests: "But in time, some began to seek Te Fiti's heart. They believed if they could possess it the great powers of creation would be theirs" (*Moana*, 2016, 0:01:25). Instead of working in collaboration with Te Fiti, the nature goddess, those who began to seek Te Fiti's heart wish to "possess" her powers to create life. This wish is a direct result of the individuals' selfish interests that endanger environmental security and sovereignty. By presenting the greediness of humankind, the movie clearly refers to some real-life examples of how natural resources are overexploited and overconsumed for personal ambitions such as taking too many minerals from sea beds and removing excessive coal from the ground. Hence, the movie foregrounds the fact that although nature provides resources sufficient for everyone, the greed of humankind operates as a destructive threat not only to nature but to human society itself. By depicting the negative effects of human greed and overuse of natural resources, *Moana* is an effective means of bringing attention to environmental sustainability and the significance of responsible resource management for the survival of both humanity and the planet.

As her story continues, Grandma Tala further informs the audience about a very unfortunate event jeopardizing the future of these Pacific Islands: "And one day, the most daring of them all voyaged across the vast ocean to take it

(ie Te Fiti's heart). He was a Demigod of the wind and sea. He was a warrior. A trickster. A shapeshifter who could change form with the power of his magical fish hook. And his name was Maui" (*Moana*, 2016, 0:02:09). When Maui steals the heart of Te Fiti, it is a gesture to please the humans who had once rejected him. This means that physical destruction, although it comes from the actions of a demigod, is undertaken to meet the needs of humans. In this sense, it is humans, then, who cause the violence against Te Fiti and nature, and it is humans who will ultimately face the "darkness," due to the environmental destruction. The narrative continues, "But without her heart, Te Fiti began to crumble, giving birth to a terrible darkness" (*Moana*, 2016, 0:02:25). Natural balance is disturbed, and the nature goddess Te Fiti, who possesses the power to create life and bring other islands into existence, turns into the destructive Te Kā: "Maui tried to escape, but was confronted by another who sought the heart: Te Kā, a demon of earth and fire" (*Moana*, 2016, 0:02:56). In this confrontation, Te Kā strikes Maui, who projects the superior attitude of human beings over Nature and all other non-living beings, thereby resulting in the disappearance of the demigod with his magical fish hook and the heart of Te Fiti forever. This depiction of ecological collapse threatening the security and sovereignty of communities in the movie directly warns the child audience of the drastic impact of environmental degradation.

At the end of her tale, the grandma in a way prophesies Moana's voyage to save not only her people but also the entire planet. She concludes their collective story by hoping that: "…but one day, the heart will be found by someone who would journey beyond the reef, find Maui, deliver him across the great ocean to restore Te Fiti's heart and save us all" (*Moana*, 2016, 0:03:55). In their article, Jennifer R. Marlon, et al. argue that hope is essential for environmental effectiveness because it offers a realistic path to progress in addressing environmental challanges (2019, pp. 2–3). Accordingly, as the story unfolds, Moana's journey becomes inevitable, when her people find themselves in a grave ecological struggle wherein their food security is seriously compromised. Their crops are failing and the coconuts are turning black because of the overuse of the land. The soil is no longer producing food and the villagers have overfished the waters between the reef and their island, which results in mass starvation, and exhaustion of their food sources (*Moana*, 2016). Metaphorically and microcosmically, all this reflects the global ecological crisis, where oceans are getting warmer, fish stocks are declining due to overfishing, and crops grow irregularly due to the intrusion of saltwater into the soil. The change in climate and rising sea levels are also impacting the state of the land. Through this description, the child audience is invited to understand how food systems and our changing climate interact and how this understanding must lead to embracing sustainability to save our planet from ecological collapse.

Teaching ecological knowledge and systems is advocated by Capra, who believes in recognizing the relationships, connections, and context in a bigger picture (Stone & Barlow, 2005). The prologue of the movie emphasizes the fact that nature and humans are interconnected, thereby inviting the audience to understand and respect this connectivity, interdependence, and interaction of all life. While the people of the island fear the ocean because they perceive it as dangerous and threatening, Grandma Tala and Moana act like mediators between the village people and the ocean, recognizing this interconnectedness. For example, in the opening scene, while listening to the story of Maui, the rest of the children are alarmed, scared, and even faint, but Moana is enthusiastically engaged in the narrative. Right after Grandma Tala's prophetic tale, we are shown that even as a toddler, Moana prioritizes nature over her own desires, thus discovering a connection to the ocean. To illustrate, when a baby sea turtle struggles against seagulls while trying to leave its nest, Moana helps the creature and guides it with a palm leaf. This results in the ocean interacting with Moana, who rediscovers the heart of Te Fiti, only to lose it again when her father – representing human intervention – appears and takes her back to the village. Goleman, Bennett, and Barlow argue that one way of developing empathy for all forms of life is to study Indigenous cultures, most of which "share a profound reverence for all living creatures, especially for those that co-exist with them in and around where they live" (2012, p. 13). Likewise, Grandma Tala and Moana see the ocean as the only hope for salvation, so to restore the ecological balance, Moana must sail to the distant island of Te Fiti and return the heart to its owner.

The Indigenous knowledge of conserving nature has been bestowed on Moana by her grandmother Tala, who orally transmitted their cultural heritage. Accordingly, throughout the movie, she constantly strives to complete her mission to save her people and her island by restoring the biodiversity of the planet Earth. However, as the chosen one to restore balance and harmony to her island and its surrounding waters, Moana has to confront Te Kā, the fierce fiery creature threatening her home and all the other islands. Unknown to the audience at this point, Te Kā, whose heat and flames seem to represent global warming and ecological destruction, is the villain of the story, and Moana has to defeat her. To this end, she needs to find Maui, who at first views Moana as passive and feeble since she is a woman, and thus, he declines to assist her in reviving Te Fiti's heart. In one scene, despite Maui's refusal to support her in her mission, she makes an effort to recover the heart of Te Fiti when it is stolen by the pirates Kakamora (*Moana*, 2016, 0:48:48). In another scene deep in the ocean, Moana helps Maui to get his magical hook from the giant crab Tamatoa, by tricking the monstrous crustacean with the heart of Te Fiti, the most desirable object for all (*Moana*, 2016, 1:05:29). In both cases, she proves to be strong, determined, and resilient, reflecting what Goleman, Bennett, and

Barlow argue in the following statement: "When we turn to nature, we find that healthy communities of living organisms are diverse, have a strong network of relationships and are resilient" since "Life in nature does not survive in isolation" (2012, p. 13). In other words, belonging to the same ecosystem, Maui needs Moana's help as much as she needs his magical hook, which indicates that the only way to save not only themselves but also to stop environmental degradation is to act together, in other words, to cooperate.

Understanding the principles of ecology and the interconnectedness of all living systems is best exemplified when Te Kā is finally revealed as Te Fiti herself. This revelation indicates that Te Kā is always present in Te Fiti, but is not empowered to destroy until Te Fiti, mother nature, is harmed by the interests of humans. In other words, nature does not remain indifferent to the harmful interactions of humans. As Moana realizes Te Kā is Te Fiti and is trapped in this violent body, she sings these words: "I have crossed the horizon to find you. I know your name. They have stolen the heart from inside you, but this does not define you. This is not who you are. You know who you are. Who you truly are" (*Moana*, 2016, 1:29:35). Upon hearing her song, Te Kā's expression relaxes as her eyes open up wider, to a more innocent state and her hand, instead of reaching to take Moana, freezes, thereby signaling her hesitation to harm. After Moana returns the heart to Te Fiti/Te Kā, Te Kā is replicated by Te Fiti, who is restored to her original form, signaling the close bond between Moana and deified nature. Moana can empathize with Te Kā: by touching Te Kā's forehead, she asks for forgiveness for mankind's disgraceful attempt to exploit nature. This scene also draws attention to Moana's innate understanding of ecology (ecoliteracy), which has enabled her to soothe the enraged Te Kā and revive Te Fiti. As a result, the islands become green again, and luscious flora covers her body like a blanket; her head and shoulders graze the sky. With the return to Motunui, Moana places a conch shell upon the tower of past chief rocks, elevating the island to include the ocean. It is a story of salvation: of course, we cannot magically fix the environment in which we live, by simply returning a stone. However, *Moana* highlights the significance of ecoliteracy for the hope of restoring our destroyed ecosystems and encourages children's agency and activism for environmental stewardship.

3. "WATER IS THE FIRST MEDICINE"

Carole Lindstrom's picturebook, *We are water protectors,* the winner of the 2021 Caldecott Medal, also explores the topic of the environmental call to protect the water and the land on planet Earth. The first lines of this picturebook provide the first description of the water: "Water is the first medicine/ We come from water" (Lindstrom, 2020) as Nokomis – in the Ojibwe language, the name Nokomis means Grandmother – tells the girl in the opening spread. The two

of them are drawn standing in water up to their waists, with the grandmother's tender hand resting gently on the girl's back as the layers of water seep up into the shapes of trees and leaves. Promoting literary engagement by appealing to the visual senses of the reader is one of the common characteristics of the picturebook genre (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006; Nodelman, 2005). Readers come across codifications of the real and imagined world through illustrations, which helps them comprehend both verbal/narrative language and the language of the physical world (Johnson, 2019). Thus, the environmental theme of the entire book is strengthened by Michaela Goade's drawings, which further immerse readers in the physical and emotional reality of our interconnectedness and dependency on water. Goade brilliantly manages this medium to produce swaths of different saturations, clear lines, and intricate patterns that are a visual feast for the reader. The drawings on each page that go with it depict scenes from nature that show how people interact with one another, animals, water, and the cosmos, as well as patterns of stars and flowers in shades of deep blue, turquoise, indigo, and purple.

The visual in picturebooks creates the context for the verbal, which then extends the discourse of the visual in an "eternal circle" (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). Accordingly, in *We are water protectors,* when the girl is shown alone on the following page, we understand that she is never completely alone since her long hair cascades into waves of water filled with fish and plants. Likewise, the narrator relates, "We stand/ With our songs/ And our drums/ We are still here/ The river's rhythm runs through my veins/ Runs through my people's veins" (Lindstrom, 2020). At this point, the reader is invited to comprehend two fundamental messages by the words of the narrator as well as the accompanying images on the pages: water is life, and we are all connected. Hence, the connectivity, interdependence, and interaction of all life are foregrounded in the first pages of the book, thereby preparing the reader for a prophecy very different from that of Grandma Tala in Disney's *Moana.* While Grandma Tala prophesies that one day a villager will repair Te Fiti's heart and prevent their island from being destroyed, which encourages Moana to set out on her quest to fulfill her destiny and save her people, a Lakota prophecy foretells a black snake, which will destroy the land: "My people talk of a black snake that will destroy the land/ Spoil the water/Poison plants and animals/Wreck everything in its path" (Lindstrom, 2020). As is clear from these lines, the reader hears an urgent warning to safeguard the Earth's water from possible destruction as a result of harmful human activities. The ironic juxtaposition of these prophecies serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of all life and our shared responsibility to preserve the planet for future generations.

The connection between the oil pipeline and the blacksnake is obvious, as the oil pipeline transports oil and petroleum over long distances, risking enormous environmental damage to land and water from leaks. This snake is,

therefore, a metaphor for the controversial construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016, which faced massive resistance from North Dakota's Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, as well as members of hundreds of other tribes from across the U.S., Canada, and Latin America. As the narrative relates, even though they would not expect the prophecy to come true shortly, when it does, it brings ecological destruction poisoning their land and water supplies: "Now the black snake is here/ Its venom burns the land/ Curses through the water/ I must rally my people together" (Lindstrom, 2020). Sarah James, as a spokesperson for the Gwich'in people, raises awareness about the impacts of oil development on their traditional way of life and the environment. Inhabiting the region known as the Gwich'in Settlement Area, which spans parts of Alaska, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories in Canada, the Gwich'in people have decided against pursuing oil development despite the possible economic rewards because of the potential harm it could cause to their land, water, and wildlife. They believe that "everything is connected to everything else" and the environment is "perfectly designed to support human survival – if we understand, respect, and relate to it based on need, not greed" (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012, p. 45). Hence, when we fail to recognize this, not only nature but also people suffer from the severe impacts of climate change. The picturebook seems to invite the reader to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all life, thereby protecting both the natural world and the well-being of future generations through sustainable practices.

Believing that we are approaching a critical turning point in the history of the planet Earth, as human actions deliberately threaten many of the natural systems, the Gwich'in focus on the necessity of education for providing solutions to environmental issues. To this end, as the representative for the Gwich'in community for more than twenty years, James travels all around the world to raise awareness and educate people about the conflict between oil drilling and the traditional way of life. "Education is central," as James states, emphasizing the fact that through education, it is possible to strengthen children's innate love of nature and, from there, to develop a strong ability for emotional, social, and ecological intelligence (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012, p. 54). Accordingly, in *We Are Water Protectors,* the young girl with images of flowers and sea animals such as fish and sea turtles on her long wavy hair calls for action by outcrying and inviting children's agency and activism as clear in these words: "TAKE COURAGE!" (Lindstrom, 2020). Leading the way with a feather in her hand to protect the land and water, she declares herself as the steward of the earth: "I must keep the snake away/From my village's water/ I must rally my people together" (Lindstrom, 2020). In other words, as the water protector, this young girl steps up to safeguard Earth's most treasured resource when a black serpent threatens to destroy the planet and contaminate her people's water. The young protagonist of the picturebook demonstrates

eco-intelligence by understanding how ecosystems are interconnected and therefore, actively organizing her community to defend the land and water from environmental harm caused by the oil pipeline.

The picturebook helps young readers become eco-literate by not only promoting an awareness of the interdependence of humans and the natural world but also instilling a sense of responsibility for environmental stewardship. Marlon et al., assert that "Communicating that awareness is increasing, and highlighting efforts being made to address the problem … may reinforce existing sources of hope among the public and support motivation to engage in climate issues. Hope, however, is not enough – action is essential" (2019, p. 2). Likewise, the need for action is obvious when the narrative of the picturebook continues with these lines: "To stand for the water/To stand for land/ To stand as ONE/Against the black snake" (Lindstrom, 2020) while we see the young child standing on the grass in the middle of a group holding hands and at the same time, pointing the feather in her hand to the sky as if to signaling a better future. Although the girl accepts the fact that it is not going to be easy to stand against the black snake, they will be there, hand in hand, acting together, and looking at the ugly face of the snake with its forked tongue sticking out like a blaze of fire. On the next page, we see various plants, flowers, and animals such as a bird butterfly, a snail, a grasshopper, and a spider accompanied by these lines: "We fight for those/Who cannot fight for themselves/ The winged ones/ The crawling ones" (Lindstrom, 2020). Therefore, inviting the child reader to recognize the relationships between all living and nonliving objects on our planet, the story engages eco-literacy by increasing the environmental responsibility and sensibility for the ones who cannot protect themselves. Thus, "The four-legged/The two-legged/The plants, trees, rivers, lakes… The earth/ We are all related (Lindstrom, 2020) is deliberately mentioned in this call for action.

As Stone and Barlow also inform us, for the Okanagan people, the "idea of community, as understood by [their] ancestors, encompassed a complex holistic view of interconnectedness that demands our responsibility to everything we are connected to" (2005, p. 13). By presenting children and young adults with environmental issues, it is possible to empower them to volunteer together for action. Therefore, by fostering ecological awareness and responsibility in children from a young age, we can cultivate eco-literate learning in our communities and thus contribute to the creation of a sustainable future. Having gained the skills of socially and emotionally engaged literacy, people can learn to control their emotions including fear, anxiety, and anger, relate effectively to others – particularly, to those with whom they disagree – and share their lifelong knowledge of connection to the land and water (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012, p. 52). As textual evidence of this idea, in *We are water protectors* the young child gathers her people and displays strength, hope, and resilience,

asking even the reader to be a steward of the land and water: "We stand/With our songs/And our drums/We are still here/We are stewards of the Earth/Our spirits have not been broken" (Lindstrom, 2020). Acting together in the face of environmental degradation seems to be a common strategy of ecological literacy, as exemplified throughout this picturebook. Thus, developing a sense of group responsibility and action in children not only helps them become more environmentally conscious but also gives them the ability to take an active role in environmental stewardship projects, which in turn helps our communities develop resilient and sustainable cultures.

Lindstrom's picturebook ends with the black snake fighting for its life, and the water protectors refusing to stand back even though their tears are streaming down like waterfalls, all of which evokes the concept of "solastalgia" as articulated by Glenn Albrecht "to give greater meaning and clarity to environmentally induced distress" (2007, p. 95). Solastalgia is defined as "the pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment" (Albrecht et al., 2007, p. 96). In other words, environmental destruction can cause people to feel distressed, especially in the context of "open-cut coal mining and power station fallout, and severe drought" (Albrecht et al., 2007, p. 96). Upon the devastation of their home/country in their daily travels, one Indigenous interviewee describes the level of solastalgia he and many of his people felt in these words:

> It is very depressing, it brings you down . . . Even (Indigenous) people that don't have the traditional ties to the area . . . it still brings them down. It is pathetic just to drive along, they cannot stand that drive. We take different routes to travel down south just so we don't have to see all the holes, all the dirt . . . because it makes you wild.
>
> (As cited in Albrecht et al., 2007, p. 97).

The community of the girl in *We Are Water Protectors* seems to suffer from similar environmental distress when the black snake poisons their water and thus, they are illustrated as shedding tears that flow into the water as if to attempt to clean it with their tears. This striking imagery highlights the detrimental effects of environmental degradation on communities and their sense of belonging, underscoring the deep emotional connection that exists between humans and their surroundings. Therefore, young readers are invited to develop an understanding of their connection with nature and cultivate empathy toward others and the environment.

In picturebooks, as Shelby A. Wolf in her work called *Interpreting Literature With Children* states, "The images do not decorate the text, and the words do not caption the illustrations. Instead, they work hand-in-hand and sometimes in opposition to deliver two kinds of information that together make up a unique message" (2004, p. 228). Accordingly, the use of kid-friendly language

and drawings in *We are water protectors* fosters ecological imagination, thereby enhancing their comprehension of nature, as well as their obligations and relationships to it. The readers also get a deeper grasp of Native American culture and ideas, including the idea that the earth, creatures, and plants should be shared and preserved. In this sense, while Dakota Access Pipeline protesters seem to be presented as the "water protectors," the character Moana – whose name can be translated as "the ocean" – in Disney's movie represents the fight of the Pacific Islanders against climate change and the collapse of the food systems (Rampell, 2016). Both stories bring a deep sensibility and understanding of nature, particularly water, which sustains life and thereby demonstrates one of the practices of socially and emotionally engaged literacy.

4. CONCLUSION

The environmental crisis already affecting every element of life on the planet is worsening. At the intersection of the environment and society, sustainability themes such as food systems, demand for energy and waste and resource use come forward addressing global concerns. Water is one example of an environmental sustainability theme that spans all areas and allows children and young adults to delve further into a specific field of significance and interest. Over a billion people worldwide are impacted by the global challenge of inadequate water supply (Ashcraft & Mayer, 2017). Sustainability challenges associated with population growth, climate change, land use, energy choices, and global poverty are some of the issues to be addressed to increase water quantity, availability, and quality around the world. When children are exposed to more environmental situations, they can develop an early sense of responsibility and sensibility for the planet and make an impact to tackle these global challenges. To this end, it is of significance to promote a capacity for eco-intelligence as well as social and emotional intelligence from elementary and secondary schools through colleges and universities, as well as continuing education and professional development. In this sense, the need for environmental narratives, including popular art media accessible to people of all ages, to empathize with the interconnectedness of humanity with nature is crucial. According to Lawrence Buell (2001), environmental narratives can serve as a platform for educating people about ecosystems and encouraging them to actively protect them.

Through the stories of *Moana* and *We are water protectors,* we see examples of putting engaged ecoliteracy into practice. Devoted to safeguarding the environment, Walt Disney perfectly encapsulates the mission of eco-literature exploring the connection between humans and the environment. Thus, one can conclude that the movie helps audiences understand environmental issues and encourages environmental advocacy as well as an appreciation for sustainability. We can easily identify similarities between the movie *Moana* and the

picturebook *We are water protectors,* which can make a critical contribution to rethinking how we teach our children about their place in nature. Ecological literacy brings hope as nature can provide "the guidance and inspiration that we need to design and maintain healthy, sustainable communities," as Stone puts it (2017, p. 47). Hence, there is hope for the future of environmentalism as long as we can find models for a renewed educational emphasis on the study of human interaction with natural systems. Following the principle of *need, not greed* in our consumption and reconsidering our economic systems would lead us to change our lifestyle. Younger generations must rethink what gives their lives purpose because they will be carrying the weight of climate change (Gallay et al., 2020). To conclude, they should be aware of the fact that protecting the planet Earth must be our top priority like the Indigenous ideology and people have been reflecting an ecological sensibility and responsibility throughout human history.

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TZINA KALOGIROU ORCID: 0000-0003-1116-4986
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

ARETI DIMITRA DOUKA ORCID: 0009-0008-5044-719X
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
University of Angers

Cultivating Ecological Empathy: A Literary Journey Through the Seasons

Abstract: This article introduces a pedagogical project aimed at cultivating ecological consciousness and empathy in primary and middle school students. In response to the pressing climate crisis and the increasing human-nature disconnect, this initiative proposes a cultural shift in environmental understanding. It employs an interdisciplinary framework, integrating ecopedagogy, ecocriticism, and mindfulness to deepen students' environmental sensibility and underscore the inherent links between human and natural systems. Essentially, this teaching project comprises a series of educational activities and instructional practices designed to build environmental awareness in young learners. The study demonstrates how literature can enhance students' environmental appreciation and highlight the interconnectedness of natural and human populations.

Inspired by the four seasons, the project incorporates various literary forms, predominantly picture books, fairytales, and poems, to engage students. By engaging students in seasonally themed activities – such as investigating river ecosystems in autumn, reflecting on urban environments in winter, encouraging self-exploration in spring, and appreciating nature's wonders in summer – the project aims to cultivate key sustainability competencies.. It prioritizes creative engagement, critical thinking, and a profound appreciation for the planet's delicate equilibrium. Ultimately, this initiative seeks to empower the younger generation to envision and actively pursue a more sustainable and harmonious future by nurturing a deep, literature-informed connection with the natural world.

Keywords: Ecopedagogy, Environmental literacy, Empathy, Children's literature, Sustainability education, Mindfulness, Interdisciplinary teaching.

INTRODUCTION: THE URGENCY OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

Our planet faces unprecedented environmental challenges, from escalating climate crises to widespread biodiversity loss. While technological innovations are crucial, a deeper shift in cultural perspective and human-nature

relationships is equally vital. This pedagogical endeavor explores how literature can serve as a powerful tool to nurture ecological consciousness and foster a profound connection between young learners and the natural world, drawing inspiration from the timeless rhythm of the four seasons (Mitsoula & Kalogirou. 2025; Orr, 1992).

For generations, the natural world, particularly the cyclical dance of the seasons, has been interwoven with human existence and cultural understanding. Traditional education is often synchronized with these natural rhythms, with seasonal narratives and outdoor activities playing a significant role in fostering a connection to the environment. Artists and composers, from the evocative symphonies of Vivaldi to Van Gogh's deep personal reflections on nature's shifting palette, have consistently celebrated this harmonious interplay.

However, in contemporary educational discourse, particularly within burgeoning fields like ecopedagogy and environmental mindfulness, the deliberate integration of literary studies into the environmental conversation has often been overlooked. Our project seeks to bridge this gap, proposing a framework where literary engagement becomes a catalyst for cultural transformation and the development of environmentally conscious practices within the classroom. With this study, we would like to start a dialogue regarding the opportunities and responsibilities presented in the literary field to re-orient everyday teaching practice in ways that drive cultural change and engender alternate environmental practices and metaphors within the classroom. regarding the opportunities and responsibilities presented in the literary field to re-orient everyday teaching practice in ways that drive cultural change and engender alternate environmental practices and metaphors within the classroom. We even collaborated with environmental scientists, to ensure our pedagogical strategies are grounded in current scientific understanding of climate change and other ecological shifts.

During the implementation of this project, we found inspiration from Rachel Carson's compelling prose in *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, which stands as a seminal work in the history of environmentalism, widely recognized for its profound and lasting impact on public policy and ecological thought. This meticulously researched text functions as a critical exposé of the pervasive and deleterious effects of synthetic pesticides, particularly DDT, on ecosystems and human health. Carson systematically marshaled scientific evidence to demonstrate how these chemical compounds, introduced extensively after World War II, did not merely target specific pests but bio- accumulated through food chains, leading to widespread environmental contamination, declining bird populations, and significant health risks to other species, including humans. Her narrative vividly illustrated the interconnectedness of natural systems, challenging the prevailing anthropocentric view that nature existed solely for human exploitation and could be managed through technological

interventions without consequence. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is renowned for its evocative and urgent prose. One of the most representative excerpts, and arguably the most famous, is the opening "A Fable for Tomorrow" chapter, which sets the tone for the entire book:

> *There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example – where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh.* (Carson, 1962: 2)

Academically and pedagogically, *Silent Spring* is significant for several reasons. It underscores the importance of interdisciplinary scientific inquiry, connecting toxicology, ecology, and public health by means of a compelling, and at times lyrical, narrative (Oliver & Jurdjevic, 2002). Furthermore, it serves as a foundational text for ecocriticism, prompting literary scholars to examine the representation of environmental issues in literature and the role of writing in shaping ecological consciousness. As Carson, the educators of today and tomorrow must effectively translate complex concepts into a persuasive narrative, demonstrating the power of literature and the arts in fostering ecological understanding and driving societal change concerning environmental stewardship.

A SHIFTING REALITY: FROM CLIMATE CHANGE TO CLIMATE CRISIS

The idyllic portrayal of nature often contrasts sharply with the stark realities of our current environmental predicament. As environmental author L. Davenport aptly notes,

> *Nature is beautiful, powerful, delicate, fierce, mysterious, and awesome. But nature isn't just outside of us in the trees, fish, clouds, and lakes: We humans are part of nature. We share the same history and we're made from the same elements as everything else on the planet, like hydrogen, oxygen, and phosphorus. We all live in and share the biosphere* (Davenport, 2021: 1).

This inherent interconnectedness underscores the urgency of protecting our shared home.

The term "climate change" has largely been superseded by "climate crisis", reflecting the intensifying severity of global environmental degradation. Biodiversity is collapsing at an alarming rate, and planetary temperatures are rising at an unprecedented pace. Data from leading scientific bodies like the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023) consistently highlight the gravity of the situation. For instance, the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (2021) projects that global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least mid-century under all emissions scenarios. Human activities are undeniably the primary driver, leading to a global average temperature rise of 1.09°C (1.96°F) above pre-industrial levels in the decade 2011–2020. This is pushing us dangerously close to the 1.5°C (2.7°F) threshold, beyond which the risks of severe and irreversible impacts significantly escalate. (World Wildlife Fund & Zoological Society of London, 2024)

The planet's rising temperatures are showing up in undeniable ways, especially through more frequent and intense extreme weather events. Just look at what's been happening: We're seeing more brutal heat waves (Berkeley Earth, 2020). Take July 2021, for example: Kuwait City sizzled at an astounding 53°C (127.4°F). That same summer (2021) Greece baked in temperatures up to 47.1°C (116.8°F), sparking 84 major forest fires that scorched roughly 130,000 hectares (321,000 acres) of land. Then there's the flooding. In July 2021, Germany and other parts of Europe were hit by devastating floods that caused immense damage and tragic loss of life. And don't forget the phenomenon of "rain bombs" (The Economist, 2020). Cities like Phoenix, Arizona, have experienced these intense, sudden downpours, a clear sign of how precipitation patterns are shifting. Beyond headline-grabbing catastrophes, climate change is quietly reshaping our seasons. We're seeing earlier springs, shorter, milder winters, and longer, hotter summers. These changes carry serious weight for human health, crop yields, and the fragile harmony of ecosystems. While abstract scientific data can feel remote, the everyday shifts in weather and seasonal patterns truly hit home for people.

Our project springs from this very disconnect: How can we effectively communicate the urgency and consequences of these environmental shifts to young people? Could literature be a strong way to share this knowledge? Can we use engaging stories to build environmental awareness and help children grasp the transformations happening on our planet and in our seasonal cycles? Ultimately, what impact do we hope children's literature will have on future generations?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: ECOPEDAGOGY, ECOCRITICISM, AND MINDFULNESS

Our interdisciplinary project is rooted in the theoretical frameworks of ecopedagogy, ecocriticism, and mindfulness.

Ecopedagogy, drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire, teaches us that truly "reading the word" is deeply connected to "reading the world". Freire believed that reading isn't just about understanding; it's an active, critical process that

empowers us to act. In this view, nature is seen as inherently balanced, with human activities often being the main source of disruption. Therefore, ecopedagogy helps us understand the intricate links between human actions and both environmental and social harm. Greta Gaard (2009) emphasizes "cultural ecoliteracy", urging us to critically examine unsustainable cultural practices and cultivate an ethical, balanced approach towards all forms of life. This field aims to help us see ourselves as vital parts of the planet, navigating complex environmental challenges and using various kinds of knowledge.

Meanwhile, ecocriticism delves into the relationship between humanity and nature as shown in literature. While stories have always celebrated nature's beauty, ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s as a distinct field, shifting its focus to how humans impact the environment. It moves beyond simple appreciation to expose environmental destruction and human responsibility, recognizing that human culture is profoundly woven into the physical world. Unlike traditional literary theory where "world" often refers to society, ecocriticism expands this idea to include the entire ecosphere. This perspective challenges the perceived separation of humans from nature, a divide that has arguably grown wider with technological advancements, leading to nature being seen as something "other".

By bringing these theoretical perspectives together, we can give teachers and students the essential tools they need to develop sustainability competencies (Goga & Pujol-Valls, 2020). Our goal is to foster a "green literacy" that brings children closer to their environment, recognizing that children's literature is an especially powerful way to nurture eco-consciousness. We believe in inspiring change from within, focusing on the younger generation who have the natural ability to reshape their thinking and, by extension, the direction of our environmental future (Misiaszek, 2020; Louv, 2005).

Finally, the concept of mindfulness beautifully complements these approaches. Mindfulness is our natural ability to be fully present, and aware of our surroundings and actions without feeling overwhelmed. It's not a skill you learn, but a state you can access, starting with an awareness of your own body. Our overall project integrates mindfulness practices and uses children's picture books that embody this philosophy, exploring themes of spiritual disconnection in a world grappling with ecological devastation and a lack of empathy towards nature. Such stories encourage us to look inward and engage with our world in a slower, more intentional way (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings, 2015).

PROJECT METHODOLOGY: CULTIVATING ENGAGEMENT

Our project employs a diverse range of pedagogical methods and creative writing practices to facilitate active engagement with environmental themes. It's almost impossible to refer to all the theoretical and epistemological assumptions that

academically ground this project within the academic field of Literature Teaching. For this reason, the table below provides an in-a-nutshell overview of the project's core epistemological principles, which we consider easily recognizable and widely accepted by academia. Broadly speaking, literary theory is balanced with didactic practice, guiding it. We begin with the concept of the open work (opera aperta), which directly refers to Umberto Eco's semiotics (Kalogirou, 2009) and continue by combining reader-response theories, reception aesthetics, hermeneutics, multiliteracies, digital literacy, soft skills (Douka, 2024), etc.

Exploring the Poetics of the "Open Work": Encouraging multiple interpretations and personal connections to texts.

Individual and Small Group Reading: Fostering both personal reflection and collaborative discussion.

Literature Circle Models: Structuring engaging discussions around literary texts.

Fostering Independent Reading: Encouraging exploration of environmental literature beyond the classroom.

Reading with "Eyes and Ears": Emphasizing sensory engagement with the text and its themes.

Creative Writing and InterArt Poetics: Integrating various art forms and creative expressions.

Digital Tools and Culture: Utilizing technology to enhance learning and research.

Democratic, Creative, and Dialectic Eco-Pedagogical Spaces: Creating inclusive environments where all voices and forms of knowledge are valued.

Dialogical Equality: Recognizing and integrating the knowledge and perspectives of both teachers and pupils.

SEASONAL IMMERSION: ILLUSTRATIVE TEACHING APPROACHES

Our project is structured around the four seasons, recognizing their enduring influence on human life and providing a natural framework for exploring environmental themes. We begin with autumn, aligning with the start of the school year, and conclude with summer, marking its joyous end.

1. AUTUMN: THE RIVER'S EVER-CHANGING FLOW. AN ECOCRITICAL, AND MINDFULNESS-BASED ANALYSIS

Reading: The lesson begins with Heraclitus's famous adage, "No man can step in the same river twice". Through open-ended questions (e.g., "Is it literal or metaphorical?", "When does a river stop moving?"), pupils explore the concept of flux and the impact of human activity, urbanization, and climate change on river systems. Mary Oliver's poem, entitled *The leaf and the cloud*, then introduces a more emotional connection to the river, allowing pupils to consider its "unfinished story" and their place within it:

What can I say that I have not said before?
So I'll say it again.
The leaf has a song in it.
Stone is the face of patience.
Inside the river there is an unfinishable story
and you are somewhere in it
and it will never end until all ends.

Take your busy heart to the art museum and the
chamber of commerce
but take it also to the forest.
The song you heard singing in the leaf when you
were a child
is singing still.
I am of years lived, so far, seventy-four,
and the leaf is singing still.

(Oliver,2001)

The poem. a seemingly simple lyric, invites a sophisticated close reading that reveals its intricate formal qualities and profound thematic resonances, particularly when approached through the lenses of Ecocriticism and Mindfulness. The poem, functioning as an autonomous aesthetic object, crafts a powerful statement on perception, presence, and humanity's enduring connection to the natural world. the poem's effectiveness stems from its internal coherence and the skillful deployment of its constituent parts. The opening lines, "What can I say / that I have not said before? / So I'll say it / again," establish a rhetorical frame built on repetition and emphasis. This immediate reiteration signifies the poem's core message as an urgent, timeless truth, rather than a novel insight. This diction sets a tone of quiet insistence, inviting the reader to reconsider fundamental perceptions.

The poem employs vivid, yet unadorned, imagery. The "song" within the leaf and the "face of patience" on the stone are instances of personification and metaphor, imbuing inanimate natural elements with vital, enduring qualities. The "unfinishable story" inside the river functions as a central extended metaphor, representing life's continuous flow and the individual's embeddedness within a larger, perpetual narrative. The phrase "and it will / never end until all ends" introduces a cosmic scope, an apocalyptic undertone that situates the individual narrative within a universal, cyclical framework.

Oliver's use of caesura and enjambment contributes to the poem's rhythm and emphasis. The abrupt line breaks like "The leaf has a / song in it" or "Stone is the / face of patience" force a pause, drawing attention to each image as a discrete, significant entity. The short, declarative statements create a sense of directness and authority, amplifying the poem's exhortation. The parallel structure of "Take your busy / heart to the art museum and to the chamber of commerce / but take it / also to the forest" highlights a central antithesis, contrasting the artificiality

of human institutions with the essential truth of nature. The poem's ending, with the repetition of "and the leaf is / singing still," functions as a volta of affirmation, reinforcing the enduring presence of natural beauty despite the speaker's advanced age, thereby creating a sense of timelessness and continuity. The poem's autotelic nature allows its meaning to emerge from the interplay of these formal and linguistic elements.

Through an ecocritical lens, Oliver's poem actively challenges anthropocentric perspectives and re-centers human experience within the broader ecosphere. The opening question, "What can I say / that I have not said before?", can be read as a lament for humanity's historical failure to heed crucial environmental truths, a critique of ecological amnesia. The poem asserts the intrinsic value and agency of nature: "The leaf has a / song in it," suggesting an inherent vitality and voice independent of human perception. Similarly, "Stone is the / face of patience" portrays geological time and resilience, contrasting with the often frenzied pace of human activity.

The river, as an "unfinishable story" that the reader is "somewhere in," becomes a powerful ecological metaphor. It signifies the deep, often unacknowledged, interconnectedness between human existence and natural processes. The poem deconstructs the notion of humanity as separate from or dominant over nature, instead portraying us as inextricably "somewhere in" its ongoing narrative. The imperative "Take your busy / heart… to the forest" acts as an environmental imperative, a call for direct engagement with the wild, prioritizing it over the cultural and economic realms. This suggests a necessary re-evaluation of human priorities in the face of ecological alienation. The recurring image of the "singing leaf" from childhood to old age serves as a potent symbol of biophilia – the innate human connection to living systems – and the enduring presence of nature's wisdom, even when overlooked. The poem fosters ecological literacy by encouraging readers to "read" the natural world as a text imbued with meaning and agency.

The poem's exhortations are deeply aligned with principles of mindfulness, advocating for a profound shift in present-moment awareness and sensory engagement. The initial rhetorical question and its immediate answer – "So I'll say it / again" – can be interpreted as a mindful prompt: a call to return to the present moment and truly hear what has perhaps been previously overlooked.

The poem encourages a state of attentive presence. The "song" in the leaf and the "patience" of the stone are not merely poetic constructs but invitations to a deeper, more mindful perception of the natural world. It asks the reader to activate senses beyond the superficial. The line "Take your busy / heart… to the forest" is the poem's clearest mindfulness instruction. "Busy heart" symbolizes the distracted, over-stimulated state common in modern life. The antidote is not passive observation but an active relocation of one's core self – the "heart" – to a natural environment. This implies a release from the mental constructs and preoccupations of daily life (art museums, chambers of commerce) in favor of the sensory richness and grounding presence of the forest.

The speaker's reflection on the "song you / heard singing in the leaf when you were a child / is singing / still" speaks to the power of reconnecting with innate wisdom and childlike wonder. Mindfulness often involves shedding preconceived notions and returning to a fresh, immediate experience of reality. The poem suggests that the ability to perceive nature's subtle "song" is not lost but merely dormant, awaiting a mindful awakening. The final lines, acknowledging the speaker's age yet affirming the leaf's continued song, underscore the timelessness of mindful awareness and the perennial availability of nature's solace and truth for those willing to pay attention. This cultivates a sense of interbeing, where the individual consciousness merges with the broader fabric of existence through focused attention.

Mary Oliver's "What can I say" functions as a powerful testament to the enduring power of concise poetic language. Through a close examination of its formal elements, the poem reveals a carefully constructed internal logic emphasizing repetition, vivid imagery, and a compelling rhetorical structure. When these elements are further illuminated by ecocritical perspectives, the poem emerges as a vital call for humanity to re-establish its inherent connection with the natural world, recognizing nature's inherent agency and its embeddedness within the system. Finally, by integrating mindfulness notions, the poem transforms into an exhortation for present-moment awareness and sensory engagement, inviting readers to shed the distractions of modernity and rediscover the timeless truths and solace found in attentive communion with the ecological realm. The poem, therefore, transcends a simple observation, becoming a profound meditation on perception, belonging, and the urgent need for ecological consciousness.

Another interesting choice and resource that was used during our Project is *The River* by Alessandro Sanna (2014), translated by Michael Reynolds. (Image 1)[1].

Image 1

[1] All images featured in this paper are sourced from the respective books, with complete bibliographic references listed in the Bibliography section

Alessandro Sanna's *The River* (2014) represents a compelling case study of the sophisticated artistry and narrative capabilities of the contemporary picturebook as an aesthetic object and a powerful means of communication. It pays tribute to the river Po (in Northern Italy) and wordlessly conveys time, movement, and experience through minimalist watercolor imagery (Salih, 2016). Primarily a wordless narrative, or more accurately, a nearly wordless picturebook given its minimal textual interjections at the beginning of each seasonal chapter, *The River* relies overwhelmingly on its visual grammar to convey meaning, emotion, and temporal progression. This strategic choice positions the work as a rich subject for critical inquiry grounded in picturebook theory.

The book's structure is inherently cyclical, organized into four distinct chapters, each dedicated to a season along Italy's Po River. This seasonal cycle is not merely a backdrop but a central thematic element and a narrative device, mirroring the fluid passage of time and the continuous transformations within both the natural world and human experience. Sanna employs a distinctive visual style, characterized by hundreds of watercolor images presented as full-page spreads or panoramic panels. This consistent use of watercolor imbues the illustrations with a soft, luminous quality, allowing for nuanced color palettes that shift dramatically with each season – from the purples and russets of autumn floods to the blues and crisp whites of winter, and the vibrant golds of summer. The illustrations often feature vast, expressive skies, demonstrating Sanna's mastery of atmospheric perspective and establishing a profound connection between the sky, the river, and the emotional tenor of each section (Image 2).

Image 2

A key aspect of Sanna's artistic achievement lies in his ability to create a visual narrative that is simultaneously sweeping in its scope and intimate in its detail. The book transcends simple illustration; it embodies the principle that pictures carry the weight of the narrative (Ramos & Ramos, 2011). The sequential arrangement of images, akin to photographic albums or cinematic frames, necessitates patient attention from the reader, rewarding close observation of the subtle changes in landscape, light, and the incidental vignettes of human and animal life (Image 3). This invites a reader-response engagement that is active and interpretive, as viewers must infer relationships, emotional states, and mini-narratives from the visual cues (Iordanaki & Kalogirou2020).

Image 3

The River also engages with the concept of interdependence between verbal and visual text. While minimal, the lyrical prose that prefaces each season provides conceptual anchors, offering clues and setting the emotional tone for the visual unfolding that follows. This creates a synergistic relationship where the sparse text amplifies the visual communication without dictating it, allowing for polyphony in interpretation.

From an ecocritical perspective, *The River* functions as a profound meditation on the human-nature relationship. The river itself acts as a dynamic character, a "pulsating entity" that embodies the resilience and vulnerability of the natural environment. While celebrating the beauty and constancy of nature's rhythms, the book subtly hints at the impact of human presence and the changing climate (e.g., warmer winters, hot summers). It fosters ecological literacy not through an authoritative text, but through immersive visual storytelling that encourages a sensory and empathetic connection to place.

In essence, Sanna's *The River* is a testament to the picturebooks' capacity as an aesthetic object and a potent medium for conveying complex themes of

time, place, and environmental consciousness. Its primarily visual narrative, coupled with strategic textual cues, creates a richly layered reading experience that invites reflection across age groups, positioning it as a significant contribution to both children's literature and the broader field of environmental humanities.

The poetic and visual texts, Mary Oliver's *The Leaf and the Cloud* and Alessandro Sanna's *The River***,** offer a powerful gateway for cultivating empathy, awareness, and a deeper connection to the natural world. The following eco-literary activities – focused on primary and middle-level students – aim to bridge environmental literacy with aesthetic appreciation. By combining creative writing, visual storytelling, and reflective practices, these activities invite students to perceive nature as a living presence, understand their embeddedness within ecological systems, and reimagine their relationship with the Earth through imaginative and ethical engagement.

For primary school students, the integration of eco-consciousness begins with fostering a sense of wonder, empathy, and agency toward the natural world. After reading selected verses from Mary Oliver's *The Leaf and the Cloud*, such as "The leaf has a song in it" and "Stone is the face of patience," students are invited to consider nature as alive, expressive, and deserving of care. In a guided activity titled "Voices of the Earth," children choose a natural object – leaf, river, stone, or bird – and imagine what it might say about the world around it. They then write a short poem or letter from this object's perspective, highlighting its role in the ecosystem and any concerns it might have (e.g., pollution, deforestation, being ignored). This helps build biocentric thinking – the idea that nature has value beyond human use.

To deepen eco-consciousness, students engage in a mindful nature walk, where they are asked to "read" the landscape silently, paying attention to small shifts in texture, sound, light, and smell. Back in the classroom, they reflect on what the land might be teaching them. This culminates in a creative drawing or short descriptive paragraph titled "If the River Could Speak" inspired by Oliver's metaphor of the "unfinishable story" inside the river. This exercise helps students consider their place within ecological cycles and understand that environmental stories are ongoing – and they are participants, not bystanders.

Using Alessandro Sanna's *The River*, primary students explore how visual narratives can convey ecological ideas without words. In a collaborative project titled "Seasons of the Earth," students work in small groups to illustrate a four-part story of their local environment changing across the seasons, paying attention to how human activity affects this change (e.g., litter in spring, drought in summer). The project emphasizes interconnectedness, systems thinking, and the idea that human choices shape the living world.

For middle school students, the emphasis shifts toward *critical ecological literacy* and *reflective action*. After analyzing Mary Oliver's poem in depth,

students discuss what she means by "Take your busy heart… to the forest" and reflect on how human routines (school, work, commerce) may distract us from engaging with the Earth's rhythms. In an activity titled "Eco-Reconnection Journals," students track their interactions with nature over a week – moments of seeing birds, walking on soil, hearing wind – and reflect on how such encounters affect their mental state. They then compose a reflective essay or poem addressing the question: *"What does it mean to live with ecological awareness today?"*

Inspired by Sanna's *The River*, middle schoolers explore visual storytelling as eco-activism. After examining how water, time, and seasonal cycles are depicted, students create visual narratives addressing environmental concerns in their own communities – plastic pollution in a local stream, vanishing insects, tree loss, etc. This project, "River Stories, Earth Stories," teaches them to communicate environmental urgency and beauty through image, tone, and sequence, rather than exposition. Students learn that art, like science, is a powerful vehicle for ecological truth.

In another activity titled "The River as a Living Being," students draw on the philosophical and ecological implications of Heraclitus's quote "No man can step in the same river twice." They write a short story or monologue from the point of view of the river – charting its encounters with industry, wildlife, seasons, children playing, floods, and climate change. This fosters *ecocentric narrative thinking*, encouraging students to imagine the world through non-human perspectives and challenge the human-nature divide.

A final cross-curricular activity, "Environmental Testimonies," invites students to conduct interviews with older community members about how local rivers, forests, or coasts have changed. They use these testimonies to create a multimedia presentation or eco-poem titled *What the River Remembers*. This promotes intergenerational environmental consciousness, linking personal memory with ecological history and asking: How do we learn from the past to care for the future?

2. WINTER: BELONGING TO A LIVING HOME

This winter module explores the concept of "polis" (city) and the often-lost connection between urban living and nature, drawing on ecopedagogy and the New Urbanism movement. New Urbanism represents a vital shift towards more sustainable and community-oriented urban development. Its principles offer a framework for addressing many contemporary urban challenges, particularly those related to environmental impact and social fragmentation. (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2013; Kalogirou, Chourdaki, & Mitsoula, 2025).

Jeannie Baker's *Belonging* (2004) is a visually compelling wordless picture book that explores the intimate relationship between humans and their natural environment. The narrative follows a young girl as she grows up in a vibrant,

biodiverse urban neighborhood that gradually undergoes significant environmental transformation. Through detailed collage illustrations, Baker contrasts the girl's personal development with the simultaneous loss of natural habitats and green spaces due to urban expansion and environmental degradation (Image 4).

Image 4

The story highlights key ecological themes such as habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, and the human impact on ecosystems. It sensitively portrays the tension between development and conservation, emphasizing the importance of ecological stewardship. By inviting readers to witness these changes from a child's perspective, *Belonging* fosters eco-consciousness by encouraging reflection on how everyday life and urban planning choices affect the health of local and global environments.

It serves as a profound visual narrative that complements the theoretical foundations of ecopedagogy and New Urbanism by depicting the evolving relationship between urban spaces and their natural environments. This wordless picture book chronicles the transformation of a city neighborhood over several decades, illustrating the gradual re-emergence of endemic flora and fauna alongside human habitation. Through its detailed and textured artwork, *Belonging* embodies the principles of New Urbanism by emphasizing the integration of natural elements within urban design and fostering a sense of community grounded in ecological awareness.

The book's narrative wordless structure invites readers to engage actively with the visual progression, encouraging close observation and interpretation, which aligns with ecopedagogical goals of fostering critical environmental

literacy and experiential learning (Gruenewald, 2003). By juxtaposing stark urban development with burgeoning greenery, Baker highlights the tensions and potential harmonies between concrete infrastructure and natural ecosystems. This contrast not only underscores the environmental degradation historically associated with urban expansion but also illustrates the possibility of regeneration and coexistence through mindful urban planning (Image 4). As the creator herself indicates[2]:

> *In the past, "home" meant not only the building in which a person lived. One's 'Home' also included the street, the landmarks and the special places in the neighbourhood. But now our street spaces are usually so full of cars and their noise and their dangers, people no longer use their streets in the ways they used to. Often people have never even seen or met some of the other people also living in their street. In evolving my ideas for 'Belonging' I became conscious of the worldwide movement 'Reclaim the street' in which street residents collectively decide they want to stop or dramatically reduce their street traffic so that their street can once again become a place for social interaction, for children, community and plants.*

Moreover, *Belonging* addresses the socio-ecological dimensions of urban living by portraying how natural restoration contributes to social wellbeing and community identity. The presence of native species reclaiming space within the cityscape symbolizes resilience and continuity, reinforcing New Urbanism's advocacy for human-scaled, diverse, and interconnected neighborhoods that promote both ecological sustainability and social cohesion (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). The book's imagery suggests that urban dwellers can cultivate a renewed "polis," where environmental stewardship and cultural belonging are intertwined.

In educational contexts, *Belonging* offers a powerful multimodal resource for engaging primary and middle school students in discussions about urban ecology, biodiversity, and the role of individuals and communities in shaping sustainable cities. Its accessible yet layered visual storytelling can inspire activities that encourage observation, reflection, and creativity, fostering an embodied understanding of the complex dynamics between people and place.

Conclusively, Jeannie Baker's *Belonging* embodies a visual ecocritical narrative that resonates with the core tenets of New Urbanism and ecopedagogy. It not only documents ecological change but also envisions a future urban landscape where nature and society coexist in mutually reinforcing ways, offering a hopeful and instructive model for reimagining the city as a living, evolving organism. It illustrates the gradual return of endemic species to urban neighborhoods over decades, showcasing the interconnectedness of people, their communities, and the evolving landscape. The book subtly highlights contrasts

[2] This is part of an extended review of *Belonging* in *Magpies Magazine*, vol. 9, no 3 July 2004.

between concrete and greenery, light and shadow, and the changing sentiments they evoke.

Designed for both primary and middle school students, the activities presented, based on Jeannie Baker's *Belonging* (2004), encourage learners to critically engage with themes of urban ecology, community, and environmental change. Grounded in ecopedagogical theory and informed by principles of the New Urbanism movement, this approach fosters awareness of sustainable urban development. It cultivates empathy for the natural world within built environments. By adapting prompts and tasks to the developmental stages of younger and older students, the module supports differentiated learning while promoting environmental literacy and active citizenship from early childhood through adolescence.

For the introductory activity, students will be shown carefully chosen photographs of diverse urban environments, prompting open-ended questions. A picture, for instance, might capture a busy city street teeming with cars, bicycles, and pedestrians, or a local park boasting green spaces and playgrounds. Questions to accompany these images could include:

- *"What kinds of transportation do you see here?"*
- *"How do you think people's choices in travel affect the environment?"*
- *"What do you notice about the green spaces in this area?"*
- *"How might this place change if more people walked or biked?"*

This activity invites learners to consider how everyday choices related to food, energy consumption, transportation, and urban design impact local and global ecosystems. For primary students, questions are simplified and focus on concrete examples from their immediate surroundings, while middle school students engage with more complex, systemic reflections. This approach grounds the exploration of the current climate crisis in familiar, relatable contexts.

In the main activity, students engage with the wordless narrative of Jeannie Baker's *Belonging* to create their own original stories, either individually or collaboratively. Multiple copies of the book are made available to enable close examination of the rich visual detail across its evolving.

For primary students, guided prompts support imaginative and sensory engagement. For example: "Imagine you are 6-year-old Tracy looking out your window. What do you see, hear, or feel? What is changing outside?" This kind of prompt helps children step into the world of the book through personal, sensory-rich experience.

For middle school students, more complex, critical perspectives are encouraged, such as:

- *"Imagine you are the building itself. What do you observe about the changes over time in the street and community?"*

- "*Write a letter to the mayor expressing your hopes or concerns about how your neighborhood is changing*".

These tasks promote empathy, spatial awareness, and ecological thinking by inviting students to consider different viewpoints and environmental transformations.

For younger or less confident writers, a collaborative "story chain" method can be used. In this structure, each student contributes a sentence or idea in turn, gradually building a shared narrative. For example, one student begins with *"Tracy opened the curtains",* the next continues *"and saw a new tree planted where the old fence used to be",* and so on. This method fosters inclusivity, supports emergent literacy, and encourages cooperative creativity.

During the whole-class plenary, groups or individuals present their completed narratives to their peers. This structured discussion session allows students to reflect on the storytelling process and share key moments from their texts. Teachers may guide the conversation with prompts such as:

- *"What surprised you about the changes in the neighborhood?"*
- *What message does your story send about the relationship between people and nature?"*
- *"How did the pictures help you imagine the story?"*

This collective reflection promotes critical thinking about the intersections between urban life and the natural environment and highlights the power of visual storytelling in shaping ecological awareness and values.

The reflection phase is designed to support ongoing consideration of how literature and imagery influence perceptions of urban nature. Teachers facilitate age-appropriate discussions, encouraging students to identify personal and community actions that support sustainable urban living. For younger students, reflections may focus on simple daily actions, while middle school students are guided toward deeper ecological and civic engagement. This process helps build a supportive classroom community committed to environmental stewardship.

Overall, these activities provide a flexible and scaffolded pedagogical framework that integrates multimodal literacy, empathy, and social responsibility. They empower students across primary and middle school levels to critically engage with the dynamics of urban ecosystems and their role within them.

3. SPRING: A SEASON OF SPELLS AND SPEAKING FOR THE WILD

Robert Macfarlane's *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* (2017) (Image 5), magnificently illustrated by Jackie Morris, transcends the conventional boundaries of a children's picturebook to become a profound cultural intervention.

Born from the controversial removal of nature-related words from the Oxford Junior Dictionary, the book functions as both a lament for a diminishing connection to the natural world and a powerful act of literary reclamation. This

analysis will explore the book's multimodal engagement, its ecocritical underpinnings, its pedagogical implications, and its subversive approach to language and knowledge.

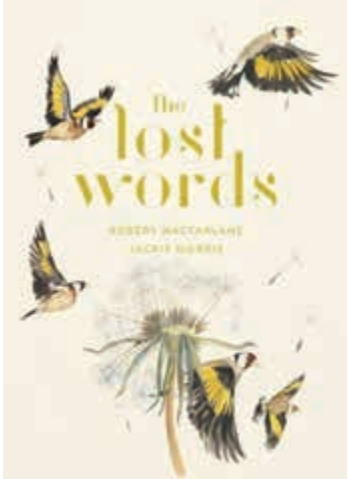

Image 5

The Lost Words is a masterclass in multimodal storytelling, where text and image are inextricably linked to create a holistic sensory experience. Macfarlane's "spells" – deliberately chosen over "poems" – are acrostic verses for twenty "lost" nature words (e.g., acorn, adder, bluebell, dandelion, otter, wren) (Walsh, 2018) (Image 6).

Image 6

These lyrical incantations are designed to be read aloud, emphasizing the oral tradition and the power of pronunciation in "conjuring" the absent entities

back into being. The language is rich with alliteration, assonance, and evocative imagery, mirroring the sensory richness of the natural world it seeks to represent. Here is an example of Macfarlane's "spells": Wild-song, briar-song, thorn-song,/ Rapid wren is needle, rapid wren is pin – / Each wren etches, stitches, switches, glitches, yes – /Now you think you see wren, now you know you don't. (Macfarlane, 2017:1)

What makes this "spell" so effective is:

Acrostic structure: The first letter of each line spells out the word, making the word itself integral to the "spell" of conjuring it back.

Onomatopoeia and alliteration: Macfarlane uses sounds and repetitive initial sounds to evoke the creature's characteristics and movements.

Sensory language: The words aim to make the reader feel, hear, and almost see the creature in their mind's eye.

Emphasis on disappearance/re-conjuring: The ending often plays on the idea of the word and the creature being elusive, hinting at their lost status and the magic of bringing them back.

Morris's accompanying illustrations are not mere decorations but active participants in the book's meaning-making. Each "spell" is accompanied by a triptych of art: a depiction of the creature or plant's absence (often subtle, a mere outline or negative space), followed by a vibrant, gold-leaf-infused "icon-esque" portrait, and finally, the creature or plant in its natural habitat (Image 7).

Image 7

This visual progression reinforces the narrative of loss and rediscovery, allowing young readers (and adults) to visually grasp the concept of absence and

then celebrate the vibrant presence that the "spell" re-instates. The scale of the book itself, often described as "oversized," further enhances this immersive experience, inviting readers to physically engage with its contents, much like one might pore over a natural history guide.

At its core, *The Lost Words* is a profoundly ecocritical work that engages with two crucial concepts in environmental psychology: environmental generational amnesia and shifting baseline syndrome. These terms describe how ecological knowledge and memory are progressively lost over generations. As environmental conditions deteriorate, each successive generation regards the increasingly degraded state of nature as "normal", failing to recognize what has been lost (Kahn, 2002; Pauly, 1995).

Environmental generational amnesia, a term coined by Peter Kahn (2002), refers to the phenomenon where each generation perceives the environment of their childhood as the benchmark of ecological normalcy, regardless of how degraded it may be. As a result, awareness of biodiversity loss, pollution, and ecosystem decline weakens across time. In *The Lost Words*, Macfarlane and Morris confront this directly by illustrating how the removal of nature-related words such as "acorn," "otter," and "kingfisher" from a children's dictionary is not merely a lexical change – it is emblematic of this amnesia. When language fails to include the natural world, it accelerates our psychological and cultural detachment from it.

Closely related is the concept of shifting baseline syndrome, introduced by Daniel Pauly (1995) in the context of fisheries science, which describes how perceptions of environmental health shift over time due to a lack of historical knowledge. Each generation resets the "baseline" for what they perceive as a healthy or abundant natural environment. In the context of *The Lost Words*, this syndrome is made visible through the poetic and artistic reclamation of lost language. The absence of these words from children's vocabularies reflects how normalized the absence of nature has become in everyday life.

By reinstating these words through poetic "spells" and vivid illustrations, *The Lost Words* attempts to reverse these psychological phenomena. It fosters intergenerational dialogue and ecological literacy, encouraging young readers to recognize, name, and thus care for the natural world around them. In doing so, Macfarlane and Morris challenge the linguistic and conceptual shifts that both reflect and reinforce ecological decline, offering a form of cultural resistance rooted in language and imagination.

The book acts as a counter-narrative to this cultural forgetting. It argues that losing the words for nature means losing the capacity to truly see, understand, and therefore care for it. As Macfarlane himself has stated, "We find it hard to love what we cannot give a name to. And what we do not love we will not save" (Macfarlane, 2015). The "spells" are not simply exercises in vocabulary; they are acts of resistance against ecological illiteracy, designed to re-wild

children's language and, by extension, their imaginations and lived experiences of the outdoors. It challenges the anthropocentric bias that often places human concerns above the natural world's intrinsic value, subtly advocating for a more balanced, interconnected worldview.

The Lost Words has a significant impact on educational practices, fostering what can be termed "green literacy" or "nature literacy". Its design encourages active engagement: the scattered letters at the beginning of each "spell" invite children to identify the "lost word", transforming reading into a playful activity. The emphasis on reading aloud, combined with evocative imagery, stimulates sensory perception and emotional connection to natural subjects.

Beyond simple vocabulary acquisition, the book promotes critical thinking about the relationship between language, culture, and environment. It implicitly asks why these words were lost and what the implications of such loss are. This book can be utilized to inspire nature walks, observational drawing, creative writing, and discussions. Its widespread adoption in schools and libraries across various regions underscores its effectiveness in cultivating eco-consciousness and sustainability competencies in young learners. The book encourages a shift from passive consumption of information to active participation in understanding and protecting the environment.

Crucially, *The Lost Words* subverts traditional modes of knowledge transmission. By framing the entries as "spells" rather than dictionary definitions, the authors imbue the words and their subjects with a sense of magic, wonder, and agency. This playful approach contrasts sharply with the often dry, utilitarian nature of dictionary entries, making the learning process enchanting and memorable. The book doesn't just present information; it invites children to participate in an act of "conjuring", transforming them from passive recipients of knowledge into active agents in its retrieval and revitalization.

Furthermore, the book operates as an artifact of cultural preservation. In its physical form – a large, exquisitely produced volume – it becomes an object to be cherished, handled, and returned to, mirroring the value it places on the natural world it depicts. This aesthetic and tactile quality reinforces its message of valuing and preserving what is precious.

The Lost Words stands as a landmark picturebook that seamlessly integrates artistic beauty with urgent ecological messaging. Through its multimodal brilliance, its profound ecocritical stance, and its innovative pedagogical approach, it serves as a powerful call to action, urging a re-engagement with the natural world through the re-enchantment of language. It reminds us that words are not merely labels but vital conduits for understanding, connection, and ultimately, care for the planet we inhabit. As such, it is not just a book about lost words, but a potent tool for ensuring they are found and celebrated by future generations.

To extend the transformative potential of The Lost Words into educational practice, the following classroom activities are designed for primary and

middle school learners. These exercises align with the book's ecocritical stance, multimodal structure, and literary innovations, offering opportunities for students to rewild their language, imagination, and relationship with the natural world. Rooted in creative pedagogy and critical environmental education, the activities promote linguistic exploration, sensory engagement, and ecological awareness.

A foundational activity involves students compiling their own "lost words" list. In collaborative sessions, students brainstorm nature-related terms they rarely encounter in everyday speech – such as local flora, fauna, landscape features, or weather phenomena. Examples might include words like "dandelion", "histle", or "gale". This process encourages reflection on why such terms are rarely used nowadays, prompting discussions around urbanization, digital lifestyles, and declining outdoor experiences. The act of identifying "lost words" positions students as active participants in the preservation of linguistic biodiversity. The resulting class chart, prominently displayed, becomes a living artifact of the class's growing eco-vocabulary and serves as a resource for subsequent activities. You can see an example below.

Word	Category	Description/Meaning	Why might it be "lost"?
Dandelion	Plant (Flora)	A yellow wildflower common in fields	Often called a weed; less noticed in cities due to lawns and paving
Thistle	Plant (Flora)	A prickly wildflower with purple blooms	Seen as a nuisance, so removed from parks and gardens
Gale	Weather	A very strong wind	Rarely discussed in everyday conversation; more common in literature or weather reports
Hedgehog	Animal (Fauna)	A small spiny mammal that rolls into a ball	Less visible due to habitat loss and urbanization
Bramble	Plant (Flora)	A thorny shrub that produces blackberries	Less known as children play less outdoors
Brook	Landscape	A small stream	"Brook" is an old-fashioned word, replaced by "stream" or "creek"
Heather	Plant (Flora)	A purple-flowering shrub common in moorlands	Less common in urban areas and in daily speech
Moth	Animal (Fauna)	A nocturnal insect attracted to light	Often overshadowed by butterflies in conversation

Building upon their curated word lists, students are then invited to craft original "spells" in the style of Robert Macfarlane's acrostic poems from *The Lost Words*. It is crucial that these creations follow the acrostic form – where each line begins with a successive letter of the chosen word – since this structure is essential to Macfarlane's poetic style and symbolic of bringing "lost" language visibly back into the world. Omitting the acrostic format would undermine the pedagogical and poetic goals of the exercise.

N A T U R E

Nestled in the quiet earth,
Air filled with whispers of leaves,
Twinkling stars above the woods,
Underneath, the soft moss grows,
Rivers sing their endless songs,
Every creature plays its part.

These "new spells" writing workshops encourage children to infuse their words with sensory richness, emotional depth, and metaphorical power – mirroring the re-enchantment of language seen in *The Lost Words*. The sharing of these spells aloud, whether in small groups or classroom performances, reinforces the oral tradition highlighted in the original work and cultivates a communal atmosphere of storytelling, creativity, and respect for nature.

Finally, students' completed poems can be compiled into a class anthology – Our Own Spell Book – which serves as a lasting testament to their imaginative engagement with language, poetry, and the environment.

To support this, teachers should provide clear models and scaffolding appropriate to the students' age. Primary students, for example, may benefit from sentence starters and word banks focused on the five senses – touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste – while middle and upper-grade students can be encouraged to incorporate more sophisticated literary techniques such as metaphor, personification, and alliteration. Emphasis should also be placed on the ecological or emotional resonance of the word being explored, helping students reconnect with the natural world through language.

To deepen this engagement, students keep ongoing Nature Observation Journals. Each child selects a specific plant, animal, or natural feature – such as a schoolyard tree, a common bird, or a changing patch of sky – and records detailed observations over time. Prompts might include sensory reflections *("What do you smell*?"), emotional responses (*"How does this make you feel?"),* or descriptive challenges *("What changes have you noticed since last week?"*). These journals foster a quiet attentiveness and a habit of mindful noticing that is essential for ecological literacy. Moreover, they serve as a wellspring for later creative writing or visual representation, reinforcing the interdisciplinary links between science, art, and language.

Narrative creativity is further encouraged through "Lost Words" Story Starters. Teachers offer prompts based on selected words from the book or student-generated lists, such as *"What would happen if 'acorns' were truly lost?"* or *"What would a 'wren' say if it could speak about its vanishing habitat?"*. These scenarios stimulate speculative and empathetic thinking, asking students to imagine ecological futures or speak from the perspective of

nonhuman life. Such exercises integrate fiction writing with environmental ethics, reinforcing the central premise of The Lost Words: that the erasure of words can signal the erasure of worlds.

Visual arts activities provide another dimension to this multimodal pedagogy. One key exercise involves illustrating students' original spells in the triptych format used by Jackie Morris. The left panel depicts the absence or fading of the subject – perhaps through faint outlines, silhouettes, or negative space. The center offers a vibrant, gold-accented portrait, invoking Morris's "icon-esque" aesthetic. The right panel places the subject in a flourishing, detailed natural habitat. This format not only mimics the book's visual structure but also reinforces the narrative of loss and re-emergence through a deeply sensory, symbolic process. Artistic materials such as watercolors, gold markers, and textured paper elevate the creative experience, allowing students to express ecological emotion through form and color.

Complementing this are nature-based craft activities such as mandala-making and collage. Students collect small natural items – twigs, stones, dried leaves – during supervised outdoor walks and arrange them into symbolic patterns that reflect a selected "lost word." This tactile engagement with natural materials fosters a sense of respect and intimacy with the more-than-human world. Teachers are encouraged to frame these activities within sustainability practices, discussing responsible gathering and the ecological significance of each material. Such artmaking extends the book's ethic of attentiveness into material form, promoting both environmental appreciation and artistic expression.

For more three-dimensional engagement, students create dioramas or sculptures using recycled materials to depict their chosen lost word in context. Primary students may build simple habitats using cardboard and paper, while middle school students can be encouraged to construct more intricate ecological scenes, incorporating research into the food webs and ecosystems that support their subject. This hands-on activity encourages systems thinking and a concrete understanding of ecological interdependence while reinforcing principles of reuse and sustainability.

Auditory engagement is foregrounded through the creation of "nature soundscapes." Students listen to curated audio recordings of birdsong, rustling leaves, water flow, and other natural sounds. They then create abstract or representational artworks inspired by these auditory cues. This activity invites a shift from the visual to the sonic, emphasizing the often-overlooked acoustic richness of natural environments. In doing so, it raises awareness of ecological silencing – what Rachel Carson famously called the "silent spring" – and offers an opportunity to reflect on the fragility of soundscapes in an age of ecological disruption.

Field-based and interdisciplinary activities help bring these ideas into the world. A "Lost Words" Scavenger Hunt takes students outdoors – whether to the school grounds or a local park – to search for real-life examples of their chosen words. Equipped with clipboards or field notebooks, students compare their observations with the original illustrations in The Lost Words, bridging textual imagination with experiential learning. Conversations may follow on biodiversity, species decline, and the differences between urban and rural ecologies. This exercise grounds abstract discussions in tangible experience and fosters curiosity and care.

Finally, students are invited to take action through the "Bring Back a Word" Campaign. Each child selects one lost word and creates a small advocacy project to reintroduce it into the classroom or community. This may take the form of posters, persuasive letters, mock social media posts, or oral presentations. Schools might even host a "Lost Words Awareness Day," inviting families and other classes to engage with students' work. Such initiatives not only reinforce vocabulary acquisition but also empower students to become ambassadors for ecological and linguistic renewal.

Through these interdisciplinary, sensory-rich, and ecologically grounded activities, students become not only readers of The Lost Words, but co-creators in its mission. The classroom becomes a space of rewilding – of language, perception, and ecological thought – where the lost is not only remembered but imaginatively reawakened. In doing so, education fulfills its highest purpose: to cultivate attentive, empathetic, and literate citizens who are capable of seeing, naming, and caring for the world around them.

4. SUMMER: SLOWING DOWN WITH NATURE, ECOLOGICAL MINDFULNESS AND SENSORY LITERACY

The final phase of this interdisciplinary project engages with the summer season through Jo Loring-Fisher's Taking Time (2020) (Image 8), a picturebook that harmoniously integrates themes of mindfulness, ecopedagogy, and global ecological awareness. This text provides fertile ground for pedagogical exploration, offering young readers an opportunity to contemplate their relationship with the natural world through both a sensory and ethical lens.

Taking Time is notable for its multimodal and affective richness, blending poetic narration with evocative illustrations that depict diverse children from around the globe pausing to observe nature in their immediate environments (Kalogirou, 2021). While the text may be approached through various interpretive frameworks, its ecological significance is central. It gently underscores the fragility and beauty of the cyclical rhythms of nature, conveying a sense of loss that accompanies environmental degradation or disruption of the seasonal cycle.

Image 8

At its core, Taking Time advocates for a mode of attentiveness that aligns closely with both mindfulness practices and ecocritical literacy. It prompts readers to slow down and engage in a kind of "close reading" of nature – an interpretive and perceptual attentiveness that parallels literary analysis but is directed toward the "open book" of the living world. This practice encourages a deepened sense of presence and fosters emotional and ethical connections to the natural environment. According to Kalogirou (2005) the archetypal perpetual cyclical time of nature lies at the core of this book: "The book invites children to slow down and take their time to gather up the blossom dancing tree, to listen to a bird's song in the breeze, to watch with awe a spider build her home, etc. […] In all its visual and verbal manifestations the book celebrates the encompassing beauty and the wisdom of life, the harmonious cyclic rhythm of nature. The child figure is closely connected to nature and totally synchronized with its pulses and rhythms (like the rhythmic purr of a cat in the fifth opening). The book conceives and depicts time as a natural phenomenon; the sun rises and sets, seasons change, sunshine and snow, life and death alternating in nature in which there is generic (not individual) rebirth.

Several key pedagogical and ecocritical themes emerge from the text:

- *Slowness and Perceptual Engagement*: The book invites children to pause, observe, and reflect – a practice increasingly rare in accelerated digital cultures. This slowing down is not only a mindfulness strategy but also an ecological one, emphasizing the value of sustained attention as a means of cultivating care for the world.

- *Sensory Literacy*: Through its poetic structure and vivid imagery, Taking Time nurtures an embodied literacy – one in which sight, sound, touch, and emotion are integral to understanding and meaning-making. This aligns with contemporary theories in ecopedagogy that advocate for somatic and affective modes of learning as vital for ecological awareness.
- *Global Interconnection*: The text depicts children from varied cultural and geographical contexts engaging with local nature, reinforcing the idea that while ecosystems differ, the act of noticing and appreciating nature is universal. This supports an ethic of shared responsibility for planetary stewardship and fosters cross-cultural empathy.
- *Celebration of Diversity and Interdependence*: The narrative implicitly celebrates both human and ecological diversity, reminding readers that differences – whether cultural, biological, or seasonal – are essential to the richness and resilience of life.

In this way, Taking Time serves as both a literary and ethical tool for educators seeking to integrate ecocritical awareness and mindfulness into summer classroom practices. It provides a reflective and emotionally resonant conclusion to a seasonally structured curriculum that foregrounds ecological literacy, emotional intelligence, and global citizenship. Ultimately, it positions the act of taking time not only as a personal practice but as a political and ecological imperative – a quiet yet powerful resistance to the forces of environmental neglect and cultural disconnection.

Jo Loring-Fisher's *Taking Time* (2020) offers an evocative invitation to slow down and reconnect with the natural world through mindfulness and reflection. Designed for use during the summer months, when children have more opportunities to engage with their environment, the following activities translate the book's themes into developmentally appropriate learning experiences for both primary and middle school students. These activities aim to nurture ecological awareness, emotional literacy, and multimodal expression, fostering a deeper sense of connection to nature and self.

The first activity invites students to create paper crafts based on small natural objects that appear in the book *Taking Time*, such as feathers, leaves, or stones. These are called "keepsakes" because they are special and remind us of a moment in nature. Students will use basic art materials (like paper, scissors, glue, crayons) to make their own versions of these items.

Then, students will imagine: What if this object could speak? What would it say? Younger children can write or say short, simple sentences or rhymes – for example, "I am a leaf dancing in the wind." Older students can write short poems or monologues (a short speech) from the point of view of the object. They can explore where the object came from, what it has seen in nature, or how it feels about the world. This activity helps students build empathy, imagination, and emotional connection with the natural world. These

are important parts of ecological literacy – understanding and caring about the environment.

Next, the show-and-tell activity invites students to bring in a cherished non-technological object or a photograph thereof, sharing its significance by describing who gave it to them and why it matters. They then write short narratives or reflections expressing their emotional connection to the item. This storytelling is extended through collaborative play, where students swap objects (e.g., temporarily exchanging the seashell for another student's pinecone from a forest walk) or integrate them into a shared imaginative space – such as a "magic garden" named *Paradise* or *Our Mother Planet*. In this collective world, each object is placed with care and given a story – like the seashell becoming a home for a magical sea creature, or the pinecone growing into a talking tree.

To prompt deeper reflection on absence and value, students engage in a visualization task where they draw a planet devoid of their favorite objects or natural elements. This creative exercise encourages them to consider the impact of loss on their imagined world, using color and composition to express emotions such as emptiness or longing. By confronting the idea of what a world without these treasures might feel like, learners develop a heightened awareness of environmental fragility and the importance of conservation.

Building on emotional literacy, pupils participate in a reflective writing activity where they complete prompts like "I feel happy when…" or "I enjoy…" related to their experiences and cherished moments. These individual reflections are then combined into a collaborative class poem, which is displayed to celebrate shared joy and diversity of feeling. This collective poetic assemblage not only strengthens vocabulary and expression but also nurtures a sense of belonging and gratitude, both essential to fostering a caring relationship with the environment.

Drawing on musical inspiration, students listen to "My Favorite Things" from the famous musical movie *The Sound of Music* (1965) directed by Robert Wise and written by Ernest Lehman, to examine how simple joys are catalogued and celebrated. Using this as a model, they create their lists of favorite things, intentionally including natural phenomena, sensory experiences, and non-material joys alongside objects. This exercise enhances auditory and lyrical skills while broadening their understanding of value beyond possessions, reinforcing an appreciation for the intangible richness of their surroundings.

Additional activities further extend these themes. For example, guided nature walks encourage students to engage in mindful observation, focusing on the sensory details of their surroundings, listening to birdsong, feeling the textures of leaves, or noticing subtle seasonal changes. Journaling these observations promotes sustained attention and personal reflection, key skills for ecological literacy. Primary students may draw pictures and label simple

observations, while middle school learners write descriptive paragraphs or short reflective essays.

Another engaging task involves collaborative creation of a "Seasonal Rhythm Calendar," where students map local seasonal changes using drawings, photographs, or collected natural materials. This visual tool helps them recognize and respect the cyclical nature of ecosystems, reinforcing the book's emphasis on the circularity of time and ecological processes.

Students can also participate in "Gratitude Circles," where they verbally share moments of appreciation for nature or relationships, fostering social-emotional learning and strengthening community bonds. This can be complemented by creating "Thank You" notes or posters addressed to the natural world, integrating literacy and environmental ethics.

For an experiential science connection, teachers might guide students in planting a "Slow Garden" with native species that bloom or bear fruit over the summer, providing a living classroom to observe growth and seasonal change firsthand. Students document the garden's progress through drawings, photos, or diary entries, linking hands-on stewardship with the mindfulness practiced in *Taking Time*.

Lastly, students can engage in mindful movement or yoga sessions outdoors, guided by prompts from the book that emphasize breathing, sensing the environment, and grounding in the present moment. These practices support holistic well-being, connecting physical awareness with ecological mindfulness.

Together, these activities embody the ethos of *Taking Time* by emphasizing attentiveness, emotional connection, and creative expression. They encourage children to slow down, observe closely, and reflect on their relationship with the natural world. By integrating art, writing, storytelling, music, movement, and science, the curriculum supports multimodal learning suited to the developmental stages of primary and middle school students. Moreover, by fostering emotional intelligence alongside ecological awareness, the activities position the classroom as a space where self-care, others, and the planet converge, cultivating the mindful guardianship that *Taking Time* so beautifully advocates.

A CALL TO ACTION: IMAGINING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

We live in an era characterized by an unprecedented ecological crisis – anthropogenic climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, food insecurity, and forced migration. Addressing these issues demands more than just technological solutions; it calls for a radical cultural shift in how we perceive and interact with the natural world. Within this transformative effort, literature teaching emerges as a vital tool for cultivating ecological awareness and emotional intelligence.

Our pedagogical project situates literature at the heart of this shift by designing a curriculum that incorporates ecopedagogy, mindfulness, and emotional literacy. Through a carefully curated selection of literary texts, both fiction and non-fiction, picturebooks, and poetic works – we guide students from primary until middle school to explore themes of interdependence, care, loss, regeneration, and responsibility. Stories like *The River* by Alessandro Sanna, *Belonging* by Jeannie Baker, *Taking Time* by Jo Loring-Fisher and *The Lost Words* by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris help young readers engage with nature not just as a backdrop but as a co-participant in their lives and learning.

The chosen texts promote eco-consciousness by drawing attention to the beauty and fragility of the natural world while fostering empathy – for animals, for displaced communities, and for future generations. Literature circles, reflective journaling, creative writing, and dialogic reading strategies offer entry points for students to reflect on their relationship with the planet and their capacity to act as stewards of its well-being (Kalogirou, 2012). In doing so, the classroom becomes a space where imagination and action intersect.

As Paulo Freire profoundly observed,

> *"A peasant who by banking standards was completely ignorant said: 'Now I see that without man there is no world.' When the educator responded: 'Let's say, for the sake of argument, that all the men on earth were to die, but that the earth itself remained, together with trees, birds, animals, rivers, seas, the stars . . . wouldn't all this be a world?' 'Oh no', the peasant replied emphatically. 'There would be no one to say: This is a world'"* (Freire, 1970/2005: 82).

Freire reminds us of humanity's unique ability for self-reflection and the power of naming, imagining, and transforming. It is precisely this human capacity – our ability to dream of a more just and sustainable world – that literature nurtures. Literature opens the door not only to awareness but to agency, inviting young readers to see themselves not as passive observers but as active participants in shaping the future of our planet. By embedding ecological literacy and empathy at the core of literature education, we offer students not only knowledge but hope – and with it, the tools to help restore the balance of the world they will inherit.

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SULTAN KOMUT BAKINÇ ORCID: 0000-0001-7815-389X
Istanbul Kültür University

An Ecocritical Reading of *Just a Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg and *The Curious Garden* by Peter Brown

Abstract: Recently, social sciences have shown an increasing amount of interest in environmental issues. The world has seen noticeable rapid changes in the environment during the second part of the twentieth century, which has made literary scholars and authors themselves more aware. Consequently, ecological systems and environmental issues have been the focus of literature. This chapter will examine two picture books by Peter Brown and Chris Van Allsburg that specifically discuss environmental issues. The specific aim is to investigate how environmental problems and concerns related to them are conveyed in Peter Brown's *The Curious Garden (2009)* and Chris Van Allsburg's *Just a Dream(1990)*, and how the two works highlight the importance of consciousness and its potential to improve both the condition of humanity and the environment itself.

Keywords: Environment, Eco-criticism, Awareness, Chris Van Allsburg, Peter Brown

I. INTRODUCTION

Although, when asked, most individuals claim to care for and appreciate nature and animals, they tend "to abuse them in a multitude of ways" (Bekoff & Bexell, 2010: 70). The destructions we, as human beings, cause are discernible if we care to pay enough attention. Interestingly, we tend to ignore the dire consequences of our actions only to be concerned about our well-being. Yet, there has been a growing interest in ecological issues in various social sciences. In their article "Emerging Environmental Issues" Munn *et al.* point out the fact that "The study of emerging environmental issues has become a growth industry" (2000: 1603). They state further that "early identification of emerging issues will assist in 1) developing research priorities over the midterm (the next 5 years), 2) designing appropriate early warning monitoring systems, and 3) providing insight into policy responses that might be taken before an issue has become a serious threat to society and/or the biosphere" (Munn et.

al., 2000: 1603). It is fortunate that the same growing interest that will help increase awareness of environmental issues can be seen in literary studies, as well. Not only literary scholars but also authors themselves have gained consciousness due to the noticeable and rapid environmental changes that the world has witnessed since the second half of the twentieth century. As a result, environmental challenges and ecological systems have been the subject matter in literature. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) defines ecocriticism as follows:

> Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.

On the one hand, this definition serves well to establish a territory for the field. On the other hand, it is too broad: thus, it fails to define any methods or ways of interpretation. For the sake of this discussion, Serpil Oppermann's article "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice" is worth including here. In the article, after providing several definitions Oppermann writes:

> Almost none of the definitions of ecocriticism signals a move towards a field-defining theoretical method, nor provide a viable model of interpretation. The only discernible pattern among ecocritical definitions is their focus on the importance of the relationship between literature and the physical environment; they also share the common aim to synthesize literary criticism with the natural sciences, and literary studies with the environmental philosophies. (2006: 105)

In this perspective, ecocriticism can be said to employ literature as a pretext for examining environmental concerns and "evaluates relevant texts according to their capacity to articulate ecological contexts" (Oppermann, 2006: 111). However, an eco-critical reading of texts can proceed regardless of whether or not the text is explicitly concerned with nature or the environment. The researcher might try to see the links between the physical world and human beings, and how the physical world impact culture and/or the construction of the literary work.

Children's literature has also evolved into a very rewarding area for the formation of ecocritical consciousness of both children and adults in order to recognize the harmful apocalyptic path that modern society is approaching (Elnady, 2018). In this chapter, two picture books that explicitly include environmental issues will be analyzed. Specifically, the aim is to explore how these issues are presented in *Just a Dream* (1990) by Chris Van Allsburg and *The Curious Garden* (2009) by Peter Brown and how these stories reveal the

significance of awareness which could change the lives of people and the environment itself. In *Just a Dream,* the young protagonist is forced to change for the better and be more responsible for the future of the earth while the protagonist of *The Curious Garden* is the agent who initiates a happy change that leads to a cleaner, greener, and more beautiful city. The change is so visible and effective that the garden spreads, and so does its inspiration. People start to engage in activities that would make both themselves and their surroundings improve.

II. *JUST A DREAM*

Chris Van Allsburg (1949–), one of the authors of contemporary American Children's Literature, has written and illustrated over twenty books. Van Allsburg received the Caldecott Honor Medal in 1980 for his book *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*. Along with receiving the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, he is the recipient of two Caldecott Medals for his work on *Jumanji* and *The Polar Express*. He also won the Boston Globe Award for both *The Polar Express* and *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. Finally, Van Allsburg was awarded The Regina Medal for lifelong accomplishment in children's literature. *Jumanji* received the National Book Award for Book Illustration in 1982, and in 1996, a successful feature film adaptation of the book was released.

Van Allsburg explores the mysterious territory between fantasy and reality in most of his stories, which intrigue readers of all ages. When the fantasy world invades the real world in his stories, the hero or heroes set out on a magical/surreal adventure, which enables them to learn their lesson over the course of the story. Olgahan Bakşi Yalçın states that "Van Allsburg's lessons in his picture books are often found by reading between the lines since without being didactic his stories incite wonder and invite children to track down clues in the fantasy world to reach the hidden lessons" (2022: 28). Accordingly, *Just a Dream* (1990) is a story in which promoting environmental awareness, sustainability, and conversation of ecosystems are the significant components. The book also focuses on character development as in almost all his other stories. Van Allsburg's shifting perspectives and angles in his illustrations also contribute to the surreal atmosphere of his stories, inviting the reader either to be a part of the scene or watch from above. In his story, *Just a Dream*, the protagonist, a young, careless boy named Walter changes drastically because of his dream, which turns into a nightmare when it shows him possible versions of the future. In an interview, Van Allsburg mentions how writing *Just A Dream* was an intentional act to raise awareness about ecological issues. He puts forward that:

> *Just a Dream* was my attempt to contribute to causes that advocate for the protection of the planet – at that point in my life, I was reading Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature*. I thought that I could do something personally as an artist. I'm

> not sure that's the best motivation for an artist because the message can dominate the story in a way that strips art from it.
> Nonetheless, I did *Just a Dream* and tried to tell the story in a way that had certain elements of fantasy. I was trying to create something that wasn't too grim and depressing, and also to suggest the future could be better if it more closely resembled the past. [1]

While children are growing up, they create a sense of reality in accord with their interaction with other human beings, and the audio-visual materials they are exposed to. Since picture books provide settings with valuable information and set examples, guide the readers through the exploration of both the real and fantastical worlds, and convey values like empathy, bravery, belonging, and diversity that are essential for their development and growth, they play a major role in children's sense of reality. The role of literature in constructing reality is a well-studied issue. For instance, on fantasy literature and how it influences reader, Daniel Baker writes that "Fantasy does not escape reality but exposes, subverts, and creates it" (2012: 445). As Baker also puts it fantasy literature, in particular, has the capacity to subvert reality only to construct a new one. An equally significant aspect of fantasy, as Matthew Grenby suggests in his book *Children's Literature,* is that it is suited for thinking about identity-related issues. The characters are removed from the contexts that place and tie them into a certain function within the family, the school, or the greater society by traveling to another country or period. They must then rediscover who they are, and, often, by the conclusion of the book, they are better able to return to their reality (2008: 164).

In *Just a Dream*, Van Allsburg portrays Walter as a careless boy who does not think about the effects of his actions. From the first page, it is clear that Walter does not care for the environment as we see him crumbling up the empty bag of a doughnut with jelly he has bought from the bakery and throwing it carelessly at a fire hydrant on his way home. While presenting a character who is ecologically ignorant, Van Allsburg does not hesitate to create a foil for this character. Rose, his next-door neighbor, is presented as an ecologically conscious girl, who loves the environment so much as to ask for a tree for her birthday. At home, Walter sees Rose watering the tree that has just been planted for her birthday. It is beyond Walter's understanding that someone asks for a tree as a present. It is revealed that "his own birthday was just a few days away, 'And I'm not getting some dumb plant,' he told Rose", mocking her for her delight in the tree she has just received (Van Allsburg, 1990). On the same day, after dinner, we see Walter taking the rubbish out into the same container without sorting them out or recycling it as he hurries back home for his favorite show because "He was too busy to sort through garbage, especially when there was something good on television" (Van Allsburg, 1990). His attitude is reminiscent of his ignorance, even selfishness.

[1] https://web.archive.org/web/20120326203905/http://www.devstu.org/blogs/interview-with-chris-van-allsburg-part-2

Up until here, Walter can be seen as a representative of indifferent people who does not care about nature and how, as human beings, we destroy nature by simply not being aware of the destruction that we cause. In their article entitles "Ignoring Nature: Why We Do It, the Dire Consequences, and the Need for a Paradigm Shift to Save Animals, Habitats, and Ourselves" Marc Bekoff and Sarah M. Bexell most cogently state that "Humans are big-brained, invasive, and omnipresent mammals who seem to think they can do almost anything they want" (2010: 70). They claim that we tend to ignore our responsibilities toward the ecosystem not only because of selfishness but also because of lacking awareness. As a result, they believe that responsible individuals should play a vital role in being a role model to ecologically unaware people. They add that the media must be encouraged to report on ecological issues and offer simple, workable solutions. Additionally, researchers must serve as positive role models for the wider public, especially in nations where economic restrictions make change difficult (Bekoff & Bexell, 2010: 71).

"Walter went to bed wishing he lived in the future. He couldn't wait to have his own tiny plane, a robot to take out the trash, and a machine that could make jelly doughnuts by the thousands" (Van Allsburg, 1990). As can be seen in the quote, in the show Walter hurries back to watch, there is a boy like himself living in the future with robots doing chores for him and tiny personal planes, and machines that make life easier. Indeed, it is a promising future for him. Walter falls asleep that night as an ecologically unaware child and his wish to live in the future comes true in his dream as he travels to the future. To his surprise, the future is not as promising as he has hoped to be.

> Walter woke up in the middle of a huge dump. A bulldozer was pushing a heap of bulging trash bags toward him. "Stop!" he yelled.
> The man driving the bulldozer put his machine in neutral. "Oh, sorry," he said. "Didn't see you."
> Walter looked at the distant mountains of trash and saw half-buried houses. "Do people live here?" he asked.
> "Not anymore," answered the man.
> A few feet from the bed was a rusty old street sign that read FLORAL AVENUE.
> "Oh no," gasped Walter. He lived on Floral Avenue. (Van Allsburg, 1990).

Through Walter's dream, the readers are reminded of most of the ecological issues that the world deals with now or will face soon. It is a wounded world ravaged by the careless mistakes of the past. Each scene in Walter's dream journey invites the reader to observe types of ecological/ environmental degradation. For instance, Walter travels in his sleep to the midst of an endless garbage dump situated on his street, which points out the dangers of illegal dumping and land pollution/degradation. Then, he travels to a tree in a forest that is about to be cut down, which indicates the ill effects of deforestation on the future of humanity.

Next, Walter finds himself on the top of a smokestack belching pollution, which burns his throat and makes his eyes itchy reflecting the air pollution as well as the growing hole in the ozone layer/atmospheric degradation. Then his dream takes him to the middle of a fishless sea, where the reader is introduced to the problem of reduced fish stock in the world's oceans/ water degradation. In his dream, Walter also visits places like The Great Canyon in the USA, which is impossible to see because of the smog, and Mount Everest, which only strengthens the negative versions of the future. Walter's interaction with the places he journeys to in his dreams shows him possible versions of the future and at the same time displays the possible adverse consequences of his being messy or careless, and indifferent to the environment.

Seeing as this is a picture book that is originally illustrated and written for children, the representation of the scenes through pictures plays a significant role. The details, in particular, in his dream are illustrated as immense and exaggerated so as to deepen the effects of a possible environmental disaster. It is not surprising that Walter's imagination as a child makes things even bigger and more intolerable, which functions as a reminder of Walter's own responsibilities and how small he is, and how small we are as human beings when it comes to facing nature's force. When he wakes up, he is a changed boy, and immediately he goes out to find the empty jelly doughnut bag that he threw at the fire hydrant on his way home from school and even sorts out all the trash by the garbage that he neglected to do the previous night. In his article "Ethical fantasy for Children," Francis J. Molson states that "choosing between right and wrong and accepting the consequences of that choice are marks of maturity" (1982: 86). Thus, it might be claimed that Walter's change is an indication of his coming of age which could result in his ecological awareness and emotional maturity. In line with his newly acquired environmental awareness, a few days later on his birthday, he asks for a tree, which is planted near Rose's birthday tree. When he falls asleep that night, he dreams of the future again. In this dream, he is shown a different version––instead of a world of robots and machines, laundry hangs on the line, and a man mows his lawn with a motorless mower. Walter is delighted to see that the two little trees have grown tall and strong in the clean air. This second dream indicates that only if individuals, like Walter, are aware of their responsibilities towards the environment, can they dream of a better future. The story's message is that everyone plays a significant role in protecting nature.

A central theme in Chris Van Allsburg's stories is the development of a character – how the character's thoughts and feelings change for the better– and this change is often inferred. His ideas about his environment change at the end of the story, and he becomes more responsible and thoughtful, which highlights the importance of caring for the Earth not only for children but also for readers of all ages. When his dream turns into a nightmare for him, it teaches him

the importance of being thoughtful and responsible in the present. Thus, Chris Van Allsburg helps his readers to gain environmental awareness, learn how to achieve sustainability, and protect ecosystems. For instance, the child reader learns about litter, waste, recycling, conserving resources, and the importance of planning for future generations. Through dramatic illustrations and humor, we get a glimpse of what the future could be like if we did not change our habits. This is not only a great discussion starter but also a call to action.

III. *THE CURIOUS GARDEN*

The second picture book to be discussed in this chapter is *The Curious Garden* (1979) by Peter Brown who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in illustration at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena California. Having written and illustrated over ten widely popular books, Peter Brown has illustrated six books for other writers. In addition to authoring four *New York Times* bestsellers, he has also won the Caldecott Illustration Honor and received positive reviews from *Booklist, Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, and Horn Book Magazine*. Brown also received E. B. White Read Aloud Honors for his picture books *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild* (2013), *Children Make Terrible Pets* (2010), *The Curious Garden* (2009), and *Creepy Carrots* (2012). Finally, the 2011 Irma S. & James H. Black Award Honor and 2011 Parents Choice Award Silver Medal were given to *You Will Be My Friend* (2011). *The Curious Garden* is significant because of being able to convey several important messages for not only children but also adults. Brown creates a world in which we can sense the importance of curiosity, education, and even more important leadership. Therefore, the protagonist's one intentional action toward a better environment helps and heals not only the environment but also the inhabitants having lived in a lifeless city.

Having been inspired by the revival of the Highline railway on the west side of Manhattan, Brown combines appealing images with a story that is full of discovery and optimism In the epilogue, the author writes about the Highline railway project and how it stimulated him to write *The Curious Garden*:

> On the west side of Manhattan, there is an old, elevated railway called the Highline. Its trains rumbled high above the city streets for decades, but in 1980 the Highline was shut down and forgotten. Without people and trains getting in the way, nature was free to redecorate. Over the years, the rusty rails and gravel slowly gave way to wildflowers and trees. And if you look at the railway today you'll see a lush garden that curves above the streets and between buildings.
> …
> All of this made me curious: what would happen if an entire city decided to truly cooperate with nature? How would that city change? How would it all begin? (Brown, 2009)

As is clear from the statement above, the story can be read as a lesson about the value of education and leadership in developing positive relationships with the living world. The result is an inspiring ecological story that is a great read for both children and adults.

The Curious Garden is about a boy named Liam who likes to walk in the city even though the city is "a dreary place", "without gardens or trees or greenery of any kind" (Brown, 2009). It is a depressing city, very polluted, with factory fumes and ugly skyscrapers covering the sky, which forces people to stay indoors most of the time. Unlike those, Liam always walks curiously around the city. Considering the youngsters today, he is a more independent child who is allowed to go outside by himself, making the most of this priceless gift of freedom by exploring his city and finding isolated pockets of life there. In this way, Liam develops the abilities required for internal sustainability, self-reliance, and confidence. Through Liam's outdoor experiences that lead to a happy change in society, Brown also conveys the message that spending time outdoors, in nature, is better than sitting in front of the TV or playing video games and it could lead to exciting discoveries, which is also an indirect message for the children.

One day, while walking by himself around the old railway "he stumbled upon a dark stairwell leading up to the tracks" (Brown, 2009). With curiosity, he goes up to the railway only to find dying wildflowers and plants that need a gardener. He feels sorry for them and the next day he goes there to help dying flowers. He encounters several issues, but he quickly discovers what plants require to survive. When the blooms swell and cover the railroad rails, his effort and commitment pay off. Not being an "ordinary garden", Liam's garden wants "to explore" just like its young gardener often does (Brown, 2009). In a few months, the little a-gardener finds himself dealing with a garden "explore[s] every corner of the railway" (Brown, 2009). Finally, winter arrives forcing Liam to stay indoors, not being able to see his garden. We see him educating himself about gardening by reading books during the snowy days and finally, the snow starts melting after three months; he is much more knowledgeable about gardening. It should be noted that as a children's book, the story raises awareness of not only ecology but also the importance of education. In his book *How Children Learn*, John Holt points out the ways children should be educated. He writes that:

> Children do not need to be made to learn, told what to learn, or shown how. If we give them access to enough of the world, including our own lives and work in that world, they will see clearly enough what things are truly important to us and others, and they will make for themselves a better path into that world than we could make for them. (Holt, 2009: 157)

With *The Curious Garden,* Brown provides a vital example of children's learning and education. The young boy is not told to protect nature or "shown how" (Brown, 2009). He has access to the world without any restraints only to

discover an area in which he expands his knowledge and capability. It can be claimed, then, that Brown inspires children to educate themselves about the issues that would make them more knowledgeable and successful. Liam's enthusiasm about being a better gardener yields great results; when spring arrives, he puts his newly acquired knowledge into practice, which may lead young readers to reflect on the steps of learning and once more inspire them.

Liam does not try to get rid of "the tough little weeds and mosses" (Brown, 2009) and when the winter ends, they appear once more. As the story unfolds, we learn that even though these "popped up farther and farther from the railway and were closely followed by the more delicate plants" (Brown, 2009). In her well-known essay, "Why are Americans afraid of Dragons?" Ursula K. Le Guin writes that "To discipline something, in the proper sense of the word, does not mean to repress it, but to train it – to encourage it to grow, and act, and be fruitful, whether it is a peach tree or a human mind" (1974). Likewise, Liam's interaction with nature, by not repressing but encouraging it in Le Guin's words, once more yields positive results and the curious garden expands. Liam has a strong affinity for the garden's curiosity and irrepressibility and thus, he admires how it may appear in the most unexpected locations and may be in harmony with its environment while maintaining its character. He does not differentiate between weeds and flowers; he cares for them all while admiring the garden's resilience, brightness, and beauty, which shows the readers Liam's respect towards the garden's own tendencies and its own nature.

Children construct reality using a variety of sources including tales, songs, plays, movies, and other experiences that aid in codifying reality into repeatable common patterns. They learn about themselves and the environment they live in through these sources. Picture stories, like *The Curious Garden*, in particular, play a significant role in children's sense of reality because they offer knowledge and role models, lead the reader through the exploration of the real and fantastical worlds, and communicate values like empathy, courage, belonging, and diversity that are crucial for their development and growth. In this regard, the narrative simplicity of Brown's story sets a positive example and helps young readers to understand better and erase boundaries between the characters and themselves. Such simplicity also helps children to build empathy with the young Liam which would lead them to take him as a role model.

Social learning theory explains why people are prone to look to role models for advice as well as how role modeling may be connected to ethical leadership. According to the theory, imitation, and observation of role models play a significant part in how people learn what to do and how to act (Brown & Treviño, 2014: 588). Michael E. Brown and Linda K Treviño, henceforth, point out that "children select attractive ethical role models and learn from them by observing and emulating modeled behaviour" (2014: 589). I contend that children's stories should create role models that are not far different from the

children who are reading these stories. In this way, the young readers will feel empowered and gain self-confidence. Therefore, not only Liam as an enthusiastic young boy but also others in society become role models for both young and adult readers.

In her article entitled "Why Are They So Afraid of Children's Books? The Subversive Power of Imagination", Olga Bukhina discusses censorship regarding children's books. She contends that because of holding the power of giving messages to the next generations the authorities tend to censor children's books. She cogently argues that "Many books possess a hidden subversive power that helps the next generations to change the world" (Bukhina, 2019: 171). In a similar vein, in her essay, "Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" Le Guin writes about fantasy as a genre and how people choose to ignore its power and significance. She contends that:

> For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom (1974).

Despite the fact that neither rejection of fantasy as a genre, nor censorship is an issue of importance in this chapter, their claim is significant and applicable to understanding Liam's initiation for a better world. In the story, as the curious garden spreads around the city, more people become interested in gardening and more gardeners start to appear across the city, covering the buildings and streets in blooms and vegetation. That people are influenced by the curious garden and each other is something that needs special consideration. It shows that people can be guided easily to do some good for themselves and society. On the one hand, Liam's self-discovery of the garden, his interest in gardening, and his effort to gain knowledge in this new area are inspirational for young readers. On the other hand, the visible result of young Liam's experience, which is inspiring others to change their environment, is a message for children demonstrating that even only one individual has the power to change the people and the environment. It is also worth mentioning that Liam's influence is a subtle one instead of a direct pressure on others; yet, it is even more effective Emine Ulu Aslan and Bayram Bas (2020) argue that when one realizes his/her potential this self-realization is shared by other people in society.

> The first step of eco-criticism philosophy is the realization of the self-realization potential of the human being and starting to live consciously. In this way, the philosophy of self-realization, which has the belief that the consciousness acquired individually is shared by all humanity, becomes a lifestyle. In this lifestyle in which ecological consciousness spreads, there is a cycle where everything is interconnected. (Aslan & Bas, 2020: 713)

In line with what Aslan and Bas argue, Liam becomes a figure who starts a revolution for the city itself and its inhabitants because as people start integrating the living world into many aspects of their lives, the formerly gloomy and lifeless town gradually undergoes a complete transformation. It is a fact that people's quality of life can be improved by having access to green areas. This leads to healthier lifestyles, increased productivity among people and their families, and better lives for women, children, and the elderly.

As a result, not only the environment changes with Liam's revolution but also the people living in the city transform. They start conversing and socializing with each other, thus creating a livelier and merrier atmosphere for everyone, which directly improves people's mental health. Thus, the story is also conveying messages about the relationship between the environment and one's mental health. Environmental psychology is the study of how people relate to their surroundings, examining how both the constructed environment and the natural world have an impact on who we are as individuals. It is concerned with how individuals shape their environments and how various environments influence people's experiences and behavior. Liam and the other city dwellers simply experience the advantages of spending time in the natural world and engaging themselves with physical activities concerning nature. This changes not only their physical environment but also their social environment.

As the title suggests, the garden has its agency; it is a curious garden. The author uses anthropomorphization to convey the message. The garden's curiosity is what makes him reach the other parts of the city. In line with this notion, it can be claimed that human beings or nature do not act by themselves in the way of a better world; their interaction and cooperation could yield positive results. Eco-critics focus on the relationship between culture and nature, claiming that it is imperative that they co-exist and interact with each other. The garden's expansion into new territories along with human beings' constant care and improved knowledge work together for a better world as stated in the epilogue.

> It often seems impossible for nature to thrive in a city of concrete and brick and steel. But the more I've traveled, and the closer I've looked at the world around me, the more I've realized that nature is always eagerly exploring the places we've forgotten. You can find flowers and fields and even small forests growing wild in every city; you just have to look for them. (Brown, 2009)

At the end of the picture book, it is revealed: "Many years later, the entire city had blossomed. But of all the new gardens, Liam's favorite was where it all began" (Brown, 2009). Referring back to the social learning theory, we can infer that through imitating others around both nature and people acquire an awareness. According to Etienne Wenger, another scholar studying social learning theory, participation increases the efficiency of learning and helps individuals

construct identities. Here, participation refers to a broader process of becoming an active participant in the practices of social groups and developing identities in connection to these communities rather than merely local occurrences of participation in specific activities with specific persons (Wenger, 1998: 4). Learning as participation, in his words, "takes place through our engagement in actions and interactions, but it embeds this engagement in culture and history. Through these local actions and interactions, learning reproduces and transforms the social structure in which it takes place" (Wenger, 1998: 13). What happens to Liam and the city proves social learning theory and the impact of participation and developing new identities that lead to a positive change in the social structure.

CONCLUSION

In his article, "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," Glen A. Love claims that "[t]he most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world" (cited in Opperman, 2006: 106). It is my view that both *Just a Dream* and *The Curious Garden* can be read as fascinating examples of ecocritical reading. At the heart of both stories is a celebration of the characters who go through a dramatic change only to become more conscious about the environment, a change caused by either themselves or the characters around them. In Chris Van Allsburg's *Just a Dream*, the protagonist changes drastically as a result of his dream, which turns into a nightmare as it shows him possible versions of the future. Similarly, in *The Curious Garden*, not only the garden but also the other gardens along with the people change because of Liam's effort to make the curious garden alive again. Today we all face significant issues including rapid climate change, the ecological collapse of our oceans, the decline of significant biodiversity in wildlife, the increasing scarcity of freshwater, and other problems related to pollution that affect all of earth's inhabitants in one form or another. In addition to applying sustainable environmental practices, we can also combat environmental issues by raising the awareness of future generations, in other words, our children via literary texts in children's literature as Chris Van Allsburg and Peter Brown achieve successfully.

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IPEK ONMUS ORCID: 0000-0002-9917-0733
ILGIM VERYERI ALACA ORCID: 0000-0002-7512-1507
Koç University

Ecofantasy and Rural Industrialization: An Ecocritical Reading of Two Stories from Türkiye and China

Abstract: This paper provides readings of two different narratives of rural industrialization and its effects on human–nature and human–nonhuman interactions through the lens of ecocritical studies, namely Latife Tekin's *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley* and Xiu Xinyu's *The Stars We Raised*. These texts can be characterized as ecofantasy – a subgenre of speculative fiction that incorporates fantastical elements inspired by the natural world. This study examines the role of ecofantastical elements in these narratives, such as the talking plants in *The Children of Golden-Meadow Valley* and the sentient 'stars' in *The Stars We Raised*. It explores how these two texts engage with topics such as ecological consciousness and environmental justice, employing a set of three questions designed by the renowned ecofeminist scholar Greta Gaard for the studies of environmental children's literature.

Keywords: ecofantasy, ecofiction, ecofeminism, industrialization, human–nonhuman engagement

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an ecocritical study of two texts, drawing a comparative analysis of their treatment of industrial development and its impact on human–nature and human–nonhuman relationships in rural settings. One of these texts is a children's novel by a famous Turkish author known for her literary explorations of ecofeminist themes, while the other one is a speculative coming-of-age story written by a young Chinese author. We believe that the study of these texts is both timely and distinctive, given their origins in two relatively underrepresented regions within the field of children's literature studies, particularly when compared to the dominance of works originally written in English. These texts were selected for their thematic resonance with one another in addressing industrial development in rural settings, despite their different countries of origin. They present narratives that draw on local sensibilities while at the same time

addressing global ecological concerns, particularly those entangled with environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change at large. According to Suzanne Van der Beek and Sonali Kulkarni (2022), in order to have a more global perspective on environmental issues, it is critical to understand such narratives with their connections to the ecological and climate crises in different geographic regions. Ultimately, this global perspective, if attained, could serve as an invaluable asset for building bridges, sharing knowhow, and collaborating in real-life situations. As such, these two texts present a window into two different regions that hint at differing problems and resolutions, albeit fantastical, for the reader to consider. The special cases introduced can be pondered as hypothetical scenarios that might inspire readers from different parts of the world to rethink their relationship to their immediate natural surroundings. For instance, although Tekin's narrative is embellished with a fantastical style, it also concerns itself with mines and rapid industrial development in rural areas, which is a present concern in Turkey and actively discussed. In that manner, this book grounds itself in current challenges about mining, nature preservation, and pollution. Global awareness is a topic of ever-growing concern, and narratives from different parts of the world can reveal connections and foster communication in order to facilitate interconnectedness.

Both texts show characteristics of ecofantasy, an ecocritical subgenre of speculative fiction in which the fantastical framework is driven by nature-inspired elements. This fantasy standpoint makes it easier to delve into issues of a particular gravity that, if presented in realist fiction, might assume a more demanding literary voice. Fantasy serves as a method of alienation, creating a distance between readers and the narrative. This distance may help the author to introduce serious topics in a less didactic manner. This type of alienation through a fantastical framework allows readers to come into contact with an idea, only to stand at a distance from it and evaluate this experience afterwards. Alienation and distancing strategies can also be utilized in texts to bring a temporal change of environment in the narrative and give a glimpse of an imaginary situation. Van der Beek and Kulkarni address potential negative consequences of temporal or geographical alienation and the distancing strategies used in environmental narratives, such as climate-change stories set in a distant future or focused only on locations such as the Arctic or Africa (2022: 37–38). They argue that such narratives might unintentionally alienate readers. The perceived temporal or geographical distance between the reader and the story can cause problems that are concrete and pressing to seem abstract and distant. However, we argue that alienation and distancing strategies can also be utilized in creating more approachable and engaging environmental stories for children and young adults. Both of the texts that we are working with here are set in realistic rural environments, in the authors' respective countries, and in the contemporary era, avoiding the unintentional alienation highlighted by

Van der Beek and Kulkarni. These texts instead establish a different layer of alienation through their fantastical framework. We argue that this type of distancing can be an effective strategy in helping readers to engage with environmental issues in a less didactic manner. Taking a non-didactic approach in ecological storytelling can be a strategic choice. This might allow readers freedom to explore and evaluate their own position in relation to environmental issues, without feeling coerced to follow a certain path. Such a subjective approach facilitates a ground for contemplation and critical thinking where readers are allowed to reassess their relationship with the environment and recognize their own degree of agency.

This paper will examine these two texts in juxtaposition to highlight the range of different attitudes toward industrial development in rural areas. There is a rich scholarly tradition that studies the dichotomies human–nature and nature–technology in literature. Through the lens of speculative fiction, these classic dichotomies are reinterpreted with even further clarity, as speculative fiction operates by making the figurative literal (Todorov 1970: 76–77), thereby enhancing our understanding of these symbolic oppositions. In narratives centering around human–nature conflict, the protagonists often find themselves in a struggle against the forces of nature. Traditionally, these forces are portrayed as paradoxical: simultaneously feared and yet respected; unpredictable yet ceaseless; destructive yet reproductive. They are seen as mysterious, awesome, and simply beyond human understanding. However, with the advent of the Enlightenment, nature was reframed as an impediment to civilization and a civilized world: a domain to be conquered with the help of science. This shift in perspective prompted Enlightenment scholars to reassess the defining characteristics of human civilization and its stance towards nature. Within this new framework, it was logic, science, and technology that were designated as human civilization's chief achievements, and these stood in contrast to nature which was often depicted as unpredictable and uncontrollable. In literary studies, this is still, perhaps anachronistically, discussed as the "man vs. nature" conflict. It is through this repositioning of humanity that the epic myth of *man* as the rational animal is created, and his scientific maturity marks his triumphant departure from the precarious nest of *mother nature*. Any violent acts he commits to oppress and conquer her are justified in the name of advancing human civilization through technological development and industrial growth. The gendered nature of this discourse is not accidental; gender stereotypes are rather deeply embedded in "man vs. nature" narratives, and the systems of oppression that they describe for dominating nature parallel the systems of exploitation imposed upon women, people of color, and other marginalized groups (Warren 2000: 1–2). One of ecofeminism's concerns is to untangle and analyze these gender-coded dynamics. Ecofeminist thinkers and authors criticize and reject the justification for exploitation of nature and non-human

entities in the name of humanity. In her 1986 thought piece *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, author Ursula Le Guin expresses her exasperation with the narratives (whether of history or fiction) that glorify violence toward or in response to nature, saying that: "[…] if that's what it took [to be human], to make a weapon and kill with it, then evidently, I was either extremely defective as a human being, or not human at all" (Le Guin, 1986: para. 11). In the texts selected for this paper, each author engages with these themes from their own unique perspectives. The following sections will provide ecocritical readings of these texts while also bringing out their distinctive features.

GOLD OR MEADOW: CONFLICTING INTERESTS OF "MAN" AND NATURE

The first book that this paper examines is a children's book titled *Altınçayır Vadisi'nin Çocukları* (trans. *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley*) written by the contemporary Turkish author Latife Tekin and published in 2020 in Turkish.[1] It is the first children's book written by this author, and in 2020 it was included on the International Youth Library's White Ravens list for international children's and youth literature. Tekin is a pioneer of ecocritical writing in Turkey. Environmental issues, especially the way they intersect with social problems and injustices, have always been at the core of her writing, including her previous novels written for adults. In an article that analyses Tekin's 2018 novel *Manves City*, which talks about tragic events that take place in a fictional post-industrial city, Ozlem Akyol describes Tekin's writing as 'ecosocial' (Akyol, 2021). Ecosocialism combines socialist and green concerns under the umbrella of ecocritical studies and aims to turn a critical lens toward environmental issues that disproportionately impact impoverished areas and underprivileged populations. In a newspaper interview, Tekin has expressed her interest in exploring the intersecting of social injustices and environmental problems, saying, "I had first turned to nature, to things humans deem as the 'other'… Yet, as I heard the cries of the underprivileged and the impoverished, it has become my calling to write these novels [that bring these two issues together]" (Tuna, 2018).

Tekin's interest in these topics is rooted in her own upbringing and childhood experiences. Tekin was born in 1957 in rural Turkey to a family of modest means and seven children. When she was nine years old, her family migrated to Istanbul in search of better economic opportunities. Tekin grew up experiencing firsthand the rural–urban divide and the myriad of problems that rural-to-urban migrants face (Kas, 2019:66). In the 1970s and 1980s, Turkey

[1] At the time of writing, this novel has not yet been translated into English. All translations of quotations from this work, including its title, were made by the authors of this article.

went through a politically turbulent time period, with violent conflicts between right-wing and left-wing groups. Tekin laments that most Turkish authors of her generation, who spent their formative years engrossed in these political struggles, largely overlooked environmental and ecological issues (Tekin, 2014 qtd. in Ergin, 2020: 53). In a 2020 study on ecocriticism in Turkey, Meliz Ergin[2] suggests that by combining "a political reading of ecological problems with an ecological reading of social problems," Tekin delivers a literary style and narrative that is different from other politically motivated authors of her generation (2020: 53–54). Tekin also believes that younger generations of readers are more receptive to topics related to the environment, compared to her own generation (Tekin, 2011 qtd. in Ergin, 2020: 53), revealing a potential source of motivation for her decision to write a children's book which addresses these critical issues.

The Children of Goldenmeadow Valley, just like Tekin's books for adults, explores difficult themes such as industrialization, pollution, rural poverty, rural depopulation, and resistance against capitalist exploitation. *The Children of Goldenmeadow Valley* is a magical yet mundane story of a small rural town with gold reserves. In this story, the inhabitants of Goldenmeadow Valley are left worried and divided as the town's mines reopen under new ownership after a long and relatively peaceful hiatus of fifteen years. Despite navigating these heavy themes, Tekin skillfully avoids a didactic tone. Tekin's literary style is whimsical and lighthearted, which strikes a balance with her subject matter. Through her creative use of figurative language and unexpected euphemisms, she alleviates the harshness of unpleasant concepts or events. For example, when a villager gets diagnosed with cancer, it is referred to as a "bad illness," (Tekin, 2020: 64) and when talking about the impacts of the pollution caused by the mine, Tekin writes: "[… as for the trees] the poison took away their breath […]" (Tekin, 2020: 77). Tekin's deliberate use of innovative language that is based on an ecological framework, exemplified by expressions such as these, brings an ecopoetic dimension to her writing, while leaving it still accessible to a young audience.

The Children of Goldenmeadow Valley is not only a story about the industrial development of a small town, it is also about its mythology, local tales, superstitions, as well as its imaginative flora. The town's local plants play an important role in the book, as the protagonist learns from her grandmother that the medicinal herbs that grow in Goldenmeadow Valley's woods can empower children to treat any illnesses their mothers have; and that those who pass under the trees on which the very last drops of rain have fallen can have their wishes granted.

The Children of Goldenmeadow Valley also contains certain allegorical aspects. These aspects can be observed in the friend groups formed by the

[2] See Meliz Ergin's book *Ecocriticsm and Turkey* (2024) from Bloomsbury Publications for further information on this topic.

children of the village based on shared interests or ambitions: such as the Dreamers (of which the protagonist, Asinaz, is the last remaining member), the Gold Rushers, the Bird-Watchers, the Scientists, and the newly-emerging Leaders. The nicknames given to villagers also reinforce the allegorical tone, such as 'Realtor Bali the Trickster' ('Emlakçı Alavere Bali', in the original), who tries to convince the villagers to sell their land to the mining company, his son 'Selim the Busybody' (Kımılcık Selim), known for swindling others, and 'Nabitcar the Gold Trader', a historical character who founded the first gold mine in the village. All three of these characters are talked about in a negative vein, especially in terms of their affiliation with the mining company, and they can be considered the antagonists of the story. However, Tekin does not dehumanize them. For instance, despite his flaws, Selim the Busybody is hinted to be a caring father, and when he gets diagnosed with a tumor, the children of the village are sincerely upset about this predicament. This nuanced approach allows the narrative to avoid the pitfalls of one-dimensional characters despite its allegorical framework.

The same principle also applies to characters who are generally seen in a positive light. Throughout the narrative, we get to explore their shortcomings as well. For example, Sultanay Dudu, who is the grandmother of the main character, is portrayed as a wise old woman archetype, serving as both a mentor and spiritual guide to Asinaz. She teaches Asinaz about the medicinal uses of local plants and important weather events of Goldenmeadow Valley, and she also tells Asinaz stories about the village's history. One passage illustrates Sultanay Dudu's intimate relationship with the village and nature: "Those who couldn't listen to the thunder of the waterfall, would not be able to enter the [secret] gardens. There wasn't anyone left in Goldenmeadow but Sultanay Dudu who could listen to and decipher the language of the falling water" (Tekin, 2020: 44). However, the villagers' opinions on Sultanay Dudu are divided. A portion of the villagers look up to her, showing respect for her knowledge and skills. They go to her for fortunetelling, and she also plays an important role in organizing and leading the protests against the mining company. Other villagers, however, associate Sultanay Dudu's knowledge of herbal medicine and fortunetelling skills with witchcraft and try to undermine her credibility. It is worth noting that those who disapprove of Sultanay Dudu and spread rumors about her are also those who cooperate with the mining company, such as Realtor Bali the Trickster. This is another direct manifestation of the underlying ecofeminist framework of *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley*, as women such as Sultanay Dudu are portrayed as having a more close-knit relationship with nature and taking the initiative to protect it. In contrast, male characters such as Realtor Bali are stereotypically depicted as financially motivated and greedy at the expense of the well-being of nature and their village. Realtor Bali slurs Sultanay Dudu as "the witch with the motorcycle" (Tekin, 2020: 62). From

this innovative name-calling, we can get a glimpse of the world built by Tekin. On the one hand, it is a fantasy land with witches, magical talking plants, and time travel. It is rumored that there are mysterious crypts under Sultanay Dudu's house, that she possesses supernatural powers, and that she meets up with her female pirate acquaintance every day in the caverns by the sea. But as the audience, we are never sure what to make of these rumors and stories because, on the other hand, the world of Goldenmeadow Valley is also a very mundane one. Sultanay Dudu is called "the witch with the motorcycle" simply because she is unable to travel to and from her house on foot due to her old age, and her so-called supernatural powers could merely be traditional practices or rituals that she inherited from her matriarchal ancestors. Her primary concern appears to be to protect her village from further exploitation by capitalist corporations. The fantasy aspects of the story are in a constant clash with the mundane and call the reader to question how much of what they are reading is just an exaggerated and childlike retelling of common life events, and how much of it is actually fantasy built into the world of Goldenmeadow Valley.

The storyline about the 'Karaboğular', petrified humanlike creatures in the forest, also blurs the line between reality and fantasy. These creatures, whose presence is accompanied by the sound of the cracking of a whip, are rumored to be the spirits of former laborers who were forced to dig for gold in the mines by a cruel king of the past. However, when Asinaz sees the face of one of these petrified creatures, it reminds her of her father. We find out that Asinaz's father used to work in the mines until an accident that caused him to lose his legs and resulted in the cessation of mining activities in the village fifteen years ago. Although this accident is not explicitly narrated in the book, we understand that it was a very traumatic event that took a financial as well as a psychological toll on the family. Asinaz's mother, employed at a nearby holiday resort as a service-industry worker, is described as someone who sleeps a lot, is often melancholic and moody, and is evidently "having a hard time carrying the weight of the past" (Tekin, 2020: 22), possibly as a post-traumatic reaction to this accident.

The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley, similar to Tekin's other novels, shows characteristics of magical realism and draws inspiration from oral traditions, such as folktales, legends, and mythology (Kas, 2019:66). *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley* can also be defined as a work of ecofantasy. Ecofantasy pays special attention to the codependency of humans and nature (Goga, 2018: 58). Brawley (2014) discusses two major functions of fantasy writing. Firstly, fantasy mimics or recreates the feeling of "awe" that readers experience from religious texts and practices, and secondly, it urges the readers to reconsider their perception of and their relation to the natural world (2014: 5–6). He argues that fantasy offers the readers secular narratives that they can enjoy in a similar way religious people may enjoy spiritual texts (2014: 9). In

The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley, nature comes closest in replacing this definition of the divine. However, nature is not all-powerful; it is not immune to harm and destruction, yet it possesses the power to rejuvenate. This is exemplified when Sultanay Dudu interprets the arrival of the Blue Crow as an auspicious sign: "'The Black Forest will be green again; the breath of a new life has been drawn into the pines,' she said" (Tekin 2020: 67).

Having narrowly escaped a thorough defeat by industrialization fifteen years ago, Tekin's Goldenmeadow Valley still resists *domestication* by the mining corporation. However, it is less guarded towards Asinaz. Goldenmeadow Valley's plants talk to her for the first time after aiding her in saving her grandmother and let her give them names (Tekin 2020:86). From the eyes of its post-industrial readers, Goldenmeadow Valley is full of mysteries, unpredictability, unknown dangers, as well as adventures. It is also a place of nostalgia and childhood.

FARMING STARS IN A POST-INDUSTRIAL WORLD

The second work that we discuss is a short story titled *The Stars We Raised*, written by the Chinese author Xiu Xinyu. Xiu is a young author in her late twenties who lives in Beijing, China, and she mainly writes speculative and science fiction. She wrote *The Stars We Raised* in 2017 in Chinese. It was translated into English by Judy Yi Zhou in 2021 and published as part of the Chinese speculative-fiction anthology *The Way Spring Arrives*. This anthology exclusively consists of the works of female and non-binary Chinese authors of speculative fiction. It is important to note that the anthology in which Xiu's work appears is not a collection devoted specifically to children's or young-adult literature. However, *The Stars We Raised* speaks strongly to experiences of childhood and growing up. This has inspired us to consider it in a cross-cultural dialogue with Tekin's *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley*. Both texts essentially tell the story of a rural village undergoing industrial development, yet following drastically different paths.

The Stars We Raised is a coming-of-age story that poses interesting questions about human–nonhuman relationships within a capitalist framework. Just like the Goldenmeadow Valley, *The Stars We Raised* also takes place in a rural setting undergoing certain changes due to industrial development. According to the speculative narrative of the story, this village becomes one of a few dozen places in the world where a strange phenomenon occurs: unidentified objects that people refer to as 'stars' descend from the sky. These are rock-like objects, and they seem to organically grow in size over time. They emit fluorescent light, but as they grow, their light starts to dim, and they start to float in the air. It is these features that gain them the name 'stars'. Not much is discovered about these objects, beyond the fact that they do not pose any immediate threat to

people and that they can be ground up into 'stardust' to be used as a construction material. As this material is moderately sturdier than regular construction materials, it makes the stars an asset for the villagers, but not enough of an asset to relieve them of their financial problems. What these objects are, why they appeared, and where they come from remain unknown throughout the story. "If these stars had a message, no one knew what it was," comments the unnamed narrator (Xiu, 2022: para. 11). This attitude shows parallels with the attitude of industrial and capitalist societies towards nature and natural resources. They are simply controlled, possessed, and turned into profit without being understood. In the village where *The Stars We Raised* is set, the villagers develop a custom of having children "care" for the stars during their infancy stage, even though the stars do not require any kind of special care:

> […] We would wipe the baby stars with melted snow, hoping the pristine water would wash away the dullness and make them shine more brightly. Some […] under the belief that their baby stars could learn to understand simple commands, would cup them in their palms, hold them up like offerings, and talk to them every day. (Xiu, 2022: para. 4)

When the stars reach an optimum size, their parents then take them back and sell them to factories:

> No matter what we did or did not do, however, the stars always grew up. They became larger and lighter, and by the following spring, […] would turn an opaque grayish brown. That was when our parents would try to get us to grind them into dust and sell them. (Xiu, 2022: para. 5)

Through this practice which largely parallels livestock farming, *The Stars We Raised* tells the story of how the children of the village cope with the situation. As early as elementary school, the children become involved in this process by acting as caretakers or trainers of the stars, only to have them taken away by their parents each year. Some of the children, especially one called Jiang Yang, feel conflicted at this situation and refuse to let their stars go. However, for their parents, the stars are an important source of extra income, and thus the children must make compromises. By the time the children reach middle school, their gamified interest in the stars turns into apathy:

> No city kids had ever bothered to try raising stars. They had all sorts of toys, like transformers, dolls, and stuffed animals. City people had thought of stars as strange objects with a mysterious composition and unknown origins, so it would be best to keep the children as far away from the stuff as possible. (Xiu, 2022: para. 57)

This excerpt describes the change in the narrator's attitude towards the stars as she grows up and starts to navigate her place and status in society, especially

in relation to urban dwellers. It is hinted that the children of the village slowly start to become aware and self-conscious of their rural upbringing. As children grow up to be adults, many of them leave the village for better education or employment opportunities in big cities. The village also undergoes changes, as the harvest of the stars becomes regulated by the government to keep their population under control, similar to measures applied to wildlife hunting and fishing:

> […] and the village had even developed an elaborate set of star-mining standards. The mountains were now blocked off all year, except in winter, when the government paid the village to hire a bunch of locals to collect grown-up stars all at once. For young people who came back once a year [during the Chinese New Year holiday], it was a good seasonal job for extra cash. (Xiu, 2022: para. 84)

These regulations put further distance between humans and the non-human stars, and transform star-harvesting into merely a new underpaid job opportunity for villagers. In this narrative, what could have been an extraordinary event – a possibly extraterrestrial entity, and one capable of building emotional bonds with humans, descending to Earth – is rendered mundane by the priorities of capitalist society. Initially, children take notice of the remarkable nature of this event, but as they grow older, their priorities shift, and they even begin to doubt whether their bonds with the stars were not merely a part of their childish fantasies. In Tekin's novel, the changing priorities of children as they grow up are expressed by the groups they belong to: the Gold Rushers and the Scientists gain popularity, a new group called the Leaders appears, and Asinaz's group, the Dreamers, is reduced to a single member. Asinaz's best friend, who moved to the big city with her family, leaves Asinaz's persistent letters unanswered, emphasizing the symbolic distance and divide between the urban and the rural. This change is mirrored in Xiu's *The Stars We Raised* when the "dreamer" of this story, Jiang Yang, finally ends up grinding the star that he raised as a child into stardust.

THREE QUESTIONS ON ECOCRITICISM

Fiction has the potential to stimulate readers emotionally and intellectually in order to create a response to ongoing global issues. When it comes to ecocritical narratives, it can be argued that the desired responses would be an increased interest in nature-related issues, as well as prompting individuals to reevaluate their status as humans in relation to the nonhuman world. Małecki (2012), among others, highlights the substantial work that is needed in order to tackle this challenge, suggesting that fiction alone cannot be sufficient to take all the necessary actions, even though it can stir up substantial debate and encourage the readers to support this cause. Gaard proposes three questions to

evaluate the capacity of ecocritical children's literature in creating these desired responses (2008: 15; 2009: 327). Each of these three questions corresponds to one of the three steps in the 'logic of domination' as defined by ecofeminist studies: alienation, hierarchy, and domination (Gaard, 2008: 12). The 'logic of domination' and its three steps play an important role in the normalization and justification of violence against marginalized groups and, within the context of ecofeminism, against nature and non-human entities.

The first question is: "How does the text address the ontological question, 'Who am I?' Is the human self-identity constructed in relation or opposition to nature, animals, and diverse human cultures/identities?" (Gaard, 2008:15). According to Gaard, in order to dismantle the myth of a separate self and alienation,[3] which is the first step of the 'logic of domination', narratives can showcase interdependence between humans and the non-human world, challenging the assumptions of human superiority and independence (Gaard, 2009: 327). In *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley*, characters such as Sultanay Dudu are in a codependent relationship with nature and they do not distinguish themselves as separate entities from it. However, characters such as Realtor Bali alienate themselves from nature, elevate the benefits they can obtain over its well-being, and dominate it, following the three steps in the 'logic of domination'. *The Stars We Raised* illustrates the level of detachment through humanity's disinterest in finding out the actual nature or the origin of the stars. The villagers and government are only interested in benefiting from the stars financially. Even though children initially connect with the stars on a personal and passionate level, as they grow up, they learn to adopt a more "pragmatic" attitude and internalize the mainstream attitude towards the stars and other nonhuman beings. They distance and alienate themselves from them, elevate themselves and their economic interests to a different level, refusing to believe that the stars may be sentient, and lastly, dominate them by collecting and selling them. Both texts engage in a critical examination of how the myth of the separate self is constructed in order to financially benefit from non-human entities.

The second question is: "How does the narrative define the ecojustice problem? Does the narrative conclusion offer an appropriate strategy for responding to the problem posed in the story, rejecting hierarchy in favor of community and participatory democracy?" (Gaard, 2008: 16). Gaard explains that the 'logic of domination' necessitates a hierarchical structure that prioritizes the advancement of human civilization over the well-being of nature. Narratives

[3] Alienation, in this context, should be distinguished from the distancing strategies discussed earlier in this paper. In the former case, alienation is employed to temporarily distance readers from harsh realities, providing them a safe space to reflect on these difficult issues in an approachable manner. In the latter, the act of alienation specifically targets non-human entities, marking them as separate from and inferior to humans.

can counteract these rigid value judgements by depicting diverse communities without hierarchical structures (Gaard, 2009: 327). This theme is vividly explored in *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley,* where the main dispute among the villagers stems from their differing priorities and the hierarchies that these priorities imply. *The Stars We Raised* explores the same concept in a somewhat more pessimistic manner through Jiang Yang's futile efforts to resist the mainstream hierarchical structure by refusing to grind the star he raised into dust. Neither of the texts studied in this paper directly calls for action, but they clearly convey a message that criticizes the damaging actions of hierarchical capitalist institutions. As mentioned in the introduction, narratives that opt for a non-didactic approach may provide readers room to engage with these themes on their own terms, encouraging their critical thinking and independent contemplation.

The third question complements the previous ones, this time inquiring about the extent of agency attributed to nature in ecocritical texts: "What kind of agency does the text recognize in nature? Is nature an object to be saved by the heroic child actor? Is nature a damsel in distress, an all-sacrificing mother, or does nature have its own subjectivity and agency?" (Gaard, 2008: 18). This question aims to dismantle the final step of the 'logic of domination' which is the physical and spiritual domination of nature by stripping it of its agency and subjectivity. In both texts studied here, nature plays a more passive role with little agency over its fate. In *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley,* it can be argued that the self-renewal of the Black Forest, despite its devastation at the hands of the mining company, is a testimony to its resilience and its intrinsic will to persist. In *The Stars We Raised,* it is expressed that the stars hardly need human care in order to go through their life cycle; they persevere regardless of human intervention. These non-human entities demonstrate the capacity to not only exist and survive but also to flourish on their own. Yet, the impact that human civilization has on them can be severely devastating. However, their attitude towards humans is marked by compassion and benevolence. This is vividly illustrated in the sentient talking plants' interaction with Asinaz in *The Children of the Goldenmeadow Valley*, when they come to Asinaz and her grandmother's aid in their time of need, symbolizing their agency and intrinsic goodwill. Thus, the entanglement of humans and nature is made visible, and their coexistence is vividly portrayed. The two ecofantasy narratives that we evaluated can also be reminders of our own estrangement from the natural world around us, which may be summarized as follows:

> […] we have become estranged, othered, from the planet and from our bodies, the ghosts of our past we hold within exposes us. But we are tied together by a genealogy, a history of our bodies entangled on this landscape with others. Noticing attunes us to worlds otherwise unrecognised and reconfiguring our sensing of bodies forces us into a new recognition of our histories. (Malone et al. 2020: 110–111)

In that manner, the two selected narratives can serve as aide-mémoires for revisiting the various ways in which human–nature entanglements and relational positionings can be built. A closer look at these texts reveals the ever-changing scenarios we can envision or critically engage with, in fiction and the real world, with the aim of exploring those blurred boundaries.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided in-depth readings of two ecofantastical narratives that center around rural industrialization and discussed them through an ecocritical lens. The cross-cultural dialogue between these environmental texts helped us peruse a more nuanced picture of a rural village undergoing industrial development. Through a study of these narratives, we explored the impact that rural industrial development has on human–nature and human–nonhuman relationships and delved into the ways in which these texts critically engage with topics such as ecological consciousness and environmental justice. The final part of this paper analyzed these two texts using a framework of three questions designed by ecofeminist scholar Greta Gaard, with an aim to evaluate the potential social impact of ecocritical narratives. These questions seek to understand ecocritical narratives through the lens of the 'logic of domination' formulated by ecofeminist studies. These questions reveal strategies taken by authors Tekin and Xiu to make visible and dismantle the prevalent 'logic of domination' mindset that justifies human civilization's exploitation of the nonhuman world. We argue that these narratives foster a critical engagement with environmental issues, facilitating a bridge between reality and fantasy, prompting a dual sense of alienation from what we know and what is foreign to us concomitantly. They enable us to imagine the ecological transformations that rural areas are going through or can go through in the near future, encouraging a degree of awareness and contemplation through an ecocritical lens.

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BERNADETA NIESPOREK-SZAMBURSKA ORCID: 0000-0001-9935-6733
University of Silesia in Katowice

MAGDALENA OCHWAT ORCID: 0000-0002-0178-165X
University of Silesia in Katowice

Humanities Education for the Climate in a Polish Studies/Slavic Studies Application[1]

Abstract: The study presents an international interdisciplinary project obtained as a grant from the International Visegrad Fund in the category referred to as strategic projects, implemented with four partners from the Visegrad countries: Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland[2]. The project assumptions are outlined here, namely: laying down the foundations in the Visegrad. Four countries for a humanistic, multifaceted, modern education of the general public with a sense of responsibility for the climate present and future of the planet, the premises underlying the project, its concept based on two complementary parts, its aims, and the implementation plan. Due to the completion of the project, the results are also described here that have already been obtained in terms of studying curriculum frameworks and teaching aids, with a particularly detailed presentation of survey research related to the climate catastrophe that took place in Poland, attracting substantial interest from the community and from the media. The activities concluding the project are also described, as well as program recommendations in the field of education at all levels, and hope is expressed in relation to the future outcomes of the planned pro-climate education.

Keywords: pro-climate education, climate, ecology, environmental humanities, new humanities, ecodidactic materials.

Aspects related to counteracting climate change are among the most significant challenges of the 21st century. What is alarming is both the pace of the changes (although research by climate scientists proves that they are more a rule than an

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exception) and their cause, namely anthropogenic pollution. It is our increasingly numerous species that is consuming more and more energy, drastically changing land use and, as a result, certain characteristics of the Earth's surface (e.g. through urbanization, deforestation, farmland conversion, and drainage of wetlands), important in heat transfer processes. It has become justified to call our times the Anthropocene, as it is human activity that has produced an effect comparable to the powerful natural geophysical processes of the past.

The climate scientists' diagnosis of the global threat of an environmental catastrophe has become a reality (Ripple at al. 2020). Over 11,000 signatories from 153 countries summed up the climate emergency and synthetically indicated six key areas in which changes should be made: energy, short-lived pollutants, nature, food, the economy, and population. We do not know the exact scale of their impact, but it is worth realizing that they do not operate independently and autonomously. They most probably have a combined influence, and only their resultant effect can slightly shift the trajectory of the Earth's climate towards one that is less destructive and dangerous for humans, and even for most organisms in general. The humanities have an important role to play in the area of influencing change, a role that tends to be underestimated and often not widely recognized as an essential element of the recovery system faced with the state of climate emergency. The latter is not merely a "scientific fact" in terms of scale and figures. The respective endangerment is actually, as historian Julia Adeney Thomas noted, "a question of both scale and value. Only the humanities and social sciences […] can fully articulate what we may lose" (Thomas 2014: 1588). In fact, the climate crisis is also a social crisis, it is a question of changing mentality and consciousness, a question of justice that requires people to have competences only the humanities can allow them to develop: the ability to empathize with another human being, but also with non-human beings, the ability "to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person" (Nussbaum 2016: 23), of another being. Understanding the importance of humanistic values has become a premise for many educators and researchers in the area of the humanities. Other premises included:

- → calls from international organizations (notably: UN 1982) to take responsibility to keep our blue planet and its inhabitants alive;
- → activities of states, local organizations, business and local authorities towards achieving climate neutrality (Ministry of the Environment 2008);
- → high awareness among young people concerning the status of the Earth's climate and risks, as well as the resulting concern.

THE PROJECT AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

However, young people's awareness and knowledge are insufficient, often being trivialized and superficial, and many people do not make a connection

between the events they experience on a daily basis and global processes, such as global climate change and global warming. In order to meet the climate-related demands of the modern world, a group of researchers and educationalists in the field of the humanities from the Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Humanistic Education at the University of Silesia in Katowice invited researchers from the Visegrad Group countries to pursue joint pro-climate activities. The project team included representatives of universities and schools from the V4 countries, thus modeling a clearly international perspective. They include researchers from Palacký University in Olomouc, Comenius University in Bratislava and Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, as well as teachers from the National Polish School in Hungary. The project participants as well as the guests invited to contribute represent many areas of humanities, which makes the research interdisciplinary. Practitioners are also involved: teachers, educationalists and mentors from different institutions and educational institution levels in the Visegrad Group countries. The harmonized meetings of this group of researchers and practitioners made it possible to develop an innovative standard involving an integrated, multifaceted and comprehensive view of the matter, and ensured effectiveness of the activities carried out.

The main aim set for the project was to establish, in the four V4 countries: Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, the foundations for a humanistic, multifaceted, modern education of the general public with a sense of responsibility for the climate present and future of the planet. For the project implementers, climate education means building knowledge, carrying out practical activities for the sake of the climate and, above all, forming humans as conscious inhabitants of the Earth using content and methods appropriate for a networked society. In the process of building knowledge, the project participants adopted a humanistic perspective, making environmental[3]/green/new engaged humanities the reference source of scientific knowledge for the project (Nycz 2017: 19–27). This makes it possible to create justifications as well as theoretical and methodological foundations for research in this paradigm. The set of instruments for education, encompassing theoretical and practical knowledge of climate in texts of culture and about the implications of change for humans, is provided by environmental didactics.

[3] Environmental/green/new humanities understood as an interdisciplinary methodology taking into account the aspect of human/non-human relations. In this line of research, environmental studies are enriched by a humanistic perspective, with the humanities changing at the same time, extending the scope of research to include the natural world: plants, animals, rocks, rivers, and the Earth at large. Environmental humanities include environmental philosophy, environmental history, anthropological studies, social geography, political ecology, eco-economics, and ecocriticism (Bińczyk 2018: 186), cf. also the definition of "ecological humanities" (Domańska 2013).

The project that involves building competences and good civic practices with a sense of responsibility for the Earth's climate condition has two complementary parts. It consists in:

- → diagnosing the current status and
- → designing institutional, substantive and didactic forms of action for the time of climate crisis.

The project is now in its third year of implementation[4]. In the first phase, emphasis was placed on disseminating expert knowledge about the climate: highly attended meetings with experts (masterclasses) and conferences featuring researchers and teachers from outside the project, but involved in pro-climate education, were held. Webinars and workshops for both teachers and students were and have continued to be held in all V4 countries to promote environmental actions[5]. In relation to these, a plan was made to repeat/extend part of the competence survey three years after the end of the project to verify the effectiveness of the teaching activities undertaken by the project team (cf. www.hec.platforma.us.edu.pl).

During the two years of project implementation, research was also carried out concerning the place and scope of knowledge about the climate in the core curriculum, syllabuses and textbooks for the first language and for other humanities and social sciences subjects (e.g. second languages, geography). They were analyzed and interpreted to diagnose the current educational offering. A similar survey will also be carried out for the selected study curricula. The awareness/competence of Polish language and literature teachers, students and parents were also studied.

The initial diagnosis indicates that both the curriculum offered, in terms of the teaching aids (textbooks), and the competence of some of the respondents, are very modest. There is scarce content conducive to pro-climate education expressed explicitly in the core curricula, and textbooks (for Polish as the first language or as a second language) contain equally few pro-environmental activities at the level of tasks and exercises for students. The analysis also showed that educational documents and textbooks offered many more potential opportunities in this respect: the framework curricula include content drawing attention to the relationships between words and the world of nature, the books contain quite a lot of texts for ecodidactic use, but they lack environmentally-profiling tasks (Niesporek-Szamburska, Przybyla 2021; Olchowa 2021). Therefore, for climate

[4] This study was created in 2023, when the HEC project was in its third (and final) year. The project ended on September 30, 2023, but the instruments created then are still being developed. See www.hec.platforma.us.edu.pl

[5] Examples of workshop topics include: 1) Climate catastrophe on paper? Non-fiction literature at the time of the Anthropocene; 2) Green sells? Commercial advertising – a case study; 3) Ecocritical Reading: Poems by Wisława Szymborska; 4) Ecocriticism and Climate Fiction in Polish and Slovak Literature.

education to be present in the content and activities of the students, it is essential to involve and prepare the teachers as the persons eliciting the potential pro-environmental capacity from the curriculum and the texts.

At this point, it is worth dedicating some more space to the survey research, as it covered a substantial group of respondents, and the findings generated considerable interest not only among educators and researchers, but also in the broader community. The survey research also made it possible to collect unique, comprehensive data on the implementation of environmental humanities at each stage of school education. It furthermore made it possible to confirm the role of teachers in supporting students' pro-climate attitudes, as well as to find out about solutions for activating the teachers'/Polish studies specialists' communities in the area studied. Finally, it made it possible to obtain information on the linguistic competences of Polish language and literature teachers, primary and secondary school students, and parents of students with regard to knowledge about climate change.

The survey research within the project was carried out from January 2021 until the end of March 2022. Three surveys were carried out at the time: among 234 Polish language and literature teachers[6], 2,181 primary and secondary school students, and 303 parents of students. A total of 87 questions were asked in this survey triad, including 58 close-ended questions, 18 open-ended questions, and 11 semi-open-ended questions.

Reviewing the findings of the three surveys from today's perspective, one cannot help but compare awareness between the respondent groups. Environmental awareness is based on knowledge, so questions about the assessment of education related to the climate crisis, as well as to the state of perceived satisfaction with its quality were relevant. A total of 71.67 % of the teachers surveyed believe that there is not enough education about the climate crisis at school (Guzy, Ochwat 2021a). The same opinion was expressed by 67 % of the parents surveyed (Guzy, Ochwat 2022). Students are not satisfied either, with only 13.85 % feeling happy with the quality of pro-climate

[6] The first survey questionnaire for the research was developed in a more extensive team, and subsequently they were conducted in Poland by two researchers: Anna Guzy and Magdalena Ochwat. Due to the need to analyze only fully completed questionnaires, the final analysis included 120 questionnaires completed by Polish teachers, 1,227 student questionnaires, and 225 questionnaires completed by parents of students of years 4 to 8 of primary school and parents of secondary school students. Researchers invited teachers and students to participate in the survey through the university website (www.us.edu.pl), Interdisciplinary Research Center website (www.icbeh.us.edu.pl), Visegrad project website (www.hec.us.edu.pl), EUROPE DIRECT Silesia website (https://www.europedirect-slaskie.pl/), Facebook and Instagram social networks. The respondents included students from different schools, representing other age groups, with a predominance of young people aged 14–18. The largest group among them were those living in the Silesian province (96.68 %). Thus, the study in the group of students can be considered regional and representative of the second level of education.

education in their schools (Guzy, Ochwat 2021b). Young respondents were then asked to express their views on what they believe climate education should entail. Their responses indicate a strong preference for interactive lessons that foster active participation in discussions and provide in-depth explanations of the material. They emphasize the importance of teacher engagement and encourage debates, as these formats stimulate critical thinking and reflection. Conversely, they express dissatisfaction with lessons that rely solely on traditional teaching methods such as lectures and textbook work. According to students, effective climate education should be practical, involving activities such as environmental cleanup initiatives, extracurricular activities, and Oxford-style debates. They advocate for instruction led by experts who demonstrate passion, as they believe this approach is essential for motivating young people to become actively involved. Here are some statements from the students:

> Joint actions that would benefit the environment, increase awareness of young people, and interest them in the topic.
>
> […] I favor practical activities that will encourage student's interest in the subject. Conducting them outside the school grounds would certainly bring great variety. I want these lessons not to look like some classes at school, i.e., in the form of a boring 45-minute monologue from which nothing of value is learned.
>
> First of all, they should give basic facts, argue them well, and refute false information on the subject, because as far as I can see, most teenagers in Poland know almost nothing about global warming and climate change, making them believe in fake news […]. The subject should also show what the real consequences are and encourage Poles not to ignore the problem […].

The results of the survey, as well as the quoted statements of respondents therefore clearly point to the need to rethink the forms and content offered in this area in institutional education. It is becoming necessary to supplement the framework curricula of all subjects, at each stage of education, in line with the recommendations of the teachers surveyed and with the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the core curricula, by adding elements of environmental and climate knowledge and by creating wise teaching inspirations based, among other things, on cross-subject correlation.

Since the climate crisis is imposing a different lifestyle on us, based on reduction and austerity, the surveys also contained questions about the extent to which the respondents were aware that sustainability meant giving up a certain degree of convenience. The parents surveyed were most aware of this, with the vast majority, i.e. 70 %, understanding that protecting the planet means people giving up certain comforts of modern civilization, luxuries, or mindless prodigality. For the sake of comparison, only 59 % of the teachers and 55.34 % of the students surveyed declared such awareness. Many respondents found it hard

to admit that in order to protect the planet, we would be virtually obligated to adopt certain restrictions (Guzy, Ochwat 2021a,b; 2022).

As shown by the research, respondents lack pro-climate education, but they themselves would relatively rarely consult books, films and other texts of culture addressing the topic of climate change or climate catastrophe. Among the parents surveyed, 37 % were familiar with films, books or other texts of culture related to the topic of climate change, but as many as 63 % of the respondents were unable to name specific titles. Students are far more willing to watch films (31.7 %) than to read books (8.15 %). The low number of students who read indicates a certain niche that is worth filling with reading profiled towards pro-climate content, although it is clear that this will not be an easy task in view of the readership crisis in Poland (Guzy, Ochwat 2021a,b; 2022).

How do Polish language teachers deal with the reading crisis, mainly the 19th-century canon of school readings and the lack of ecological content? First of all, it is worth emphasizing that the Polish language teachers surveyed feel responsible for the state of the planet and believe in the performative power of literary texts – as many as 90 % of them (along with teachers of natural sciences) express a sense of concern for shaping pro-environmental attitudes in their students. The vast majority (89.17 % of respondents) believe that they put this concern into action in their selected Polish language lessons. Indeed, as many as 93.33 % of respondents consider reading literature and other cultural texts as one of the ways of shaping responsible pro-environmental attitudes in students. Many teachers see the possibility of reading readings in an ecocritical[7] paradigm[8].

[7] Ecocriticism offers fresh interpretations of canonical works from a distinct perspective, focusing on the environment, nature, and human activity as factors contributing to the planet's degradation. P. Barry, in "Ecocriticism or Green Studies," within the book "Literature and its Natures: An Ecocritical Guide for Teachers and High School Students" by P. Czaplinski, J.B. Bednarek, and D. Gostynski (pp. 21–36), sheds light on this approach.

[8] They point to a broad set of texts: from the Bible (the description of Eden, the creation of the world) and mythology (e.g., the myth of Demeter and Korah), through readings, e.g., *Pan Tadeusz*, *W pustyni i w puszczy* (In Desert and Wilderness), *Lalka* (The Doll), to the prose of Olga Tokarczuk. Teachers working in elementary schools see possibilities for interpretation in environmental optics of such works as excerpts from the Bible, selected myths, and works by Adam Mickiewicz, etc. *Pan Tadeusz*, *Świtezianka*, *Sonety krymskie* (*Stepy Akermańskie* – Akerman Steppes); works by Henryk Sienkiewicz, such as *W pustyni i w puszczy* (In Desert and Wilderness) and *Quo vadis*; Ignacy Krasicki's satire *Żona modna* (The Fashionable Wife); Jan Kochanowski's *Fraszki* i *Pieśni* (Epigrams and Songs), Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *Mały książę* (The Little Prince); Stefan Żeromski›s *Syzyfowe prace* (Sisyphus' Works), Jan Twardowski's poetry; as well as works outside the reading list, such as Andrzej Maleszka's *Magiczne drzewo* (The Magic Tree) and Marcin Szczygielski's *Czarny Młyn* (The Black Mill).
In secondary school, on the other hand, teachers suggest such readings as Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*, Reymont's *Chłopi* (Peasants), Prus's *Lalka* (The Doll), Wyspianski's *Wesele*

Figures of authority are important for building environmental awareness. This is why the survey included questions about who inspired the respondents in the field of climate change, and whether they could name any figures they valued and imitated. Finally, respondents were asked about the patterns and models they followed most willingly and most frequently. Younger respondents stood out in this part of the survey, as students were the ones naming far more often a figure of authority in relation to climate change, and drawing pro-climate inspiration from them. As many as 41 % of students indicated that. Among the adults surveyed, only 27 % of the parents pointed to some figure of authority. More precisely, the students would be inspired primarily by actions observed in their immediate environment (siblings, parents, grandparents, friends, other family members), followed by environmental organizations, while the parents would point to specific individuals, such as Polish scientists Szymon Malinowski and Piotr Skubała, and British biologist David Attenborough. These responses show that when it comes to raising students' environmental awareness, knowledge alone is not enough. Students follow the example of people in their closest environment, of adults, including in particular their parents. According to the research, the effectiveness of environmental education among young people will depend on whether they will be able to observe care for the planet and responsible behavior in adults, both at home and at school (Guzy, Ochwat 2021a,b; 2022).

The studies by Anna Guzy and Magdalena Ochwat show that parents and teachers are highly competent in the area of climate change rather than young people. The level of students' competence in this field is insufficient, which is understandable considering their continuous exposure to the process of forming, maturing, and discovery. These data clearly shatter the myth of young people as a new generation excellently prepared for the time of climate crisis, forming a prefigurative culture in which the older generation, for instance their parents, learn from them (Mead 1987). This is because it often turns out that students' knowledge is based on unverified information, fake news, and unreliable sources (Guzy, Ochwat 2021a,b; 2022).

(The Wedding), Dostoyevsky's *Zbrodnia i kara* (Crime and Punishment), Sienkiewicz's *Potop* (The Deluge); *Kwiatki świętego Franciszka z Asyżu* (The Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi), Orzeszkowa's *Gloria victis*, the poetry of Jan Kasprowicz, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Jan Kochanowski, Julian Tuwim, Bolesław Leśmian, Zbigniew Herbert (cycle *Pan Cogito*) and Czesław Miłosz, also Jacek Dukaj's *Katedra* or Albert Camus' *Dżuma* (Plague). Apart from the essential reading list, there are also *Żywot człowieka poczciwego* (The Life of an Honest Man) by Mikołaj Rej, *Nad Niemnem* by Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Ziemia obiecana* (The Promised Land) by Władysław Reymont, *Sklepy cynamonowe* (Cinnamon Shops) by Bruno Schulz, *Ludzie bezdomni* (Homeless People) by Stefan Żeromski, fairy tales by Stanisław Lem, prose by Olga Tokarczuk and *Patyki i badyle* (Sticks and Stalks) by Urszula Zajączkowska. Polish language teachers see many "textual" opportunities for reading texts about the environmental perspective at school. Still, they also point to significant limitations, including too few hours of Polish lessons about the recommended reading list and too archaic school canon.

At this point, it is worth looking at the differences in the results related to the questions concerning elementary climate science and those concerning ecological competence in numbers. It is worth noting that answers to these questions are indisputable, as there is a complete consensus on them among scientists:

"humans are responsible for climate change" is an opinion shared by:

96.67 % of the **teachers surveyed**,

95 % of the **parents surveyed**,

86.39 % of the **students surveyed**.

"global warming intensified by greenhouse gas emissions is a fact" is an opinion shared by:

94.17 % of the **teachers surveyed**,

92 % of the **parents surveyed**,

75.71 % of the **students surveyed**.

Differences can also be seen in how the respondents perceive the significance of the issue of climate change. A significantly higher proportion of the parents surveyed (90 %) believe that the problem is important, compared to the share of young people making similar statements. Only 67 % of students, in fact, considered it significant. The explanation may be sought in the attitudes of adults and young people: while parents are concerned about their children's future and are anxious about tomorrow, young people represent a carefree attitude to the passage of time, which is typical of them (a base for such behavior is also presented by neurodidactics scholars (cf. Kaczmarzyk 2014: 132–133).

Parents also see their own agency and possibility to act with regard to combating climate change much more clearly than students. A total of 90 % of them believe that we can stop climate catastrophe through a variety of actions. As far as belief in agency is concerned, students displayed a much lower level (69 %). A similar result was recorded for the belief in the power of influence in the group of Polish language and literature teachers. Nearly 70 % of the teachers believe in their ability to influence the student and to shape their views on the issue. School must continue to kindle this belief in students with educational vigor, to prevent us from losing hope and sinking into a state of apathy faced with the climate crisis. This will be a tough task, as only 10 % of parents surveyed and 13 % of the students surveyed are satisfied with climate education. The opinion on pro-climate education conducted in Polish schools in the 21st century is devastating, and therefore everyone must get involved, including parents, so as to show by their example, as one respondent wrote, *that adults* (too – A.G., M.O.) *believe in ecology* (Guzy, Ochwat 2021a,b; 2022).

One of the tasks the researchers also set themselves was to design recommendations for education-shaping institutions promoting a curriculum of humanistic knowledge of the climate and environmental crisis – as an interdisciplinary school and university-wide subject – using knowledge and good

practices (among others, in building climate awareness, without fear management). Let us quote the demands considered absolute:

1. Introduction of climate and ecological education at all stages and levels of education, characterised by:
   a. Interdisciplinary nature, taking into account new interpretative perspectives that unstiffen the traditional anthropocentric view of the world.
   b. Participatory nature, with a profile created with experts and interested communities – including schools and universities.
   c. The networking of humanistic climate-environmental education understood as establishing cooperative education systems at the university and school levels capable of responding rapidly to contemporary issues.
   […]
2. Changes to curricula and educational methods
   a. Changes to the core curricula in place at primary and secondary schools, with a particular focus on the core curriculum for humanities subjects in terms of taught content and reading lists, enabling the implementation of climate education.
   b. Changes in university education systems in terms of study programmes and plans, interdisciplinarity of subjects, and graduation seminars (introduced with proclimatic content in mind).
   c. Changes in the training of future teachers of all subjects and classes to make them responsive guides in environmental education.
   […]
3. Introduction of programmes/courses to improve the preparation of teachers of all subjects and classes, as well as of university teachers (and support for such activities by universities and other institutions responsible for teacher education) in terms of:
   a. Competence in the subject of environmental change.
   b. Competence to skilfully stimulate pupils/students' interest in the environment and shape their environmental sensitivity (empathy, sensitivity, attentiveness to nature) – using a different didactic technique, field education.
   c. The competence to develop in pupils/students critical thinking, the skill of verifying scientific data and interpreting them (to recognise and separate true information on the state of the environment and climate from disinformation and attempts at manipulation).
   d. The competence to develop attitudes of agency, commitment, responsibility and resilience. Agency, on the one hand, means introducing into the school/university the long-promised methodology of action, so far mostly limited by listening and talking, and on the other hand, the rather difficult attempt to take responsibility for the future of the world, since the content I teach or learn about and the attitudes that are shaped at school have an impact on the future of the Earth. […] (see www.hec.platforma.us.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/HEC_rekomendacje_EN.pdf).

As part of the project, environmentally oriented teaching aids were produced to a large extent. A continuously expanded collection created by the project

implementers – researchers, teachers, and students – has been gathered on a publicly available platform (on an open access basis). It consists of webinars, scripts (partly in English), suggested teaching materials and methods, including materials for remote education, texts of culture containing linguistic and non-verbal images of the world in the climate crisis. Lectures are also available in this space, presented in the introductory part of the project, building knowledge among the audience. They are a source of knowledge and sensitization to threats (see www.hec.platforma.us.edu.pl). The online platform, dedicated to education for the climate, has also become a space containing research and practical solutions from the project implementers, as well as multimodal texts and scientific studies, which found their place in the digital publication, a multi-author monograph bearing the title of the project, presenting an image of the world in climate crisis (see https://wydawnictwo.us.edu.pl/node/27303). The novelty of the joint project consists in the educational humanistic perspective, i.e. the interdisciplinary implementation of cultural knowledge about the climate in the educational space of the Visegrad Group countries.

CONCLUSION

It is no coincidence that the idea of caring for the climate and of pro-climate education came out of Silesia. It is a region whose identity, recognized in Poland and across the world, has for a long time now been determined by industry, including coal mining. Heavy industry used to prevail in the area for several decades, exerting a strong impact on the natural environment and on the quality of life, an impact still felt today. The issue of the climate and of the future of humanity on Earth, as well as the importance of climate education have a global, but also a regional dimension. The environmental activities of the authorities should be stimulated by a pro-climate attitude of an informed civil society, based on comprehensive educational measures focusing on developing competence and awareness. This can be done by teachers well prepared for such a task during their studies. The V4 countries whose universities and schools are involved in the project, namely Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary, have a similar past and climate problems, and the process of solving the latter should involve the contribution of responsible citizens forming human capital, educated by informed teachers. Studies in the field of humanities will therefore play an intermediary role in the dissemination of specialized knowledge with regard to climate science. Still, their main task is above all to shape knowledge about the relationships between humans and the Earth and human impact on the climate, as well as to shape climate sensitivity and the awareness that not only large industrial organisms, but every single human individual has an influence on the future of humanity and of the Earth.

The "V4 Humanities Education for the Climate…" project created the foundations for reflection on a world based on responsibility, solidarity and harmony of the bio-community, for the sake of a stable future for all beings and the Earth. The project participants hope to be supported in this task by interdisciplinary reflection leading not only to the development of specific university and school practices, but also preparing the ground for the application of modern humanistic education and upbringing fit to meet ecological challenges.

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ANNA PODEMSKA-KAŁUŻA ORCID: 0000-0001-5179-0514
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

"The Green Children" – A Tale of the Bizarre by Olga Tokarczuk with an Environmental Message to the Young Generation Facing the Climate Crisis

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to indicate links between *The Green Children*, one of the ten bizarre short stories by Olga Tokarczuk, and present-day environmental protection problems. Apparently this text on the stay of a king's physician in Volhynia in 1656 is not connected with the contemporary environmental discourse. In this short story the reader may find no fragments concerning global sustainable development goals or preventing degradation of the Earth's resources. However, a thorough reading of this text shows that the short story by Olga Tokarczuk may be considered an influential contribution to the multigenerational discussion on the need to prevent climate disaster and promote good environmental practices. This short story should be analyzed and interpreted at lessons of the Polish language in secondary schools, since it provides an important message in line with the position of conservationists and supporters of Youth Strike for Climate. The story of the green children and their symbiotic relationships with nature is in line with the postulates of present-day teenagers, representatives of the generation of Greta Thurnberg and Fridays for Future. *The Green Children* is another important text within the environmental dimension of literary works by Olga Tokarczuk (after the novel *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, a collection of essays *The Moment of the Bear* and fragments of the Nobel Lecture *The Tender Narrator* delivered at the Swedish Academy in 2019). For many years now the writer has been involved in actions promoting the preservation of natural resources, she advocates attitudes ensuring coexistence of humans and nature and is a vocal opponent of instrumental treatment of animals and plants (the Nobel laureate is a vehement critic of the hunting traditions and advocates intensification of actions ensuring effective protection of tree stands).

Keywords: nature, humans, ecology, environmental protection, green children, short story.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION IN THE WORKS OF OLGA TOKARCZUK

Olga Tokarczuk frequently includes environmental aspects in her writing. Issues related to environmental protection account for a major dimension in the works of the Polish Nobel prize laureate, who is known for being vocal about animal rights and protection of trees. Love for wildlife, respect for all living creatures, deep concern for the future of our planet and mitigation of the negative impact of climate change are environmental issues of paramount importance in the literary works by Olga Tokarczuk. The writer poses topical questions concerning the relations between humans and nature, questions on the continuity of our planet's ecosystem, the planet we inhabit as a civilisation of intelligent, or sapient, creatures. Grzegorz Bożek, the editor of *Dzikie* Życie [Wild Life], an influential monthly on environmental issues, stressed this aspect in his remarks for a weekly *Tygodnik Przegląd* (in the survey *Czytam książki Olgi Tokarczuk, bo…*[I read books by Olga Tokarczuk because …]): "I read books by Olga Tokarczuk, because they give the reader an opportunity to encounter environmental issues, rarely found in literature" (Sobczyk 2019)[1].

One of the most important examples of the environmental dimension in the works by Olga Tokarczuk is *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (Tokarczuk 2009), which has been popularized by *Pokot* (Spoor) – a film adaptation directed by Agnieszka Holland (2017). In this novel Tokarczuk expressed her vigorous protest against public acceptance of harming and killing of animals by hunters. *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* is a moving critique of the hunting culture and the cruel rituals it entails. The narrative focuses the attention of contemporary readers on the outdated traditions and reveals the controversial actions of hunters. Olga Tokarczuk presents inhumane cruelty of people towards defenceless animals, which are brutally killed in the pursuit of fleeting self-satisfaction. This book is the vehement criticism and vocal defence of animal rights. The story of Janina Duszejko provokes reflections on the role of humans in the ecosystem. The writer focuses the readers' attention on the absolute, ruthless subordination of nature by humans and subjecting other living organisms to pillage and plunder. In the opinion of the author of *House of Day, House of Night* contemporary people treat nature as subservient, totally subjected to their absolute power; as a result mankind constitutes a threat to numerous species of fauna and flora. Małgorzata Książek-Czermińska when discussing the environmental message of *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* wrote that "the novel proved to be excellent script

[1] By the time this paper was submitted for publication *Opowieści bizarne* [Bizarre Stories] had not been officially translated into English. The author prepared translations of the fragments of Olga Tokarczuk's stories, as well as studies and other texts in Polish, which are cited in this article.

material for *Spoor,* a film directed by Agnieszka Holland showing the absolute cruelty of the hunting traditions" (Książek-Czermińska 2021). Another work, in which Olga Tokarczuk indicates examples of abuse of animals is a collection of essays *Moment niedźwiedzia* [*The Moment of the Bear*] (Tokarczuk 2012).

Olga Tokarczuk takes an unwavering stance in the discussion concerning the degradation of the natural environment. This environmental position of Olga Tokarczuk is a manifestation of her concern for a better future for the Earth's ecosystem. In her Nobel Lecture given at the Swedish Academy the author of *Flights* underlined the need to prevent the environmental disaster and encouraged a change in our perception of nature [Tokarczuk 2020: 289]. Polish conservationists after hearing the Nobel Lecture stated: "We are pretty convinced that the strong stance of Olga Tokarczuk on climate and the future of our planet will raise public awareness persuading people that the time to act is now" (Kokoszkiewicz 2019). Thanks to her literary work and continuous participation in the environmental discourse the writer is affecting public opinions and attitudes, promoting changes in deleterious habits into new ones, markedly more beneficial for the natural environment.

Support for human and animal rights, as well as nature conservation and environmental protection are the statutory tasks of the Olga Tokarczuk Foundation. The *Final report on the Foundation's operations in 2022* provides information on the two debates within the #zezwierzęcej [#animal perspective] project ("Animals and war" and "The animal burden"), which "focus on animal rights and ethical treatment of animals" (the Olga Tokarczuk Foundation 2022).

In 2021 Olga Tokarczuk received a Doctor Honoris Causa title of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In the justification for this decision the Senate of the oldest Polish university indicated "her literary works, which creatively reveal the truth about the human nature, help find order and sense, as well as her activity outside literature: cultural, social, civic, environmental activism, promoting the ideals of equality, freedom and democracy, and responsibility for the natural environment" (Kopiejka 2021).

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN *THE GREEN CHILDREN*

The Green Children, one of the ten bizarre stories published in 2018, is an example of the environmental dimension in Tokarczuk's writing (Tokarczuk 2018). The first impressions do not really indicate ties of this micronarrative with the contemporary discourse on preventing degradation of the Earth's resources. *The Green Children* only marginally are related to the global postulates of sustainable development and even the keenest reader will find no remarks in this story on the need to shift towards conservationism in the coming decades of the 21st century. A tale by William Davisson, a Scotsman from Aberdeen and the court physician of the Polish king John II Casimir takes the form of an

autobiographical report from his stay in Volhynia in 1656. It is purported to be an evocative reminiscence from a journey by this foreigner over the Eastern Borderlands of the 17th century Poland. What attracts the reader's attention in this short story by Olga Tokarczuk is a story of green children as a manifestation of an unusual relationship between people and nature.

The Green Children is a story in line with the bizarre dimension as the primary category of narrative in the ten short stories published following the world acclaim of *The Books of Jacob* (Tokarczuk 2014). The original term "bizarny" used in the Polish title is a Polonized version of the French adjective "bizarre", as defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary denoting strange, unusual, peculiar, eerie, weird or odd (Cambridge Dictionary 2022).

On the cover of this Olga Tokarczuk's book we will find information that these are "unpredictable, strange, beautiful, eerie tales of the bizarre […] Each of them takes place in a unique space. Volhynia at the time of the Swedish Deluge, contemporary Switzerland, an ordinary tenement house somewhere in Poland, distant Asia and imaginary places" (Tokarczuk 2018). These "strange and unusual" stories by Olga Tokarczuk are loaded with meaning. They evoke different historic times and even a futuristic vision of the future (in the short story *Kalendarz ludzkich* świąt *[A Calendar of Human Holidays]*). These short fiction forms are in line with Gothic and horror stories, so popular in the English language literature, as evidenced in works of authors writing in English, whether British, American, Irish, or Welsh (E.F. Benson, Robert W. Chambers, Ch. Dickens, N. Hawthorne, H. James, H.P. Lovecraft, E. A. Poe), as well as French literature (Guillaume Apollinaire, Honoré de Balzac, Anatole France, Théophile Gautier, Guy de Maupassant, Prosper Mérimée, Gérard de Nerval), Russian literature (Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol, Mikhail Lermontov, Alexander Pushkin, Aleksey K. Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev) or German literature (Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Heinrich von Kleist, Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, Paul Ernst). In turn, in Polish literature the convention of Gothic or horror stories was adopted by Zygmunt Krasiński, Józef Korzeniowski, Bolesław Leśmian or Władysław Stanisław Reymont.

Opowieści bizarne [Bizarre Stories] are a vivid confirmation of the author's mastery in playing games of fiction with her readers. They are unique stories, far from following regular schemes, occasionally catching the reader off-guard. They constitute a series of peculiar philosophical tales, in which Olga Tokarczuk ponders the condition of the world, the individual and nature, asks numerous questions and searches for answers, while at the same time refraining from giving definitive solutions. This bizarre quality is a binding element for the entire book. In an interview given to Emilia Padoł, the author of *Flights* defined the function of the bizarre in her stories: "I selected for them a title framework, that is the word "bizarny" [bizarre], because I believe that their common denominator is to penetrate the boundaries of our experience

and face novel themes, which are emerging in the area of our interests, fears, anxieties" (Padoł, 2018).

The quality of being bizarre is mentioned in texts devoted to this collection of short stories published in 2018. The meaning of the French adjective *bizarre* is referred to in the titles of reviews and in interviews with the writer herself. For instance, an interview with Olga Tokarczuk conducted by Katarzyna Kubisiowska for Tygodnik Powszechny (an influential Roman Catholic weekly magazine focusing on social, cultural and political issues), is entitled Światy *bizarne* [Bizarre worlds] (Kubisiowska 2018). A review by Michał Sowiński in Krytyka Polityczna (a quarterly of left-wing intellectuals covering social science, culture and politics) was printed under the title *Olgi Tokarczuk dziwniejsze opowieści [More bizarre tales by Olga Tokarczuk]* (Sowiński 2018). Jerzy Sosnowski devoted an extensive piece of writing on his blog to explain the meaning of the word "bizarność" [the quality of being bizarre] and the functions, which this concept serves in the analyzed short stories (Sosnowski 2018). Next to positive opinions on bizarreness in the collection of Olga Tokarczuk's stories there have also been some less favorable. The latter include e.g. a highly critical analysis by Paweł Kaczmarski *Opowiadania mizerne* [Feeble stories] published in Mały Format (Kaczmarski 2018), or a measured review by Wojciech Szot in *Zdaniem Szota* (Szot 2018), in which the author indicated both strong and weak points of the Nobel winner's Bizarre stories[2].

The reality of the Volhynia in 1656 is bizarre – it is the spacetime of *The Green Children*, one of the best and most intriguing short stories in this volume. This is how it is described by the author of *The Books of Jacob*:

> The principle is simple: the closer to the center, the more real and palpable everything seems to be, whereas the farther from the center, the more evidently the world seems to disintegrate, falling apart like mildewed fabric. One more thing – this center of the world seems to be slightly raised, with ideas, fashions, inventions, everything trickling down. First they saturate the adjacent or neighboring areas, only to trickle down farther, with their impact becoming weaker, while only a small part of the contents may reach the most distant areas (Tokarczuk 2018: 25).

One of the modules in the recreation of events taking place in the 17th century somewhere in the remote areas of Poland's Borderlands is devoted to an extensive reflection on nature, on its peculiar manifestation – two green children. These title characters were brought to a manor house in Hajdamowicze by several armed courtiers from King John II Casimir' retinue. The children were unusual catches captured during a hunt. As Davisson wrote in his memoirs:

[2] Wojciech Szot wrote: "They are still good, and occasionally even very good stories, but at times they are lacking this freshness of narrative, which we could observe in previous short story collections by Tokarczuk. From time to time it gets stuck" (Szot 2018).

> they were two children, small and thin, poorly clad, or rather dressed in rags, in coarse cloth, all in tatters and mud-covered. Their hair was matted into rope-like strands, which I found very interesting, as an excellent example of *plica polonica*. The children were tied up like you do with roe deer and attached to the saddles – I was afraid they may have been battered a bit and their thin, brittle bones broken. The armed retainers explained they needed to do it, for the youngsters were biting and kicking. […]
> Was I to judge them by their size, I would have said they were around four and six; however, judging by their teeth I decided they were older, although looking tiny. The girl was bigger and stronger, while the boy looked peaked, half-starved, but brisk and lively. But it was their skin which I found most intriguing. It was an odd skin tone I had never seen before – resembling either young peas or Italian olives. The hair falling over their faces in matted dreadlocks was fair, but seemed coated with a greenish mildew, like moss-covered stones. As I was told by the young Ryczywolski those Green Children, as we immediately named them, were probably the victims of war, which nature nurtured in the forest, as it may have been sometimes heard, as in the story of Romulus and Remus (Tokarczuk 2018: 19–20).

In another section of his memoirs, written following the convention of 20th century personal document literature, the Scottish physician once again discussed the phenomenon of the green colored skin and hair.

> With time the girl started to trust me and allowed me to examine her […] I gently turned the girl's face towards the light and I took several rope-like strands of her hair into my hands – they felt warm, as if made from wool, while sniffing them I found them to smell of moss; it appeared they were overgrown with some lichens. Her skin when examined closely was covered with a multitude of tiny dark-green spots, which I had mistaken for dirt before I had the chance to take a closer look. We were greatly surprised – me and Ryczywolski; we decided that she had something vegetal about her. We suspected that was the reason why she would undress and sit in the sun, since as all plants she needed sunlight, which nourished her through the skin, and apart from that she had no need to eat much more of anything, she got by on bread crumbs alone (Tokarczuk 2018: 29).

The narrator focuses the readers' attention on the older girl. This is because the younger sibling, the Green Boy, died and his body disappeared under mysterious circumstances. His sister was named the Crumb. For around a dozen weeks the local residents believed that the girl was unable to communicate with others. Socialization resulted in making verbal contact first with the young gentleman, Feliks Ryczywolski, and later also with the king's physician. These contacts developed language skills of the green girl to such an extent that after a few months she would sit under a linden tree and spin amazing tales. She was listened to particularly by children and teenagers, for whom it was one of very few amusements in the manor house in the middle of swamps.

The green children are manifestations of symbiosis between humans and nature. The lifestyle of the youngest is a consequence of humans observing the laws of nature. It is synergistic, following the passage of the seasons, subjected to the natural rhythm of changes in the natural environment. The arrival of the two green creatures in Hajdamowicze acts as an activator of the environmental dimension. In the analyzed bizarre short story it is connected with the Utopian coexistence of humans with the elements – the earth, the Sun, air and water. Instead of faith in God or belief in taming nature with technological inventions to satisfy human whims and needs, the writer presents to the readers, particularly young representatives of the generation facing the climate crisis, a vision of close coexistence of humans and nature. Here two extensive fragments need to be quoted, as showing complete harmony of the green people with the natural environment.

The first fragment is a description of the moon world, from which the Crumb and her brother had emerged. The reader learns of a land in the middle of a forest, beyond swamps,

> where the moon shines equally bright as the sun darker than ours […] In that land people live on trees and sleep in tree hollows. During the moon day they wander onto the tree tops and there expose their naked bodies to the moonlight, from which their skin turns green. Thanks to that light they need to eat only very little and get by merely on forest berries, wild mushrooms and nuts. And since they do not have to till the land or build shelters, any work is done for pure pleasure (Tokarczuk 2018: 38–39).

The other important quote presents information on how the green people spend their winters. We get to know this story by the Crumb as reported by the young Ryczywolski to the king's physician so that he could scientifically describe this natural phenomenon:

> I told him once to ask how this green people spent their winters. Ryczywolski brought back the answer the very same evening and squeezing my poor thigh he told me that they did not notice the coming of winter at all, since as soon as the first early frosts arrived they would gather in the largest hollow of the biggest tree and there, snuggling up together as mice would do, and they would fall asleep. They are slowly being covered by thick moss, protecting them against the cold, while large mushrooms would overgrow the entrance to the tree hollow so that they cannot be seen from the outside. Their dreams are special, because they are shared, which means that when somebody is dreaming the other ones can "see" this dream in their heads. In this way they are never bored. They lose much weight over winter and for this reason when the first warm spring moon rises, everyone would climb to the tree tops and there they expose their pale bodies to the moon rays until they turn healthy green again. They also have their own way of communicating with animals and because they do not eat meat or hunt, animals befriend them and help them. Supposedly they even

> tell them their animal stories, thanks to which these people become wiser and know nature better (Tokarczuk 2018: 40).

From the notes left by William Davisson the reader learns some more interesting information on the customs of the green people. All the group members care for the children. They consider being useful to nature an important aspect of their existence. They treat their bodies as fruit, which after their death will be consumed by other living creatures. For this reason the green people offer corpses to be fed on by forest animals and birds. This is what happened to the Green Boy, whose remains were found hanging high up in a tree (Tokarczuk 2018: 43).

THE TALE OF THE GREEN PEOPLE AND PROBLEMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The vison of the moon world made it possible for Olga Tokarczuk to show how much we, inhabitants of our planet, are ruthless towards the Earth, how unwise our actions are, showing an utter lack of imagination, respect for natural resources and biodiversity. The green children, who appeared unexpectedly in "the last circle of the world" (Tokarczuk 2018: 43), expose human stupidity and cruelty in our contacts with nature, while also indicating inertia and indifference to the fate of future generations. The writer presented this position already in her earlier works, in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* and *The Moment of the Bear*. The imagery of the Nobel laureate helped her to create visions of symbiotic relationships of the green people with nature. It is a Utopian model, particularly in relation to the ecosystem of the 17th century Volhynia described in great detail, which Davisson left behind, "having enough of this manor house hidden in the middle of a forest and swamps, these rotting leaves, these flies, spiders, worms, frogs, beetles of all kinds, ever-present damp, the smell of silt, the thick intoxicating aroma of greenery" (Tokarczuk 2018: 41).

When presenting the customs of the green people Olga Tokarczuk points to the need to preserve the natural resources here and now. In this case literary fiction is a historical disguise to reflections on problems of the present-day world. The lifestyle of the title characters – the green children and the community from which they came, is a vision of good practices, which in the 21st century should constitute a package of solutions ensuring a better tomorrow. The environmental message of *The Green Children* is addressed to present-day teenagers. We need to consider to what extent this short story by Olga Tokarczuk may be of interest to the contemporary young generation. Thus a question arises: Is this work an important text for young conservationists, presenting a topical message in line with the environmental turn?

Positive answers indicate a high value of actions involving this work of fiction at lessons in the Polish language in secondary schools[3]. The subject of thorough reading followed by literary explication should not only include a comparative analysis with fragments of the 17th century *Memoirs* of Jan Chryzostom Pasek. It needs to be added here that Jan Chryzostom Pasek was a Polish diarist of the Baroque period, who presented a lively picture of 17th-century Poland. His *Pamiętniki* [Memoirs] were written around 1691–1695, towards the end of his life, but they describe his experiences as a young representative of the Polish Szlachta, the noble estate of the realm of Poland at that time (Pasek 1987)[4]. His *Pamiętniki* cover the years 1658–1688; however, in Polish textbooks for secondary schools students study primarily fragments concerning historical events of the 1650s. Pasek's memoirs present Poland during the Deluge – the Swedish invasion of Poland (1656), the Hungarian invasion by George Rákóczi (1657), the Russo-Polish war (1660–1666), as well as Lubomirski's rebellion. Pasek also described in detail the famous military raid of Denmark by the Polish army headed by Stefan Czarniecki (in the years 1658–1659). His *Pamiętniki* are first of all a monumental and realistic document of his times, particularly since its author was deeply convinced of the grandiosity of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its unique role in Europe, as well as the superiority of Polish culture and the Roman Catholic religion.

Literary historians consider *The Memoirs of Jan Chryzostom z Goslawic Pasek* the most prominent diary of the Baroque era, constituting an invaluable source of knowledge on the 17th century life, customs and language, a source of inspiration for many writers and historians. *The Memoirs* have exerted a significant impact on Polish literature not only during the Baroque period, but also in subsequent centuries. The diary of Jan Chryzostom Pasek was admired by Adam Mickiewicz and inspired Polish writers of the 19 and 20th centuries, particularly Juliusz Słowacki, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Henryk Sienkiewicz or

[3] The author focused on the discussion of the content within the primary research perspective: functioning of the environmental turn in the analyzed short story. It is the topic of particular interest for students living in the Anthropocene. The article included topic preferences of secondary school students, for whom *The Green Children* is a highly attractive text of the current literary corpus. For this reason the author does not discuss the form of *The Green Children* or the position of this short story within the structure of *Bizarre Stories*. Undertaking a discussion of these literary theory problems would require additional analyses and studies on teaching materials, being outside the scope of *The core curriculum of general education for general secondary schools, technical secondary schools and stage II sectoral vocational schools [Podstawa programowa kształcenia ogólnego dla liceum, technikum i branżowej szkoły II stopnia]*. Until 2024 *Bizarre Stories* were not included in the reading lists for this stage of school education.

[4] The Memoirs were translated into English by Maria Święcicka-Ziemianek and published by The Kosciuszko Foundation (Pasek 1979).

Witold Gombrowicz, with Sienkiewicz's Trilogy constituting a homage to that 17th century diarist.

The Memoirs of Jan Chryzostom Pasek share the time and location of the narrative with *The Green Children* by Olga Tokarczuk, along with the detailed descriptions of everyday life and customs of the 17th century Poland, the diary form as an account of an eyewitness, presentation of events looking back in time, vivid interest in the surrounding world, presentation of diverse natural and climatic conditions.

The Green Children needs to be used as a teaching aid in the discussion on the narrative imagination of Olga Tokarczuk with students in the context of existential problems important for contemporary people. One of such topics, on which the Nobel laureate focuses is the promotion of coexistence between people and nature and prevention of climate disaster. This marks a common ground with innovative didactics of teaching literature. An action in line with the paradigm of present-day Polish studies is connected with the development of environmental awareness in view of sustainable tomorrow and future free from apocalyptic degradation of the natural environment. Development of learners' competences promoting innovativeness is a major trend in education also in lessons of the Polish language. It is worthwhile to read *The Green Children* by Olga Tokarczuk in secondary schools taking into consideration the need for the topical dialogue on preservation of the Earth's resources. Reading this short story will contribute to intensification of this highly important discourse in Polish schools. It may be hoped that it will promote in-depth discussion and reflections on climate change, while providing grounds for the implementation of good practices leading to positive changes, particularly those friendly to the Earth's ecosystem.

This short story by Olga Tokarczuk is an influential contribution to the multigenerational discussion on destructive global changes, a discussion becoming increasingly vital in the 2020s and 2030s. This is also a suggestive vision of transformations, which needs to be implemented to be able to satisfy primary existential needs of the future generations. The symbiotic character of the relationships between the title characters and nature is in line with the postulates of contemporary teenagers, representatives of the generation of Greta Thurnberg and Fridays for Future. This environmental manifesto corresponding with the position of activists and supporters of Youth Strike for Future. The vision of an alternative world presented by Olga Tokarczuk and based on the ingrained and undisputed respect of humans to flora and fauna of our common planet is a manifestation of the proposed green transformation free from exploitation of nature or other people, with no further degradation or depletion of natural resources, with no greenwashing of the Global North.

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MARIA WACŁAWEK ORCID: 0000-0002-3307-5338
University of Silesia in Katowice

MAŁGORZATA WÓJCIK-DUDEK ORCID: 0000-0001-9032-8875
University of Silesia in Katowice

(Bio)biographies: A Parenetic Turn in Literature for a Young Readership and in Education at School?[1]

Abstract: The authors of the article consider the place of biography in Polish studies education and, more broadly, in humanities education. They suggest that the list of canonical writers about whom students learn during Polish language lessons should be supplemented with biographies of people who are not related to literature, but to other disciplines of science. An example of such a biography is the biography and achievements of Simona Kossak, an excellent Polish biologist, scientifically and privately associated with the Białowieża Forest. Silesian researchers argue that critical reading of Kossak's biographies and texts strengthens the effect of an ecological turn in Polish language education, which thanks to such procedures becomes not only interdisciplinary, but by convincing that biography can be taken as a challenge to change attitudes and make bold decisions, it gives students a sense of agency.

Keywords: biography, ecocriticism, ecological turn, humanistic education, Simona Kossak, Białowieża Forest

Our hamlet consists of a few houses situated
on the Plateau, far from the rest of the world.
The Plateau is a distant geological cousin
of the Table Mountains, their remote harbinger.
(Tokarczuk, 2019: 20)

The new core curriculum for Polish instruction, both at the primary- and at the secondary-school level, clearly makes amends regarding biography. Following a lengthy period of structuralist-inflected teaching practices, which are still a strong presence in Polish classrooms, writers' biographies are again looked at with an approving eye, though this eye is, regrettably, profoundly ideologised.

Such an affirmation of biography has not always been the case. As early as in 1914, Kazimierz Wóycicki called for a sound detachment from biographical

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narratives and warned that 'the literary history that looks for feelings and ideas in the poet's life, attitude to society, in personal, family and historical events, runs a serious risk' (Wóycicki, 1914: 43)[2] of becoming reduced to the history of the poet's experiences alone (Łojek, 1985: 202). Yet, at the end of the 20th century, Stanisław Bortnowski ardently argued for restoring biography to what he considered its rightful place and deplored seeing 'the author manhandled' (Bortnowski, 1998: 45), a practice that flourished as structuralism made serious inroads into Polish classrooms and spurred the deprecation of history and the history of literature for the benefit of immanent text:

> One is prompted to protest […] when witnessing an almost complete invalidation of the writer's biography, contempt for attempts at interpreting texts in the context of writers' lives, the conflicts they experienced, the dilemmas they had to solve, the feelings that tossed them. I regard it as a vote of non-confidence against a certain sphere of culture. It seems not to matter anymore what towns writers inhabited, what houses were connected with them, what people they loved, liked or hated, what objects they left behind, where they were laid to rest after death, and how others remember them; all this is deemed a liability, something good for museums, but bad for literary studies. (Bortnowski, 1998: 45)

Bortnowski's alarmist tones were slightly mitigated by the methodological contribution of Alina Zabrotowicz, who highlighted the essential presence of biographies in Polish classrooms. Zabrotowicz showed that biographical resources could be effectively used as a context to support the understanding of texts, the retracing of creative processes and the appreciation of the relevant cultural epochs. Zabrotowicz also pointed out that writers' biographies had a meaningful part in upbringing (Zabrotowicz, 1997: 14–17).

What is the place of biography in Polish education in the 2020s, almost twenty-five years after Bortnowski and Zabrotowicz shared their insights? I will try to answer this question by referring to the biography of Simona Kossak.

I believe that biography is still waiting for an apt reconsideration, one reason for this being that the humanities as discussed today rarely come without any adjectival modifier. The new humanities, as Ryszar Nycz reminds us, are 'a world of immanence, a reality of participation, of learning from within, of participant knowledge' (Nycz, 2017: 59), which results not only in a new humanistic lexicon but also in new research practices. Przemysław Czapliński claims that a major change took place when concepts inherited from the anti-positivist turn came to be replaced. A range of notions, such as 'boundary,' 'counter-,' and 'trans-' in the sense of thinking against (constraints) and above (boundaries), were supplanted by new ideas and practices, including subversion, recognition, utilisation, reassembling, interweaving and node (Czapliński, 2017: 19–20). This means that the

[2] All quotations from the texts that have not been published in English are given here in the translation of the translator of this text. (translator's note)

new humanities are simply engaged or, as Justyna Tabaszewska puts it, ancillary: 'Their utility is thus founded on their capacity to complicate and undermine the entrenched thought patterns, making the world far more difficult, rather than easier, to grasp' (Tabaszewska, 2022: 38). Tabaszewska's model of the humanities as disrupting the comfort of easy knowledge brings it to our attention that, if embracing this mission, humanistic education 'can on a daily basis demolish our sense of at-homeness in the world and equip us to detect trivialisations replete in daily life' (Witkowski, 2007: 278). Humanistic education inspired by the thought of Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 2017) or Rosi Braidotti (Braidotti, 2012) helps understand the human as 'an outcome of an ongoing process of individuation, of the solidifying and destabilising of symbolic and material relations' (Chutorański, 2020:115), as a relational being that consists of 'the a-personal, the sub-subjective, the objective, the symbolic and the affective' (Chutorański, 2020:115). The interwovenness of human existence and planetary relations has been compellingly captured by Tim Ingold:

> Living beings […] make their way *through* a nascent world rather than *across* its preformed surface. As they do so, and depending on the circumstances, they may experience wind and rain, sunshine and mist, frost and snow, and a host of other weather-related phenomena, all of which fundamentally affect their moods and motivations, their movements and their possibilities of subsistence, even as these phenomena sculpt and erode the plethora of surfaces upon which inhabitants tread. (Ingold, 2011: 73; italics original)

This way of looking at things is particularly worth embracing now that 'crisis' appears to be the key word to depict education. Today, Ingold's belief that we are all interconnected – not only in the human-to-human sense, but also across the scales of connectivity, including human-nonhuman (or perhaps, better, suprahuman, as this term does not add another opposition to the world that is divided more than enough) and living beings-matter – does not sound novel. These interrelations simply illustrate the first law of ecology (see Commoner, 1974), which is rather heavily cited in the time of the climate crisis and critical reflection on the Anthropocene. What we can wish for is an educational upheaval that transforms this idea into an ethical obligation, rather than just into a formatively functional ecological imperative capable of essentially recasting the perception of humans as an integral part of the bio-community, without perpetuating an anthropocentric bias.

HUMANISTIC 'EDUCATION +'

Such an education could be designed as 'education +' since the presence of various actors included in it would foster ever new configurations, ever new collectives and, in this way, also attempts at re-building our shared world in

which constant change would be presupposed and taken into account. However, the point is not for the idea of education receptive to the notion of constant change to produce an unstable school in a flutter. Rather, education should be responsible for re-organising curricula, syllabi and teaching/learning methods so as to transcend their fossilised one-sidedness, which the current crises have laid bare, their isolation from the world and their ignorance of transformations at hand. The point is for education not to pursue predefined outcomes or to verify petrified achievement, but to incorporate necessary changes again and again, and again.

We know today that learning is not about the acquisition of information but about making sense of information and that, as such, it is not cumulative, but multidirectional. We are aware that learning is situated and embodied, because it always takes place in a particular setting and abolishes boundaries not only between expert and common knowledge but also between school subjects or scholarly disciplines. We believe that learning is related to emancipation, which should lead to a more conscious and, thus, better experience and life (Skórzyńska, 2018). Importantly, Agata Skórzyńska claims that 'social knowledge is historically produced (and hence also expanded and accumulated over time), but in the process of learning we experience knowledge BIO-graphically' (Skórzyńska, 2018:7), which she believes offers an opportunity for linking the knowledge we acquire to particular experiences in our lives.

In my view, the implementation of humanistic 'education +' should be concerned not only with the capaciousness and openness of the project, but also with the verifiability of its principles in everyday practices and thus with the degree of its commitment to the affairs of our shared world. In this context, my ponderings are encouraged by Maksymilian Chutorański's insistence, when championing 'long-range pedagogy,' that 'good educational theory should have something to say […] about everything that is going on in the world when people do education, rather than only about what is going on within education' (Chutorański, 2020: 177).

BIO-BIOGRAPHIES IN 'EDUCATION +' AT SCHOOL

What place in humanistic/Polish 'education +' should be ascribed to biographies of authors and artists in order to turn Polish instruction into 'long-range education' and to make the reading of '*vitae*' relevant to the working-through of currently pertinent issues? If we are supposed to experience learning 'BIO-graphically,' which entails transposing learning onto our own life experiences, we should rely on an encounter with somebody's biography to find either a confirmation or an interrogation of our own experience and, regardless of which it is, to open up to opportunities of finding out/going through something new. Today, it is not enough to have biography in Polish classroom for

the purposes listed by Zabrotowicz, such as reproducing or, at best, harnessing the knowledge it conveys as an interpretive tool for the reading of texts.

Firstly, we need new models of doing biography at school; we need to curb or to complement the national-liberation paradigm, which stands tall despite the passage of time. The pantheon of the national bards, most of them males, should be extended to include women and local 'heroes,' since the latter – as contributors to the surroundings in which readers are immersed – stand a greater chance of making for a compelling story that will be more readily integrated with young readers' personal experiences and biographies.

Secondly, it is an urgent task to rethink biographical areas in contemporary education. Should they be primarily filled with mainstream narratives, or should they also make room for those that revolve around individuals conspicuously absent from school-told tales so far, for example, members of minorities, including sexual minorities, and nonhuman characters?[3] In other words, are we able to imagine a Polish lesson in which the biography of the writer or the protagonist shakes hands with a biography of, say, the Lithuanian backwoods or Lithuanian flies? What I mean is not just providing a simple account of places or nonhuman actors, because such assignments are a staple of classroom discussions; what I mean is a deconstruction, or perhaps rather a reconstruction, of the narrative so as to nurture the perception of the 'entirety' of mutual entanglements.

Thirdly, will Polish lessons prove hospitable to biographical stories from outside the circle of writers and culture-makers? If humanistic education in the age of critical reflection on the Anthropocene is supposed to unseal its familiar narratives, we can also expect Polish instruction at school to put forward models of examining nature-culture. Therefore, the training in reading textual and cultural products, and thus in exploring the world of culture, should be expanded by adding the reading of nature-culture. This would require revising school reading lists to incorporate popular-science publications, such as popular-science essays on the natural sciences, geology, hydrology and (post)industry. A wealth of such writings can be found in the work of Urszula Zajączkowska, Adam Wajrak and Jacek Karczewski. Whose biographies could be mobilised in the service of this sector of nonfiction, and what role should they play in education?

We need both old, but newly reconsidered biographies and fresh biographical tales not only to open the school up to the future, but above all to encourage

[3] I mean, for example, biographies of places, such as *Ekobiografia Krakowa* [An Ecobiography of Cracow] (2018) edited by Adam Izdebski and Rafał Szmytko and *Pnińskie błota. Natura, wiedza i polityka na polskim Polesiu do 1945 roku* [The Marshland of Pnin: Nature, Knowledge and Politics in Polish Polesia until 1945] (2022) by **Sławomir Łotysz.** Both publications are monograph studies of selected areas, produced from an environmental perspective.

learners to undertake the work of imagination. This responsibility is not informed by the belief that there is any already given and structured knowledge; just the other way round, it is premised on the idea that knowledge is negotiable. Inspiration for such approaches can of course be derived from the texts of Donna Haraway, a fierce opponent of dogmatic objectivism and universalist research methods as principles put in place by the experimental sciences in the mid-17th century (Haraway, 2009). In the 21st century, school and childhood need new biographies and new protagonists of biographical narratives. In this respect, the imagination is given a powerful boost by the appeal articulated by Ursula Le Guin, who asked in her talk at *The Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* conference in 2014:

> May there not come even that bolder adventurer, the first geolinguist, who, ignoring the delicate trenchant lyrics of the lichen will read beneath it the still less communicative, still more passive, wholly atemporal cold volcanic poetry of the rocks, each one a word spoken how long ago by the earth itself in the immense solitude, the immenser community, of space. (Kanngieser, 2015: 1)

The criteria of 'an even bolder adventurer, the first geolinguist' are in my view met by Simona Kossak, whose biography is in sync with Haraway's strategy of searching for real stories that are at the same time speculative fabulations bound up with speculative realism (Haraway, 2019). In other words, the narrative of Simona Kossak is a story that leans toward the future of what Haraway calls Terrapolis, heralding possible life scripts.

As a matter of fact, tales of this kind have inundated bookshop shelves for at least three years now, with this upsurge probably resulting from a somewhat arrogant belief that the young generation will handle the climate crisis and, in general, design a better world if only youngsters are given appropriate education, which apparently and for no explicable reason cannot be extended to those for whom systemic learning is already a thing of the past. Literature for a young readership investigates not only the interlacements of bio-community but also human agency, which may overcome the torpor of the Anthropocene, melancholy and climate depression. The belief in agency instils hope, giving readers motives to be active. The pro-active attitude may spark rebellion, disobedience and anger, fanned by concern for the closest surroundings and the world at large. For this reason, despite their triumphant-sounding titles, today's enormously popular books, such as Justyna Suchecka's *Young Power. 30 historii o tym, jak młodzi zmieniają świat* [Young Power: 30 Stories about How the Young Change the World], Anna Dziewit-Meller's *Damy, dziewuchy, dziewczyny. Historia w spódnicy* [Ladies, Wenches and Girls: History with a Skirt on] and Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo's *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls: 100 Tales of Extraordinary Women* (published in Polish as *Opowieści na dobranoc dla młodych buntowniczek.*

100 historii niezwykłych kobiet) are supposed to startle instead of putting at ease and to encourage active involvement instead of spawning complacency. In other words, these books persuade (primarily) young girls that, although contemporary crises have become enveloped in a mesh of catastrophic narratives, crisis situations can indeed be kairotic, rather than merely apocalyptic. On this model, crisis is an opportunity – one not to be missed – for courageous decision-making and active engagement. The future of the world is at stake.

The catalogue of books that promote pro-active attitudes by marshalling concrete real-life examples includes at least two other books: Olga Ślepowrońska's *Klimatyczni* [The Climate People], illustrated by Weronika Żurowska, and Wojciech Mikołuszka's *Wielkie przygody w świecie przyrody* [Grand Adventures in the World of Nature], illustrated by Joanna Rzezak. The former, as the writer claims, seeks to give climate activists the publicity usually showered on rock stars and football players (Ślepowrońska, 2020: 144), because while the problems besetting our world are eloquently addressed, solutions are only rarely and reluctantly proposed. Indeed, this gap is redressed by this publication, as it contains a series of biographical vignettes recounting the lives of, for example, William Kamkwamba, Henryk Jordan, Wangari Maathai and Arvind Gupta. Importantly, the parenetic episodes in their lives are supposed to inspire readers, whom Ślepowrońska exhorts to take care of the air, waste segregation and community building through, for example, arranging neighbourhood picnics or energy-saving practices. At the end of the book, readers are urged to look carefully around, identify the shortcomings and needs of their localities and deal with the problems at hand. A range of local ills can be averted by fundraising, corresponding with sick children, helping at shelters, feeding birds in winter and supporting species in danger of extinction (by constructing houses for insects).

The latter book is filled with tales of people from various walks of life whose biographies may be an inspiration to young readers. The inclusive gallery of the protagonists brings together writers, saints, musicians, naturalists, activists, etc., such as St Francis, Alexander von Humboldt, Greta Thunberg, David Attenborough, Jane Goodall, Urszula Zajączkowska, David Rothenberg, Iwa Momatiuk, the Łyczkos and others. The multiplicity and the diversity of the tales are supposed to make readers realise that 'the paths trodden by the protagonists of this volume represent but a fraction of possibilities that nature affords us. […] I hope that everybody will find something that suits them best' (Mikołuszko, 2020: 5).

These two bio-biographical books can be a useful exercise for young readers' ecological intelligence. As explained by Daniel Goleman, this kind of intelligence combines cognitive skills with empathy for all life. In order to develop it, one must relinquish the notion that humankind is situated outside nature

(Goleman, 2009: 43–51) and accept the fact that humans and nature are intrinsically interwoven.

BIO-BIOGRAPHY AS *RESPONSE-ABILITY*

I believe that Simona Kossak's bio-biography is about something more than just building linkages and connections with the world. Her biography is particularly rewardingly read through the lens of another concept advanced by Haraway. In an interview with culture-studies scholar Martha Kenney, Haraway spoke of response-ability as 'a specific relation of humans and nonhumans, as a result of which we develop an ability to act by becoming capable of responding' (Chaberski, 2019: 248). As an effect, we never lose sight of environmental problems (Chaberski, 2019: 248). Haraway's concept is highly useful in the study of literature, including biographical texts, the reading of which can breed readers' disposition to make decisions (*response-ability*) that are conducive to new modes of interpreting the world and constructing their lives.

The story of Simona Kossak's exclusion from the human community and her striving to become part of the nonhuman world is perfectly suited to this end. Kossak became a household name when a massive logging of the Białowieża Forest was launched in 2017, with the government citing the combating of the bark beetle infestation as an excuse. Powerful machines, each capable of cutting up to three hundred trees a day, entered the forest. Kossak had been dead for ten years at the time, but her biography penned by Anna Kamińska and published in 2015 turned her into a special hero by reminding the reading public of Kossak's extraordinary intimacy with the forest that was being annihilated at the moment. Kamińska's *Simona: Opowieść o niezwyczajnym życiu Simony Kossak* [Simona: A Tale of Simona Kossak's Extraordinary Life] draws a portrayal of an outstanding scholar, a sensitive inhabitant of the forest and an outcast from the closest of human communities – her family. Born a girl rather than a long-expected son and without a talent for painting, Kossak failed to meet her family's criteria of a cherished child, was appallingly betrayed by her fiancé, despised and lied to by her sister and then unfairly disinherited by her mother; all in all, she perfectly exemplifies exclusion. Additionally, hers was a thoroughly 'unfeminine' profession, since having abandoned her major in Polish Studies, she became a biologist and professor of forest sciences. Whether alone or later with her partner Lech Wilczek, she lived deep in the woodland, relinquishing the human community for co-being with non-human life forms. Kamińska eagerly emphasises Kossak's incompatibility with the world outside the forest, without needing to contrive any special arguments for that, as the life of Kossak, a dweller of a forester's lodge, itself abounds with them.

Kossak herself was keen to underscore her singularity:

> Driven by atavism, I settled in the primeval forest. At a certain moment, I realised that I had crossed the cordon and found myself siding with trees and animals. So I speak on their behalf. I graduated from biology, but it was only the years of living in the woods that taught me to understand the language of animals. I know it so well that I should be burned at the stake as a witch. (Kamińska, 2015: 4; cover page)

Interestingly, Kossak's accession to bio-community came with the Harawayan disposition for response-ability – responding to the call. As a result, Kossak became not only a biographer of vegetal and animal species, but also of their particular specimens. This is epitomised in *Opowieści z Dziedzinki* [Tales from Dziedzinka] and *Trzy żywoły* [The Three Elements], in which Kossak relies on specific and, so to speak, embodied experiences from the micro-space, sourced from the immediate surroundings of the lodge and from the Białowieża Forest. These texts offer a glimpse into how the researcher's participation in the field, co-being in the landscape and interplays with other beings fostered her capacity to stand up for their 'interests' and speak on behalf of those whose language we do not understand.

This exegesis of human-nonhuman relationships was refined in the volume titled *Saga Puszczy Białowieskiej* [A Saga of the Białowieża Forest]. The generic choice of the saga reasserts the universality of the first law of ecology. Everything is connected with everything else, and if the Plateau, as Tokarczuk states in the motto to this paper, has its geological cousins, the Białowieża Forest must also be a relational space in which Kossak found her own place.[4] The book was designed as a historiosophical biography of the backwoods. The tale opens with a bitter recollection of 1992, when Kossak protested against one of the many logging campaigns. Spanning nearly 500 pages, the narrative goes back to the distant past, medieval economic policies and increasingly ruthless hunting practices not only to deconstruct the myth of Poles' attachment to land and their respect for native nature, but also to argue that the eponymous saga is drawing to an end:

> The Białowieża Forest is dying […].
> That it has not yet shared the fate of other primeval forests of which only the names have survived results from its seemingly inexhaustible vital powers, from the terrible tribute paid to game hunters and from its geographical location, far away from populous agricultural settlements and big cities; situated at the border of countries and nations, hidden in the marshland, it has survived. Gravely mauled, robbed of trees and animals, but still the only European forest vaguely reminiscent of the primeval backwoods that covered the European Lowlands from the Carpathian Mountains up to the Baltic Sea six thousand years ago.
> Our generation are witnessing the last act of its history. (Kossak, 2016: 11, 13)

[4] This way of approaching space was evidently appreciated by Kamińska, who wrote a book on relations with place in 2017. Her *Białowieża szeptem. Historie z Puszczy Białowieskiej* [Whispering about Białowieża: Tales of the Białowieża Forest], which is a biography of the forest, won the Wiesław Kazanecki Literary Award funded by the Mayor of Białystok.

Written for a young readership as part of the biographical series *Oni zmienili świat* [They Have Changed the World], Kossak's biography is less alarmist. Agnieszka Ludwig-Słomczyńska portrays the naturalist first and foremost as a dweller of Dziedzinka, an old forester's lodge in the Białowieża Forest. Both the title of the book – *Simona Kossak. Mieszkanka dzikiej puszczy* [Simona Kossak: An Inhabitant of Wilderness] – and Marcin Bruchnalski's cover image suggest that the protagonist paradoxically found calm in the wild, which, rather than frightening her, protected her. On the cover, the rejuvenated Simona looks at readers, and though her characteristic features are easily recognisable, the impression is that she is represented as a young girl, perhaps almost a peer of the book's implied readership. She is holding a young roe dear in her arms, with a wild boar, an owl and a raven behind her in the background. Having read the book, we will know that the wild boar is Żabka, Kossak companion for seventeen years. There are photographic records of this extraordinary relationship, showing Kossak sharing bed and board with Żabka, but none of these multiple, nearly 'cult' photos are included in the book. The raven pictured on the cover is Korasek, a scourge of the Białowieża residents. Korasek

> was a terrible nuisance, stealing keys, money, cigarette packs, hairbrushes, notebooks […] Worse still, the bird would tear off hens' heads, push people off bikes and pull at women's skirts. Only Simona was able to domesticate the 'gangster raven,' as he was called in the area, and even make friends with him. (Ludwig-Słomczyńska, 2021:17)

In her mini-biography of Kossak, Ludwig-Słomczyńska espouses the idea that the protagonist, who suffered exclusion from early childhood on and had no loving relations with her parents, bonded with nature in search of attachment. The writer highlights the role of the garden to which Simona regularly sneaked out as a girl. Long catalogues of tree species in the garden and an observation that Simona was fascinated by moths and beetles suggest that Kossak saw the garden as a dependable system, whose rhythms furnished her with security, which was a scarce commodity at her familial home. Interestingly, Bruchnalski's illustrations convey the fraught nature of Simona's relations with parents. In his images, her mother and father are reduced to legs alone, while the animals, plants, objects and places important to Simona are accurately pictured with a fair share of realism (readers may learn how to tell trees from one another based on their drawings).

Kossak's new home is presented through increasingly detailed and specific depictions. If one page features a brief description of the Białowieża Forest complete with a map and a European bison as its emblematic animal, the following ones focus on a concrete location in the wilderness, namely, on Dziedzinka, a forester's lodge where Kossak came to live. A modest cabin, without electricity or running water stands in stark contrast with a Cracow villa owned

by Kossak's parents, who hailed from affluent intelligentsia families with artistic traditions on her father's side. Paradoxically, however, and in an uncanny play-on-words, Dziedzinka[5] became the young woman's real home. By fashioning a welcoming space and a shelter for animals in need, Simona naturally, as it were, became part of the local community. Dziedzinka proved 'a home for everybody' (Ludwig-Słomczyńska, 2021: 15), for the human and the nonhuman alike.

Additionally, Ludwig-Słomczyńska's book blurs the boundary between 'wards' and 'friends.' The fuzziness of these notions basically only reaffirms the fluidity of the distinction between the ontological statuses of humans and animals, an indeterminacy of which Simona became convinced when studying the zoopsychology of wild game, primarily of roe deer. Having fathomed and mastered a rich array of deer behaviour, she was recognised by them as part of the herd, so much so that they would warn her against an approaching lynx. This bonding with roe deer made it imperative to her to vocally denounce killing wild animals when she was invited to an opening of *The Year of a Hunter* exhibition at the Wincenty Pol Manor House as a daughter to Jerzy Kossak and a great-granddaughter to Juliusz Kossak, apologists and painters of hunting:

> People of grand lineage are expected not to bring shame. I believe that it's not enough. If we celebrate the great deeds of our ancestors, we must also know what was contemptible in their actions and what still breeds pernicious consequences. It is our duty […] to redress this evil. […] I have […] my views on killing wild animals, and these views are informed not only by emotions but also by the facts of science. Considering hunting in ethical terms, I believe that to kill animals only for entertainment was and still is unworthy of civilised human beings. (Kamińska, 2015: 206–207)

Concluding her tale of Simona Kossak, Ludwig-Słomczyńska discusses her research work and her popular outreach. Readers find out that Kossak had her own radio show titled *Dlaczego w trawie piszczy*[6] (1816 episodes of which were aired), wrote books, made nature documentaries and was a renowned animal psychology scholar. Nevertheless, Kossak's most salient achievement defies measurement:

> Rejected by her own family as a child that failed to live up to their hopes for her, Simona created her own extraordinary world at the heart of the Białowieża Forest. She was eagerly visited by other researchers, tourists and above all common

[5] The play-on-words involves the morphological similarity between Dziedzinka as the name of the lodge and *dziedzictwo*, a Polish word denoting legacy, heritage, inheritance, and the uncanniness is related to the fact that Kossak's mother later disinherited her.

[6] The title literally means: 'Why is there buzzing in the grass?' but playfully echoes 'co w trawie piszczy' (literally: what's buzzing in the grass), a popular Polish idiom which expresses the idea that one should find out what is actually going on. (translator's note)

> people, who knew that Dziedzinka was an oasis of unity with nature, giving them joy and the sense of meaningfulness. (Ludwig-Słomczyńska, 2021: 21)

The short book is capped with a call: 'Follow the example of 'the forest woman' and never abandon your dreams!' (Ludwig-Słomczyńska, 2021: 21). Haraway reiterates that it matters what stories we use to construct other stories, whose thoughts we rely on to think our thoughts, what depictions we draw on to construct our depictions and, above all, how stories make the world and how the world inspires stories of it.

This is the reason why thinking by and through new biographies makes sense, especially in the model o humanistic 'education +'. Despite her traumatic exclusion from one community, Simona Kossak, a woman and a researcher, found a way to enter another community, based on bio-communal principles. Her biography is an ecobiography insofar that it comprises examples of 'other possibilities' for reconsidering one's life, which Julia Fiedorczuk views as representations of '"other possibilities" for the world – other than the progressing devastation of the systems sustaining life on the Earth, other than the increasing economic gap between the rich and the poor, the two most salient challenges of our times' (Fiedorczuk, 2019: 15). With its anchoring in the Greek etymology of 'ecology,' stemming from *oikos* (house, household with its relationships) and *logos* (knowledge), ecobiography suggests how the knowledge of 'home' may translate into good 'husbandry' (Fiedorczuk, 2015: 17), or, in other words, how we can live better lives. The inclusion of such biographies or biographical motifs when reading canonical texts[7] at school would encourage exploring new horizons and looking into entwinings and couplings that can help us find 'a new system of symbiosis with nature and all creation' (Skolimowski, 1995: 10) and enable us to return home, that is, to re-establish our severed ties with the environment.

I believe that there is a shortage of such tales in Polish schools today. This observation should compel us to open up to a new preventive power of biography and to commit to its three principles of: resilience as adjustment to challenges and adaptation to changes; persistence as a capacity to consistently pursue our goals; and sustainability as the promotion of the harmonious integration of relations with the non-human world (environmental dimension), human relations (social dimension) and relations to the self (spiritual and emotional dimension). To accomplish this, we need biographical narratives that undermine (school) habits and make us receptive to 'other possibilities': 'Throughout my life, I've been looking for people to unsettle my world. With such people, I can realise that a felled tree is not dead at all, that a pack of wolves is like a family rather than

[7] I have discussed this theme elsewhere. See M. Wójcik-Dudek, 'Inne możliwości. "Uziemianie" romantycznego pejzażu,' in B. Gala-Milczarek and A. Raszewska-Klimas (eds.), *Wiek XIX na lekcjach języka polskiego. Literatura – język – kultura – historia* (Siedlce: Instytut Kultury Regionalnej i Badań Literackich im. Franciszka Karpińskiego, 2020). pp. 293–312.

a dictatorship, and that a forest is not a plantation of boards. Such people air my head, and Simona Kossak is a classic in this department' (Kossak, 2022: 4, cover page; endorsement by Łukasz Długowski).

We need ecologically engaged biographies.

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TZINA KALOGIROU ORCID: 0000-0003-1116-4986
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

ARETI DIMITRA DOUKA ORCID: 0009-0008-5044-719X
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
University of Angers

Reading or Fun, Reading for a Cause, Envisioning a Biocentric Future in University Settings: Fostering Positive Attitudes Toward Reading for Social and Environmental Change

Abstract: As environmental crises intensify, the need for innovative educational approaches that inspire young adults to engage with sustainability and environmental justice becomes increasingly urgent. This paper examines the role of literature – specifically ecofiction – as a transformative tool for fostering ecological awareness and promoting a biocentric worldview among university students. By emphasizing the importance of reading for enjoyment, reading with purpose, and cultivating positive attitudes toward literature, we explore how storytelling can serve as a catalyst for social and environmental change. Through a university-based project focused on integrating ecofiction into discussions of sustainability, we assess the potential of literary engagement to shape students' perceptions, ethical considerations, and actions toward a more just and sustainable future. The findings highlight the capacity of literature to not only enhance environmental literacy but also to empower young adults to envision and advocate for systemic transformation.

Keywords: Ecofiction, environmental literacy, sustainability education, biocentrism, transformative learning, literature and sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the need for a profound societal shift toward sustainability and environmental justice has become increasingly apparent. With climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation rapidly altering the world as we know it, it is essential to engage individuals in both understanding and acting upon these pressing issues. The role of education in fostering this engagement is critical, especially at the university level, where young adults are

at a crossroads between personal growth and broader societal responsibility. A key aspect of this educational process involves cultivating positive attitudes toward reading and integrating literature into the broader narrative of social and environmental change. The aim of this paper is to explore how literature, specifically ecofiction, can serve as a transformative tool in encouraging young adults to envision a biocentric future. This will be accomplished by highlighting the role of reading for fun, reading for a cause, and fostering positive attitudes toward reading through a university-based project centered on social and environmental transformation.

BIOCENTRISM: AN ETHICAL PARADIGM CENTERED ON LIFE

Biocentrism, as an ethical framework, assigns intrinsic value to all living entities, advocating for the reverence and preservation of life in its myriad forms. This perspective stands in contrast to anthropocentrism, which prioritizes human interests, yet it does so without adopting a misanthropic stance.

Undeniably, we live in the age of the Anthropocene. This is what life looks like in this era. Humans have altered the anaglyph of Earth in myriad ways and now we have reached a point when people need to find ways to address the magnitude of the environmental problems without feeling weak or disheartened (Kalogirou,2025, Reno, 2022). Instead, biocentrism seeks to bridge the perceived chasm between humanity and the natural world, promoting a harmonious coexistence. Central to biocentrism is the assertion that all living beings possess inherent worth, irrespective of their utility to human endeavors. This philosophy underscores the moral obligation to consider the rights and welfare of non-human animals, acknowledging their inability to advocate for themselves. Recent discussions in moral psychology have delved into the evolutionary underpinnings of moral behavior, suggesting that human morality, while often appearing altruistic, may be deeply rooted in self-interest and social utility (Sauer, 2024). Such insights compel a reevaluation of our ethical responsibilities towards other sentient beings.

The moral orientation of biocentrism can be dissected into two primary concerns: the imperative to avoid inflicting harm on sentient creatures and the commitment to preserving the purity and integrity of natural entities. These dual facets engage distinct cognitive and emotional processes within the human psyche. Neuroscientific investigations have begun to unravel the neural substrates associated with moral cognition, highlighting the complex interplay between brain regions in ethical decision-making (Fumagalli & Priori, 2012). Understanding these mechanisms offers profound implications for how individuals and societies might cultivate a biocentric ethos. Embracing a biocentric perspective necessitates a paradigm shift in environmental ethics, urging

humanity to recognize its integral role within the biosphere rather than as a dominator over it. This shift has practical ramifications, influencing policy decisions, conservation efforts, and our daily interactions with the environment. Furthermore, exploring the neural correlates of moral reasoning related to biocentrism can inform strategies for moral enhancement, potentially guiding interventions aimed at fostering more empathetic and ecologically conscious behaviors (Persson & Savulescu, 2017).

ECOCRITICISM AND ECOPEDAGOGY WITHIN A BIOCENTRIC FRAMEWORK

In the context of biocentrism, which emphasizes the intrinsic value of all living beings, ecocriticism and ecopedagogy emerge as pivotal frameworks that explore and enhance the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Ecocriticism examines how literature portrays the relationship between humans and nature, offering insights into cultural attitudes and experiences. By analyzing literary texts, ecocriticism seeks to uncover and challenge anthropocentric narratives, advocating for a more inclusive understanding that recognizes the intrinsic value of all life forms. This approach aligns with biocentric principles by emphasizing the need to respect and value the natural world beyond its utility to humans. Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of pedagogical ecocriticism in enhancing environmental awareness, particularly in the post-pandemic era (Research Gate, 2022).

On the other hand**,** ecopedagogy emerges as an educational movement that integrates ecological awareness into the learning process, aiming to foster a transformative consciousness among learners. Grounded in critical pedagogy, ecopedagogy encourages individuals to question dominant societal structures and values that contribute to environmental degradation. By promoting an understanding of the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems, ecopedagogy seeks to empower learners to engage in actions that support environmental sustainability and social equity. Recent research underscores the urgency of adopting an ecocentric ethic within educational frameworks. For instance, studies advocate for integrating ecological and human well-being into management curricula, proposing arts-based ecopedagogy as a means to challenge prevailing neoliberal ideologies and foster transformative learning experiences (Northumbria University, 2023).

Therefore, inorporating biocentric principles into ecocriticism and ecopedagogy involves recognizing the intrinsic value of all living beings and the interconnectedness of life systems. This integration challenges anthropocentric perspectives and promotes a holistic understanding of environmental issues. By embedding biocentric values into literary analysis and educational practices, these frameworks can more effectively contribute to the development of

a society that values and preserves the natural world. An intercultural dialogue on ecopedagogy between Daoism and Naess's ecosophy highlights the potential of integrating diverse philosophical perspectives to enrich ecopedagogical practices (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

THE IMPACT OF LITERATURE ON HUMAN UNDERSTANDING AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A FOCUS ON ECOFICTION

Literature has long been a powerful tool for shaping human consciousness, offering not only a window into the past but also a lens through which individuals can interpret their present and imagine their future. It provides an avenue for individuals, particularly students and children, to gain insights into human experiences across time and cultures, allowing them to learn more about themselves and the world around them (Langer, 1995). Beyond simply entertaining or informing, literature offers an invaluable resource for emotional growth and social awareness. From exploring how to manage feelings and cope with anxiety to learning how to empathize with others, literature has a unique role in developing emotional intelligence and social empathy in young readers (Nussbaum, 1997).

In the case of non-fiction books, young readers also gain substantial knowledge across various subjects while maintaining an element of enjoyment. Whether through historical accounts, scientific discoveries, or cultural explorations, non-fiction literature broadens the mind and encourages curiosity (Briggs, 2009). However, fiction – particularly that which blends elements of fantasy with reality – has a unique way of enhancing aesthetic development, fostering empathy, and sparking the imagination (Beaumont, 2015).

One of the key aspects of literature is its ability to serve as a bridge between the realm of fantasy and reality. This dynamic interplay between fantasy and reality plays a crucial role in developing young readers' aesthetic sensibilities, which is essential for both emotional and intellectual growth (Hirsch, 2016). Through literature, children encounter moral dilemmas, social challenges, and interpersonal conflicts that reflect real-world issues, allowing them to develop critical thinking skills and navigate their feelings and anxieties in constructive ways (Wolfe, 2002). While literature can certainly serve as a form of enjoyment and leisure, it also carries the potential for greater societal impact. The capacity of books to inspire thought and action is profound, especially when combined with a sense of purpose (Goldstein, 2017). When young readers engage with literature that promotes social change – whether related to environmental sustainability, social justice, or human rights – they are not only entertained but also motivated to reflect on their role in society and their impact on the world.

One significant genre that has emerged in recent years is ecofiction – a form of fiction that intertwines environmental concerns with storytelling. These

novels, particularly within the young adult (YA) category, strive to promote a sustainable ethic of care, fostering an understanding of the intricate relationship between humans, nonhumans, and the environment. Ecofiction can be a powerful tool for encouraging young readers to become environmentally conscious, instilling values of sustainability, and promoting an active stance against environmental degradation (Humes, 2017). Ecofiction offers readers an opportunity to grapple with the ethical and moral challenges of a rapidly changing world and to consider the roles they might play in creating a sustainable future (Morrison & Robbins, 2019).

In the context of environmental education, literature like ecofiction plays a crucial role in shaping the way young people understand their responsibility toward the planet. These books are often used in educational settings to spark discussions on climate change, conservation, and the moral implications of ecological choices.

Furthermore, literature can foster a sense of collective responsibility. By engaging with narratives that highlight social and environmental issues, young readers are encouraged to reflect on the broader societal implications of personal actions. Through the empathy and understanding gained in reading ecofiction, students may develop a sense of shared responsibility for the earth and its ecosystems. Literature is a space where readers can develop an ethical consciousness (Kidd, 2018, Jameson, 2019) that transcends the individual, promoting both a sense of personal and collective agency.

ADOLESCENT IDENTITY AND LITERATURE: CONFRONTING INJUSTICE, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND CRISIS

To design and implement this project, we considered the multifaceted and complex nature of adolescence, acknowledging that our participants were still within this developmental stage. Given that adolescence is characterized by significant psychological, emotional, and social transformations, it was crucial to account for the unique developmental needs and experiences of the students, who themselves were navigating this period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence, characterized by a time of significant transition, represents a unique period in the human lifecycle. It is a time when young individuals are increasingly aware of their social identities and are in the process of negotiating and consolidating their sense of self. In literature, this developmental stage is explored and represented in various ways, offering young readers insights into the complexities of identity formation and the challenges that accompany this phase of life (McLeod, 2011).

Literature, especially works aimed at young adults (YA), serves as a mirror to the adolescent experience, engaging with themes that are relevant to contemporary societal issues. These works often present identity as a dynamic,

evolving process that is deeply influenced by social, political, and environmental factors. In particular, contemporary literature challenges traditional notions of identity and opens up space for exploring broader issues such as social justice, climate change, and personal responsibility (Wells, 2013).

The transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by a search for autonomy, the establishment of personal beliefs, and the negotiation of social norms and expectations. As adolescents engage with their identities, they must navigate a range of emotional, social, and cognitive challenges, making identity a fluid and continuously evolving concept.

Literary works aimed at adolescents often reflect this complexity, portraying characters who struggle with self-perception, societal expectations, and the pressures of fitting in. These narratives allow young readers to see themselves represented and to explore their own questions of identity. In doing so, literature provides a space for adolescents to understand that identity is not fixed but rather shaped by personal experiences, relationships, and broader cultural and societal influences (Kroger, 2007).

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL): A PATHWAY TO HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG ADULTS

To implement our project effectively, we selected the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach as the most appropriate framework for our group. This decision was based on SEL's evidence-based efficacy in fostering key competencies which will be analyzed in this chapter, all of which are critical for the personal and academic development of adolescents. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained significant attention in educational, psychological, and developmental fields as an essential framework for fostering positive outcomes in young people and adults. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), SEL is defined as "the process through which all young adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions." SEL supports the development of competencies that help individuals respond effectively to life's challenges, build resilience, and engage in positive social interactions.

The five core competencies that are central to Social and Emotional Learning are:

Self-awareness: This competency involves recognizing and understanding one's emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior. It allows individuals to develop a realistic sense of their strengths and limitations and fosters a healthy self-concept (Elias et al., 1997). Self-awareness is linked

to improved mental health, as individuals with higher emotional awareness are better able to cope with stress and regulate their emotions (Gross, 2002).

Self-management: This refers to the ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations, including stress, frustration, and conflict. Individuals who excel in self-management are better at setting and achieving goals, managing their time, and responding to challenges in adaptive ways (Zins & Elias, 2006). Research has shown that effective self-regulation leads to improved academic achievement and interpersonal relationships (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Social awareness: This competency involves the ability to take the perspective of others, show empathy, and understand social and ethical norms for behavior. Social awareness is vital for fostering healthy relationships and resolving conflicts in constructive ways (Payton et al., 2000). Research supports the idea that social awareness is linked to pro-social behaviors and is essential for community cohesion (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Relationship skills: These are the abilities needed to establish and maintain healthy, supportive relationships with others. Effective communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, and active listening are essential components of this competency. Studies have demonstrated that individuals with strong relationship skills tend to have better social outcomes, including higher levels of social support and positive interpersonal interactions (Zins et al., 2007).

Responsible decision-making: This competency focuses on making constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. Responsible decision-making involves considering the well-being of oneself and others in decision-making processes. Research suggests that individuals who exhibit responsible decision-making skills are more likely to engage in behaviors that promote long-term well-being and avoid risky or harmful behaviors (Jones et al., 2017).

SEL is integral to fostering emotional intelligence and social competence, which are foundational for healthy psychological development. A growing body of research highlights the significance of SEL in promoting positive mental health and preventing mental health issues (Durlak et al., 2011). Programs that incorporate SEL competencies have been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression in children and adolescents and improve emotional well-being (Weare & Nind, 2011). Furthermore, individuals who engage in SEL programs demonstrate improved social behaviors, such as empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution, which contribute to stronger, more supportive relationships (Zins et al., 2007). The development of SEL competencies has also been linked to better academic performance and long-term success. Studies indicate that students who develop strong emotional and social skills are more

likely to perform well academically and are less likely to engage in disruptive behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Reading, especially in the context of Young Adult (YA) literature, is a powerful tool for personal growth and social engagement. As future educators, pre-service teachers hold a pivotal role in influencing young minds and cultivating an interest in literature that fosters not only academic skills but also emotional and social intelligence. The objective of this project was to explore whether and how a university-level workshop on YA literature could contribute to developing positive attitudes toward reading while simultaneously fostering a mindset for social and environmental change.

The workshop targeted 18/19-year-old pre-service teachers who were provided with a broad range of reading materials, including traditional fairytales, contemporary picture books, poems, and graphic novels. These texts were chosen for their capacity to evoke deep engagement, encourage reflection on personal and societal values, and stimulate an understanding of the pressing social and environmental issues of our time.

The main objectives of this project were:

1. To assess how engagement with a variety of YA texts could foster a positive attitude towards reading among pre-service teachers.
2. To evaluate how YA literature can cultivate a mindset focused on social and environmental change, particularly through the lens of the characters, themes, and narratives presented in the readings.
3. To explore the ways in which reading promotes personal connection – both with oneself, one's peers, society, and the natural world.

Methodology

The participants in this project were 18/19-year-old pre-service teachers. Students read a variety of YA texts, carefully selected for their thematic diversity. The readings[1] spanned different genres and forms, including traditional fairytales, contemporary picture books, poems, and graphic novels, each chosen for their potential to engage students in deep reading and reflection.

The selected readings were integrated with carefully designed activities to promote self-expression, emotional awareness, and creativity among university students through both classroom and outdoor experiences. These books,

[1] The chosen readings were: Loring-Fisher, J. (2020). *Taking time*. Lantana Publishing; Lunde, M. (2022). *The guardian of the sun*). Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva; Poetry School. (2022). *Ecopoetry anthology* (Ginkgo Prize). Poetry School. https://ginkgoprize.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Ginkgo-Prize_Ecopoetry-Anthology-2021–1.pdf; Tokarczuk, O. (2021). *The lost soul*. Seven Stories Press.

all significant works within the realm of ecofiction, align with the principles of ecopedagogy, fostering critical thinking about human-nature relationships and inspiring a deeper ecological consciousness.

Taking Time by Jo Loring-Fisher is a beautifully illustrated picture book that invites readers to slow down and appreciate the small wonders of nature. Through poetic language and evocative imagery, the book encourages mindfulness and environmental awareness, making it an ideal choice for reflective journaling and mindfulness exercises in natural settings. By engaging with this text, students cultivated a heightened sense of presence and appreciation for their surroundings, reinforcing the idea that sustainability begins with attentiveness to the world.

The Guardian of the Sun by Maja Lunde is a particularly powerful addition to the reading list, as Lunde is renowned for her climate fiction that intertwines human stories with environmental crises. This novel explores themes of ecological collapse, climate resilience, and intergenerational responsibility, making it a vital resource for ecopedagogical discussions. The narrative, which imagines a future affected by environmental degradation, urges readers to consider their role in shaping a more sustainable world. Students engaged with this text through group discussions and creative storytelling workshops, using Lunde's themes to craft their own speculative narratives about climate futures. This process not only strengthened their creative abilities but also deepened their understanding of ecological interconnectedness, reinforcing the power of literature in shaping environmental ethics.

The *Ecopoetry Anthology* from the Ginkgo Prize provided a rich selection of contemporary eco-poetry, demonstrating how language and artistic expression can serve as powerful tools for environmental advocacy. The anthology showcases diverse poetic voices that explore themes of ecological grief, resilience, and reverence for nature. Students engaged with this text through poetry-writing sessions, composing their own ecopoems to express personal connections to environmental themes. This creative process allowed them to articulate their emotions about ecological issues, bridging personal reflection with broader environmental concerns.

The Lost Soul by Olga Tokarczuk is a meditative fable that explores the themes of disconnection, burnout, and the importance of slowing down. The book, with its minimalist text and evocative illustrations, serves as an allegory for the modern condition of being constantly on the move while losing touch with oneself and the natural world. This text was accompanied by artistic projects, such as visual storytelling and personal artifact sharing, prompting students to reflect on their own relationships with time, nature, and personal well-being. Through these activities, the book facilitated meaningful discussions about the necessity of balance and mindfulness in both personal life and environmental engagement.

Collectively, these readings and activities not only strengthened students' social bonds but also aligned with the principles of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) by promoting self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. By integrating ecofiction with ecopedagogical practices, the project successfully fostered a deeper engagement with both environmental and personal transformation, demonstrating the vital role of literature in shaping a more sustainable and empathetic future.

Throughout the workshop, students were encouraged to engage in reflective exercises, group discussions, and written responses that allowed them to connect personally with the texts. They were asked to consider how the stories related to their own feelings, experiences, and beliefs, as well as to think critically about the ways in which these narratives intersected with broader social and environmental issues.

The project focused on four key areas of connection:

1. Connection with Self: The readings were designed to provoke personal reflection, enabling students to connect with their own emotions, needs, and experiences.
2. Connection with Peers: Group discussions and collaborative activities encouraged students to engage with their classmates' perspectives, fostering a sense of community and shared learning. This collaborative environment allowed students to challenge and refine their ideas while building empathy and understanding among their peers.
3. Connection with Society: The readings selected for the workshop often addressed social issues such as inequality, injustice, and the need for societal change.
4. Connection with Nature: Several of the texts explored environmental themes, encouraging students to think critically about humanity's relationship with nature and the impact of environmental degradation. These readings provided a platform for discussing sustainable practices and the importance of protecting the environment for future generations.

CLASSROOM AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED

The selected readings were integrated with carefully designed activities to promote self-expression, emotional awareness, and creativity among university students through both classroom and outdoor experiences. *Taking Time* by Loring-Fisher was paired with reflective journaling and mindfulness exercises in natural settings, encouraging students to slow down and cultivate a deeper appreciation for their surroundings. *The Guardian of the Sun* by Lunde inspired group discussions and creative storytelling workshops, allowing students to explore ecological responsibility through imaginative narratives. *The*

Ecopoetry Anthology from the Ginkgo Prize served as a foundation for poetry-writing sessions, where students composed their own ecopoems to express personal connections to environmental themes. The *Lost Soul* by Tokarczuk was accompanied by artistic projects, such as visual storytelling and personal artifact sharing, fostering discussions on disconnection and the importance of mindful living. The activities, which which are described in more detail later not only strengthened students' social bonds but also aligned with the principles of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) by promoting self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills, ultimately deepening their engagement with environmental and personal transformation.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Personal Object Sharing and Reflection: Students are encouraged to bring an object that holds personal significance to them. This could be an item that brings them joy or comfort, or a photo of something meaningful (e.g., a beloved pet). Students are asked to share the object with the class, explaining why it is significant to them, its origin, and any emotional attachment they have to it. This exercise fosters self-awareness and communication skills, as it provides an opportunity for students to articulate their personal connections to objects and share their stories with others. It also emphasizes the value of simple, non-technological objects, promoting mindfulness and reflection.

Creative Writing and Expression: After sharing their objects, students are tasked with writing a short story centered around their chosen item, expressing their feelings and thoughts about it. This writing activity promotes emotional expression and creative thinking. By reflecting on their favorite items, students engage in a process of self-discovery, connecting their emotions with tangible objects.

Object Exchange and Collaborative Play: All students' objects are collected and displayed in the classroom. This provides an opportunity for students to share, swap, and explore the significance of each other's belongings. Collaborative play is encouraged through the creation of new games involving these items, allowing students to engage in shared experiences and build a sense of community.

Creating a Magic Garden: Students are asked to create a collective "magic garden" using the items they brought. They are invited to name the garden, with options like "Paradise" or "Our Mother Planet," which encourages a sense of collective identity and environmental appreciation. This activity promotes creativity, collaborative thinking, and connection with nature.

Imagining and Drawing Planets: Students are then tasked with drawing two representations: one of a "planet of their favorite items," reflecting their emotional connection to these objects, and another depicting a planet without their cherished belongings. Students reflect on the color schemes, textures, and

features of these planets, which fosters imagination and deepens their emotional awareness of how personal items influence their well-being and identity.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Nature Walk and Memorabilia Collection: The teacher encourages students to take a walk outside the classroom and observe the natural environment. Students are asked to collect a piece of nature, such as a leaf or flower, to bring back to the classroom. Each student must explain why they chose their specific item and discuss the feelings or connections they have to it. This outdoor activity connects students to the environment, promotes mindfulness, and encourages students to reflect on their relationship with nature.

Feelings and Enjoyment Writing: Students are asked to write sentences or paragraphs beginning with prompts such as, "I feel happy when…" or "I enjoy…" This exercise helps students reflect on positive emotions and identify activities, environments, or relationships that contribute to their sense of well-being. It encourages students to articulate their feelings and create connections between emotions and personal experiences.

Needs and Aspirations Writing: Another writing prompt invites students to express their needs and aspirations. Examples include: "I need… because…" (e.g., "I need the seashells because they remind me of the beach"). This activity allows students to explore their desires, motivations, and the underlying reasons for their needs, fostering greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence. It also encourages empathy as students share and listen to one another's needs.

By integrating both classroom-based and outdoor activities, this project fosters emotional intelligence, creative thinking, and social bonding among students. The activities encourage self-reflection, emotional expression, and a deeper connection to both personal belongings and the natural world. Furthermore, the collaborative elements of the activities promote empathy, social awareness, and teamwork. Through these activities, students not only develop their emotional and social competencies but also cultivate a greater appreciation for the people, objects, and environment around them.

CONCLUSION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF NATURE IN EDUCATION

Immersion in nature has long been recognized for its ability to foster personal growth and development. This study underscores the profound impact that nature can have on cultivating a person's character, particularly in enhancing their natural inclinations for exploration, discovery, curiosity, and imagination. These traits, often stifled by the conventional confines of urban living and structured education, are nurtured through direct interaction with the natural

world. Students who engage with nature experience significant increases in self-confidence and self-esteem, reinforcing the notion that the natural environment serves not just as a physical space, but as a profound source of psychological and emotional development.

The multifaceted and demanding role of teachers in the modern educational landscape cannot be overstated. Teachers are tasked not only with imparting academic knowledge but also with guiding the emotional, social, and personal development of their students. The findings of this study reveal that many students, through their immersion in nature, have come to recognize the urgent need for transformative changes within society. They now understand that the lessons of nature – its resilience, interconnectedness, and cyclical wisdom – offer vital insights into how we might address the pressing challenges of our time, from environmental sustainability to social justice. These realizations point to the potential of nature as a powerful tool in fostering both personal and collective growth.

It is clear from this study that nature's transformative effects go beyond individual development. The lessons it offers have a broader social significance, encouraging young people to think critically about the future and their role in shaping it. As students reflect on nature's inherent wisdom, they acknowledge that the time for radical societal change is now, and the pathway to that change lies in a deeper connection with the environment and an understanding of the lessons it provides.

In conclusion, nature continues to perform its miraculous work, as it has done throughout human history, by nurturing the mind, body, and spirit. Its capacity to spark curiosity, foster imagination, and build self-confidence is unmatched, offering a framework for a more sustainable, compassionate, and thoughtful future. Through education that integrates nature's lessons, we are presented with a unique opportunity to shape individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also emotionally intelligent, socially responsible, and equipped to bring about the radical changes our society so desperately needs.

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SYLWIA JANKOWSKA ORCID: 0000-0002-7620-382X
University of Wrocław

Intersectional Representation of "The Owl House": Luz Noceda, a Bisexual Afro-Latina with ADHD

Abstract: This article delves into Luz Noceda's intersectional identity as a bisexual, Afro-Latina individual with ADHD within the narrative framework of the animated series "The Owl House", a television series created by Disney Channel in 2020. By critically analyzing Luz's portrayal, this research investigates how intersectionality enhances our comprehension of her lived experiences and challenges within the enchanted setting. Luz's depiction as a multidimensional character not only mirrors diverse identities but also serves as a vital representation for audiences, particularly adolescents. Through Luz's narrative trajectory, viewers can empathize with her struggles if they share similar identities or gain insight into minority experiences, thereby fostering empathy and broader understanding. This study posits that media representations, exemplified by Luz's character, exert significant influence in shaping societal attitudes and advancing inclusivity. By foregrounding Luz's intersectional identity, this study contributes to scholarly discourse on media diversity and its profound implications for societal perceptions and individual identity development.

Keywords: neurodiversity, queer, POC, intersectionality, animation, representation of minorities in pop culture

INTRODUCTION

Each year, Polish society is observed to rank low in acceptance and tolerance towards minorities, encompassing sexual, ethnic, or racial groups. In 2022, Poland was positioned 42nd in the *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia*, marking it as the lowest-ranked country within the European Union (Annual Review, 2023). Scholars focusing on children's and young adult literature, as well as cultural texts aimed at these demographics, have consistently emphasized the significance of representing diverse characters. The subject has been extensively explored by Mateusz Świetlicki and Sabina Świtała, who delved into motifs present in queer literature aimed at children and young adults (Świetlicki & Świtała, 2022). In addition, the themes were thoroughly

addressed by Katarzyna Reszczyńska-Urban, who conducted an analysis of the theme of initiation in the works of writer Natalia Osińska (Reszczyńska-Urban, 2019). My own research delves into the transgender identity of Daniel, the protagonist in Osińska's *Fanfik* (2016) and *Slash* (2017) (Jankowska, 2023). Increasingly, characters within this literary domain are portrayed not only as queer but also as members of other minority groups. For instance, Wika from Osińska's *Fluff* (2019) is characterized as a lesbian on the autism spectrum.

This article aims to introduce another character exemplifying such diversity, Luz Noceda from the *Owl House* TV series. The discussion is excerpted from my thesis, which investigates intersectional discourses of minority and identity in 21st-century American animation, particularly within educational contexts.

The objective of the dissertation was to showcase non-normative characters from various minorities and identities through an intersectional lens. It further aimed to demonstrate how school curricula could be enriched with audiovisual cultural texts (in this case, animations) that represent characters in a respectful and comprehensible manner. Such representations can facilitate identification for non-normative individuals and foster empathy and acceptance among normative audiences.

One of the animations highlighted in my research is "The Owl House", featuring protagonist Luz Noceda, an Afro-Dominican adolescent girl from Connecticut who struggles to fit in with her peers and is labeled a 'freak'. En route to a summer camp intended to 'normalize' her, Luz inadvertently enters a portal to another world. There, despite of absence of magical abilities – witches possess the appropriate organ and are biologically predisposed to using magic and Luz lacks this organ – she still finds her own path to understanding and utilizing magic. The protagonist becomes an apprentice to the Eda at the Owl House, pursues her dream of becoming a witch, and ultimately finds a new family.

Produced by Disney Television Animation and created by Dana Terrace, "The Owl House" premiered globally on January 10, 2020, on the Disney Channel, and in Poland on January 4, 2021, on Disney XD. While it may appear to be a typical narrative about teenage witches, the series exemplifies the phenomenon of intersectionality, portraying Luz as a bisexual Afro-Latina who also has ADHD. This analysis will examine how these identities are represented in the animation and discuss how such content can contribute to the cultivation of understanding and tolerance among young viewers in the context of intersectionality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given that "The Owl House" is a relatively new series, having concluded on April 8, 2023, it has not yet been extensively analyzed in academic literature.

However, its queer themes have been addressed by scholars such as Erika G. Abad (Abad, 2020) and Kleinke (Kleinke, 2023), as well as the group of researchers behind the article "Animating queer figured worlds: How young adult animation is cultivating queer spaces and narratives" (Dennin, Black, Alexander, 2024), which discusses inclusive storytelling in the series. Luz's psychosexual orientation has received the most attention, while her ethnicity is usually only briefly mentioned. The context related to her ADHD is often overlooked, despite her neurodiversity being confirmed as early as April 2021 (Rose, 2021).

This oversight is significant, given that the topic has been important among fans of the series, who have created articles such as "'The Owl House,' Luz Noceda, and Neurodivergent Coding" (Screen Queens, 2020) and "Luz has ADHD and her being a human trying to be a witch is a metaphor for her being neurodivergent, here's why" (n.d., 2020). Therefore, I aim to fill this gap through an intersectional approach. By exploring Luz's character through the lens of intersectionality, we can gain a deeper understanding of how her multiple identities – bisexual, Afro-Latina, and neurodivergent – interact and influence her experiences. This approach not only enriches the academic discourse surrounding "The Owl House" but also highlights the importance of comprehensive representation in media.

The concept of intersectionality, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, posits that biological and social categories such as gender, age, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and worldview are not isolated phenomena. Rather, they comprise intersecting systems that often lead to compound and multifaceted forms of discrimination, and occasionally, to an aggregation of privileges. Intersectionality thus underscores the intricate interplay and perpetuation of inequalities, exemplified by the heightened discrimination faced by women of color from ethnic minorities. These women encounter additional challenges, including restricted access to education and reproductive rights (Kolářová, 2008). In stark contrast, white, educated men from affluent backgrounds often begin at an advantaged position due to their gender, race, and class. While these examples may appear pronounced, it is crucial to acknowledge that intersectionality can also manifest in subtler forms. The interconnected nature of oppressive mechanisms, encompassing racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism, necessitates a holistic examination. This approach is particularly vital for comprehending the social perception of individuals with non-normative identities, where multiple intersecting identities coalesce to form unique personal identities divergent from societal norms.

The multifaceted nature of these phenomena presents challenges in elucidation, particularly to younger audiences with emerging conceptual frameworks. However, it is argued that through diligent effort and innovative pedagogical strategies, educators can clarify the complex interrelations inherent in diversity and difference, fostering an environment of understanding and acceptance.

In her analysis, Lindsey Pelucacci outlines that the character Luz desires to study a bit of everything rather than choosing a specific track in school. While some might interpret this as indecision, in this context, it represents a full spectrum of possibilities and an openness to multiple life paths. Pelucacci notes that the scene where the protagonist is granted permission to pursue this course is set against a background with the colors of the bisexual flag, highlighting a deeper meaning (Pelucacci, 2022).

Although Pelucacci does not explicitly use the term „intersectionality" (she refers to the concept of „coenaesthesia"), her observations align with this framework, much like the character herself. Additionally, the challenges Luz faces can resonate with both neurodiverse individuals struggling with learning and queer individuals. The quote, "I still can't choose. Maybe it's crazy, but I wish I could study a little bit of everything," also reflects a journey of self-exploration, identity, and personal approach to life.

The significance of Luz and „The Owl House" is not lost on Gray E. Takahashi, who states, "The Owl House is unique because of its willingness to break and queer a multitude of social conventions" (Takahashi, 2023).

As „The Owl House" is a relatively new animated series, having concluded in 2023, scholarly research on it is still in its infancy. The series awaits extensive analysis, particularly within the contexts of queer studies, gender studies, POC studies, and neurodiversity research.

LUZ NOCEDA: A CASE STUDY IN INTERSECTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Luz Noceda, the protagonist of the animated series "The Owl House," is portrayed as a dynamic and optimistic teenager who inadvertently finds herself transported to a magical realm. This unexpected journey provides her with a unique opportunity to embrace and celebrate her individuality. As previously discussed, Luz struggles to integrate into her community, often facing ostracism due to her unconventional humor and interests. Despite lacking the inherent abilities to become a witch, she remains resolute in her aspiration to achieve this goal. Together with her mentor and friends, Luz embarks on a quest to discover alternative ways to harness magic. Her journey, however, is not solely self-centered; Luz develops profound connections with other characters and empathetically aids them with their challenges. Notably, she assists her mentor in managing a curse that, within this world, symbolizes disability (Rattray & Ellis, 2023). Luz's benevolence fosters transformation in her environment, epitomizing her mentor's philosophy: "Us Weirdos Have to Stick Together."

From a scholarly perspective, Luz's narrative arc in "The Owl House" provides a rich text for analysis. As viewers, we observe Luz's persistent struggle

against various adversities. One of the most significant narrative threads is her quest to become a witch, which serves as a compelling allegory for self-acceptance and the pursuit of acceptance from others. Initially, Luz is unable to pursue conventional studies in magic, compelling her to seek alternative methods to learn and utilize magic. These adaptations can be likened to the accommodations required by students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Vrasmas & Vrasmas, 2012). Luz's journey culminates in the profound realization that her ultimate desire is to be understood and accepted. This acceptance, when received from her mother, mentor, friends, and most importantly, from herself, enables Luz to fully actualize her potential and truly become a witch.

The character of Luz Noceda introduces themes of self-discovery and acceptance across multiple dimensions, including sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and ethnic background. Luz, as a bisexual Afro-Latina with ADHD, represents a significant and unprecedented level of representation in a Disney animated series. This multifaceted representation suggests that Disney may not have been fully prepared for such progressive inclusivity, yet it also highlights the evolving nature of animated media in addressing contemporary social issues. Luz's characterization challenges traditional norms and encourages a broader dialogue about the importance of diverse representation in media.

Furthermore, Luz's experiences and interactions within "The Owl House" resonate deeply with various marginalized communities. Her struggles and triumphs offer a narrative that is both relatable and inspirational, particularly for individuals who may feel alienated or misunderstood in their own lives. Luz's journey underscores the importance of empathy, resilience, and the pursuit of one's true identity, making her an exemplary figure for discussions within the realms of queer studies, gender studies, People of Color studies, and neurodiversity research.

As a Disney production, The *Owl House* faced considerable resistance from the studio in incorporating LGBT+ representation within its character roster. Despite such challenges, the show triumphed in delivering a series that not only features Luz as Disney's inaugural bisexual protagonist but also crafts her relationship with Amity, who identifies as a lesbian (Weeks, 2021). Their dynamic evolves from rivalry to friendship and blossoms into a romance, offering viewers a progressive depiction of a relationship that serves as an example not just for queer individuals but for heteronormative audiences as well. The portrayal of their bond, characterized by open communication, mutual trust, and mature problem-solving, sets a standard for relationships founded on honesty, respect for personal boundaries, and assertiveness.

Luz's identity is further enriched by her ethnic background and bilingualism. The lead character of The *Owl House* is an Afro-Latin bilingual, adeptly navigating between English and Spanish: a trait thoughtfully intended by the creators and realized through the casting of Sarah-Nicole Robles, who mirrors

Luz's linguistic fluency. While the series situates Luz primarily in a fantastical realm, her cultural heritage subtly permeates through her occasional use of Spanish, enriching her interactions and cultural exchange with her friends. From an intersectional perspective, Luz's mixed heritage and bilingualism further contribute to her experiences of exclusion and alienation. These aspects of her identity may influence her perception of reality and intensify her need for understanding and validation. Moreover, bilingualism, while not uncommon – with research suggesting that up to 66 % of children worldwide are bilingual (Konishi et al., 2014) – places Luz within another atypical category. In this context, these factors can serve as additional barriers to acceptance and fitting in. However, considering these attributes from an alternative viewpoint, Luz's bilingualism and diverse background might actually equip her with a unique adaptability, potentially facilitating her integration into the unfamiliar magical world and its distinct culture.

Additionally, it is through Luz that the series addresses neurodiversity, as she exhibits characteristics associated with ADHD from the beginning. Her tendencies toward hyper-fixation, difficulty with concentrating, and impulsive behavior are evident, culminating in her being directed to a 'Reality Check Summer Camp'. Yet, in the magical Boiling Islands, Luz confronts similar perceptions of indiscipline and incapability, underscoring her struggles within environments that fail to accommodate her unique learning needs. Luz's journey to discover alternative magic forms not only highlights her resilience but also her exceptional ability when provided with the right support and resources.

Luz's battle with emotional dysphoria, particularly Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD), is portrayed with sensitivity, showcasing her intense fear of disappointing others and her tendency to internalize blame. Through episodes like 'The Agony of the Witch' and 'The Mirror Graveyard', the series delves into Luz's emotional turmoil, emphasizing the importance of a supportive network in navigating feelings of guilt and fear of rejection. This theme of neurodiversity and the significance of understanding and support is further underscored by Dana Terrace's confirmation of her character design, that she is afraid of being abandoned. "The Owl House" advocates for the diverse needs and learning styles of individuals with neurodiversity, with characters like Eda offering Luz a nurturing environment that fosters her curiosity and love for learning.

This narrative thread is developed and emphasized further in the third season, particularly through the lens of Luz's mother, Camila. Initially perceived as critical, Camila's own experiences with bullying and societal pressure to conform reveal a deep empathy for Luz's challenges, illuminating the complex dynamics of parental support and societal expectations. It is her acceptance and support that allow Luz to understand who she truly is.

It is imperative to acknowledge that parents frequently encounter societal exclusion alongside their neurodiverse offspring, stemming from a deviation from the neurotypical standards. In Poland, this reality is poignantly captured in Jacek Hołub's investigative piece, "Niegrzeczne. Historie dzieci z ADHD, autyzmem i zespołem Aspergera" [Stories of Children with ADHD, Autism, and Asperger's Syndrome] (Hołub, 2022). This work sheds light on the systemic failures of societal, educational, and institutional frameworks to effectively support neurodiverse children and their families. It is crucial, however, to criticise the use of the term 'Asperger's syndrome' within the title. The contemporary understanding of autism as a spectrum, as delineated by the DSM-5 and the forthcoming ICD-11 in 2022, categorizes Asperger's syndrome under the broader classification of 'autism spectrum disorder'. Given Hans Asperger's affiliation with Nazi ideologies and his condemnable actions towards 'maladjusted' children, the autistic community vehemently rejects the association with his name.

The Owl House adeptly mirrors the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals with neurodiversity and their immediate circles. The animation's final season notably shifts the narrative focus, highlighting that the issue lies not within Luz but within a society that remains inflexible and intolerant of diversity. Through overcoming her fears, Camila exemplifies the societal transition required to embrace and support differences.

Luz's journey, marked by her unwavering pursuit of self-acceptance and understanding, offers a rich tapestry of themes for scholarly examination. As the series continues to garner attention and analysis, it is poised to contribute significantly to academic discussions surrounding representation, inclusivity, and the complexities of navigating multiple intersecting identities in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

Luz, as a protagonist, embodies a confluence of minority identities: from her bisexuality and Afro-Latin heritage to her neurodiversity and ADHD. The *Owl House* not only navigates the nuances of these identity discourses but also critically examines societal reception and the often-detrimental impact of external judgments on the individual. Luz's character serves as a tangible illustration of intersectionality, offering a relatable figure for young viewers across the spectrum of normativity. Through Luz, the series extends an opportunity for normative audiences to gain insight and empathy towards non-normative individuals, for whom Luz emerges as a beacon of representation and empowerment. Furthermore, for atypical individuals, she serves as a role model and a point of identification, providing meaningful representation that can support adolescents through the challenging phases of development.

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ROSY-TRIANTAFYLLIA ANGELAKI ORCID: 0000-0002-5096-2211
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Ideology in Nonfiction Picturebooks for Children and Museum Pamphlets

Abstract: The idea of a narrative approach to archaeological objects that Museum Studies have adopted derives from the Theory of Literature, which deals with a reconstruction of the past by means of accessing archaeological documentation or by making use of historical sources. Interpretations of the past, management of collective memory, introduction of nation building ideologies, experiential learning and contact with timeless values in ways that are fulfilling, are the goals set in both children's nonfiction books that deal with History and Archaeology and History or Archaeological museums' pamphlets. Based on scholarly work on Children's Literature Studies, History, Archaeology and Museum Studies, this article focuses on nonfiction picturebooks for children that reflect the contemporary museographic explorations and compare them to the educational pamphlet of the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, Hellas; Given that byzantine heritage was embraced as an integral part of Hellas' national heritage when the country's affinity to classical antiquity was disputed, therefore, since the early twentieth century Hellenic national museums perpetuate nationalist narratives, the article observes the manner in which information about the byzantine past and art is communicated and examines the authors' ideological orientation, as well as whether the narratives familiarize readers with interpretations of historical sources and archaeological artifacts.

Keywords: nonfiction picturebooks; museum pamphlets; historical knowledge; museum narratives; interpretations

INTRODUCTION

By the end of the nineteenth century, the acceptance of Byzantium formed in the Hellenic national consciousness to support the notion that the Hellenic spirit is eternal. Specifically, the byzantine legacy was reassessed as an integral part of the Hellenic heritage after Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer's allegations that the Hellenes had no biological relation to the ancient Hellenes but were mixed with Slavs. Hellenes needed to prove the unbroken evolution of the Hellenic

nation mainly by claiming that the ancient Hellenic civilization had been reshaped as it met with Christianity during the Byzantine era (Liakos, 2008: 208). It was then that history and literary texts supported the threefold historical scheme that had been crystallized by the first decades of the twentieth century, according to which the byzantine heritage was an integral part of Hellas' national History. The byzantine era has been a source of inspiration to Hellenic writers, especially to those whose readership was children. Byzantium provided them with an opportunity to write books that highlighted the importance of Byzantine culture and its connection to Hellenism by bringing it to the forefront (Angelaki, 2018: 59–62).

Museums are informal learning environments accessible by the public. Their purpose is to recreate the historical past and by collecting and preserving naturfacts and artefacts and making them accessible for purposes of study, education or pleasure (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007: 2–4). Since they can construct social realities (Bennet, 1995: 59), Hellenic museums[1] supported the tripartite distinction of the Hellenic nation's main periods, which are ancient Hellenism, medieval Hellenism and modern Hellenism, through museum exhibitions (Gazi, 2011: 363). Thus, museums in Hellas can be considered an example where "alternative" narratives of the past were perpetuated and supported, according to which the continuity of the Hellenic nation is unbroken; at least this was the belief until 1999, when the country's museums and, particularly, the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens and Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki cast off the outmoded profile that had characterized them and overcame the aforementioned narrative (Konstantios, 2009: 122–23). Since 2000 instead, in view of the strong association of Byzantium and the Church and the fact that Orthodoxy was the cornerstone of Hellenic nationalism, curators exhibited the byzantine objects and the Christian heirlooms in ways that suggested a "self understanding and knowledge of a complex past" (Konstantios, 2007: 13) and not the dominant narrative of a continuous Hellenism.

THE RELATION BETWEEN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, DISCOURSES OF POWER AND MUSEUM NARRATIVES

As the educational role of museums became a main concern and there was an increasing interest in finding ways to attract children to museums to acquaint them with the exhibits, Hellenic museums organized educational programs impacted by Dewey's and Vygotsky's theories (Tsakmakidou, 2018) and, under the influence of the "narrative turn", developed new forms of publications, brochures and narrativized texts that encouraged young visitors to familiarize

[1] For the purpose of this article we refer to a specific type of museum, the History and Archaeology Museum; specifically, the Museum of Byzantine Culture of Thessaloniki.

themselves with objects on display; highlighting the fact that archaeological past is being quoted and interpreted in many ways (Alberti, et al 2016; Andreou & Kotsakis, 2002:102–103) museums professionals aimed to familiarize children with the artifacts in such a way that they could understand and interpret them in accordance to their own personal experiences and to think of themselves as "readers" of History (Baron, 2014: 35). The idea of a textual approach to archaeological objects adopted by Museum Studies has derived from the Theory of Literature, which also deals with the re-creation of the past on the basis of archaeological documentation and by making use of historical sources. It is, in fact, classified amongst the plethora of existing historical sources that help teach children to evaluate the validity of historical sources (Trisno et al, 2020: 1146).

Teachers who were supposed to lead the educational visits at the museums were to follow the instructions of the pamphlets. These types of narratives often look like iconotexts and/or sequential graphic narratives and are produced as part of the museums' regular, periodical or special programs and are based on a dynamic interaction between text and image, in the same way as children's books. Their aim is to help children gain a better understanding of the recreated reality as well as the history of the artifacts with which they have the opportunity to interact; they also contribute to the consolidation of a distinctive national identity as they are considered to be carriers of national, social, historical and political agendas (Sakali, 2012: 5).

Contemporary nonfiction books for children that deal with History, Archaeology, Religion, Cultures etc., are visually attractive and aesthetically pleasing books, as book designers "pay as much attention, sometimes more, to what readers look at as to what they read" (Meek, 1996: 44). Just like the museum pamphlets, they provide examples that portray historical "truth" visually and illustrate not only the artistic styles of the past but also the artistic resources found in museums, in order to introduce young readers to the world of visual art and to the history of a certain era (Sipe, 2001).

Throughout the last three decades, nonfiction has been earning a very strong place in the premises of Children's Literature (Swanson, 2002: 53). Today, nonfiction children's picturebooks is considered to be a hybrid form of literature that encourages children to think critically about the world (Sanders, 2018) while the authors, consciously or not, express their ideology since reality is perceived subjectively (Panaou & Yannicopoulou, 2021: 55–56, 64). The authors' and illustrators' subjectivity is acknowledged especially in the case of nonfiction books that employ a variety of techniques wherein the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity is represented, the past is reconstructed and objects of national symbolism are attended to (Angelaki, 2021).

Since nonfiction picturebooks can possibly enforce children's engagement with artifacts and share many similar characteristics with museum pamphlets

(Dinç &Alaca, 2021: 237; Sakali, ibid.: 119), it is of interest to examine the function of children's nonfiction picturebooks and museum pamphlets as cultural and ideological tools, as carriers of social representations, as well as narratives that public archaeology produces within the context of museum education. This study provides a critical overview of previously published studies on Children's Literature, children's learning in museums, museum storytelling, visitor studies and learning History and Archaeology in early childhood. The article focuses on three nonfiction picturebooks titled as *Byzantine Art. A study guide for children* (1990), *Studying Byzantine Icons* (2008) and *A walk in the Byzantine era* (2011) written by the famous Hellenic author Mariza Decastro.

The selected books present museums as "storytellers" and objects as texts that "speak to the eyes" and the narrative framework they are placed within is viewed as that which "breathes life into" artefacts and historical and archaeological objects (Schwartz, 2008); they are examined in parallel with the printed material of the educational program of the Museum of Byzantine Culture of Thessaloniki, *Getting to Know Byzantine Icons* (MBC 2004), in order to compare the narratives' style, content and purpose and to evaluate whether the authors encourage readers to take an active role in creating meaning, on the basis of the museum experience offered by the texts. Recognizing that interpretation of the past is affected by present ideology (Shanks & Tilley, 2016:14); that nonfiction picturebooks communicate ideology (Angelaki, 2023:31); and that museum and museum narratives, regardless of which mediators are presented through, support ideologies too (Coffee, 2006), the article will also discuss whether the material being studied presents the holy icons in way that promotes the concept of the timeless continuity of Hellenism.

NONFICTION PICTUREBOOKS.

The primary aim of nonfiction books for children is to inform readers about the world they live in and to present facts or data through indexes, diagrams, tables of content, maps, pictures, sketches or photographs and descriptions that support children's learning. They are characterized by scientific validity and creativity in the use of language and it is vital that they encourage children's curiosity (Angelaki, ibid:16; Kotaman &Tekin, 2016: 2). Typically, this genre is categorized in nonfiction books and books where fact and fiction are intertwined and share common characteristics with literary narrative texts.

However, the combination of fictional and factual elements that has been occurring with greater frequency in contemporary nonfiction picturebooks for children (von Merveldt, 2018:232) may be based on the assumption that

young readers can better experience a situation as being "real" as well as process the information more easily, if their imagination, which is activated through fictional elements, comes into play. Additionally, the trending "fictionalizing" as an authors' stylistic option is understandable considering that the information they want to impart to children does not exist in a vacuum, but is comprised of events governed by a cause-and-effect relationship (Martinez & Nash, 1998: 78; Nora, 1978: 125). Thus, contemporary writers exploit narrative elements and techniques they previously used in literary texts. After all, the interpretation of events, phenomena, achievements etc., all contain the element of subjectivity and for their construction some type of representation is necessary (Nodelman &Reimer, 2003: 129, 138).

Although this trend, on the one hand, impedes the assignation of a clear-cut definition of the particular textual genre being discussed, on the other hand, it is possible that it motivates theorists and critics of Children's Literature to devise classifications for these books. Of the many classifications that have periodically been recommended worldwide, the author of this article suggests the following categorization[2]: (i) Nonfiction illustrated books, (ii) literary nonfiction picturebooks labelled as nonfiction, wherein fiction and conveyance of knowledge are combined and narrative elements found in literary fiction are encompassed, and (iii) nonfiction picturebooks where the sketches have both an educational and an "artistic" (Grilly, 2021) character , aiding the reader to understand the provided information(Angelaki, 2023:33).

THE INFORMATIONAL PAMPHLET

The adoption of storytelling in museums, usually presented through exhibition narratives, has been introduced as another means to contextualize artefacts as specific events in the museum's school programs and by including personal stories related to historical events in exhibitions. These stories generate personal connections between visitors and content (Bedford, 2001; Pujol, et al, 2013:96). Additionally, since the contribution of museums in the educational process of young visitors, the production of printed material and the creation of a museum language through which heritage professionals could show children that "they were respected" and "perceived as peers and not as inferiors" (Andrews & Asia, 1979: 229) has increased. Museums' narrative texts are discernible as informational texts and vary in both form and

[2] The categorization arose in the context of the author's unpublished Post- doctoral thesis titled *Byzantium in Children's informational books. Comparative and ideological approach. Digital educational scenario* which was written between 2018–2022 in the Department of School of Early Childhood Education, Education Department, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Hellas.

content (e.g., pamphlets, catalogs, learning packages, guides, texts on walls, captions), depending on the type of the museum, the educational activities involved and/or the amount of money that is available for their production. Regardless the type of narrative, though, he museums' ideology regarding policy is made quite clear. (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994: 124–125; Frykman, 2009: 299–319).

Specifically, this type of material is categorized in (i) the pamphlets that are similar to children's nonfiction picturebooks, as they have both the quality features of a well-published commercial book and the typical structure of a children's nonfiction picturebook, (ii) informational pamphlets or worksheets and small museum guide books that motivate children during the educational program to explore the museum's space, solve exercises and express themselves through writing and/or sketching, and (iii) illustrated worksheets with explanatory texts that assist children in discovering objects in the museum, answering questions, reinforcing imparted information, constructing objects, etc. (Decastro 2010: 400; Plati, 2010: 392).

DECASTROS' BOOKS AS A CASE STUDY

BYZANTINE ART. A STUDY GUIDE FOR CHILDREN

According to the proposed categorization, this book falls into the category of nonfiction picturebooks. Reading *Byzantine Art. A study guide for children* (fig.1), readers are encouraged to perceive artefacts as texts since, "byzantine art, like any other form of art, can be read"[3] (Decastro, 1990: 9). The author employs many narrative techniques suitable to the understanding and perception of the children she addresses to, so as to present the byzantine culture as one of the milestones of European cultural heritage. Byzantine art is presented as communicative event, carrier of meaning and evidence of the past that serve the management of memory (Hamilakis & Labanyi, 2008: 17), but nowhere in the text it is implied that Hellenes were the heirs of the byzantine legacy, which was the backbone of national master narratives. The images play a dominant role in the narrative emphasizing the interplay between verbal and visual codes and serve as cultural documentation. According to the third-person narrator, the pictures of the holy icons "are didactic narratives that used to tell worshippers everything they needed to know about their faith" (Decastro, ibid: 20), while for the illiterate ones, they constituted "an alternative form of literature" (ibid, 24).

The narrator uses explanatory and simple language to explain to children that byzantine art is divided into the Early Byzantine, the Middle Byzantine and Late Byzantine period, as well as to clarify that the term "byzantine" wasn't

[3] The translation is done by the author.

Fig. 1

used back then, since "in the consciousness of the Byzantines the Empire was perceived as the continuation of the Roman Empire" (ibid, 11). Apart from helping them to gradually grasp the notion of historical continuity, the narrator also informs them that "byzantine art is mainly religious" (ibid: 9), "but also special", since the hagiographers "whose talent was Godsent" (ibid:15), "produced the holy icons so as to speak to the worshippers' soul" (ibid :19).

The text provides information regarding the Macedonian and Cretan schools of icon painting , "the byzantine perception of the universe", "which quickly led Byzantines to build churches with a dome, symbolizing the celestial sphere" (ibid: 23), as well as useful details concerning the brushstrokes of the hagiographers or the origin and symbolism of the colors they used- information supported through the the visual code, too. Also the author, in an effort to enable children to connect the past with the present mentions through the narrative voice that the byzantine manuscripts, codices Psalters and Hymn books "were illustrated", for example with full-page portraits of the Saints or the evangelists, "just like contemporary informational history picturebooks" (ibid: 28). A detailed catalog of the byzantine frescoes, wall paintings, and hagiographies, which are presented as objects of worship and described as 'icons that reflect the soul of the Byzantines' (Decastro, ibid: 12), can be found at the end of the book, along with an index and a glossary. Children can refer to these resources to address any questions related to what they have read. Additionally, activities and puzzles are provided, formulated to assess the knowledge acquired by the children, help them express themselves creatively, and develop their historical imagination.

Fig. 2

In this nonfiction picturebook (fig. 2) the byzantine hagiography is viewed "not merely as painting, but as a divine experience" and, therefore, byzantine icons are presented as objects embedded in cultural significance (Decastro, 2008: 5). The author chooses a playful way to organize the content of the book and to present to children several Saints of the Orthodox Church, while helping them learn about the calendar months; each section of the book corresponds to one of the twelve months and includes an archeological and religious story, which concisely and pleasantly narrates the lives of the presented Saints.

The book contains terminology relative to the byzantine art but at the same time accessible to children. Even though the information provided in the text concerning byzantine architecture, hagiography and mosaics, the Cretan School of Painting or the fresco technique and the Iconoclastic controversy is scientifically valid, Decastro makes use of narrative techniques traditionally associated with fiction ;for example, she appeals to her readers' sentiment, when describing the "hardships and sufferings" of John "the prophet of the desert", after he fell victim to the schemes of "the wily Herodias" and "her enchanting daughter" (ibid: 8). She thus emphasizes the fact the nonfiction picturebooks are hybrid creations. The merging of fact and fiction in children's nonfiction picturebooks, typically marketed as nonfiction, is criticized primarily for heightening readers'

disorientation (Colman, 1999: 217; Freedman, 1998: 225). However, in this case, it cannot be assumed that children would become so engrossed in Decastro's artful prose and imaginative writing that they would be unable to distinguish between reality and fiction.

The pictures are integrated into the narrative flow, explaining and reinforcing the text. The symmetry between verbal and visual narration becomes evident either on the book's double-page spreads, where one side holds the text and the other showcases the image, or on pages where corresponding illustrative inserts are placed alongside short paragraphs. The hagiographic style reminiscent of the byzantine period is encountered even in the decorative vignettes. It's worth noting that the pictures emit reverence, melancholy, moderation, awe and self-sacrifice. This could be considered to be in accordance with the text, where a rather minor severity is found due to the Hellenic archaic polytonic orthography[4] that Decastro chooses to use, arguably in order to lend yet another historical element to her text, as well as to spark the children's interest in the development of the written form of the Hellenic language (Apostolidou 1999: 347; Barton, 2008: 65). This way it is verified that ideology in nonfiction picturebooks and in literary nonfiction picturebooks is communicated both through verbal text and illustration. However, at this point it should be stressed that the fact that the narrator states that the "byzantine letters and numbers were the heritage of the Ancient Hellenes" (Decastro, ibid: 41), does not indicate the author's effort to refute Fallmerayer's theory and present the byzantine heritage as an indispensable theoretical acquirement for the modern Hellas' aspirations.

Finally, every chapter in the book is followed by a section called "Processing", which includes activities based on discovery learning, encouraging children's critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Readers are also motivated to creatively express their thoughts by writing stories so that to contextualise the actions of the Byzantine worshippers by explaining and evaluating their actions, for instance the fact that icons were attributed with extraordinary powers and healed the sick or were carried into the battlefields, and to develop a sense of empathy through imagining the past (Savenije & de Bruijn, 2017). They are also motivated to engage themselves in arts and crafts projects relevant to the represented objects, a strategy used by museums as a valuable prerequisite for sharing knowledge. This section also includes a questionnaire that checks the readers' knowledge. Additional information is provided by the writer about the historical

[4] While the simple monotonic orthography introduced in 1982 corresponds to modern Hellenic phonology, and requires only two diacritics (*tonos* to indicate stress, and *diaeresis* to indicate a diphthong), the Hellenic polytonic orthography, which was used since the Hellenistic period, required seven diacritics, notating Ancient Hellenic phonology: (i) the acute accent (*oxeia*– sharp or high), (ii) the grave accent (*bareia* – heavy or low), (iii) the circumflex (*perispomene* – twisted around), (iv) the rough breathing (*dasi pneuma*), (v) the smooth breathing (*psilon pneuma)*, (vi) the *diaeresis* to indicate diphthong, and (vii) the *iota* subscript t (*hypogegrammene* written under).

books she studied to gather the provided information, as well as the current exhibition locations of each presented artifact. This may aim to encourage children to visit museums and archaeological sites.

A WALK IN THE BYZANTINE ERA

This nonfiction picturebook (fig. 3) promotes children's interaction with the legacy of the divine art with which Byzantine Empire endowed the world, clarifying in a simple and explanatory way that Byzantium was a cultural and political powerhouse influenced by Christianity and that it produced enormous artistic output, focused on piety and religious virtuosity. For example, children are informed that byzantine jewelry had to observe strict religious rules and standards and the Cross was the ultimate jewel that the Byzantines wore to profess their faith. It could be claimed that Decastro's intent is to underline the semiotic and narratological reading that antiquarian encounters offer, as she states that her book "can serve as a guide for readers not only to approach the byzantine archaeological artifacts, but also to hear the stories they narrate" (Decastro, 2011:11). The pictures eloquently succeed one another and depict each historical and cultural artifact presented in the text.

Fig. 3

In the preface, the curator of the Byzantine Antiquities of Athens at the time mentions that byzantine art "can be 'read and re-read'" (ibid: 9). Then the author, through the narrative voice, taking into consideration the existing knowledge

of the children she addresses, simplifies historical information and ventures in a pleasant way to transform the byzantine mosaics, frescoes, icons and the temples into "speaking" archaeological knowledge analogically to the Christian art of Byzantium, that "teaches worshippers whatever the sacred texts teach" (ibid). Considering that museums reinvent and reconstruct our understanding of past periods, the process and reasons for "establishing a museum in Athens where byzantine artifacts would be preserved and exhibited" (ibid: 9) is also explained.

Notably, the author does not imply the dominant narrative of a continuous Hellenism and through the narrative voice underlines that the data about past periods and actions are incomplete, contradictory and ambiguous and that historians and archaeologists interpret individual pieces of evidence and fit it into coherent and "truthful" stories (Bounia & Nikonanou, 2008). For example, aiming to underline that heritage professionals often conceptualize, contextualize and interpret events and circumstances of the past and, as a result, there are multiple inconsistent narratives shaped by powerful institutions and political or religious interests that can be told for certain archaeological materials, the narrator focuses on a specific marble artifact and mentions that "it might represent Orpheus, the mythical musician worshiped by the Ancient Hellenes". In the following phrase, the narrator wonders "whether it symbolizes Christ, who died and was then resurrected and enchanted people with his words" (Decastro, ibid: 20).

Indicating that archaeology is a semiotic enterprise engaged in the study of meaning-making practices, in the adjacent page readers are prompted to observe and wonder who the depicted young shepherd might be, while being informed that "archaeologists have linked the specific relic to what John writes in his Gospel" (ibid: 21). Since the symbol of the Holy Cross was deeply embedded in Orthodox tradition and in byzantine art, the narrator goes on to emphasize that many findings were "**rebaptized**" (ibid: 23) after Christianity was established as the official state religion. This word written in bold font that is supposed to make children aware, on the one hand, that Byzantium's ideology and culture were heavily permeated by Christianity and, on the other hand, that heritage professionals often rely on the so-called "archaeological imagination" and take into account the religious and moral values that existed in a certain period- let alone the byzantine era, where the culture and art of the Empire were profoundly influenced by the Christian religion-, so as "to recreate the world behind the ruin in the land, to reanimate the people behind the sherd of antique pottery" (Shanks, 1992:25).

GETTING TO KNOW BYZANTINE ICONS

The pamphlet of the Museum of Byzantine Culture of Thessaloniki (fig. 4) uses spatial, narrative and material engagements in order to facilitate children's processing of artifacts (Yohlin, 2012: 261), just as in the case of the aforementioned picturebooks. It is included in the Museum's educational folder and is

addressed to teachers of Hellenic pre-primary and first-grade primary school that take part in a specific educational program, which is designed based not only on the permanent exhibition which promotes the aesthetic qualities of byzantine icons that are restituted as part of medieval European art, but also on the perception that museum spaces are pedagogical spaces with an anthropocentric character that should provide interactive and multisensory experiences and enable the visitors to experience the exhibits (Hod-Shemer &Sher, 2021:43; Nikonanou, 2009: 38).

Through its artful prose the pamphlet offers information and enjoyment to readers, whose imagination is sparked and their engagement with the exhibits (e.g., byzantine icons painted on wood with egg tempera and gold leaf surfaced with gesso and linen that survived the Iconoclastic vehemence) is supported (Nakou, 2000: 237). The folder, besides the teacher's book includes the program's material (pictures of the byzantine icons as well as entertaining puzzles), contained within a small case that the teachers picks up upon their arrival at the Museum. It also supplies descriptions of the educational program, which is supposed to take place in the 10th room of the Museum, where the icons are exhibited in the same order as the text presents them.

Fig.4

The pictures of the byzantine icons become an extension of the pamphlets' text and function in relation to words in didactic panels – just as the icons that are exhibited at the Museum, which "are caught up in, best explained by, and most

enjoyable in relation to a context of verbal language" (Nodelman, 2016: 16). In the exhibition narrative it is clarified that the byzantine icons are not simply a painting of an artist, but they were considered to have divine properties and were also objects of ritual veneration.

The suggested activities in the pamphlet, according to the editors' note, aim to facilitate children's historical understandings by developing more empathetic perceptions of the Byzantines. Taking under consideration "the value of learning through the senses" (Hooper- Greenhill, 2007:374) as well as the object-based learning, the Museum's educators organized activities to encourage children to construct meaning by way of interacting with the byzantine icons and, generally, with the museum objects (jewelry, vestments, coins, medallions, etc.). The activities include narration, puzzles, drawing, book-reading, games of mimicry, shadow play theatre, etc. (fig. 5). They are also developed based on discovery learning, a type of learning that is mainly applied in games exploring museum space, and are carried out in an effort to approach museum exhibits and to get to know the exhibition environment in general (Kanari et al, 2022).

Fig. 5

Regarding the suggested activities, it could be argued that questions such as "how do we use the byzantine icons today?", demonstrate the editors' intent to help children to make sense of the world and, by realizing that veneration of icons is actively practiced to date as a strong expression of Eastern Orthodox faith, to become historically conscious and be able to make connections

between interpreting the past, understanding the present and having a perspective of the future (Dixon &Hales, 2014: 7). It should be underlined that nowhere in the pamphlet is it implied that Byzantium is a vital component of Hellenic national History, even though it mentioned that it maintained Hellenic as its official language and the language of the Church. Children are motivated to learn more about this by studying the relevant sources the editors propose at the end of the booklet along with the citations of various books they have consulted.

According to many museum educators, one of the best ways to prepare a child for visiting a museum is through books, specifically historical novels, the genre of travel literature and informational books (Anagnostopoulos, 1999: 118, 139–140). Conversely, the pamphlet encourages children's exposure to literature; the suggested activities include the reading of a well-known Hellenic author's picturebook, Eugene Trivizas' *Young Hermes* (fig. 6). The book's plot is based on Bennet's argument that "it is through movement, bodily acts, walking and touch that museum visitors create meaning" (1995: 37). Consequently, the reframing of the museum visitors as active meaning makers through their interaction with artefacts and each other in the Museum is promoted through the pamphlet and, indirectly, through Children's Literature. According to the pamphlets' instructions, the teacher can ask children to comment on the content of the narrative, connecting it to their own experience at the Museum.

Fig. 6

It is also interesting to mention that the Museum of Byzantine Culture has created the activity "Playing with the Museum's Vessels", a digital initiative that aims to connect museum encounters, narrative engagements and Literature. Visiting the following website https://www.mbp.gr/education/paizoume-me-ta-angeia-tou-mouseiou/, children and their parents can learn about the shapes, names and uses of byzantine ceramic vessels, relate them to their modern counterparts in their homes and send the museum educators their photos. Children are also motivated to create narratives and write their own limericks and send them to the educators, too, after having read the provided information about this specific genre on the website or/and the relevant sources recommended by the museum educators, who also mention on the website the famous Hellenic poet George Seferis, awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963 for his "outstanding collection of limericks for children", that was published "four years after the poet's death" (Politis & Yannicopoulou, 2023:12).

CONCLUSIONS

This article focused on the comparison of Mariza Decastro's three nonfiction picturebooks for children about byzantine icons to the educational pamphlet of the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, Hellas. In both types of texts, it seems that the narratives share common characteristics with exhibition narratives and serve as cultural tools shaping children's beliefs about the byzantine historical past, while enhancing the reader's comprehension of how the world has evolved over time in a historical context. The byzantine icons are represented both as historical and archaeological objects and as channels of engagement and learning and children are encouraged to perceive the Museum (and, in general, museums and archaeological sites) as informal learning environments. Both in Decastro's books and in the pamphlet, children are prompted to learn about the byzantine icons while expressing themselves creatively through the art of narration and different types of game-playing and to connect the provided information with their background knowledge and experiences. They are also motivated to read books and actively engage with Literature.

It could be argued that even though nonfiction picturebooks and museum pamphlets that deal with History, Archaeology and culture are capable of conveying narratives generally viewed as definitive, neither Decastro's books nor the Museum's pamphlet promote Hellas' unified national narrative; on the contrary, it could be claimed that Decastro motivates children to question "authoritative and objective truths" about the byzantine past and to consider the possible motivations of particular versions (Schwebel, 2011: 4–6). Additionally, apart from ensuring that in her book the represented artifacts are not viewed as emblematic of normative narratives, stressing the fact that

the archaeological imagination is crucial to the shaping of modern Hellenic society, she also exploits narrative elements and techniques usually appearing in literary texts to more effectively convey historical and archaeological knowledge. Thus it could be claimed that she verifies scholars' arguments about how hybridity can be considered as a common feature in contemporary children's nonfiction informational picturebooks (Angelaki, 2023: 32–33; McClure, 2003: 80–93).

Nevertheless, both Decastro and the museum educators may omit certain aspects of byzantine religious philosophy, leaving the complete truth untold; specifically, although Christianity and the Hellenic language may have been the fundamental pillars of Byzantium, it's worth noting that magic and superstitions also played a significant role during that era, although they did not conform to the dogmatic framework of the Christian Orthodox faith at the time of the Empire (Angelaki, 2018: 156). Perhaps these forms of religiosity should be taken into consideration when presenting Byzantines' religious beliefs in children's narratives.

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BOŻENA HOJKA ORCID: 0000-0002-4591-4346
University of Wrocław
ELŻBIETA JAMRÓZ-STOLARSKA ORCID: 0000-0002-3894-4336
University of Wrocław

The Metaphorical Conceptualizations of Music in Polish Picturebooks for Children

Abstract: The article examines the verbal and visual ways of conceptualizing music in Polish books for young children. The theoretical basis is the cognitive theory of metaphor, initiated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). Conceptual metaphor is understood here as a cognitive mechanism that allows for conceptualizing abstract domains of discourse in terms of other domains. Music, as an area of ephemeral auditory experiences primarily affecting the emotional sphere of humans, is a special kind of communication. In our analysis, we explore the different areas of experience that Polish children's book authors use to talk about music and the ways of thinking about it that they present to children. We discuss concepts, motifs, and linguistic techniques used to describe and explain musical phenomena. Their interpretation will be conducted considering the cultural background and in relation to the already recognized ways of conceptualizing music in the Polish language (Bilas-Pleszak 2005). We also examine the illustrative aspect to identify visual strategies and graphic solutions used to express music and auditory phenomena through visual language. Detailed analysis was conducted on picturebooks series published in recent years by PWM Edition: Uwerturki [Little Overtures] (by Kalina Cyz, Jagoda Charkiewicz) and Sonia w Krainie Sonostworów [Sonia in the Land of the Sonocreatures] (by Katarzyna Huzar-Czub), as well as musical picturebooks by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel published by Wytwórnia Publishing House.

Keywords: music in Polish picturebooks, Polish literature for children, metaphors of music, PWM Edition, Anna Czerwińska-Rydel

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Edward Sapir, language primarily serves as a tool for symbolizing – representing human experiences and, consequently, organizing and interpreting them (Sapir, 1978: 33–49). Each language embodies a specific worldview,

reflecting the unique ways in which its users perceive and understand the surrounding reality.

However, the world around us and our functioning within it are filled with phenomena that cannot be directly expressed or translated into linguistic code. Abstract concepts and intangible phenomena pose a particular challenge for the mind's language-based symbolization and are often conceptualized through metaphorical concepts. Music is also such a phenomenon, as its auditory nature is difficult to capture in words for a non-professional recipient. To express the essence of music, we employ various metaphorical concepts that attempt to convey it through more concrete and, therefore, more relatable, and understandable conceptual systems.

The cognitive theory of metaphor by Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, formulated in their 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By*[1], asserts that metaphor is a tool of our thinking and a mechanism of the mind. It allows us to understand one set of phenomena (less familiar, harder to grasp, more abstract) in terms of another (more familiar, grounded in our daily experience, more concrete). The authors of this concept refer to domains of experience – target domains (those being conceptualized) and source domains (those being utilized in conceptualization). The source domain provides a conceptual framework to understand (conceptualize) the target domain. However, each metaphor, by juxtaposing a given phenomenon with the structural features of another, highlights certain characteristics while obscuring others.

Ewa Biłas-Pleszak's analysis of ways of conceptualizing music in the Polish language reveals a very developed system, referring to a rich set of source domains, including: UNIVERSE, NATURE, MOVEMENT, SACRED, HUMAN, ELEMENTS (WATER/FIRE), PLANT, COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE, SPEECH OF EMOTIONS, BUILDING, FABRIC (Biłas-Pleszak, 2005).

In the Polish language, a significant and established means of expressing musical experiences and describing sound phenomena is through synesthetic metaphors, invoking senses other than hearing. As noted by Biłas-Pleszak in her work on tactile-visual synesthesia (Biłas-Pleszak, 2005: 115–121), this mode of describing music perception is considered "a sheer necessity stemming from the fact that sound phenomena lack distinct terms for their qualities" (Biłas-Pleszak, 2005: 122). The role of synesthetic metaphors in the linguistic representation of one musical phenomenon, namely singing, in the Polish language has also been emphasized by Anna Prochwicz (2013). Her analyses have demonstrated that for capturing acoustic impressions associated with singing, domains primarily drawn upon include those of sight and touch, and to a lesser extent, the domain of taste.

In our article, we will analyze the areas of experience Polish picturebook authors utilize to talk about music and the ways of thinking about it they propose

[1] Polish edition: M. Johnson, G. Lakoff, *Metafory w naszym życiu*, Warszawa 1988.

to children. We aim to examine whether the conceptualization of music and musical sounds found in children's books employs the same metaphorical schemes entrenched in general language (described by Biłas-Pleszak 2005 and Prochwicz 2013), or if the child audience dictates distinct, specific modes of realization. We inquire whether literature and children's books expand and enrich the repertoire of means used to grasp musical impressions and concepts, creating new metaphorical directions in its conceptualization. To recognize the artistic strategies employed in conveying music and sound through the visual language, we have particularly focused on the visual layer. The interplay between word and image in children's books, especially in picturebooks, provides an intriguing opportunity for multimodal communication, integrating diverse metaphorical schemata and conceptualization directions, as well as visualizing musical concepts. Additionally, illustrations with musical content inherently embody the idea of synesthesia, translating auditory impressions into visual ones. Picturebooks dedicated to music can thus be regarded, from this perspective, as examples of various realizations of the sound–word–image relationship.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CORPUS

In this article, we will analyze selected picturebooks devoted to music, written, and illustrated by Polish authors, and published after 2010. The second decade of the 21st century brought a distinct revival in the field of art books designed for young readers, also in the Polish publishing market. Alongside works dedicated to painting, architecture, or theater, titles introducing readers to the world of music began to enjoy increasing popularity (Jamróz-Stolarska, 2020: 11–12). This could certainly be attributed to the celebrated 200th anniversary of the birth of Fryderyk Chopin in 2010. On this occasion, a significant number of biographies for children of Chopin and other artists emerged, along with biographical publishing series presenting the lives and works of renowned composers, as seen in the Nieprzeciętni [The Remarkable] series by Literatura Publishing House.

The new trend was actively responded to by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne (PWM), which boasts extensive experience and tradition. Established in 1945 in Kraków, PWM stood as one of the prominent music publishers in Poland alongside Society fo Authors ZAiKS until the 80s/90s of the last century, enjoying recognition and renown globally. PWM publishes, among others, musical scores, early music, works of Chopin, educational publications for music schools at all levels, children's books, works in the field of musicology, music history, and encyclopedias (Jazdon, 2017: 412–413). Since its inception, PWM has collaborated with outstanding artists, ensuring an attractive graphic design for scores and music publications (Wincencjusz-Patyna, 2021). Several years ago, PWM established a new imprint called "Little PWM" in which

three publishing series have been released to date: Uwerturki [Little Overtures] – cardboard books for the youngest about instruments (5 titles in the years 2017–2021), Sonia w Krainie Sonostworów [Sonia in the Land of the Sonocreatures] – an educational series introducing audiences to the world of extraordinary sound phenomena encountered both in music and in our surrounding sonosphere (3 titles, 2018), and Gama i Pasażerowie [Gama and Passengers] – a biographical series narrating humorous adventures of eminent Polish musicians of the 20th and 21st centuries (12 titles in the years 2019–2020).

The other significant event that undoubtedly influenced the increase in the number of titles on musical themes in the repertoire of Polish publishers was the awarding of the Bologna Ragazzi Award in 2012 (in the nonfiction category) to the book *Wszystko gra* [*All Tuned up*] authored by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel and illustrated by Marta Ignerska. The book also received a nomination for the German Children's Literature Award 2014, the Critics' Choice Grand Prix in Vienna, and was included in the White Ravens list by the International Youth Library in Munich, as well as the IBBY Honor List.[2] Its remarkable success, both in Poland and internationally, prompted Wytwórnia Publishing House and the Fryderyk Chopin Institute, co-publisher of the book, to publish additional musical titles. These subsequent publications were also authored by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, a recognized and popular children's writer with a musical background. In the so-called "music series," the following works have been published: *Co tu jest grane?* [*What Is Playing Here?*] with illustrations by Katarzyna Bogucka (2012) and *Co słychać?* [*What Are You Hearing?*] illustrated by Monika Hanulak and Małgorzata Gurowska (2015). Wytwórnia is a small, independent publishing house known for its innovative, avant-garde, and original children's books. Its offerings are dominated by picturebooks that have garnered numerous awards in prestigious national and international competitions, much like the artists who create them.

The article undertakes an analysis of picturebooks with a musical theme published by the PWM between 2017 and 2021, that are part of the first two series previously mentioned, as well as a music series by Wytwórnia. The aim of this selection of research material was to analyze on one hand picturebooks published by traditional, but specializing in music-themed publications publishing house, and on the other hand books published by a young, niche publisher, whose offerings mainly consist of editions for young readers and which incorporates the latest trends in children's book publishing in its repertoire. The discussed books belong to the genre of informational picturebooks. The creative use of the synergy between words and images to convey the essence of musical phenomena and concepts is particularly evident in the series published by Wytwórnia, which therefore deserves further discussion. The titles in this

[2] Full list of awards and distinctions: https://wytwornia.com/pl/p/Wszystko-gra/99 [Access: 08.01.2024].

series follow a modern model of such publications, which are gaining popularity in the children's book market abroad and in Poland. In the increasingly numerous scientific studies dedicated to them, there is an emphasis on moving away from linear ways of knowledge transmission or conventional learning schemes, stimulating creative thinking and provoking readers to acquire knowledge by asking questions (Grilli, 2020: 13). Nikola von Merveldt identifies as their constitutive features, following Elisabeth Dresang, the equivalence of verbal and visual information. According to the researcher, images not only document or illustrate facts, but visually organize and interpret them, not only strengthening the text, but sometimes even reversing the roles between text and image (von Merveldt, 2018: 232–233). The exceptional aesthetic and artistic values of these books are also emphasized, which form the foundation of their innovativeness (Grilli, 2020: 14).

3. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS – SOURCE DOMAINS UTILIZED IN PICTUREBOOKS ON MUSIC

The analysis of selected 11 picturebooks has primarily revealed a significant diversity in the ways of conceptualizing and depicting music. The most crucial source domains identified by us, providing concepts used in metaphorical speaking about music and describing musical auditory experiences include: COLOR, SHAPE, MOVEMENT, NATURE, PLAY, CULINARY ARTS, COMMUNICATION, and EMOTIONS.

These are general domains upon which detailed, more specific metaphorical schemes are constructed in the texts and illustrations of the analyzed books. We will discuss them further in the article, illustrating with specific examples. Importantly, in individual realizations – both textual and visual – various metaphorical schemes permeate each other, are inclusive of one another, and imply each other, creating not just a set but a system of conceptual metaphorical frameworks used in conceptualizing music. The positions analyzed by us are picturebooks, so it is not surprising that the most prominent direction of conceptualizing music in them is capturing it as something that can be shown and seen. This synesthetic underlying concept is realized not only in illustrations (which is obvious) but also in texts, where sounds and musical phenomena are described in terms related to visual perception. The most important of these are SHAPE and COLOR. In the PWM series titled Uwerturki by Kalina Cyz and Jagoda Charkiewicz, visual representation of music appears on illustrations as undulating staff lines, on which musical notes are arranged, or, as in *Solo i w duecie…* [*Solo and Duet*…] colorful spots corresponding to the notes of the scale. Their values (do–re–mi, etc.) beneath the staff are also represented by appropriate colors. In the book *Koło, trójkąt i pięć linii…* [*Circle, Triangle, and Five Lines…*], in addition to notes on the staff, colorful puzzles are arranged,

further reflecting the understanding of music as a composition of fitting. In *Czarno na białym…* [*Black on White*], a similar illustration featuring a staff and arranged colorful blocks is accompanied by the text: "Music is sounds arranged like your colorful blocks." Here, we also encounter a specific realization of the metaphor of music as a building, and its creation as constructing – a metaphor described by Biłas-Pleszak as one of the "more significant and suggestive structural metaphors" used for conceptualizing music in the Polish language (Biłas-Pleszak, 2005: 113).

The shape and color also play a crucial role in expressing and describing sounds in the book *Wszystko gra* by Czerwińska-Rydel. In Ignerska's illustrations, the sounds of individual instruments are conveyed through lines (emanating from the instruments) in three COLORS: black, neon pink, and orange. In the text, these sounds are characterized through visual synesthesia (e.g., the trumpet is pure brightness, gleaming, shining, and each of its sounds is of pure silver; the domain of the bassoon is dark basements; the clarinet corresponds to a matte sound). In the graphic layer, the differentiation of sounds from various instruments is additionally conveyed through the SHAPE of the lines visualizing them. This technique – lines of varying shapes, thickness, and color as a graphic representation spreading through space – can also be observed in other books analyzed by us (e.g., in *Alikwoty* [*Overtones*])

Original references to SHAPE as an attribute of metaphorically conceptualized music are also evident in the second series published by PWM, titled Sonia w Krainie Sonostworów. This series, authored by Katarzyna Huzar-Czub (text) and illustrated by Gosia Herba, consists of three titles: *Glissando, Ostinato*, and the aforementioned *Alikwoty*. The titular concepts are introduced to children through short, rhymed stories featuring Sonia, a girl, and creatures serving as personifications of these concepts. In the case of the first title, even the shape of the creature is an attempt to visually represent the essence of the musical phenomenon. Glissando is a concept denoting a smooth transition from one sound to another, achieved by introducing intermediate sounds between the pitches. In the book, its visual representation is a creature resembling a worm, whose shape rises and falls (Figure 1).

The up-and-down opposition is a compositional element that organizes all the illustrations – hills, slides, and stairs appear on them, reflecting the sequence of up-down-up-down, and so on. The connection of this visualization method with the titular concept is explained to the child reader in the text – Glissando likes to slide and climb, sometimes faster, slower, descend and rise. A specific SHAPE is thus additionally linked to MOVEMENT, which is another important domain used in conceptualizing music. Music, as a process, a phenomenon unfolding over time, is perceived as something moving and therefore has its dynamics and tempo.

Figure 1. K. Huzar-Czub, *Glissando*, il. G. Herba, Kraków: PWM, 2018.

In the analyzed books, sound is associated with MOVEMENT in various ways. The first approach is the association of sound and music phenomena with specific activities. In *Co słychać* by Czerwińska-Rydel, different musical tempos are depicted in the text as the pace of eating by individual characters – family members, and the evening household bustle is equivalent to a concert. In *Alikwoty*, tones dance, jump, spin, whirl, and scatter – both in the text and illustrations. In the titular *Ostinato*, the concept is defined as "a sound that keeps returning, spinning stubbornly in circles". In *Glissando*, the essence of the musical ornament is portrayed as the action of sliding up and down, in connection with typical children's activities. Thus, the type of movement is associated with the typical area of children's experience – PLAY (in this case, sledding and going down a slide).

Another way to utilize the domain of MOVEMENT is by characterizing sounds and music using vocabulary related to it – terms such as "the sound gently undulates" or "it grows rapidly" (*Co słychać*), "voices vibrate" (*Wszystko gra*), "piano sounds flow smoothly", "sounds carry themselves gracefully" (*Alikwoty*). Movement also has its direction – in relation to music, it is most often oriented vertically, according to the opposition of up and down (in cognitive metaphor theory, this is an orientational metaphor that allows the understanding of a concept through spatial references) (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980: 36). Therefore, the sounds in the books we discuss reach the sky or vibrate deeper and lower, they are played higher and lower, caught in flight, etc., which is also depicted in the visual layer where shapes and lines illustrating sound descend and rise.

Finally, the utilization of the MOVEMENT domain in specific metaphorical approaches to music in the books we analyzed directly stems from a broader

metaphor of music/sound/instrument as a living entity (ontological metaphor) (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980: 56–58), which in turn is an implementation of the overarching metaphor that conceptualizes music through the semantic field of NATURE. An example of this is the animizations and personifications of sounds, musical phenomena, or instruments that appear both in the illustrations and in the text. The result is not only their already indicated movement but also the change occurring in the described sounds (e.g., "this one is to grow, this one is to shrink", "it contracts and grows again" – referring to overtones in the book of this title).

Beyond attributing liveliness to music and sounds, the use of the domain of NATURE also involves conceptualizing music as a natural phenomenon present in the surrounding world – as in *Ostinato*, where the titular phenomenon is found in bird songs, the rustling of the wind, but also in breathing, snoring, heartbeat, etc. This is particularly interesting when we realize that music in its proper sense, as an art form, is the opposite of nature, as it is an intentional creation of human activity that does not exist spontaneously in the world (see Biłas-Pleszak, 2005: 114). Recognizing the similarities between musical phenomena and natural sounds, however, allows us to better understand them.

The understanding of music and sounds as living entities and the closely related examples of describing them in terms of human behaviors and characteristics stems from the domain of EMOTIONS. An example is the feeling of emotions by playing instruments appearing in *Wszystko gra* by Czerwińska-Rydel: "the flute is jealous…," the horn "resounds with pride," the trombone "buzzes cheerfully," and the violin "speaks out in fear." The invocation of specific emotions is justified by the narrative situation (conversation and argument among the instruments), but the association of specific emotions with instruments also reflects the specificity of their sound. Furthermore, the characterization of different genres of musical compositions (and their parts) through the invocation of the language of emotions is present in *Co tu jest grane?* by the same author. Such procedures can help associate musical phenomena with certain emotional states familiar to young audiences, and thus facilitate their reception.

The personification also results in the use of a more detailed metaphor of MUSIC AS COMMUNICATION. In the analysis conducted by Biłas-Pleszak, two versions of this metaphor emerged – music as a conversation between instruments and music as a speaking entity (Biłas-Pleszak, 2005: 107–108). In the children's books we examined, the first version is realized – music is presented as a polyphony of instruments that communicate with each other, achieving varying degrees of harmony (from conversation to argument). This metaphor forms the basis of the concept in *Wszystko gra* by Czerwińska-Rydel, which, due to its originality and artistic value, will be further discussed in the later

part of the article (dedicated to the so-called music series of the Wytwórnia Publishing House). The comparison of a concert to a conversation also serves as a compositional axis in one of the chapters of the book *Co słychać?*

The last domain distinguished by us, from which the conceptual system was transferred to the semantic field of music, is CULINARY ARTS. In *Co słychać?* by Czerwińska-Rydel, the act of eating is used as a reference that allows understanding of the concept of musical tempo, and a family dinner is compared to a concert. In the analyzed books, the domain of CULINARY ARTS is also a source of textual synesthesia that describes sounds in the context of taste, most often sweet: "in sweet tones" (*Alikwoty*), "sweetly hummed" (*Wszystko gra*). The most elaborate and creative use of this domain, in the form of detailed metaphors such as MUSIC IS A CAKE and COMPOSING IS BAKING, is realized in the book *Co tu jest grane?*. It is worth noting here that the basis for such metaphors is the perception of music as a composition of appropriately connected elements, which was also evident in the Owerturki series, where music was compared to arranged blocks or puzzles. The same way of understanding music is also the basis for metaphors described by Biłas-Pleszak: MUSIC IS A BUILDING and MUSIC IS A FABRIC (Biłas-Pleszak, 2005: 112–114). These metaphors were not present in the books analyzed by us, but it can be considered that the metaphor MUSIC IS A CAKE is an original way of highlighting the same aspects of music.

The conducted analysis of both the textual and visual layers of the discussed picturebooks allows us to formulate the conclusion that the ways of conceptualizing music present in them are generally aligned with the basic metaphorical schemas used to express music in the Polish language (Biłas-Pleszak 2005; Prochwicz 2013), but they also introduce new and fresh directions of metaphorical representation. The first is closely related to the child audience – it involves the use of the domain of PLAY and TOYS (blocks, puzzles, sledding, playing hide-and-seek), while the second involves the use of the domain of CULINARY ARTS in the form of metaphorical schemas such as MUSIC IS A CAKE and COMPOSING IS BAKING. The textual metaphors in the analyzed books are also creatively enriched by the images, which co-create the message in this context as well. Illustrations enhance the imagery, intensifying the evocativeness of metaphorical expressions, especially in visual synesthetic metaphors, but they often introduce a different or additional direction of metaphorical representation independently from the text.

In this regard, publications from the Wytwórnia Publishing House deserve special attention. Therefore, we will discuss in more detail the collaboration between word and image in creating representations of musical phenomena and the coexistence of various metaphorical schemes in one publication using them as an example.

4. THE MUSIC SERIES OF THE WYTWÓRNIA PUBLISHING HOUSE

Wytwórnia Publishing House is considered one of the most progressive and distinguished publishers in Europe (nominated for the Bologna Prize Best Children's Publisher of the Year 2022). The books in its repertoire are characterized by original subject matter and extraordinary creativity in presentating it, which is also evident in the picturebooks included in the so-called music series.

The titles published in the Wytwórnia series are authored by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, a graduate of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk, specializing in Music Theory and Composition. Therefore, she is a professional musician, educator, and above all, an extremely popular author of children's books (Pietraszewska, 2018: 84). The music series was co-created by well-known and esteemed illustrators of the middle generation: Marta Ignerska (*Wszystko gra*), Katarzyna Bogucka (*Co tu jest grane?*), as well as Monika Hanulak and Małgorzata Gurowska (*Co słychać?*). Their work has been recognized in national and international competitions, with each of them being a recipient of the Bologna Ragazzi Award.

The concept of each of the three books published by Wytwórnia is based on a different metaphorical scheme. *Wszystko gra* depicts a conversation among personified instruments preparing for a concert. The COMMUNICATION between them takes various forms, ranging from courteous exchanges to quarrels. This technique aims to highlight the distinguishing features of each instrument, their place and role in the orchestra, and to present (both verbally and visually) their characteristic sounds.

In the text, the sounds produced by the instruments are named with numerous and varied verbs of speaking: announced, repeated, stated, replied, called, muttered, interjected, spoke, addressed [to], convinced, protested, boasted, snorted, said, warned, agreed. Alongside the EMOTIONS, which also contribute to the characterization of the sounds produced by the instruments, there is an abundance of metaphoric epithets. For example, the violas' sound was "so beautiful. It contained so much warmth and love." The descriptions of individual sounds are notable for their rich metaphoric language, including synesthetic shifts. We encounter "intricate melodies" of the clarinet, the "grotesque, nasal sound" of the bassoon, and the "mysterious, velvety, and deep" tones of the violas. Onomatopoeic words also appear in the descriptions of sounds: the violin's tone is "whining," the oboe "squeaks," the bassoon "muttered" and speaks with a "bass growl," the horn "thundered," and the trombone "boomed."

The creativity in expressing musical impressions is also evident in the visual layer. As mentioned before, Ignerska represents the sounds of individual instruments primarily through lines in different COLORS. For instance, the "piercing voice" of the oboe is depicted as horizontal, multiplied pink lines, with the

number of lines increasing as the sound progresses. The "bass rumble" of the bassoon, described as having its "home in dark basements and underground caves full of bats," is represented by a wide line drawn straight (resembling a pinkfluorescent highlighter) and bent at various angles, placed on a black-colored bottom panel resembling a cellar. The flute and clarinet engage in a dispute with similar, soft, vigorous "waves," while offended violas remain silent, cleverly depicted by a computer icon of voice muting. Accompanied by them, the cellos generate harmonious serpentine curves that develop from left to right (Śniecikowska, 2020: 75). The intensity and pitch of the sounds produced by each instrument correspond to the thickness and height of the lines used.

To visualize the sounds, Ignerska also utilizes SHAPES: the trombone, which buzzes loudly and resonantly, emphasizing the need to "know how to laugh and enjoy," expresses its joy by floating pink circles that overlap like children's soap bubbles rising towards the sky. The loud, strong strikes of the drums, whose "echo reverberated in the concert hall for a long time," are depicted by thick, slightly curved orange and pink stripes that reach the edges of the pages like invisible walls of the concert hall (Figure 2). Throughout the entire book, there is a consistently executed concept of showing sound: the first spread, still in silence, is empty; the climax of the argument is depicted in a chaotic illustration showing the instruments and visualizing their sounds with various lines and splashes; and when the conductor appears on stage and all the instruments achieve agreement and harmony, three parallel, multicolored strips of color-sound are depicted.

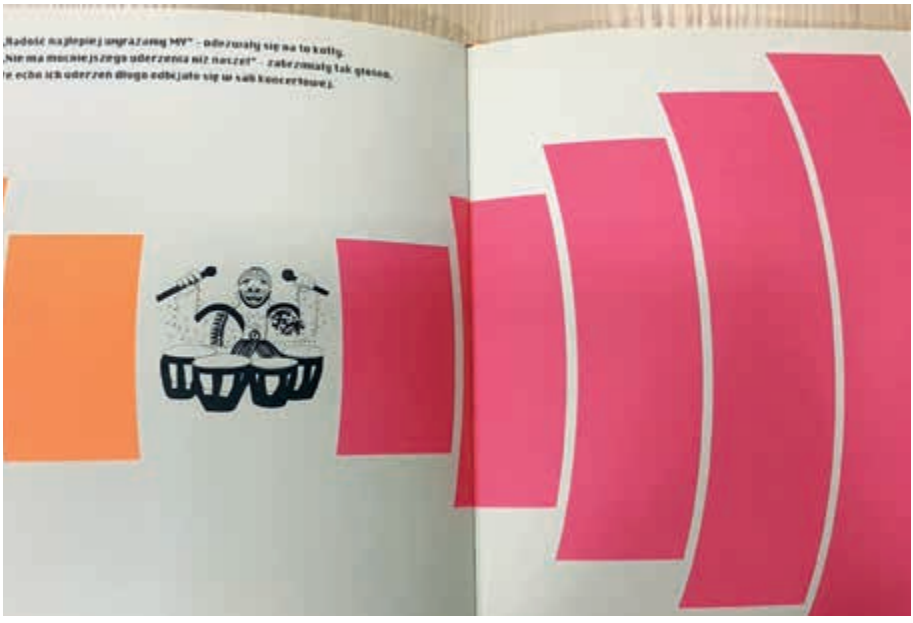

Figure 2 A. Czewrińska-Rydel, *Wszystko gra*, il. M. Ignerska, Warszawa: Wytwórnia 2011.

The originality of the visual layer of the book was appreciated, among others, by the jury of the Bologna Ragazzi Award, awarding it the main prize in the nonfiction category in 2012. In their justification for the choice, they emphasized its innovativeness and playful freshness, comparing it to the revolution brought about by Gutenberg's invention.[3] Ignerska drew inspiration from various sources, as references to ancient culture, Assyrian, and Hellenistic art, as well as avant-garde, expressionism, and geometric abstraction, are visible on the pages of the book. The music is humorously and lightly portrayed, combining the auditory and visual spheres. As Małgorzata Cackowska emphasizes, *Wszystko gra* is an "extremely original literary-graphic form of music education […] seamlessly, as if without any boundaries, the text transforms into an image, and then into music![4]

Published in 2012, *Co tu jest grane?* illustrated by Bogucka is the second book in a series introducing readers to the world of music. This time, Czerwińska-Rydel acquaints readers with musical forms such as fugue, sonata, variations, rondo, and several others. The narrative unfolds in an unconventional pastry shop named Note, offering a musical menu. The protagonist receives explanations from the salesperson behind the counter, who asserts, "In a good confectionery, it's like in music. Every piece, like a cake, has its unique form and flavor." The book's conceptual foundation lies in the reference to the CULINARY domain – through the scheme, MUSIC IS A CAKE – serving as an exemplary instance of contemporary informational picturebooks with an interdisciplinary character. By comparing the feast of the palate to a musical feast, the author engagingly imparts knowledge to young readers, encompassing not only musicology but also culinary insights.

The culinary-musical discourse is replete with synesthetic comparisons and associations linking music with the senses of taste, smell, and touch, as well as with the baking process. For instance, a yeast braid is described as "smelling and tasting exquisite, much like a musical fugue in a concert." The analogy continues with statements such as "Contrapuntal elements serve as musical sugar for the fugue," and "Studies and caprices are musical donuts," while the fugue theme, akin to yeast, "swells and expands." Verbal descriptions of musical pieces and their components are enriched with strings of adjectives transferred from the already discussed source domains of MOVEMENT and EMOTIONS. For example, in a sonata cycle, "the first part is brisk, forceful, and eventful," the second part is "slow, gentle, melodic, and delicate," and the third part is "dancelike, cheerful, and light." Such descriptions, in conjunction with the analogies to confectionery, yield an effect of diversity and richness of sensory experiences associated with specific musical forms.

[3] The jury's entire reasoning can be read at: https://bolognachildrensbookfair.com/media/libro/press_release/2012/braw_2012_en.pdf [Access: 10.01.2024].

[4] Review by M. Cackowska, Dlaczego wszystko gra we *Wszystko gra?* https://wytwornia.com/pl/p/Wszystko-gra/99 [Access: 08.01.2024].

An additional asset of the book are Bogucka's illustrations, which relate to the verbal descriptions, but at the same time also introduce new content and additional expression. The artist has delved into her favorite retro style with elements of primitive art and comics. Through illustrations characterized by muted color palettes, she instills a joyful atmosphere, portraying figures that appear to lightly float in dance, shown in dynamic poses. Among them, one can identify renowned composers such as Bach, Beethoven, or Chopin, as well as the owner of the Wytwórnia Publishing House – Magdalena Kłos-Podsiadło. In addition to their expressive function, the illustrations can also serve an educational role – showcasing confectionery products, to which various musical compositions are likened. The structural pattern of a rondo, for instance, is compared to a birthday cake. Its successive parts ABACA are described as follows: a refrain (sponge cake – part A), couplets (creams: B – lemon, C – chocolate), with the theme (i.e., sponge cake, or part A) appearing between them. The accompanying illustration, with arrows indicating the cake's layers forming the rondo pattern, not only aids in visualizing the intricate concepts of music theory but also facilitates their memorization through synesthetic association (Figure 3).

Figure 3 A. Czerwińska-Rydel, *Co tu jest grane?*, il. K.Bogucka, Warszawa: Wytwórnia 2012.

The remaining pastry-inspired compositions are presented in an equally captivating manner. Bogucka demonstrates a profound understanding of this theme, and the selection of her as the illustrator for the book has proven judicious, particularly considering that in 2015, the artist received recognition through the Bologna Ragazzi Award for *Wytwórnik kulinarny* [*Culinary Notebook*], another work published by Wytwórnia.

The final and third title in the music series, *Co słychać?*, was designed by Hanulak and Gurowska. The objective of the book, released in 2015, is to illustrate that music is not confined solely to concert halls but permeates all everyday activities. By examining the rituals of the Allegri family, the author elucidates challenging musical terms derived from the Italian language. The predominant domain in the book is MOVEMENT. During dinner, readers are introduced to the musical tempos of the Allegri family's eating habits. Conversations about vacation plans provide an opportunity to explore concepts related to the dynamics of musical composition, and the evening bustle of the family becomes a pretext for discussing articulation, i.e., the manner of shaping and producing sound. Various parameters of musical compositions are thus associated with different types of movement and activities familiar to the child from everyday life. Like the Uwerturki series, this approach reveals the presentation of musical phenomena as inherent in our surrounding reality – found in keystrokes on a keyboard, the sound of falling water droplets, the resonance of conversations, or the clatter of blocks being dropped into a box. This concept is explicitly expressed in the book: "Everything we do is accompanied by sounds. You could say there is music everywhere." Vocabulary related to movement also serves to discuss sounds, as seen in the passage: "In music, silence always appears. Immediately after it, we can hear how the sound gently undulates or grows rapidly and overwhelms us completely."

Abstract concepts explained in the book are accompanied by abstract illustrations. The members of the Allegri family are depicted as schematic, black and white, unreal figures, whose faces do not express any emotions, although we learn from the text that "Maria is getting annoyed" and "Anna is scared." Perhaps such representation of characters, focused on one activity, allows for better anchoring of the discussed concepts in memory, according to mnemonic principles. This is also served by the accompanying colorful lines and shapes, but also typographic highlighting of the terms discussed in the text.

The pace of eating spaghetti by individual family members is depicted through various compositions based on lines in different colors. "Mom eats at a *lento* pace. She slowly pulls out each strand of spaghetti…", which is illustrated by calmly undulating pink lines from bottom to top. Short, intersecting red lines at right angles symbolize a *moderato* tempo in which dad eats, while yellow, serpentine, and nervous spirals represent *accelerando*, which characterizes Maria's way of eating.

To illustrate concepts related to dynamics that determine the strength of sound, the artists used duplicated SHAPES in bold, flat colors. *Mezzo forte*, used by the mother ("she speaks calmly but forcefully"), is represented by repeating vertical bands in a pink color, fairly wide. A slightly louder *forte*, emanating from Maria's voice ("her voice is high and strong"), is expressed by

sharp, yellow semicircles transitioning into larger, merging triangles. Meanwhile, Anna's progressively quieter, almost whispered words (from *piano*, through *pianissimo*, *decrescendo*, to *piano pianissimo*) are visualized using thin, green vertical lines, gradually decreasing in density from bottom to top until they become barely visible.

SHAPES also illustrate the concepts discussed in Chapter 3 related to articulation. *Staccato* is compared to the rhythmic tapping of the computer keyboard by the father, and the red, three-dimensional keys floating in the air complement the verbal description (Figure 4). On the other hand, the mother's soft lullaby (tactile synesthesia) at bedtime (*legato*) is depicted as smoothly floating and intermingling pink circles of various sizes.

Figure 4 A. Czerwińska-Rydel, *Co słychać?,* il. M. Hanulak, M. Gurowska, Warszawa: Wytwórnia, 2015.

In the textual layer, the presented concepts are indirectly associated with EMOTIONS, which accompany the actions and activities that represent specific phenomena in the book. During the conversation, mother speaks calmly (*mezzo forte*), while Maria gets annoyed (*forte*). *Portato* appears when Stefan throws blocks into the container, and "he doesn't like to clean up. This moment before going to bed, when he must tidy up all his toys, is very unpleasant for him." The associative sequence of musical concept-action/movement is expanded in these cases by the emotional state that enhances the expression of the respective phenomenon. In combination with the shapes and colors utilized in the illustrations, we get expanded, multimodal representations of the discussed musical phenomena.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of 11 Polish picturebooks dedicated to music allowed us to identify and reconstruct an elaborate system of linguistic ways of conceptualizing musical phenomena and experiences. Its elements consist of metaphors and synesthetic comparisons, which depict music and sounds in terms of sensations associated with other senses (primarily sight, but also touch and taste), as well as conceptual metaphors drawn from domains such as COLOR, SHAPE, MOVEMENT, NATURE, PLAY, CULINARY ARTS, COMMUNICATION, and EMOTIONS. Different metaphorical schemes intertwine, creating a rich network of associations that facilitate grasping the essence of music and related sound phenomena.

Various methods of visualizing music and sounds accompany the linguistic conceptualization in the analyzed books, presenting them as visible phenomena primarily through diverse color patches and lines. Particularly noticeable – especially in the books of Czerwińska-Rydel – are the original and innovative ideas of the illustrators, who creatively exploit the idea of showing sound or illustrating sometimes challenging musicological concepts for the non-professional audience. Thanks to the close collaboration between the author and the artists, readers receive informational picturebooks that form a coherent whole, in which the reader becomes more of an explorer seeking experiences and sensations than information. The visible pictorial turn described by von Merveldt manifests itself not so much in the quantity, but in the quality of visual representations, providing intellectual and aesthetic experiences, enabling the experience of the correspondence between music and the art of words and images. Textual and visual representations in the discussed publications co-create polysemiotic approaches to music, stimulating children's imagination and appealing to the senses through a rich set of associations and metaphors.

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MATEUSZ ŚWIETLICKI ORCID: 0000-0001-7009-3837
University of Wrocław

"A Little Messed Up and Blue": Coming of Age Queer, Twin, and Anxious in Tegan and Sara Quin's (Junior) High School Books

Abstract: This essay argues that Tegan and Sara Quin's *High School* memoir and *Junior High School* graphic novels function as a transmedia narrative of queer adolescent anxiety, blending nostalgia, emotion, and musical self-representation to challenge heteronormative coming-of-age frameworks and highlight a reparative queer literary mode. While the overall premise remains consistent, when told through different media, Tegan and Sara's story emphasizes various aspects of the anxiety related to being twins, experiencing a queer coming-of-age, and the process of coming out. This essay treats the Quins' autobiographical works as examples of transmedia storytelling rather than mere adaptations. Their memories of youth, along with the anxieties tied to being teenage twins striving to be recognized as individuals rather than reflections of each other, closeted lesbians at a new school, and musicians questioning their talent and prospects, have become the core themes of Tegan and Sara's work across media. Each new element in their story adds layers to the experiences of growing up queer.

Keywords: YA literature, queer, twins, anxiety, Canadian literature, music, transmediality

LGBTQ2S+[1]-themed books, films, and TV series, including those aimed at young people, continue to grow in number and genre diversity (Jenkins and Cart, 2018: xi). While the representation of LGBTQ2S+ youth in mainstream traditional media is greater than ever before, it is still not satisfactory, especially when it comes to the voices of young people who are not white, middle-class, or cisgender (Lo, 2019; Craig et al., 2015: 257; Marshall, 2019: 66). Some

[1] I use the term LGBTQ2S+ to refer to individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, two-spirit, and other non-heteronormative and cisgender identities.

young adult books published in the last decade offer hopeful and, at times, utopian and colorblind narratives featuring characters of various gender identities that significantly differ from those dominant in queer literature before. However, such inclusive depictions of queer adolescence – very different from those present in the "dark" books of the past – seem distant from the reality of many readers (Jenkins and Cart xii). They feature sugarcoated versions of the precarious circumstances faced by adolescents who identify as (or are believed to be) LGBTQ2S+ and are statistically even more likely to experience anxiety, bullying, cyberbullying, and victimization at school than heteronormative representatives of "the anxious generation" (Peter, Taylor, Chamberland, 2015: 187; see Haidt, 2024).

This essay argues that Tegan and Sara Quin's *High School* memoir and *Junior High School* graphic novels function as a transmedia narrative of queer adolescent anxiety, blending nostalgia, affect, and musical self-representation to challenge heteronormative coming-of-age frameworks and highlight a reparative queer literary mode. Many popular books and series offer hopeful narratives, but the globally spreading anti-queer and anti-gender sentiments directed at queer youth and the media they consume trigger various types of anxieties among children and adults. As Judith Butler notes in *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (2024), even in relatively progressive countries with marriage equality, LGBTQ2S+ children and adolescents are under threat due to the spread of right-wing extremism, which treats gender "as code for pedophilia or a form of indoctrination that teaches young children how to masturbate or become gay" (6). Politicians introducing anti-gay and anti-trans policies – recently in both the USA and Canada – are allegedly acting out of fear for the well-being of children. To quote Butler,

> The fear of children being harmed, the fear that the family, or one's own family, will be destroyed, that 'man' will be dismantled, including the men and man that some of us are, that a new totalitarianism is descending upon us, are all fears that are felt quite deeply by those who have committed themselves to the eradication of gender—the word, the concept, the academic field, and the various social movements it has come to signify. (15)

Some online adult reviews of Tegan and Sara Quin's seemingly optimistic and hopeful books for adolescents reflect this fear of young people being harmed and indoctrinated. For example, in a review posted on Amazon.com on November 25, 2023, someone named S. chester writes that *Tegan and Sara: Junior High School* (2023) is "too sexualized and like everything else these days forces the alphabet agenda on children." Despite featuring no explicit content, Tegan and Sara Quin's books feature themes triggering some adult anxieties: young people questioning their sexuality, girls getting their first period, buying their first bras, and dealing with bullying online and offline.

While right-wing extremists talk about their alleged fear for the well-being of children, it is queer young people whose books are banned and rights denied who continue to grow up even more anxious than their already anxious peers. Anxiety, as Derritt Mason argues in his landmark *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture* (2021), is vital to "understanding the past, present, and future of queer YA," which he defines, quite broadly, "as a body of trans-media texts with blurry boundaries, one that coheres provisionally around affect more than content" (6). Such affective transmedia literature, as Mason believes, has "transformative potential for thinking relationality" (19). Mason emphasizes the need to embrace queer YA's ambiguity and its tendency toward redefinition and reinterpretation, advocating for the development of non-normative approaches to interpreting such texts (25; see Matos, 2024: 7). Thus, such texts, which often bend genres, should not be confined to established definitions and conventional readings. Instead, queer books should be read in ways that allow for fluidity and openness and challenge conventions.

This essay aims to follow Mason's approach and focus on examining the literary elements of the transmedia storyworld of indie-pop duo Tegan and Sara Quin. The books, inspired by the band's adolescence in the 1990s, but set in both the 1990s and 2020s, reflect various types of anxieties experienced by queer young people.[2] In 2019, after years of referencing their experiences in song lyrics and music videos – which were initially misunderstood and dismissed by some male, heterosexual, and adult critics – the Quins published the bestselling and award-winning memoir *High School* and released an album featuring reworked versions of the songs they originally wrote in the mid-1990s. *High School* is not a novel and was not marketed as a YA book, but the Young Adult Library Services Association awarded it a 2020 Alex Award, given annually to ten mainstream books that appeal to teenagers. Considering the intergenerational and ambiguous character of *High School*, I argue that Tegan and Sara's memoir can be described as a noteworthy example of a queer young adult book that defines norms and conventions typically attributed to YA (Mason, 2021: 14; Matos, 2024: 17).

In his influential work on young adult literature, Kenneth B. Kidd distinguishes between two types of books about young people: "the novel of adolescence," which is one focused on coming-of-age but not necessarily written for young readers, and "the adolescent novel," which, as Mason suggests, is "more or less synonymous with YA" (11; cf. Kidd, 2011: 167). *High School* exceeds the category of "a book of adolescence" and has been enjoyed by readers of various ages, especially due to its central place in Tegan and Sara's storyworld. After all,

[2] While Tegan and Sara's works have generated adult anxieties connected to the fact that they do not depict adolescents as non-sexual, presumably heterosexual, and in constant need of adult protection, a study of the adult reception of the books – as well as a more detailed examination of the references to high school in the Quins' song lyrics and music videos – exceeds the scope of this essay.

young adult is not a genre "but a publishing category that encompasses multiple genres" and addresses themes, problems, and wants that resonate with both younger and older audiences (Fitzsimmons and Wilson, 2020: xiii; cf. Hintz and Tribunella, 2024).

In 2022, the memoir was adapted by Clea DuVall for a television show starring TikTokers Railey and Seazynn Gilliland – queer identical twins – in the roles of the Quins.[3] Like *High School*, its critically acclaimed adaptation, which was named one of the best shows of 2022 by *Rolling Stone* and *The New York Times*, is set in the 1990s. In addition to the main premise of the book, it also features the anxieties of the parents of queer adolescents. The memoir and TV show were followed by two fictionalized graphic novels directed at a younger audience, *Tegan and Sara: Junior High School* (2023) and *Tegan and Sara: Crush* (2024), illustrated by Tillie Walden – an American illustrator who also has a twin. Here, the Quins are transported to a present-day junior high school. The graphic novels are Tegan and Sara's first book releases set in present-day Canada, where, on the one hand, queer people can get married, and according to the 2020 Pew Research Center survey, 85% of Canadians – 92% in the 18-29 age group – accept same-sex partnerships (Poushter and Kent), but on the other hand, anti-queer and anti-trans sentiments continue to increase, best represented by discriminatory laws introduced in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. The protagonists of *Junior High School* and *Crush* grow up in the 2020s in an idealized and seemingly more inclusive world, reminiscent of the one portrayed in the 2012 music video of "Closer," the band's biggest crossover hit, which captures the frankness, awkwardness, and joy of adolescence.[4] Unsur-

[3] Similarly to the music mentioned in the memoir, the series may provoke nostalgia or "'appropriated nostalgia' in which younger audiences experience media texts of the past alongside their parents or other older viewers as these older viewers enact consumed nostalgia" (McCarthy, 2019: 674). Each episode of the show, which was produced but not written by Tegan and Sara, features two points of view reflecting the different experiences and voices of the protagonists. While the story follows Tegan and Sara's early days of high school, it is fictionalized and minimalizes the use of drugs, probably to make the show appealing to even younger viewers and their parents. Instead, it focuses on the romantic plots. Notably, the series pays more attention to the anxieties of adults, not adolescents, especially the parents of queer adolescents, who in the memoir are only described from their children's point of view. For example, Christina, one of the protagonists' friends, mentions the anxiety of their fathers: "It's like they're afraid to parent us […] Without our moms, they're lost. They can't deal with conflict. They have no clue what to do" (2019: 143). Still, *High School* does not explore the anxieties felt by the teens' parents. Finally, *High School* features another main character usually not represented in the media – the city of Calgary with its queer community.

[4] "Closer" and its high-budget music video directed by Issac Rentz, which features real-life couples, serve as a happy, nostalgic journey back in time for the Quins. At the time of its release, "Closer" was not only the band's most successful release but also the most openly queer and diverse video in their repertoire. "Closer" is a narrative music video depicting a house/slumber party, and it extends the content of the lyrics, as it shows

prisingly, though, the problems of Tegan and Sara in the graphic novels differ from those experienced by closeted teen twins in the 1990s in *High School*. However, in addition to the apparent differences between the depiction of queer adolescence in the past and the present, the memoir and graphic novels point to the more universal aspects of anxieties experienced by queer youth, as well as those felt by identical twins and emerging musicians.

Although its general premise remains the same, when told across different types of media, Tegan and Sara's story seems to highlight various dimensions of the anxiety stemming from being twins, a queer coming-of-age experience, and the process of coming out. In my reading of the memoir and the graphic novels, I consider them as examples of transmedia works, rather than simple adaptations. As I demonstrate, the Quins' memories of adolescence, along with the anxieties related to being teenage twins fighting to be seen as individuals and not mere reflections of one another, closeted lesbians at a new school, and musicians questioning their talent and prospects for a future career, have become the central theme of Tegan and Sara's work across media, with each new addition to the story revealing additional layers of the experiences of those growing up queer.

HIGH SCHOOL AND YA LITERATURE

Tegan and Sara consider their high school days spent in Calgary in the 1990s to be the "origin story" of the band and of them as individuals ("Tegan and Sara: The Agony," 2019). In the years following the release of their most commercially and critically successful records – including the synth-pop single "Boyfriend," in which the duo challenged heteronormativity, and the nostalgic pop hit "Closer," with a video foreshadowing the significantly more inclusive world of their graphic novels – Tegan and Sara decided to explore their high school memories in various transmedia forms.[5] Considering the wide range of media across which they have been active, I suggest that their high school origin story can be read as an example of a transmedia story. "Transmedia storytelling," as Henry Jenkins argues, is not synonymous with adaptation because when a storyworld is told across multiple media platforms, each medium contributes uniquely to the narrative, constantly adding new elements to it (2007). This involves the

straight and LGBTQ2S+ couples representing various ethnicities. This is particularly important in the context of Tegan and Sara's memoir, which focuses on the experiences of white, cisgender, and middle-class teens. Therefore, it can be argued that "Closer," on the one hand, depicts a utopian – hopeful, idealized, and reparative – reinterpretation of Tegan and Sara's youth different from their experiences in the 1990s, one showing what the lives of queer young people of their generation *should* have been like. On the other hand, the video hints at some sense of progress of the rights of LGBTQ2S+ youth, which is also present in the Quin's two graphic novels set in present-day Canada.

[5] When composing the song, Tegan Quin recalls delving into her nostalgic reflections, particularly reminiscing about her high school days (cf. Barret 391).

presence of "a static component that precedes the story and a dynamic component that captures the unfolding of the events" (Ryan, 2015: 364; cf. Kruger, 2023). Like other transmedia stories, Tegan and Sara's has also been "created to be distributed and consumed via and across various media" (Mygind, 2024: 6). Although transmedia storytelling is usually associated with cultural texts set in fictional, often fantastic, worlds, Marie-Laure Ryan argues that "[t]here is […] no reason why transmedia storytelling could not take as its subject matter realistic storyworlds, or even the real world" (2015: 14). This seems to be the case with Tegan and Sara, whose transmedia storytelling is based on their memories of growing up in the 1990s, which they have shared across song lyrics, music videos, memoirs, television, and comics in forms that contribute to the unfolding of the story and resonate with audiences representing different generations and tastes. As I demonstrate in this essay, various media formats and languages shape, enrich, and change Tegan and Sara's transmedia high school universe, which continues to show various dimensions of anxiety associated with growing up queer, being a twin, and starting a music career (see Scolari, 2009: 587).

"The anxious sites of queer YA," as Mason notes, "bleed beyond the scope of print literature and into cultural texts broadly conceived" (16). Tegan and Sara's teenage anxieties connected to growing up queer in Calgary in the 1990s have bled into music, non-fiction, TV, and comics. The static component of their transmedia story is based on finding their stepfather's old Fender acoustic guitar and participating in a battle of bands competition called Garage Warz in 1998. Tegan and Sara received one of the highest scores in the competition's history, performing three songs, including "Collide," which two decades later was used in the audiobook adaptation of the memoir they narrate. The band, at that time, called Sara and Tegan (and earlier Plunk – light punk), won studio time, which allowed them to professionally record a demo tape ("Garage Warz").[6]

[6] Because Tegan and Sara were uncertain about their post-high school plans, they decided not to go to university, took a gap year, and continued recording demos and performing at cafes and bars across Canada. Through this experience, they gained valuable insights and perfected their skills as songwriters and performers. After Garage Warz, the Quins started giving interviews, opened for indie-rock singer-songwriter Hayden, and were noticed by record labels. On the day of their eighteenth birthday, Tegan and Sara signed a demo contract with PolyGram. Since the release of *Under Feet Like Ours* (1999), their first independent record, self-written when they were teenagers, Tegan and Sara have had a successful music career, which won them the Governor General's Award in 2018 and several Juno Awards. After years of making indie-pop music and existing on the margins of the mainstream, in 2012, Tegan and Sara released "Closer," the first single of their seventh – but first pop crossover – record, *Heartthrob* (2013). With the catchy chorus, "All I want to get is, a little bit closer/ All I want to know is, can you come a little closer?" and the optimistic video, it became their most commercially successful song. "Closer" was featured in *Glee*, *BoJack Horseman*, and *Canada's Drag Race* and helped the band receive global recognition among younger listeners, including those unfamiliar with their more alternative-sounding music.

Unlike most of their peers in show business at that time, from the beginning of their career in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Tegan and Sara have been open about their sexuality (Tegan qtd. in Schwartz, 2013). This openness has brought them, an indie band initially not signed to a major record label or promoted on pop radio, national and international publicity. Melody Lau observes in *Tegan and Sara: Modern Heartthrobs* (2022) that some male music journalists dismissed the Quin twins as a gimmick due to their being openly queer at a time when few female musicians were out (2022: 26-27, 91-92). The mixed critical reception of their early records – including sexist and homophobic reviews from *Pitchfork* and *NME* – particularly impacted Sara, who found them discouraging for queer musicians. However, with a growing online presence on platforms like Myspace, the band developed a cult following among young LGBTQ2S+ listeners and has inspired younger generations of performers (130-131). While Tegan and Sara's early songs rarely address sexual orientation explicitly, they have been, as Tegan said in 2018, "political from birth," and their music has resonated with young members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, particularly in Canada and the USA (41).

In addition to their online presence and direct contact with fans, Tegan and Sara's popularity in the early days can also be attributed to the fact that "music has been frequently associated with sexualities (….) that call into question the structures of patriarchal phallocentric culture and compulsory heterosexuality" (Peraino, 2003: 461). Unlike other types of media, music also "has a different relationship with queer subtext" (Roach, 2018: 171; Zhao, 2021: 1033-1038; Bain et. Al, 2016). At a time when LGBTQ2S+ people lacked representation in film and TV, the work of musicians such as David Bowie, Prince, Kate Bush, and Madonna had "transformative queer potential, which continues to resonate with LGBT communities today" (Roach, 2018: 171). Moreover, representations of queerness in music "may function as important sources of support to facilitate the resilience of LGBTQ youth" – especially when it is the only source of support young people have (Craig et al., 2015: 255). This function of music seems especially important for people who do not see themselves represented in literature and other media forms, particularly individuals who are not white, not cisgender, not heterosexual, and not middle-class (Lo, 2019; Craig et al., 2015: 254-257; Świetlicki, 2021). The role of music as a support system is reflected in Tegan and Sara's memoir and graphic novels – as well as in many queer YA novels, for instance, James Brandon's *Ziggy, Stardust & Me* (2019) and Malinda Lo's *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* (2021). Thus, it might be argued that openly gay musicians, or those who openly support the LGBTQ2S+ community, can help young queer people feel seen (Roach, 2018: 170). In an interview given at the time of the release of "Closer," which was inspired by memories of their youth, Sara Quin said: "In the early days, our experiences felt very authentic for people, and for kids, like us, who didn't necessarily have a ton of

gay[7] role models, or people that they were looking up to" (Sara qtd. in "MusicNewsWeb," 2013). Sara Quin recognizes the responsibility connected to the position of Tegan and Sara as musicians and "authentic" role models for "kids like them" in the late 1990s and early 2000s – that is, young Canadians who came of age when queer activism in Canada was taking off but LGBTQ2S+ individuals still had limited rights and representation in the media.

Tegan and Sara's literary works focused on adolescence showcase the hopes, fears, and anxieties of emerging musicians who are queer teenagers growing up in Canada. As I argue in my reading of the Quins' graphic novels, even in an idealized portrayal of queer adolescence, anxiety is unavoidable. Sara Ahmed argues that the distinction between fear and anxiety is typically described in relation to the presence of an object. Fear, as she notes, is often contrasted with anxiety because fear is tied to a specific object and is not anticipatory, meaning it is not related to a potential future threat (Ahmed 64). I agree with Ahmed that in anxiety, thoughts often shift rapidly between various objects, which heightens the feeling of unease. Young queer people in Tegan and Sara's books – especially the protagonists – begin to worry about an increasing number of issues; the lack of attachment to any single object allows anxiety to build by accumulating more objects, eventually overshadowing other emotional connections to the world. For example, the *High School* and *Junior High School* duology points to the shift from struggles with self-acceptance to the anxiety stemming from starting a music career.

The Quins explored their teenage hopes, fears, and anxieties in *High School*, the best-selling memoir they crafted using old journals and cassettes filled with songs they composed during high school. I want to argue that it does not position the Quins as idealized role models. Instead, *High School* highlights Tegan and Sara's entanglements in a heteronormative and patriarchal system and addresses anxieties that remain absent from their lyrics and videos. The impulse to engage with texts despite their ideological contradictions, as Angel Daniel Matos notes, is rooted in the principles of what he calls "reparative reading" (2024: 8). This approach encourages readers to recognize how texts can still provide value, meaning, and emotional support to specific communities, even amidst their shortcomings or omissions. It acknowledges that all texts are produced by individuals entangled in "hetero-and-homonormative, capitalist, and racist systems that all of us are complicit in" (8). Tegan and Sara's memoir highlights the experiences of middle-class, cisgender lesbians who engage in destructive behaviors. While its chronotope is monoethnic and hetero-and-homonormative, *High School* reflects the Quins' vulnerability and anxieties that may resonate with present-day readers. Reparative reading means exploring how the text resonates emotionally, prompts unconventional ways of thinking,

[7] In interviews and their memoir Tegan and Sara refer to themselves as "gay"– not lesbian.

and guides us "towards queerer understandings of relationality and existence," in the case of Tegan and Sara, the experience of growing up queer and female in the 1990s with no representation in the media (8).

Three days after the memoir's publication, Tegan and Sara released their ninth studio album, *Hey, I'm Just Like You,* featuring new versions of twelve previously unreleased songs written initially when they were teenagers. Notably, like the journal entries from the 1990s, which the Quins used while working on the books, all the tracks on the tellingly titled album were reworked by adult Tegan and Sara, with six receiving co-writing credits. Sonically, *Hey, I'm Just Like You* is more similar to the band's first few releases than their two previous pop albums. Some lyrics on the record, like "Hey, I'm just like you/ A little messed up and blue," reflect the emotional turmoil and mixture of hope and anxiety discussed in the memoir and were heavily featured in its audiobook adaptation, read by the Quins. Moreover, the album's title suggests that the stories told in the song lyrics mirror the experiences of other "messed up and blue" queer adolescents. The inclusion of the demos instead of the studio versions in the *High School* audiobook, which also features an interview with the Quins, might be seen as an effort to further "authenticate" the narrative as one told by teenagers, not adults looking back. Additionally, to promote the memoir and the album, the band released several YouTube videos featuring archival footage of teenage Tegan and Sara.

Mirroring in literature – self-reflection, ghostly doubles, doppelgängers, and shadow images – has long been associated with lesbian narratives, where it often functions as a tool for exploring identity and blurring the lines between self-recognition and attraction (Castle). In transmedia storytelling, mirroring can adopt new forms as stories told across media allow different audiences to access diverse identities and extend LGBTQ2S+ representation. While *Hey, I'm Just Like You* mirrors teen anxieties in song lyrics, *High School* was published with three different covers showing teenage Tegan and Sara standing opposite one another, present-day Tegan and Sara, and a mirror reflecting the readers' own images. The three covers point to the entanglements of the present and the past and suggest that the memoir can be read as a metaphorical mirror of the struggles and anxieties experienced by queer people growing up in the late 1990s, as well as many of those still faced by LGBTQ2S+ youth. *High School* focuses on identical twins who are very different but complement one another. They strive to find their voices as distinct individuals, even though many people confuse them and perceive them as doppelgängers, while being anxious teenage girls who grow apart, reconnect – initially because of drugs and later music – and ultimately realize on their own that they are not heterosexual. The cover photo depicting the Quins opposing one another also seems to reflect Tegan Quin's conviction that "she and Sara are mirror twins, a kind of identical twinning in which the features of one are asymmetrically reflected in the

features of the other" (Lau, 2022: 18). In the prologue, Tegan emphasizes the memoir's theme related to mirrors and doubles – the Quins struggle to find their individual voices as twin sisters and navigate their entangled memories. As she notes, "I wonder frequently how many of the memories I carry of Sara are actually my own. How much of my early life have I confused with hers? Our tangled nature makes even me feel interchangeable with Sara – indistinguishable, bound, and suffocated" (2019: n.p.). Thus, like the voices in their songs, at times the voices of the Quins in their storyworld overlap.

The adolescent protagonists and interchangeable narrators of *High School*, closeted lesbians who do not know any other openly queer people, drink, take drugs, and explore their sexuality – that is, engage in activities considered taboo by adults, yet at the same time, actions many young people partake in. The memoir, which features such controversial aspects of adolescence as depression, suicide, and hard drugs, has resonated with both adult and young adult readers, including not only fans of the band. Notably, the presence of these themes has significantly increased in YA literature, appearing in popular – and frequently challenged – books like Malina Lo's *A Scatter of Light* (2022), Mindy McGinnis's *Heroine* (2019), and Nina LaCour's *We Are Okay* (2017). The protagonists of *High School* are teenagers trying to come to terms with their sexuality during times when "[t]here could be nothing worse than being called a lesbian. Especially if you were one" (134). Thus, both Tegan and Sara emerge as anxious characters, afraid of being outed and, consequently, ostracized. "Do you believe as teenagers we're old enough to know about and understand our sexuality?" asks Alex, Tegan's best friend and first girlfriend, in the transcript of a school interview she conducted with Tegan and Sara in the 1990s (176). Although Sara replies, "No," Tegan and Sara's memoir, along with two graphic novels discussed in the following section, demonstrates that the answer is not simple. The protagonists and alternating narrators of *High School* feel lost and anxious about their present and future. To cope, they experiment with hard drugs, which initially "felt like an antidote" to all their problems, including the deterioration of their relationship caused by Sara's close friendship with Naomi (49). In one of the first chapters of the memoir, Tegan states that before high school, she "was plagued with anxiety dreams all summer, in which [she] wandered the halls of [her] school searching for [Sara]," who had put daylight between herself and Tegan (24). She notes, "Acid provided a small square of neutral territory, relief from the war that had been raging between us since Sara and Naomi had bounced me from their union" (29). However, instead of bringing relief, drugs lead to further anxieties and "twist" the twins' "self-esteem into self-loathing" (90). While both struggle with accepting their changing bodies and growing breasts, drugs intensify Sara's struggles with body dysphoria and depression caused by "vulnerability and shame" (31). As she observes, "I tried not to look into mirrors when I was on acid. In those distorted reflections my armor sagged to reveal the body I hated

underneath […] My body had become a stranger, and so had my mind" (30-32). The twins initially mistake drugs for the antidote for their growing anxieties, but gradually they begin to realize that such substances only intensify their negative emotions and contribute to the deterioration of their mental health.

While many of Tegan and Sara's behaviors in *High School* are destructive and stem from their insecurities, anxieties, and lack of positive representation in the media, they eventually find refuge in music, first in records by The Smashing Pumpkins, Nirvana, Green Day, and Hole who "were the new sound of youthful rebellion," and then in their own songwriting (Lau, 2022: 15). As Sara says upon listening to The Smashing Pumpkins' poignantly titled *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* (1995) for the first time, "Nothing had ever sounded more important to me. Billy [Corgan]'s words spoke directly to the places inside of me that were hurt. His suffering reflected my own, and briefly, I felt less alone" (2019: 39). None of the original members of The Smashing Pumpkins identify as LGBTQ2S+, but teenagers like Tegan and Sara, that is, young people coming to terms with their sexuality at a time when access to openly queer role models was limited, identified with the gender-bending videos and rebellious lyrics like "intoxicated with the madness. I'm in love with my sadness" ("Gay-4Grunge"; Lau, 2022: 15-17).[8] After starting to write songs, Tegan and Sara once again grow closer, exchange their fondness for illegal substances for music, and realize that their "voice[s] matter" (167). Although the twins experiment with drugs and alcohol throughout the memoir, it is music that helps them to learn to handle their anxiety and face their own queerness. In the epilogue, Tegan notes that because of their mutual love for music, the sisters reconnected and realized that they could build a future: "Until Garage Warz, my 'future' had been a giant black hole that kept me up at night, dragged me down as I studied, and created tension when anyone pressed me about it. All of a sudden, I'd gone from invisible to notable. Sara and I had a future" (300-301). This future involved becoming an inspiration for younger generations of queer women.[9]

The memoir, which focuses on the messy and emotional teenage years of the Quins, highlights the role of songwriting as an antidote to the twins' drug

[8] Moreover, although most popular bands at that time, except for Hole, consisted of all-male lineups, The Smashing Pumpkins' original bassist was a female musician named D'arcy Wretzky; this might further explain why the band was important for Tegan and Sara. *High School's* musical references to artists young readers might not be familiar with were replaced with mentions of Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish in *Junior High School* and *Crush*. The graphic novels' adults, however, mention bands like Nirvana and The Smashing Pumpkins. Thus, the rebellious artists teen Tegan and Sara identified and at times were not allowed to listen to – as was the case with Nirvana's "Rape Me" in *High School* – are now oldies listened to by the teens because of their parents influence, in a way David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen, and U2 were in *High School*.

[9] Interestingly, while no openly queer musicians are mentioned in *High School*, Tegan and Sara are among the female musicians listened to by the bisexual protagonist of Lo's *A Scatter of Light*.

and alcohol use and as a promise of a future. However, it also depicts the anxieties stemming from Tegan and Sara's deteriorating relationship, their conflicting feelings towards female friends, and the parental pressure to attend college. Moreover, *High School* addresses Sara's suicidal thoughts provoked by homophobia and bullying (78). Notably, in the 1990s in Canada, there was "little concerted action or confront[ation of] bullying and harassment based on sexual diversity or gender deviation, and even less acknowledgment of such difference in the curriculum" (Rayside 5). This is reflected in *High School*, which points to instances of casual homophobia, with adults and Tegan and Sara's peers using terms like "fag" or "dyke." Bruce, the protagonists' sympathetic and kind stepfather, calls Kurt Cobain – the gender-bending leader of Nirvana – a "fag" for wearing makeup (74); Dr. Morgan, a closeted gay teacher, refuses to react when a student says, "[c]an't get AIDS unless you're a fag" (260); and the Quin twins' uncle accuses his wife of not protecting their twelve-year-old daughter from the sight of two women kissing (170). These scenes illustrate Ahmed's observation that "queer subjects may also be 'asked' not to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy, which is itself an uncomfortable feeling, a restriction on what one can do with one's body, and another's body, in social space" (Ahmed 148). While even kind adults seem passive, teen Tegan or Sara react in all such situations. For example, Tegan, who at this point is still in the closet, calls Bruce homophobic and says, "When we were little, people called us boys and made fun of us for having short hair. Would you like it if someone were calling us dykes? Because they already call us freaks and fuckups because of how we look" (76). In the last instance, she also confronts her uncle, saying: "Protecting her from what? Gay people? […] Why is everyone acting so messed up about this? We've been watching violent movies for ten days. Marty, you take your kids to Hooters. How is Sloane seeing two girls kissing such a big deal?" (170-171). Despite their individual and shared anxieties and struggles, the memoir positions Tegan and Sara as the ones calling out homophobia, which fits the core of their story and is further explored in the two graphic novels.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL AND *CRUSH*: BETWEEN HOPE AND FEAR

In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz argues that "Hope along with its other, fear, are affective structures that can be described as anticipatory" (Muñoz 3). *Tegan and Sara: Junior High School* (2023) and *Tegan and Sara: Crush* (2024), the two graphic novels co-created with American illustrator Tillie Walden, transpose young Tegan and Sara from high school in the 1990s to junior high school in present-day Calgary and seem to represent this duality. Unlike traditional memoirs, comics "offer a way of taking control of representation in a direct and politically loaded engagement with the visual self" (Køhlert, 2019: 3).

As Frederik B. Køhlert argues, "multimodal hybridity of the comics form […] creates a distinctly unstable and decentered reading experience that enables the drawn performance of the autobiographical self as a site of ideological struggle" (4). Moreover, as Hillary Chute observes in her landmark study of women's graphic memoirs, such multimodal narratives allow their creators to "stage dialogues among different versions of the self, underscoring the importance of an ongoing, unclosed project of self-representation and self-narration" (2010: 5). Thus, Tegan and Sara's choice of the multimodal comic format gave them the opportunity to enhance their transmedia storyworld and visually explore the theme of mirroring and self-representation.

Tegan and Sara's acclaimed graphic novels aimed at pre-teens and teens are not merely adaptations of *High School* but extensions of their storyworld co-created with Walden and set in present-day Canada. They depict the Quins' teenage anxieties alongside experiences of contemporary queer youth growing up in very different circumstances. At first glance, the books are more hopeful, optimistic, and inclusive than *High School*. Many of the memoir's white, middle-class characters, depicted in the numerous photographs used in the illustrated edition and featured in promotional videos, have been transformed into characters representing various ethnicities. The changes are evident in the characters' names (Roshini, Faiza, Ms. Nguyen, Ms. Patel) and their visual representations. However, Tegan and Sara emerge as colorblind characters who do not contemplate or question their friends' ethnicities. On the one hand, the books' diversity fills the gap in Tegan and Sara's *High School* and aligns their chronotope more closely with their music videos – especially "Closer," the aforementioned track about the first intimate contact between two infatuated individuals, which offers an idealized and diversified version of Tegan and Sara's high school experience. On the other hand, the choice not to address racism and inequality can be seen as problematic because it appears to overlook the complexity of systemic oppression. Moreover, unlike in *High School*, numerous adolescent and adult characters in *Junior High School* and *Crush* are openly LGBTQ2S+ or are positioned as allies. However, despite these optimistic and seemingly utopian changes, along with familiar fears and anxieties from the memoir, the books introduce new struggles faced by representatives of "the anxious generation," that is, young people who grow up physically protected but with virtually unlimited access to the internet and social media.

Fears and anxieties have become defining features of our times, characterized by rapid changes and innovations (Ahmed, 2004: 72). These shifts have undermined traditional structures and values while fostering a sense of loss of control and uncertainty about the future (72). Tegan and Sara's graphic novels navigate between the positive representation of LGBTQ2S+ youth and their focus on sadness, specifically "the binary and hierarchical thinking that queer theories attempt to resist and challenge" (Matos, 2024: 19). Centered on 12-to

13-year-old Tegan and Sara, who have just moved and changed schools, the books contain no explicit vocabulary and make no mention of drugs, alcohol, or house parties. Thus, at first glance, the junior high school experiences of the graphic novels' Tegan and Sara diverge from the predominantly negative ones remembered by the twins in the memoir. However, at the end of *Junior High School*, the girls give it "2 stars. Product was not as described" (277), and they feel that it was "the longest year of [their] lives" (294). The protagonists of the novels question their sexuality, experience their first periods, which Sara refers to as "the WORST moment of [her] entire life" (120), buy their first bras – a theme also mentioned in *High School* – deal with bullying both online and offline, and, at times, exhibit symptoms of depression.

Junior High School and *Crush* showcase the hope associated with growing up queer surrounded by supportive peers and adults, but both visually and textually, they also highlight the fears and anxieties experienced by queer teens. Most of the panels featuring both twins are violet, a color frequently associated with lesbians, but Walden employs two colors to visually represent the different voices of the protagonists and their emotions: blue for Tegan and maroon for Sara. This choice appears intentional. Blue is conventionally associated with sadness, a feeling often expressed by Tegan. Moreover, while maroon symbolizes longing and thoughtfulness, Sara also feels marooned by her sister (McCausland, 2024: 172-175). At times, the twins agree, and their voices complement each other. For example, after attending school for the first time, Sara wonders: "WHY do people ask us the WEIRDEST questions and say the WEIRDEST stuff?" to which Tegan adds: "Omg are you twins? Can you read each other's minds? Can I Touch You? Are you real?" (20). The graphic novels also visually highlight the role of mirrors and reflections in lesbian literature and stories of self-narration. Walden's illustrations emphasize not only the differences between the sisters but also the similarities between their emotions, as seen in the panels showing them looking into the mirror separately yet with similar sadness. Additionally, she captures the anxiety connected to starting a new school and making new friends in the scene showing Tegan and Sara after they hear Avery making fun of them. After Tegan says, "I'm going to be a puddle now. Bye," Walden transforms her into a literal blue puddle of tears (52). While Sara first tries to comfort her sister, she sees herself in the puddle and gradually becomes more distraught, changing into a maroon puddle.

Both graphic novels address the issue of openly queer role models. Tegan and Sara listen to Billie Eilish, who is bisexual, and watch LGBTQ2S+ characters on TV. When Sara is sick, she feels abandoned and ignored: "Tegan and all the kids at school are doing things without me… what if I miss something? What if no one even notices I'm gone?" (95). Home alone, she watches the new episode of the third season of *Atypical* (2017-2021), in which two girl characters, Casey and Izzie, kiss. The scene highlights the differences between the

1990s, when the Quins lacked representation in the media, and the present-day circumstances of teen adolescents who can encounter teen lesbians in mainstream TV shows. Interestingly, the sight of two girls kissing makes Sara anxious, afraid of something she anticipates – that she might also be a lesbian. She starts sweating, and her eyes become larger. First, she hides under the blanket but then decides to rewind the show. "I feel so warm… is this my fever?" she wonders and decides not to tell Tegan about her experience (102). The TV kiss makes Sara think of Roshini, the female classmate with whom she is infatuated. While they are initially close friends, the proximity to Roshini changes Sara's behavior from their first encounter. Like her crush, she becomes vegan and continues to think about her. Notably, the Quins fail to address the cultural reasons behind Roshini's veganism.

Jonathan Haidt in *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Caused an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (2024) argues that the leading cause of young people's growing anxiety is access to smartphones and social media. *Junior High School* and *Crush* feature modern technology that, indeed, leads to problems previously absent from Tegan and Sara's storyworld, most importantly, online bullying (cf. McInroy and Craig, 2018: 180). The twins are always accompanied by their smartphones, which help them bond with their new friends and stay in touch with their old friend, Faiza. However, smartphones can also create additional anxieties. Sara feels rejected when Tegan does not respond to her messages, becomes suspicious when Roshini leaves for summer camp, and does not text her back. In *Crush,* she also receives a social media message from a girl warning her about Roshini, who befriended her at the camp and then stopped answering her texts. Moreover, the novels highlight the influence social media might have on young queer musicians' careers and the dangers such exposure carries. Tegan and Sara's first song, which Sara wrote about Roshini, is uploaded onto YouTube and goes viral. It receives many positive comments but also some negative ones, including an anonymous one calling the song "gay" (238). The comment bothers Sara, who seems to anticipate that openness about her sexuality and the use of she/her pronouns in her songs might turn the listeners' focus from the quality of the band's music to the twins' personal lives. Thus, while the graphic novel is set in present-day Canada, it points to an event that occurred to the Quins in the early 2000s. However, here, criticism comes not from male journalists trying to pigeonhole the duo as a gimmick, but from an anonymous online hater who cannot be confronted.

Anxiety emerges as a way of attaching and clinging to objects. Unlike fear, where the approach of an object triggers emotion, anxiety serves as a means to approach (or generate the lost) objects (Ahmed, 2004: 66). In addition to the themes of queer self-discovery and struggles with feeling seen and heard present in the other books, *Crush* focuses on the fears and hopes connected to Tegan and Sara's emerging music career and their future in show business.

While in *Junior High School* the twins find refuge for their anxieties in music, the second book begins with a nightmare that both Sara and Tegan experience – performing at an arena in front of countless unfamiliar faces. In the dream, which foreshadows the twins' anxieties depicted in the graphic novel and present in their entire storyworld, Tegan loses her voice, and Sara breaks a string in her guitar. Throughout *Crush*, the twins question the quality of their songs, deal with rejection, and sign a contract with Ramona Keys, the manager of a famous musician called Nite Fever, who records a verse on "Crush," the eponymous track. Notably, the sisters react to their new circumstances differently, with Tegan being hopeful and Sara fearful. However, they both feel the pressure connected to show business and the responsibilities of becoming public figures and potential role models for other young people. It makes Tegan wonder: "Being excited sometimes feels a little like being afraid. What if I'm not as good as" (88). Because the twins start fighting again, eventually, their mother decides to replace Ramona as their manager and encourages them to slow down, spend time with their friends, and make music on their terms.

CONCLUSION

The uplifting message of self-confidence and pride found in Tegan and Sara's transmedia storyworld has resonated with a significant portion of their audience, particularly young lesbian fans. However, what makes their work likely to connect with listeners, readers, and viewers of all ages is the anxiety, imperfections, and vulnerability that are more universal than the glamorous version of high school offered in most TV dramas or the sugar-coated representations of adolescence found in many young adult books. As their achievements have expanded and their impact since the late 1990s has reached a broader international audience, Tegan and Sara have become increasingly mindful of their role as role models for queer people and younger members of their fan base, promoting the importance of embracing and celebrating one's identity. With their rising success, Tegan and Sara have used their platform for LGBTQ2S+ activism in Canada and the USA. Most notably, they started The Tegan and Sara Foundation, a charity whose "mission is to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ women and girls" and "is founded on a commitment to feminism and racial, social and gender justice" (About). In 2024, in response to the anti-trans legislation in Canada, the foundation issued an open letter signed by over 400 artists.

Angel Daniel Matos rightfully argues that "some of the most delightfully complex and politically viable queer YA cultural productions are those that use narrative, aesthetic, and temporal innovations to channel a painful (and at times forgotten) past for readers and viewers, while nonetheless being optimistic, future-oriented, and emotionally sustaining" (Matos, 2024: 12). While

Junior High School and *Crush* can be considered more optimistic and future-oriented fictionalized prequels to *High School*, the graphic novels, targeted at younger readers, contribute something new to the story of Tegan and Sara and highlight the new types of anxieties and fears faced by young people. Moreover, with their multimodal form and numerous narrative differences, they stand as Tegan and Sara's most intergenerational book releases, resonating with long-time fans of the band and casual readers who were not born in the 1990s or even when "Closer" was released.

With university courses and numerous scholarly books and articles about the lyrics and music videos produced by global icons such as Taylor Swift, David Bowie, Kate Bush, and Beyoncé[10], the entanglements and intersections between literature and popular music have never been more obvious and have never been studied more extensively. A detailed study of Tegan and Sara's influence on younger generations of queer musicians, the place of the duo's music in their transmedia storyworld, as well as a close reading of the television series, exceed the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, as this essay has argued, their high school origin story depicted in *High School*, *Junior High School*, and *Crush* demonstrates that each high school-themed cultural text (co-)created by the sisters reflects different layers of adolescent anxieties experienced not only by the Quins but also by queer teens in the 1990s and the 2020s.

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Interviews

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EWA BIŃCZYK ORCID: 0000-0002-8945-1371
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

MAGDALENA OCHWAT ORCID: 0000-0002-0178-165X
University of Silesia in Katowice

Ecologizing the Imagination as a Key to Survival: Prof. Ewa Bińczyk on Changes in the Economy and Science

Ewa Bińczyk in an Interview with Magdalena Ochwat

Magdalena Ochwat: What is your understanding of the "ecological correction of the humanities"? In what ways can it also apply to education, schooling, and humanities education?

Ewa Bińczyk: As a philosopher of science, I have been studying the rhetoric of scientists concerned with the state of the Earth's environment for several years. After 2010 this rhetoric has changed a lot, it has become more dramatic. The point is that entire planetary systems are now destabilizing, human impact and destruction has taken on a global dimension. The changes are irreversible and the processes of destruction set in motion by humans are very worrying. The environmental protection is no longer a question of fighting for a selected species – the lynx in Poland or the wolf in a certain region, or for the preservation of a specific ecosystem such as a biodiverse peat bog or a forest unique to Europe, such as the Białowieża Forest. The scale of human interference is colossal: the hydrosphere, atmosphere, biosphere, and lithosphere are on the brink of equilibrium. Industrial agriculture, artificial fertilizers, the destruction of fertile soils, animal husbandry and hunting, industrial fishing, industrialization, consumption, and the fact that we have no regard for planetary boundaries – the buoyancy of the Earth – are largely responsible for this. We have a whole catalogue of monstrous sins on our conscience. The collective behavior of humanity is extremely irrational and irresponsible.

This is our uncomfortable starting point, which is why researchers and experts in various fields are calling for a correction of all our thinking and

practices. The most important thing is to green politics and the economy quickly (it is too late to start with education and culture, although it is of course an interconnected system). This is what fuel tax projects, decarbonisation and the Green Deal are all about. New policies to cool down growth, new priorities for thinking about transport, heating, production, energy extraction, everyday practices.

Human imagination and even dreams need to be greened. For this, we need a correction of the humanities. Today cultural studies scholars, for example, are devising a whole arsenal of mass attacks on consumerism. We need to figure out how to put an end to the promotion of hyper-individualism with which culture in rich societies such as Poland is saturated. Instead of being enthralled by private superyachts, jets, laybys, or energy-guzzling Suvs, the current young generation should already see these devices only as harmful tinfoil. The media experts who will be creating twenty-first-century advertisements need to be ecologically sensitive enough to think many times before allowing ads such as "sustainable hamburger trip" or "eco-friendly *all-inclusive* holiday in warm countries." A change in human attitudes towards nature is necessary if humanity is to survive – we are already damaging the planet so much. Numerous elements of the so-called common sense need to be rebuilt. To do this we need a new vocabulary, intellectual ambition, open imagination, courage, and persistence. We need to paste this into new ways of writing poetry, music, creating pop culture or literature. I hope that your generation will already regard consumerism or the pursuit of GDP growth as a moral scandal and an embarrassment of the past. This is why we need an ecological correction of the economy, politics, science, and academia, and in the further plan of schools and education.

Or perhaps other, new perspectives, other positive, hopeful concepts should enter the school: symbiocene, chtulucene, ecozoic? It seems that young people are particularly in need of a positive perspective that encourages action and causality.

I fully agree. One such promising perspective is offered by solarpunk. It may prove very attractive to the younger generation. In "A Solarpunk Manifesto" we read, among other things, that it is a trend that combines the ecological with the beautiful and well-designed. We do not need dystopias or more warnings, but solutions. The authors of the manifesto write: "We are solarpunks because optimism has been taken away from us and we are trying to take it back." Isn't that beautiful? It is about the enthusiasm for creating a post-capitalist, anti-corporate world of prosperity, about creative technologies improvised in conditions of limited resources. The manifesto includes the slogans: self-sufficiency, living within natural limits, creative reusing, and local energy grids.

For people making solarpunk, "science fiction is not entertainment but a form of activism" and I like it very much. I find it promising.

Imagine that a dictionary of "new words for new times" is being created, one of the entries for the dictionary you have already proposed is: "eco-verve". What words and phrases should we start to promote and use, and build new meanings around them and new narratives based on them? My favorites are "collective" and "symbiocene," and for deletion I propose "climate change" or "global warming," giving the illusion of something positive over which we have control. What words/phrases would you propose, Professor?

In 2020, in the *Ex-centre* project of the Olga Tokarczuk Foundation and the Wrocław House of Literature, I proposed the notion of eco-verve or eco-animus. It was about a complex of profound, pro-environmental, socio-cultural changes concerning the very logic and foundations of the Earth's management, in accordance with the principles of resource- and carbon-saving.

The eco-verve is the promotion of a culture of bio-balance, a society of well-being (*prosperity*), leisure time, and an economy of work, which guarantees the psychological feeling of flow – a state of concentration and total relaxation at the same time. Building a society of creativity and post-work, however, requires a gradual abandonment of the race of the economies of the rich North for endless GDP growth. The point is that the existing common sense of economics needs to be rebuilt. This is also where the need to painfully give up many harmful delusions comes in.

My new book contains an index of terms, which at the same time is just such an alternative dictionary of economics. There are more than 110 terms. Not all of them are positive. But my favorites (because they keep us hopeful and open our eyes to bold alternatives) are prosperity instead of growth, degrowth, planetary metabolism, resilient economies, planetary responsibility, post-work, flow, unconditional basic services, unconditional basic income, locking in wealth accumulation, divestment, circular economics, "luxury emissions," essential workers, the climate Marshall Plan, dismantling consumer overconsumption, social tipping points, the symbiocene and the culture of moderation, whistleblowers of catastrophe and the university as a school of survival, the community of discord, anticipatory imagination and managing without growth. There are articles and interesting research around each of these words. They need to be looked at closely.

Have geologists reached a formal decision regarding the designation of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch?

I would remind you that stratigraphers have been searching for 15 years for indisputable stratigraphic evidence (a global marker, the so-called "golden spike") indicating the beginning of a new geological epoch, which would be the Anthropocene. The role of this marker was to be played by the sediments of Crawford Lake near Toronto, Canada, containing plutonium from hydrogen-bomb tests, indicating that the Anthropocene began in about 1952.

On 5 March this year (2024), The New York Times reported that the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy (by 12 votes against 4) voted against the formal acceptance of a new geological epoch, which was to be the Anthropocene. However, the matter still appears to be open. Indeed, the chairman of this very committee, together with his deputy, Jan Zalasiewicz, and Martin Head, asked on 6 March for the annulment of the said vote, questioning, among other things, the eligibility to vote. Zalasiewicz and Head emphasize that they have not been able to conclude the discussion and have not formulated an official position for the Subcommittee. The matter is yet to be decided by the International Union of Geological Sciences. Regardless of the formal decision of the stratigraphers, the concept of the Anthropocene has gained incredible cultural momentum and plays many roles. There has been a unique debate around it between many disciplines. I wrote about it in my 2018 book, *The Epoch of Man. The rhetoric and lethargy of the Anthropocene*.

You have two new publications coming out soon ("Socializing the Anthropocene" and a translation of Tim Jackson's *Post-Growth*). Could you please briefly comment on them [What will these two items be about? Where did the idea for these publications come from?]

In my new book, *Socialising the Anthropocene. Eco-verve and the ecologisation of economics* I write about orchestrating survival in the face of environmental crisis, the 'grammar' of degrowth movement, ecological economics, resilient economies, and the mission of states in the face of decarbonization. I ask how to preserve the future, what the mission of experts is, and what planetary social thought might look like in the twenty-first century. In the final section, entitled, "Eco-verve and the boycott of lethargy," I argue that without such ambitious dreams, the future simply will not happen at all. I write about pandemics as an opportunity to dismantle "business as usual." I also ask about the future of the Anthropocene in times of war and marasmus.

"Socializing the Anthropocene" in my latest book has several meanings. "A nap or siesta instead of an air conditioner" is a slogan that rather neatly symbolizes one of them. It is about a conceptual shift – a kind of opening up

of the imagination to planned and socially accepted social change. I show that to do so requires the courage to denaturalize many of our assumptions about the *status quo* and to give up a host of harmful delusions. Clearly, the Anthropocene debate itself is riddled with flaws, reproducing many of the mental assumptions that block the possibility of boycotting lethargy and orchestrating survival – developing and implementing effective responses to the planetary environmental crisis. It is now clear that continuing with the practices we know as 'business as usual' (even when it comes to green growth or recycling) is simply counterproductive. We need to give up the delusion that it is possible to decouple GDP growth from increases in energy and resource intensity. Even green pro-climate policies such as efficiency upgrading or recycling only intensify humanity's ecological and climate footprint. We therefore need a constructive alternative to what we know – a realistic and empirically grounded plan to halt the annihilation of the biosphere. It should be socially just and take into account the interests of the most vulnerable: humans and non-human agents, guaranteeing sustainability and ecosafety.

The socialization of the Anthropocene also requires the denaturalization of the *status quo*. Our everyday life and sanity are not given in advance, inevitable, or unmodifiable. The markets that define what pays off and the fossil fuel-based infrastructures we have created seem uncontrollable and unmodifiable. However, they are in fact our creations after all, and it is up to us to redesign them. Through re-naturalization, the reality of fossil fuels and the luxury consumption of the richest is shown to be irrational and simply immoral. This opens up the imagination, facilitating ambitious, widely accepted, planned social change. Natural scientists and engineers alone in the institutions building climate policy will not create them. They simply lack competence. As well as low-carbon technologies, on which someone is likely to make money, we need social innovations such as siesta along with reduced working hours. And also humanities experts who can design them. The contribution of the social sciences and humanities to mitigating the planetary environmental crisis needs to be greater. Decades of decisive decarbonization (understood broadly, including as a socio-cultural process) will be decades of experimenting with learning societies. Not just the production of electric cars, photovoltaic panels, or air conditioners. Social and cultural experimentation will be hindered by the pressure of climate emergencies, it is inevitable. Therefore, the socialization of the Anthropocene, like decarbonization, can no longer be postponed.

Tim Jackson, on the other hand, is a British economist, sustainability researcher, former Commissioner of the UK Sustainable Development Commission, policy advisor, and one of the most recognizable critics of the growth paradigm here. With Janusz Grygieńć, we translated his book *Post*

Growth. Life after Capitalism. Professor Jackson also wrote an introduction for the Polish reader. This is his second book in Polish, next to *Prosperity without Growth*.

In writing about post-growth, Jackson offers readers an unusual thought experiment. It is about daring to imagine life after capitalism. It is an existential journey into a world without the global pursuit of relentless GDP growth. It is, in a sense, a utopia, but a unique, workable utopia, built on the latest economic empirical findings and reports by natural scientists on the seriousness of contemporary environmental threats. Jackson's book is personal, well-written, and respectful of the basic tenets of economics. Each chapter is the story of the lives of fascinating heroines and protagonists; through the lens of their personal hardships and passions, the author dissects a succession of pernicious assumptions of growthism – the ideologized belief that economies must and can grow indefinitely on a planet with finite resources.

What is your current occupation, what are you working on?

This semester I am planning several meetings concerning the book; in April I will talk about it as part of the Thinkisko series at the Rothera Mills in Bydgoszcz, in June I have an author meeting combined with an exhibition by Toruń activist and artist Arek Pasożyt – author of the book cover – at the Copernicus Integration Centre at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. I will also be speaking about my book for the economists in Gdańsk and about *The Mission of the Academy towards the Challenges of the Anthropocene* at the XXXII Psychology Colloquia at UMK.

In July, I am scheduled for a discussion on degrowth at the Olga Tokarczuk Foundation's Mountains of Literature Festival. I would also like to visit the amazing Earth Settlement. It is a living experiment of intertwining the fates of humans and other beings in an ethical community in Drawsko Park. It is formed by people concerned about the state of the planet and the problem of arranging the future.

I look forward to all the meetings and regret that I cannot accept every invitation. There simply is not enough time and strength for everything, and I really enjoy my garden in the woods, especially from May to October, then I read a lot, work in the garden, and write on the terrace. The degrowth economists propose that instead of *all-inclusive* holidays in distant countries, we should pursue "staycations." I, as part of such staycations, am catching up on my reading and catching my breath for the new academic year. I strongly support this idea, certainly in spring, summer, and early autumn, when Poland is so beautiful. We still have magical places around us, let us fight to preserve them as much as we can.

Foto: Anna Rezulak

BIOGRAPHY OF EWA BIŃCZYK

Prof. dr hab. Ewa Bińczyk works at the Department of Practical Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. She deals with the rethoric of the Anthropocene, contemporary environmental philosophy, philosophical assumptions of the ecological economics of degrowth, philosophy of science, studies of science and technology, and scientific controversies. She is the member of the Council of Greenpeace Polska, the Forecast Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Council of Experts of the Climate Coalition in Poland and the Council of the Climate Education Foundation in Poland.

She is the author of the books: *Socializing the Anthropocene. Ecoverve and Ecologization of the Economics* (UMK 2024), *The Epoch of Man. The Rhetoric and Lethargy of the Anthropocene* (PWN 2018), *Technoscience in the Risk Society* (UMK 2012), *Image that Captivates Us* (Universitas 2007), and *Sociology of Knowledge in the Bible* (Nomos 2003).

The book *The Epoch of Man* in 2019 was nominated for the Długosz Prize in Poland and also indicated as one of the "20 books to read in the 21st century" (List of International Reading of the "Polityka" campaign and Studio Theater, September 2019). In January 2022, the book was published in Russian (The New Observer Publishing House), in 2023 also in Ukrainian.

Co-author of *Modeling Technoscience and Nanotechnology Assessment* (Peter Lang 2014), co-editor of *The Text Selection of Science and Technology Studies* (UMK 2014) and *Horizons of Constructivism. Inspirations, Perspectives, Future* (UMK 2015). Scholarship holder of the Foundation for Polish Science (2005), the Fulbright

Foundation (2006-2007), winner of a scholarship by the Polityka weekly "Stay with us" (2010). She was a visiting scholar at Harvard University (Department of History of Science) in the winter semester of 2016. In August 2021, co-host of the seminar at the European Forum in Alpbach.

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MAREK OZIEWICZ ORCID: 0000-0002-5028-0771
University of Minnesota

TZINA KALOGIROU ORCID: 0000-0003-1116-4986
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

ARETI DIMITRA DOUKA ORCID: 0009-0008-5044-719X
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens / University of Angers

ELENI MITSOULA ORCID: 0009-0006-2626-9552
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Toward Ecocentric Futures: On Children's Literature, Universal Climate Literacy, and a New Vision for Education

Original idea and initiative: Tzina Kalogirou
Introduction: Areti Dimitra Douka
Interview with Marek Oziewicz: Eleni Mitsoula

Professor Marek Oziewicz is a distinguished scholar whose work bridges the crucial intersections of literature, climate and environmental crisis, and justice. Professor Oziewicz, a Polish-born comparative literature scholar and theorist of story systems, currently holds the Sidney and Marguerite Henry Professorship of Children's and Young Adult Literature at the University of Minnesota. He is also the Director of the Center for Climate Literacy, a testament to his dedication to fostering understanding and action in the face of our planetary challenges.

Central to Professor Oziewicz's research is the understanding of the Anthropocene as a profound challenge to our existing story systems. He coordinates international efforts to design universal climate literacy education, advocating for education as "ground zero for building universal climate literacy and ushering in a just, sustainable world in which human and nonhuman lives can reach full potential. Professor Oziewicz's work can be broadly understood through several interconnected themes:

Climate Literacy and its Transformative Power:

He argues that climate literacy is not merely about scientific facts, but a broader "socioscientific and cultural competence" that can be taught across all subject areas and grade levels.

His "CLICK framework" (Climate Literacy Capabilities and Knowledges) proposes four domains: Earth Care, Kinship Care, People Care, and Systems Care, drawing inspiration from Indigenous Worldviews.

He emphasizes that stories, particularly those for young people, are the most effective technology for the social transformation our planet needs, believing they can boost young people's justice literacies, cognitive capacity, and impact on the world.
Addressing the "Accountability Paradox" and Climate Guilt:
Professor Oziewicz highlights the "accountability paradox," a state where individuals internalize climate emergency as everyone's or no one's fault, leading to climate guilt. He argues that this climate guilt, often a result of deflection strategies by petronormative institutions, is a significant obstacle to meaningful climate action. His work aims to help students understand and navigate past these feelings by focusing on the systemic drivers of climate change.
Literature as a Lens for Climate Justice:
A significant portion of his scholarship focuses on how literature, especially children's and young adult literature, can serve as a powerful tool for exploring climate justice and environmental racism.
He champions the use of speculative fiction, fantasy, and myth in the Anthropocene, not as escapism, but as modes for "imagining futures and dreaming hope." This includes examining how these genres can counter "ecocidal fantasies of human exceptionalism" and foster "planetarianism" – an "applied hope articulated through stories."
His work often explores how narratives can help young readers develop "global consciousness built on inclusiveness and equality," advocating for narrative fiction as a tool for developing climate and justice literacy.
Justice in Speculative Fiction:
Beyond environmental justice, Professor Oziewicz has extensively explored the concept of justice in young adult speculative fiction.
His book, *Justice in Young Adult Speculative Fiction: A Cognitive Reading*, links the expansion of YA speculative fiction with the emergence of human rights movements and advances in cognitive sciences. He analyzes how different types of justice – poetic, retributive, restorative, environmental, social, and global – are represented in these narratives. He is the Senior Editor of *Climate Literacy in Education* and Editor-in-Chief of *Climate Lit*, an invaluable online resource hub for teaching climate literacy with children's literature and media.
Professor Marek Oziewicz's work stands as a vital contribution to our understanding of the climate and environmental crisis, particularly through the lens of literature and justice. By focusing on the power of stories, especially for young audiences, he illuminates pathways for fostering climate literacy, cultivating hope, and inspiring collective action toward a more just and sustainable future. His research empowers educators and readers alike to critically engage with environmental challenges and imagine alternative, more harmonious relationships with our planet.
We deeply thank him for this enlightening conversation.

We live in a world which seems to drive itself towards self-destruction. Only to name a few: Temperatures around the planet rise. By extension, climate change makes our weather more extreme and unpredictable. Air pollution is considered as a global public health emergency. Safe drinking

water has become scarce and costly. Glaciers are melting and consequently, the sea level has considerably risen and keeps on rising. As an expert in the field of universal climate literacy and the Director of the Centre for Climate Literacy, you constantly designate the urge for creating environmental awareness, as the stories we are used to tell ourselves – until recently, at least – about ourselves and the world, dangerously accentuated human exceptionalism. What is evident from your work is that you place considerable amount of attention on the role of children's literature towards making a difference for the Earth's future. In which ways do you aspire this innovative approach to alter the way we, as humans, look at things?

Indeed, it is my firm belief that children's literature can make a difference towards this direction. In fact, I suggest that children's literature and education are ground zero for designing ecocentric futures in an ecological civilization. The argument rests on the premise that the core design features of the current global industrial civilization are ecocidal, locking us in an accelerating, self-replicating system whose operations are tearing apart the planet's web of life and human societies alike. The other premise is that we have the opportunity – a narrow window of perhaps a decade – to lay foundations for an ecological civilization. This ecological civilization, comprised of multiplicity of local, ecocentric shifts across all areas of human functioning has the capacity to replace the current ecocidal system from within, by accretion, and starting today. I propose that the current petronormative order was imagined into being – and is allowed to continue to operate – by a climate illiterate civilization; and that only climate literate societies can imagine viable alternatives to it. How do we create a climate literate society then? My suggestion is that one way is through climate literacy education that leverages the power of children's literature and media. Thus, the primary aim of my work is to conceptualize a vision that would employ public education as an unstoppable socio-cultural force to usher in an ecological civilization, drawing on the work of the Center for Climate Literacy at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

Could you, please, elaborate a bit more on the core idea of your work?

Well, I consider the cultural work of stories, especially children's books used in classrooms, to envision how these stories can be harnessed in the service of transforming education to make a difference for the Earth's future. The reflection is framed by two stories: the story of facts and the story of a vision. These are plotted onto a larger map of where we are today as a global civilization on a rapidly climate-changing planet. A vast body of scientific data collected since the 1970s confirms that human-induced climate change has reached critical levels and is leaving us less time each year to ensure livable futures for ourselves

and future generations. In the context of accelerating planetary ecocide, should we helplessly watch it happen just because we are not climate scientists? Or should we take an active role in defense of our planetary home? If so, what is our role as the children's literature people? By this I primarily mean students, academic scholars, classroom teachers, librarians, authors, and illustrators. However, the children's literature people label also includes a much wider professional group: from animators, game designers, media creators, media studios, and companies to professional organizations, publishers, bookstores, libraries, and many other stakeholders – including children themselves, their parents, grandparents, and families.

So, what you are saying is that the children's literature people should understand the imperatives of the current situation and need to take a stand on this issue, so as to contribute decisively to the creation of climate literacy? If so, do you identify any serious obstacles that may hinder the evolution of such a vision and furthermore, how could this situation be changed for the better?

Indubitably, the children's literature people, are uniquely positioned to help accelerate a transition to an ecological civilization. We can do so by leveraging stories that build young people's climate literacy across all grade levels, all subject areas, and in all schools everywhere. This is how we build *universal* climate literacy. We build it not as a narrow expertise area for the few, but as a broad, inclusive literacy for everyone from kindergarten up and integrated across all the learning we offer at schools. Universal climate literacy creates a climate literate society. And only such society is able to design an ecological civilization.

Of course, young people today are already far more climate literate than their parents and grandparents. The problem is, they don't call the shots. Young people have the most stake in the future. Yet they have the least say in decisions – made today by the generation of their parents and grandparents – that expand the ecocidal order which destroys the possibility of livable futures. Another problem – one that we, educators, need to consider – is that most of what young people learn about the climate emergency happens outside of schools. The current education systems offer little to nothing in terms of climate education that is adequate to the scope and scale of the transformative challenge we are facing. How do we change these entrenched patterns?

One good starting point is to grasp the context of the challenges we're facing. This can be helped by articulating two stories: the story of facts and the story of vision. Literature scholars often think in terms of genre conventions and such too is my proposal. Reflecting on these stories, I invite you to consider which story *you* want to live out and help unfold.

In the "Introduction" of *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene: Imagining Futures and Dreaming Hope in Literature and Media* you sound the alarm, so we don't get carried away by the "dominant 'facts & rage' formula", as it "is antithetical to creating thought-spaces necessary for a radical transformation of how we imagine ourselves in relation to the biosphere". More specifically, you claim that "this has been the unintended failure of dystopias. Although meant as warnings, they have helped reinforce the belief in ecocide is unavoidable.". Given this assertion, could you, please, administer a definition of the term "facts story" and explain why it is so important to us to be aware of what it represents?

The facts story is a data-backed story with two plots: one written by science and research across multiple disciplines, another written by politics – governments, international organizations, and the market system. Both plots tell the story of our relationship with the planet, except that the first plot tells it in charts and numbers, the other in political declarations and financial commitments. Both plots are unfolding and we don't know how they end. Yet, both have observable dynamics and patterns, which are the best clues we have to build reasonable expectations about what is likely to happen next.

The science plot gives us an insight into at least the past 100 years, and a really detailed picture of the last 40 years. In literature studies, we call this type of story a horror. The science plot is a crime horror about ecocide, which is demolishing species, ecosystems, and the life-support systems of the planet. The destruction of life across the board – from global warming and biodiversity loss to soil erosion, endocrine-disrupting plastic pollution, nitrogen flows, and the killing of the oceans – is *accelerating* at a pace and scale that is almost incomprehensible to human minds. I was born in 1970 to a world of 3.4 billion humans, 325 ppm (.3 C global warming), and a state of the world's ecosystems that – although already damaged – were later taken as a benchmark of 100 % health for any future studies. By 2023, we're in a world of 8 billion, 417 ppm (1.2 C global warming), and with the planetary ecosystem diminished by the loss of 69 % of wildlife populations (as compared to 1970 population levels).

All of the droughts, megafires, heat waves, food insecurity and other climate-driven disasters we've seen so far have been unleashed under conditions of 1.2 C temperature rise above preindustrial levels. More warming is coming, and soon. 2023 was not just the hottest year on record, but saw the hottest week ever and the hottest day ever "in at least a hundred and twenty-five thousand years" (McKibben). By 2023 we have also broken six out of nine planetary boundaries that define a safe operating space for humanity (since ever) and scientists expect the arrival of "unsurvivable heat extremes" in many parts of the world this decade (Vanos at al., 9). It is in this context that Hansen urges "anticipatory action" (2), especially with young people, in preparation for a period

when "climate will become less tolerable to humanity, with greater climate extremes, before it is feasible to reverse the trends" and restore the climate to its Holocene levels (26). We don't know how the Earth system will react to this continuing abuse called BaU or "the Business as Usual scenario" (Herrington 615). Yet, models show BaU is most likely to lead to "a halt in welfare, food, and industrial production" already in the 2020s (614), and "a sharp decline [of welfare indicators] starting around 2030" (615). In other words, science is clear that we may be able to continue running human operations on Earth *the way we have so far* for only a few more years.

Turning to the politics plot of the facts story, literature scholars may be torn here between three appropriate genres: fairy tale (say, like Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes"), satire (say, like Karel Čapek's *The War with the Newts*), or tragifarce (say, like *Don't Look Up*, dir. By Adam McKay). No matter what name you choose, the politics plot – including humanity's key strategy of "addressing" climate change through negotiations at Conference of the Parties (COP) summits – is a story of what Amitav Ghosh calls "the Great Derangement": a tale of self-destructive descent into wishful thinking, myopia, short-termism, irresponsibility, ignorance, hypocrisy, cynicism, lies, and a wholesale disconnect from reality.

No event illustrates this more clearly than the most recent COP28 in Dubai. The conference was unprecedented in revealing the shameless determination of Big Oil to question, disrupt, deflect, slow-walk, and flat-out refuse any meaningful change. Not only was the summit led by an oil executive: the CEO of the UAE's Adnoc, one of the major oil companies in the world (which used COP28 to strike new oil deals). The Prince distinguished himself by being the first-ever COP President to declare that there is 'no science' behind demands for phase-out of fossil fuels and the summit included in negotiations at least 2,456 fossil fuel lobbyists, "almost four times as many [as] the number registered for Cop27 in Sharm el-Sheikh – which itself was a record year" (Lakhani). With so many high-level professionals pushing the fossil fuel interests, COP28 was largely – and more than ever before – a fossil fuel trade fair. In particular, the final resolution – article 28, subsection d – replaced the call to *phase out* fossil fuels with a call to transition away from fossil fuels, and specifically "in energy systems" rather than across all emission sectors and industries.

Aiding and abetting in the great derangement has been our global financial system and the market economy. In 2018, the same year when IPCC published a report that revisited Paris Agreement's goal of 2 C and warned of catastrophic consequences if warming exceeds 1.5 C, the Nobel Prize in economics was awarded to Yale economist William Nordhaus. Nordhaus was distinguished for inventing a method that measures the economic costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions against the benefits of maintaining economic business as usual (BaU). In Nordhaus' model the sectors most vulnerable to global

warming – agricultural, forestry, and fishing – contribute relatively little to global GDP, only about 4 percent. So even if the entire global agricultural system were to collapse in the future, the costs, in terms of world GDP, would be minimal. Accordingly, Nordhaus' conclusion was that the economically "optimal" amount of warming was about 3.5 or 4 degrees: a Mars on Earth. Such arguments offend common sense even when they are questioned. Yet, as long as Nobel Prize winners continue to reassure us that the collapse of Earth's habitability is good for the economy the BaU political plot will continue in the current trajectory.

The facts story is hard but important to know. Young people have a right to know about the climate emergency to make their own judgments. They have a right to know – and often they already do – that states, corporations, and main players in the current economic system have all incentives to cling on to the fantasy that we can carry on the way we've done before. And they have a right to know that the institutions that created the climate emergency have not been able to stop it and may not be able to stop it in time. This, of course, is where climate literacy education comes in: the kind of education that empowers students with the conceptual and emotional tools, courage, and honesty to see our predicament for what it is, to see what brought us here, and to be able to reflect on where we go from here. Education is not a solution: it is a precondition for building a civic society that is capable of designing such solutions.

Alongside the facts story, you also referred to the vision story. Could you, please, tell us a bit more about this term? Where could one come across this type of stories and eventually, in what ways might these stories empower the vision of an ecological civilization?

The vision story goes into the realm of passion and imagination, to envision the world in which we want to live. The vision story is mostly told in the space of literature, art, music, and other narrative media, but it is also being imagined into being in the space of everyday life, accessible to ordinary people. Morag Gamble's Permaculture Institute in Australia is inspiring and educating millions to adopt permaculture practices that heal our relationship with the land. In the US, biologist Doug Tellamy's idea of a Homegrown National Park – transforming the entire continental America, one private lawn at a time, into wildlife havens and pollinator incubators – is spreading like wildfire. In the UK, the Climate Majority Project, co-directed by Rupert Read and Liam Kavanagh, is rallying hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens in local communities, workplaces, and professions to build citizen climate action toward systems change. Other thought leaders are living the vision story in their everyday work, inspiring change in food habits, consumer behaviors, energy use, conservation efforts, and across all other spaces of human activity.

Literature and film for young audiences have been at the forefront of forging this new vision. Since the 1990s many stories have engaged with the climate emergency in the dystopian mode, extrapolating from the facts story to imagine future worlds of apocalyptic destruction and severely diminished biospheric environment. The rise of dystopia has stimulated an increasingly nuanced debate about the role of dystopian imagination as a response to our predicament. One question is whether such stories are able to mobilize active resistance or are rather symptomatic of a resigned, disillusioned acceptance the wider late-capitalist dystopian ambience. My sense is that it is more productive to examine specific dystopian texts or films for how they engage with the dominant intersubjective imagined order of our global civilization: an order Tom Moylan refers to as a "hegemonic culture of resignation" (184) and a "dystopian structure of feelings" (188). Of course, as hope scholars have argued, we also need stories that offer new visions of an ecological civilization. I my own scholarship, I describe this vision as planetarianism (see Oziewicz, "Planetarianism NOW"). As a fantasy scholar, I have argued that the capacity to use hope-oriented anticipatory imagination makes fantasy – and, to an extent, other genres of speculative fiction – especially useful in helping young audiences imagine alternatives to ecocide and dream out visions of ecocentric, just, and sustainable futures (see Oziewicz, "Fantasy for the Anthropocene").

Indeed, you have stated in "Planetarianim NOW" that "one of the greatest challenges facing education in the Anthropocene is to empower young people everywhere to believe that we are able to transition to an ecological civilization." Indisputably, you place special emphasis on how to convince them that a transition from an ecocidal to an ecological civilization is viable. Which is, would you say, the novelty you are introducing with this work to the field of Climate Literacy in Education?

Currently, rather than exploring planetarianist elements in specific narratives, I want to share a larger vision: a vision of leveraging stories in the service of climate literacy to transform education from within and create an unstoppable wave to accelerate a transition to an ecological civilization. This vision informs the work of the Center for Climate Literacy. Launched in April 2022, the Center is housed at the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development. Our work is framed by 2 premises and 3 commitments:

The premises include a recognition of where we are (the facts story) and a vision of where we want to be (the vision story): parts of which were already outlined. The recognition part includes a realization that we are waging a war with the planet and we are winning. All main systems of our civilization – our politics, industries, law, finance, agriculture, education, media, market economy, and others – were created without concern for the biosphere and are

tearing apart the web of life on Earth that supports us. We are destroying our home like we have no other choice, except we do.

This leads to our second premise, which is that a different future is possible. We can leave the ecocide behind: it is not who we are. We have the knowledge, the ability, and the means to transition to a sustainable, just, and ecological civilization. An ecological civilization is a world where humans thrive alongside animals and plants; where the air is clean, the ocean has fish, not plastic, and the Earth's web of life is strong: supporting us and the nonhuman life too.

We believe that education is key to accelerate this transformation, and this informs our three commitments:

Commitment to Climate Literacy. We believe that in order to transition to an ecological civilization we need to achieve universal climate literacy. Climate literacy can be understood as a narrow scientific competence, and as a holistic socio-cultural competence. Both are correct yet they each lead to very different outcomes: outcomes that can make a difference between emergency and emergence. The science-focused definition was proposed by NOAA in 2007 in a brochure *Climate Literacy: The Essential Principles of Climate Science* (2007, revised 2009). This climate literacy is a synonym for "climate science literacy" and means learning about the science behind climate research and the science behind how the Earth system works. Or, in NOAA wording, "an understanding of your influence on climate and climate's influence on you and society" (NOAA). A large body of research continues to view climate literacy as a science competence. The holistic definition of climate literacy has a much longer ancestry. Some ideas go back to the original definition of environmental education in the 1960s (Kopnina 702). Newer ideas were first articulated in the mid 1990s – for example, in David Orr's *Earth in Mind* (1994) – and then in the UN frameworks: Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) and then the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-30). Both of these included an educational component called, variously, education for sustainability (EfS), education for sustainable development (ESD), or environment and sustainability education (ESE) (UN Climate Change Education, 2010). Our work at the Center builds on this holistic tradition. Like scholars in the environmental humanities, we see climate literacy as a broad narrative competence – rather than a narrow science competence – that is available to all humans from a very early age. Climate change, in this approach, is not a science or technological issue, but a worldview issue, entangled with our beliefs, values, and identities. All of which, in turn, shape our thought patterns and actions in the real world. Accordingly, we define climate literacy an understanding of the climate emergency that includes facts and numbers (i.e. climate science, biology, ecology and data from other science fields), but focuses primarily on developing values, attitudes, and behavioral change aligned with how we should live to safeguard

the Earth's integrity in the present and for future generations (see Oziewicz, "What Is Climate Literacy?").

Commitment to Education. We believe that teaching about climate change should be at the heart of our educational practice. We have sleepwalked into the climate emergency because we are a climate illiterate society, caught up in what environmental sociologist Eileen Crist calls a "human-supremacist worldview" (3). We can turn this around and schools are ground zero for this effort. Climate literacy can be scaffolded and must be taught to all K-12 students and across all subject areas (see Oziewicz, "The CLICK Framework")

Commitment to Stories. We believe that stories for young audiences are the primary tool for building universal climate literacy. Stories are easy tools inasmuch as they speak to even very young Earthlings, yet they are also the most advanced tools we have, capable of evoking emotional response and rewiring our cognitive architecture no matter what your age. This commitment to stories emerges from the consensus – shared in a vast body of scholarship in the Anthropocene literary studies, the environmental humanities, cognitive literary studies, and other fields – that human cognitive architecture is evolved for narrative understanding. "Narrative reflects our mode of understanding events, which appears largely…to be a generally mammalian mode of understanding" (Boyd 131). We process causality, chronology, memory, events, emotional states, and all other content of meaning-making processes as stories or components of stories (Herman, 2002; 2013; Hogan, 2003; 2011; 2013; Shank, 1990; Turner, 1996). Our storied understanding frames not only our personal experiences – the so-called "stories of our lives" – but also our grasp of abstract concepts like nationalism (Anderson, 1983, Hogan, 2009), justice (Oziewicz, 2015), worldview (Lent, 2017), economy (Joseph, 2017), political order (Monbiot, 2017), and relationship to the nonhuman (Kimmerer, 2013; Crist, 2019; Ghosh, 2021). It also includes responses to the climate emergency (Oreskes & Conway, 2010; Norgaard, 2011; Marshall, 2014; Moore, 2016; Klein, 2019; Mann, 2021; López, 2021; Oziewicz et al., 2022). Whether called rhetoric, ideology, narrative, secular mythology, legitimizing myth, discourse, or yet something else, story is everything. The implication here is climate change is not primarily a challenge to our technologies or politics but a challenge to our story systems. Our future will be determined by developments in the space of language and imagination: by whether we are able to embrace new, ecocentric ways of thinking, a new ethic of partnership with the non-human, and a new story about who we are, as a species, in relation to all other forms of life on the planet. In this unprecedented transformation, literature, film, games, and art for young people are not additional but the most important avenues for raising climate awareness and mobilizing social adaptation to the realities of a climate-altered world.

Although the Center shares many of these core principles with other organizations, the combined commitments to climate literacy, education, and

stories are unique to our vision. Likewise unique is our professional expertise as teacher-educators, operating from within the system called education.

Imagine teachers, across all grade levels and subject areas, plugging in stories to build students' climate literacy from preK through high school. Imagine this happening in all schools everywhere. Imagine teachers getting resources, training, and support – including funding – to incorporate more and more of climate literacy education in their classrooms. Imagine academic scholars working with teachers to prepare these resources, imagine publishers sending teachers book copies to work with, and imagine teachers mentoring other teachers in workshops, summer institutes, and conferences for which they are paid. Imagine everyone involved in this work – teachers, librarians, authors, academics, school administrators and others – sharing their experiences and tips in online events or publishing them in an open access journal such as *Climate Literacy in Education* so that more educators can read about this work and implement these models. This is how we build a global community of educators and teachers dedicated to implementing universal climate literacy education in their classroom practice. If you can imagine all this, you have just imagined a grassroots revolution (see Oziewicz, "The Climate Literacy Revolution") that has the potential to transform education into an ecocentric engine of transformation, taking us toward an ecological civilization.

Thanks to the dissemination of such valuable knowledge, there is an undeniable shift in academia towards the cultivation of an ecological culture, which is very promising as these ideas spill over into the lower levels of education. In their chapter "Introducing Sustainability Topics with Ursula Le Guin's 'The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas' and Richard Power's 'The Seventh Event' " in the edited volume *Literature as a Lens for Climate Change: Using Narratives to Prepare the Next Generation* (2022), Sarah Wyman and Rachel Cohen discuss the idea that "storytelling in words and images […] acts as a commons-of-thought or an arena of invention where new conceptualizations and innovations come to be". By association comes to mind Ursula K. Le Guin's comment in her 2014 National Book Awards Acceptance Speech: "I think hard times are coming when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, who can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine some real grounds for hope". Given that hard times have arrived, in what specific ways would you describe your work as fundamentally revolutionary?

I believe this work is revolutionary because it brings together two large systems of our civilization. One is our story systems: books, films, games, authors, publishers, illustrators, creators, libraries, media companies, and other spaces

where stories live. The other is education: a massive system in our societies that directly reaches anywhere between one sixth to one tenth of any country's population.

Our work is also revolutionary because the core strategy of climate literacy education we advocate for is practical, modular, scalable, and easy to integrate in your teaching at any level. The strategy consists of using stories – books, clips, games, etc. – to generate discussion which allows introducing a climate literacy concept (or more) in a process called concept mapping. This strategy normalizes conversations about specific aspects of the climate emergency. It builds students' vocabulary, emotional resilience, and a conceptual toolset they need to grasp the human-planetary predicament of the Anthropocene. The beauty of this strategy is that you can use even a single page, or part of a film or book, to spark a discussion that anchors understanding of specific concepts to specific stories. This conceptual mapping is extremely important because the climate emergency is not just about global warming or biodiversity loss. It is also about slow violence toward poor and BIPOC communities; it is about extractivism, social justice and climate justice, externalities, economy, food chains, energy, transportation systems, native plants, keystone species, ecosystems homeostasis, human expansionism, insects, food deserts, corporations, holobionts, human-animal kinship, Earth emotions, water, ecocide, light pollution, food labels, urban gardens, and ten thousand other things. This is what climate literacy is all about. We need stories to help young people see the connections. We need stories to help them to start caring. And for this to happen, we need to start in kindergarten. To nourish wonder and appreciation of the nonhuman, to build the vocabulary, and anchor the complexity of these connections in the stories we share with young people. The more connections and concepts you see in the story, the better.

For example, Bill Peet's *Wump World* (1970) offers excellent openings to discuss the notions of extractivism, biospheric limits, and market externalities. This story helps young people understand that we can stop behaving like space alien colonists toward the only planet we call home. It helps them confronting our ecocidal economy, whose exploitation, domination, extraction, and destruction are cloaked under positive-sounding terms such as "progress" or "growth."

It would be easy to list more examples and I'm sure the reader can provide their own too. What all of them suggest, however, is that the climate literacy-oriented cultural work of stories occurs when the story 1) offers glimpses of the *emerging orders* post-carbon ecological civilization, visions of thriving human and nonhuman life without domination, pollution, and destruction; when the story 2) prompts readers to register these visions as alternatives to the *dominant* petronormative order. To realize that there are alternatives. And 3) when the story helps the reader consider *the essence* or core operations of the

dominant order. The dominant order goes by many names – Capitalism, market economy, petrocivilization, Capitalocene, and others – but it is a Mortonian hyperobject and its story is never expressed fully or openly. Bringing it to the surface of our consciousness is a cultural work of stories that is a precondition for any meaningful change and is thus central to climate literacy efforts.

Throughout the whole interview one could assume that you mainly speak about imagining applied hope through stories and infusing it into younger generations. So, I will borrow one of your questions and ask it here: "What are the forms or thresholds of hope?" or alternatively, what would be the focal point you would like to recapitulate before closing this interview?

In closing, I would like to reiterate the central point of our work. Climate literacy education is urgently needed to address a massive gap in today's education. It is needed to start a conversation about the world that may be coming apart before our eyes and about the world we want to build together going forward. Stories are the best tools we have to tease out questions, dilemmas, work through our pain, anger, confusion, and other emotions. Stories can show us how we got here, what ideas brought what consequences, and how ideas can both enslave and liberate us. If we are able to transform our civilization into an ecological one, it will be transformed by people with changed minds, people with a new vision. The transformation will not be accomplished by people with unchanged minds, people of old vision offering new programs. This has been the failure of our education systems so far. What climate literacy education seeks to achieve is a new vision, not a new program for an old vision. Recycling is a program, earth-friendly legislation is a program, electrification is a program too. They each have merits. But as long as they are programs within the old vision – keeping the status quo of human expansionism and fossil fuel energy extravaganza going for a bit longer – they will fail.

At this moment of multiple crises, of Earth shouting to us in pain and rage of polluted soil, drought and floods, heatwaves and species extinctions, tweaks of the old vision are not enough. We need a new vision and we need new stories that inspire us to get us there. This is the systems-tipping dynamics we need to activate. With every step we take toward building young people's climate literacy, we are laying the foundations for an ecological civilization. Incorporating stories and story-based activities, we have the opportunity to revolutionize education from within without waiting for standards and incentives to trickle down from state or federal levels. The ecological civilization we all want to see will require millions of small steps, such as what you can do in your classrooms. It will unfold organically, like a flower meadow, from a multiplicity of local, ecocentric shifts across all areas of human functioning, including in your classroom and your scholarship. Such education will not only survive the

approaching demise of the ecocidal petro order. It has the capacity to replace it organically from within, by accretion, starting today. We may be heading toward crises and disruptions of the civilizational transition, but we believe that as the transition accelerates, climate literacy education will become more urgent and more important in all schools everywhere. We invite you to lead the change and teach for a world you want to see.

Thank you for the enlightening interview.

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Review Article

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DOROTA MICHUŁKA ORCID: 0000-0002-7237-2618
University of Wrocław

Fantasies and Engaging with Fiction from the Perspective of Multi-addressee. In the Context of Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska's Book "Philosophical and Translatological Wanderings in Moominvalley" (2023)[1]

Abstract: The article is based on the review of the book by Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska *Philosophical and Translational Wonderings in Moominvalley* (2023). Interdisciplinary considerations concern the issue of the multi-addressee nature of works intentionally aimed at a young audience, and their basis is the analysis and interpretation of Tove Jansson's series on Moomins, deeply rooted in philosophical contexts. In the interpretation of the saga of the Finnish writer, Dymel-Trzebiatowska refers to various aspects of the theory and practice of reception as well as to selected issues belonging to the area of theory and practice of translation. In interpretative contexts, the researcher also distinguishes psychoanalytical critique, cognitive poetics, existential philosophy, the broadly understood philosophy of ethics and childhood anthropology, thanks to which her book fits perfectly into contemporary discussions on the function, place, role and status of children's literature, its meaning in the wider cultural literary circuit and - potentially - also its presence in the field of Polish language education.

Keywords: multi-addressee; children's literature; theory and practice of translation; psychoanalytic critique; childhood anthropology

Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska's book *Philosophical and Translatological Wonderings in Moominvalley* (Peter Lang 2023, Studien zur Germanistik Skandinavistik und Übersetzungskultur, Herausgegeben von B. Sommerfeld, S.H. Kaszyński, A. Kątny unf M. Krysztofiak, Band 24) fits in very well with contemporary

[1] This text is a modified and expanded version of the article: D. Michułka, *Multiplikowanie adresata utworów intencjonalnie skierowanych do młodego odbiorcy – szansa czy zagrożenie? W kontekście książki Hanny Dymel-Trzebiatowskiej "Filozoficzne i translatoryczne wędrówki po Dolinie Muminków (2019).* "Educatio Nova", Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin, Volume VI, 2021, pp. 487–496.

discussions on the function, place, role and status of children's literature, its significance in the broader circulation of literary culture and the scope of international interdisciplinary research on this literature, undertaken mainly from literary, philosophical and translatological perspectives, especially as translations and adaptations of children's literature have been stirring up discussions, controversies and polemics for many years.

The author's discussion focuses on the issues of fantasy as a narrative strategy and literary convention, as well as in a broader research perspective – on engaging in reading, getting to the deeper meanings of the work (also through psychoanalytic approaches), through existential-ethical contexts, with a particular focus on the philosophy of values, axiology and humor, which allows a special kind of perception for both child and adult audiences of Tove Jansson's work.

Its worth to emphasize that the child is a reader who is inexperienced in literature, but "fresh" and curious about the world, which is why the remarks on translations and adaptations of a literary work in the field of literature for a young reader are now highly relevant in contemporary child and adolescent reading and in the light of literary studies (among other things due to the multitude of translations, abundance of works *re-told*, read differently, repeated or 'rewritten' in a different way [*re-telling*, *re-writing*, *re-reading*]) (Cornis-Pope 1992; Woźniak 2013).

The author's reflections revolve around a literary phenomenon, masterpiece one-of-kind work – Tove Janson's nine-volume series/saga about the Moomins. Dymel-Trzebiatowska rightly emphasizes that Tove Jansson's famous multi-volume saga treated in the study chronologically, shows a peculiar picture of the evolution of characters, the process of personality maturation, and should be analyzed as a whole.

Dymel-Trzebiatowska's analyses and interpretations of Jansson's works are extremely insightful and deeply rooted in interdisciplinary research. Apart from explorations of a literary, philosophical and translatological nature, they are also clearly inscribed in the problems of human existence, aesthetic experience, the influence of the artist's biography on the artistic creation of his works, and they refer to various concepts of the "nature" of the child and the "essence" of childhood, to the creation of a socio-cultural image of childhood and its experience – captured in the work also from an adult perspective – and, above all, to "show" the image of the child who becomes the specific recipient of a literary work.

An important role in Dymel-Trzebiatowska's research, with regard to the Mumin saga, is played by the issue of the work's 'multiplied' addressee, so to speak, which can be a reader of different ages (for example, a child, a teenager or an adult), as well as the theory and practice of reception (Nikolajeva 2014). This researcher's book has a solid and precise structure, and the composition of the argument is convincingly well thought out. The monograph is distinguished by a clearly stated scientific thesis, a clear layout of the research problems and a clear

order of the discussed issues. The study is 228 pages long and includes an impressive bibliography and a personal index.

* * *

Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska's dissertation is divided into two parts, the subject matter of which is determined by the title of the monograph. These are philosophical wanderings and translational wanderings, and within them there are clearly structured chapters.

In the section *Philosophical Wanderings* for Example, prepared in the context of the broad intertextuality of analysis and interpretation, the researcher refers to the notions of hypotexts, explicite and implicite, that can be found in the series about the Moomins, and in the ten subsequent chapters assigned to this section there are references to research: Oswald Spengler, Ortega y Gasset, Socrates, Henri Bergson, Parmenides, Edvard Westermarck, Mikhail Bakhtin, Karen Horney, Antoni Kępiński, Carl Gustav Jung, Sigmund Freud and Norman Holland. In the philosophical part of the discussion, the author evokes the following issues in turn, which are also the titles of the clearly developed chapters: *Catastrophism*, *Vitality and Freedom*, *Beauty*, *Art and Artists*, *Searching for Justice*, *Life is a Dream*, *The Triumph of Life over Death*, *The Invisible*, *There is no Life without Fear*, *Crisis*, *Farewell*.

The philosophical and intertextual context so thoroughly outlined in the interpretation of the Moomin saga also allows us to refer to the broadly understood perspective of engaged humanities (children and adults) and humanistic education of young readers.

The content of the book (concerning, among other things, aspects of psychoanalysis or the theory and practice of reception) allows for the inclusion of Jansson's famous series in the context of reception by an experienced children's audience (prepared, as it were, to understand broader anthropological or existential contexts) and, of course, an adult audience.

Dymel-Trzebiatowska wonders, and consequently considers in the second part of her study, how this 'double turn' (multi-addressee) has also been taken into account in the translation of the series about the Moomins. The phenomenon of double-addressing (child and adult) and multi-addressing (multi-addressee) of a work intentionally aimed at younger readers, as the researcher signals, has already been discussed in theoretical literary studies and reveals a rather wide range of concepts related to this issue. Literary studies dealing with the issue of the reception of this type of text have identified, among others, the following terms: *ambivalence* (Shavit 1986), *triadic taxonomy*, *dual*, *double* and *single addresses*, i.e. *double*, *single* and *double turn* (Wall 1991), *shadow text* (Nodelman 2008), *multiple address* (O'Sullivan 2005) or *crossover literature* (*transgressive literature*) (Beckett 2009, 2012).

The reception of a literary work and the dialogue between the text and the reader have been discussed for many years. In the broader context of literary studies, the question of reception of a work of literature has become a problem considered, among others, by the sociology of literature (cf. the concept of literature from the perspective of the reader as seen, for example, by Harald Weinrich [1972]) and by representatives of the German aesthetic school of reception (cf. the terms: *horizon of expectation* and *the implied reader*) (Iser 1978; Jauss 1999; Weinrich 1972).

It is worth noting at this point of consideration also the aspect of the 'real reader' (Maryl 2007). Zofia Budrewicz, a literary scholar and didactician of literature, discussing the issues of reception of a literary work from the perspective of Polish language education, notes:

> The situation of reception of an artistic work is [already] derived from the anthropology of literature and cultural theory of literature [...]. Authors of many works [moving towards experiential cognition] link the operational usefulness of the figure of the subjective sensual-mental experience to the possibilities of 'insight' of the recipient-student (Budrewicz 2012: 6),

the emotional involvement of the real reader, empathetic reading and affect (Koziołek 2016; Miall 2006; Opdahl 2002; Paivio 1971, 1991). The Moomins saga seems to fit perfectly into this context of consideration, as it both incorporates vivid psychological portraits of characters that, as it were "invite" the young viewer to empathise with them, as well as presenting figures of literary characters with whom the child reader can 'emotionally' identify. The challenge for the young reader becomes is also to see and understand the broad perspective of the existential-ethical considerations undertaken in the Moomins saga.

Dymel-Trzebiatowska, emphasising in her dissertation the psychoanalytic aspect of the reception of a literary text and 'inscribing' the Jansson saga in this area of consideration, cites Norman Holland's publication *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1989).

Holland, a literary theorist and expert in psychoanalytic criticism and cognitive post-ethics, according to the author, reveals "a psychodynamic interpretation of the literary perception. Availing himself of Freud's selected psychological concepts, Holland explains the interaction between readers and books as reproducing the pleasure experienced by suckling infants in the oral phase" (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2023: 91), arguing that the naturalness and freshness of the process of reception of literature makes it possible to conclude that 'we become [then] children' (Holland 1989: 80). The researcher of reception theory and practice adds that

> the writer infuses his/her works with his/her fantasies which reader will recognize. When it happens, readers feel gratified and fulfilled while reading, and these responses are rooted in their unconscious. It is with a view to experiencing

> this pleasure that people suspend their disbelief again and again when engaging with fiction (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2023: 91),

which makes it possible to feel not only pleasure, but also satisfaction and fulfilment reaching subconscious states. Holland refers here to the issue of the defence mechanisms that characterise the human psyche and writes:

> The text, however, does not present us with the original fantasy, but rather a version of it modified and shaped by manipulations that are referred to as 'form' in literature, and which resemble defence mechanisms in the human psyche. Ultimately, it is the author who, in the act of experiencing and writing down the fantasy, places it in the text in a defensive form [...]. He or she seems to have two types of relationship with the text. On a conscious level, he is actively involved in perceiving it and giving meaning to his perceptions. Unconsciously, the text confronts him with fantasies and defence mechanisms, the same as those in his mind. (Holland 1989: 62).

> To be exact, a defense is unconscious process of the *ego* which the ego puts into action automatically at the signal of danger from the external world, the *id*, or the *superego*. Such a thing of course, happens in a mind rather then a literary text. What we have found, though, is that just as literary works embody fantasies familiar from psychoanalytic experience so they handle these fantasies by techniques that resemble familiar defensive and adaptive strategies. (Holland 1989: 57–58, quoted in Dymel-Trzebiatowska: 92).

According to Dymel-Trzebiatowska, the Muminki saga fits very well into this area of reflections on interpretative contexts, including the inner worlds and psychology of literary characters.

* * *

In the second part of the monograph – *Translator*'s *Wanderings* – the author makes insightful references to the study of Polish translations of selected linguistic issues, which she considers to be most relevant to the poetics of the entire saga. In this context, she mentions: anthroponyms [in the part of text connected with Piżmowiec (Musk Deer)], comedy (for example, in the parts of the book concerning images of Paszczaki (Hemulens) and culinary habits (according to the researcher, these are connected, among others, with the character of Mummy of Moomin, the figure of the nurturing mother who, thanks to her involvement in the preparation of meals, contributes to building good relationships in the family and to creating a positive atmosphere in the home). As Dymel-Trzebiatowska writes:

> Having already discussed the "anatomy" of humour and the challenges it poses in translation elsewhere, I would only like to restate here that, as a result of its inherent ontological ambivalences, the comic is a highly complex phenomenon in teat it is simultaneously and artistic property immanent to a text and

> an aesthetic quality that is actualised in reader's individual perceptions. With a young readership we must address an even greater complexity, because children's perceptions are difficult to assess due to the shortage of reliable tools, and, given this, we tend to rely on certain presuppositions underpinned by isolated observations. When a readership comprises both children and adults, the complications multiply because the translator must not only estimate children's competency but also sometimes prioritise adults as readers of children's literature, which continues to be regarded as a risky practice. Besides, any comprehensive exploration of the comic in translation must also take into account the idiosyncratic nature of the sense of the humour and the extra-textual and diachronic factors, such as culture that affect it […] Starting with second volume Moomin series is deliberately infused with the comic which imprints itself on the depictions of the protagonists, the construction of episodes and the language its self, both in the narrator's voice and in the idiolects of the characters. The characterization of the protagonists employs a broad spectrum of classical comedy – generating mechanisms, such as hyperbolisation, exaggeration, caricature, foregrounded, contrasts and highlighted disparity between dreams/theory and practice (Dziemidok 2011; 68, 82–83). The humour is pointedly devised for the experienced readers is at its most conspicuous in the *Moominpappas's Memoirs* which parodies the male writing style and abounds with intertextual allusions to *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini Written by Himself*, an early classic of autobiography (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2023: 155–156).

In the translator's part of the essay, she thoroughly analyses terms that are significant for this field of science, for example she discusses philological translation, the notion of transference and its hybrids, issues of transcription and substitution, while at the same time reflecting on the issue of faithfulness and unfaithfulness of a translation or adaptations of literary works. In a broader metadological context, Dymel-Trzebiatowska refers to publications by Scandinavian scholars that are of importance for the theory and practice of translation, such as Göte Klingberg*'s Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators* (1986) or Riitta Oittinen*'s Translating for Children* (2000), in which, among other things, the model of the default reader or the concept of the *child image* is defined.

> Representatives of the two Scandinavian strands of translation theory for children, natively called the 'infidelity and fidelity school' (Nikolajeva 2003), Riitta Oittinen and Göte Klingberg, build their concepts on the assumption of the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the child as a different reader. [...] The image of the child is a central factor of the translation of children's books: according to their ideology, translators direct the words to a certain type of child. (Oittinen 2006: 41, quoted in Dymel-Trzebiatowska, 2023: 216).

From the perspective of comparing the addressee of the source text and the target text, in the course of her analyses Dymel-Trzebiatowska discusses the

notion of lexemes or phrases, addresses the issues of translation technique and the question of semantic and/or formal shift. The logical construction of the considerations allowed for the formulation of synthetic and problematising conclusions on individual issues in the work's conclusion, together with a deeper reflection related to the implications of multiliteracies for translation studies.

The book *Philosophical and Translator's Wanderings in the Valley of the Moomins* encourages a broader discussion on the multi-impression of translations of literature for young readers and the status of texts written for young readers. The author concludes her reflections with important questions or challenges for the future, for example:

> Can the increasing multiple-address mode undermine the paradigm of the child reader as a distinguishing element of children's literature and abolish the traditional dichotomous taxonomy in which literature is divided into that for children and for adults? Should we multiple-address mode be taken into account in translating any children's book, or is it rather a typical feature exclusively of artistic, award-winning books described as quality literature? (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2023: 217).

Furthermore, Dymel-Trzebiatowska's analyses and interpretations of existing translations of Scandinavian literature point to a clear thesis, which takes the shape of a convincing postulate. It is the need for a higher coherence competence of translators. The researcher states:

> All these examinations yield a common insight, one that is highly relevant to the translation of children's literature. Namely, translators need a better coherence competency. I understand coherence competency as a variety of coginitive competency, that is, an ability to accumulate "knowledge that the reader acquires as he/she reads a text" (Pisarska, Tomaszkiewicz 1996: 68). This natural process automatically unfolds while reading with understanding, and it means discerning how facts hang together in the diegetic worlds of the text. I propose a separate term to capture, specifically, translators ability to associate, recognise and remember information and language forms that convey this information throughout the text and then to perform consistent and deliberate re-expression of them (Dymel – Trzebiatowska, 2023: 208–209.

To conclude, Dymel-Trzebiatowska's monograph on Polish translatological studies is not only an exceptionally mature study, philologically convincing, logically, clearly and lucidly structured, but also a novel, innovative and extremely erudite work in the analytical and interpretative parts. It can be used both in scientific explorations by literary scholars, researchers of the theory and practice of translation, as well as in the reading practices of teachers in the field of Polish school education. After all, the Muminki saga has been a popular school reading for years.

As a literary scholar *and* researcher of translation theory and practice, the author of *Philosophical and Translatological Wonderings in Moominvalley* is exceptionally thorough and insightful – she conscientiously discusses in footnotes the broader contexts of the scientific definitions she uses, referring to a very rich literature on the subject. The author's methodological background of the book, the internationality of the approaches, their interdisciplinary character, and also great care and attention to the precision of understanding the terms introduced in the book, as well as the editorial and editorial design of the study, are all very impressive.

Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska uses a mature scientific language and a clear and lucid style. The book confirms the author's excellent substantive preparation, is characterised by reliability, insight and innovation, and was written with great expertise, commitment and passion. In her considerations, the researcher skilfully combines detailed analyses of the material with a broader perspective of scientific literary studies, competently and professionally "integrating" her historical-literary interpretations with translation theory, philosophy and ethics, anthropology of literature, psychoanalysis and aesthetics, as well as literary criticism, presenting a multi-faceted and multi-level, but at the same time complete, coherent and synthetic picture of the problem posed in the title of the book.

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Artwork

DOROTA NOWAK-RODZIŃSKA
Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice
MAGDALENA OCHWAT
University of Silesia in Katowice

The Symbiocene in Artistic and Humanistic Practices

The graphic and textual works included in this volume of *Filoteknos* emerged as part of a collaborative project conducted by faculty members and students from two Katowice-based institutions: the Academy of Fine Arts and the University of Silesia. These works represent a creative reflection on the concept of the Symbiocene (from Latin *sym-* "together" and Greek *bíos* "life") – an epoch of coexistence, reciprocity, and networked interdependence among species. The Symbiocene rests on the idea of life forms living together – such as fungi and plants, humans and bacteria. The very term *symbiosis* highlights not only the biological necessity of cooperation within biodiversity, but also the urgent need to restore balance among the interests of all beings inhabiting the planet. This is particularly relevant today, as we confront the knowledge that the domination of certain life forms over others – so characteristic of the Anthropocene – has contributed to planetary crises and the degradation of the biosphere.

In this project, we brought together artistic and humanistic perspectives to explore the idea of the Symbiocene, a term coined by Australian ecophilosopher Glenn Albrecht. Rather than treating it solely as a theoretical or philosophical concept, we approached it as a tool for collaborative research and reflection – artistic, literary, and ecological. In the screen printing studio of the Katowice Academy of Fine Arts, led by Prof. Waldemar Węgrzyn and Dr. Dorota Nowak-Rodzińska, students focused on the visual dimension of symbiotic relations, creating original graphic works and objects inspired by the natural world and its complex entanglements. Simultaneously, students of the Writing Art program, within the interdisciplinary course *How to Be of the World? Field Humanities*, taught by Dr. Magdalena Ochwat and Prof. Piotr Skubała, explored the narrative and linguistic potential of symbiotic connections. Their work resulted in short texts – monologues, dialogues, and literary sketches – developed in pairs and grounded in the idea of mutualistic relationships.

The inspiration behind the students' works came from concrete examples of symbiotic relationships, such as the raven and the wolf, the algae and the fungi in lichen, the bees and the deadwood, the mycelium and the trees, or the coral and the zooxanthellae – a relationship that forms the foundation of coral reef existence and entire marine ecosystems. Particular attention was also paid to the concept of the holobiont – an organism functioning as a complex community of many beings – which aptly captures the nonlinear, relational nature of life itself.

In her book *Czuły narrator* [The Tender Narrator], Olga Tokarczuk draws on recent scientific findings to highlight this perspective:

> One of the most important discoveries in recent years – one that has transformed our very perception of what it means to be human – was undoubtedly the realization that human organisms, as well as animals and plants, develop and function in active collaboration with other organisms, that there is a tight interdependence among living beings. […] We are no longer a biont, but rather a holobiont – a collective of various organisms living together in symbiosis. Complexity, multiplicity, diversity, reciprocal influence, metasymbiosis – these are the new perspectives from which we now view the world." (Tokarczuk, 17)

New humanities and contemporary art theory are increasingly drawing from the natural sciences – not only for inspiration but also as a source of hope in a time of climate and ecological crisis. Symbiosis, understood as the coexistence of organisms for mutual benefit, thus becomes one of the key ideas – not only cognitive but also ethical – for building a realistic, shared future for all inhabitants of the planet.

The students' creative work was preceded by the collective reading of selected texts by Glenn Albrecht, Lynn Margulis, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and Donna Haraway, as well as the poetry of Julia Fiedorczuk and her translations of Forest Gander's Twice Alive. This process was accompanied by lectures, meetings with natural scientists, and field-based activities in urban spaces – especially along the Rawa River and in the Murcki nature reserve[1]. There, we observed both the presence of symbiotic relationships and the places where they had been disrupted or broken. Particular focus was given to lichens – seemingly modest, yet extraordinarily resilient forms of coexistence that serve as living examples of deep multispecies entanglement.

This project marks only the first step in our shared work – both thematically and institutionally. The project itself bears a symbiotic character: it emerged at the intersection of disciplines, across universities, and in dialogue between diverse epistemologies. It is being further developed through the creation of the Symbiotic Collective[2] – an interdisciplinary, research-based and artistic ini-

[1] The sessions were facilitated by Piotr Skubała, Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, and Magdalena Ochwat.

[2] The collective is jointly shaped and actively practiced by Dorota Nowak-Rodzińska,

tiative that brings together the humanities, natural sciences, and the arts to further explore the idea of the Symbiocene and to cultivate practices rooted in reciprocity, collaboration, and multispecies attentiveness.

On behalf of the more-than-human Symbiotic Collective,

Dr. Dorota Nowak-Rodzińska, Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice
Dr. Magdalena Ochwat, University of Silesia in Katowice

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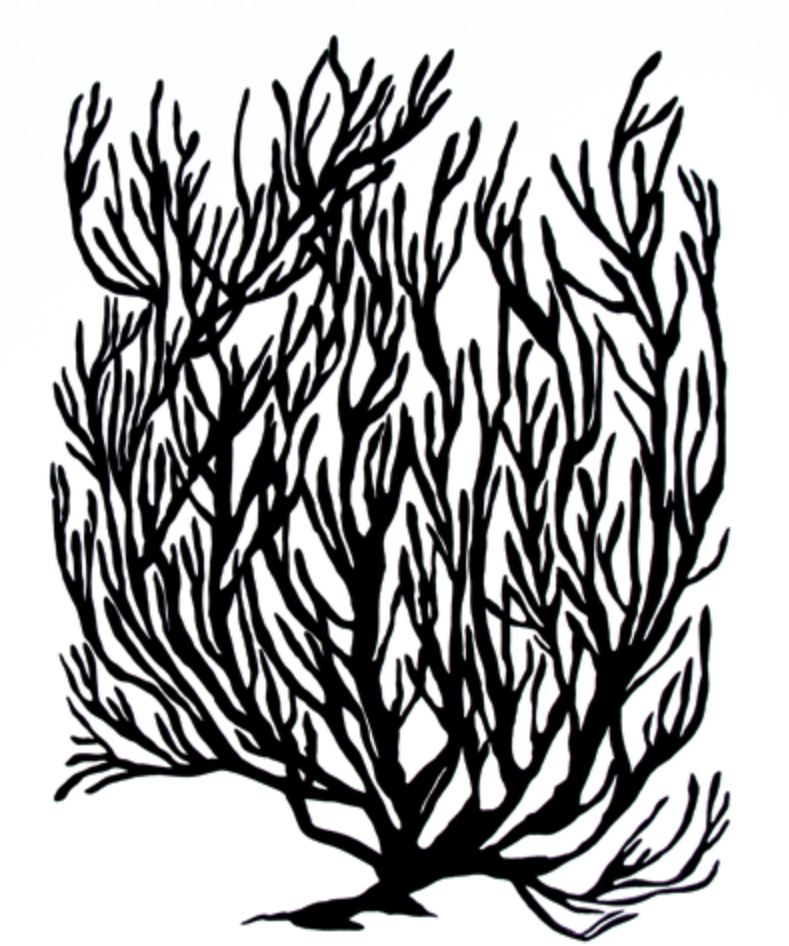
Anna Kopaczewska, Hanna Sitarz-Pietrzak, Piotr Skubała, Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, and Magdalena Ochwat.

STUDENT WORKS FROM THE SCREEN PRINTING STUDIO AT THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS AND THE WRITING ART PROGRAM

ZUZANNA SZNOBER – *BLACK REEF*

Commentary by Dorota Nowak-Rodzińska, head of the Screen Printing Studio: *"Black Reef" evokes the form of coral – one of the most intricate examples of interspecies symbiosis. This delicate yet powerful structure of life is now particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the climate and environmental crisis. The blackness present in this work may symbolize mourning for life already lost, but it can also be read as a warning: that without care for the networks of interdependence, even the most complex forms of life may disappear.*



ZUZANNA SZNOBER – *WHITE REEF*

Commentary by Dorota Nowak-Rodzińska, head of the Screen Printing Studio: *"White Reef" is a moving image of silence and dying. This delicate visual form evokes the dramatic phenomenon of coral bleaching – a process in which corals lose their symbiotic partners. They become colorless, fragile, and close to death. The reefs are disappearing before our very eyes.*

Inspired by the Symbiosis of Algae and Coral

Magdalena Meiksner	Magdalena Meiksner
Fantazmat wspólny	*Shared Phantasm*
Budzę się ze snów barwnych i żywych Do ciszy martwej, z lekka osamotnionej. Sen był wodą, ja w nim podwodną istotą. Trwałem tam w stanie splątania; wstęgi światła sączą się tu z powierzchni.	I wake up from dreams both vivid and bright Into dead silence, colored by loneliness. The dream was water, and I – a creature beneath. I remained there, entangled, ribbons of light trickling from the surface.
Zanurzony w przestrzeń bliższą baśniom spełniałem marzenie o byciu jej częścią. Między koral zagościł mir domowy i opowieści o skarbach; wyrzucane są na brzeg raz po raz.	Immersed in a realm closer to fairytales, I fulfilled the wish to be part of it. Among coral, the peace of home took root, As well as tales of treasure – They end up washed ashore again and again.
Kiedy obumierał sen powinienem poczuć. Odcięto mnie od wstąg i miru.	When the dream began to wither, I should have felt it. I was severed from the ribbons and the peace.
Granica fantazmatu jest biała. Białe są mary. Skostniały dom. Lekkie odłamki ich elegii wyrzuci na brzeg woda […]	The edge of the phantasm is white. White are the mourned visions. A house changed to bones. Light shards of their elegy will be cast ashore by the sea […]
Budzę się ze snów barwnych i żywych Do ciszy martwej, z lekka osamotnionej. Sen był wodą, ja w nim podwodną istotą. Przecież trwałem tam w stanie splątania	I wake up from dreams both vivid and bright Into dead silence, colored by loneliness. The dream was water, and I – a creature beneath. I did remain there, entangled.

KLAUDIA MUSIALIK – *SYMBIOCENE COLLECTION* (POSTCARDS)

Commentary by Dorota Nowak-Rodzińska, head of the Screen Printing Studio: *This work is a visual and textual interpretation of the idea of the Symbiocene, realized in the form of artistic postcards. Its aesthetic – simple, high-contrast, organic – draws inspiration from both human and interspecies relationships.*

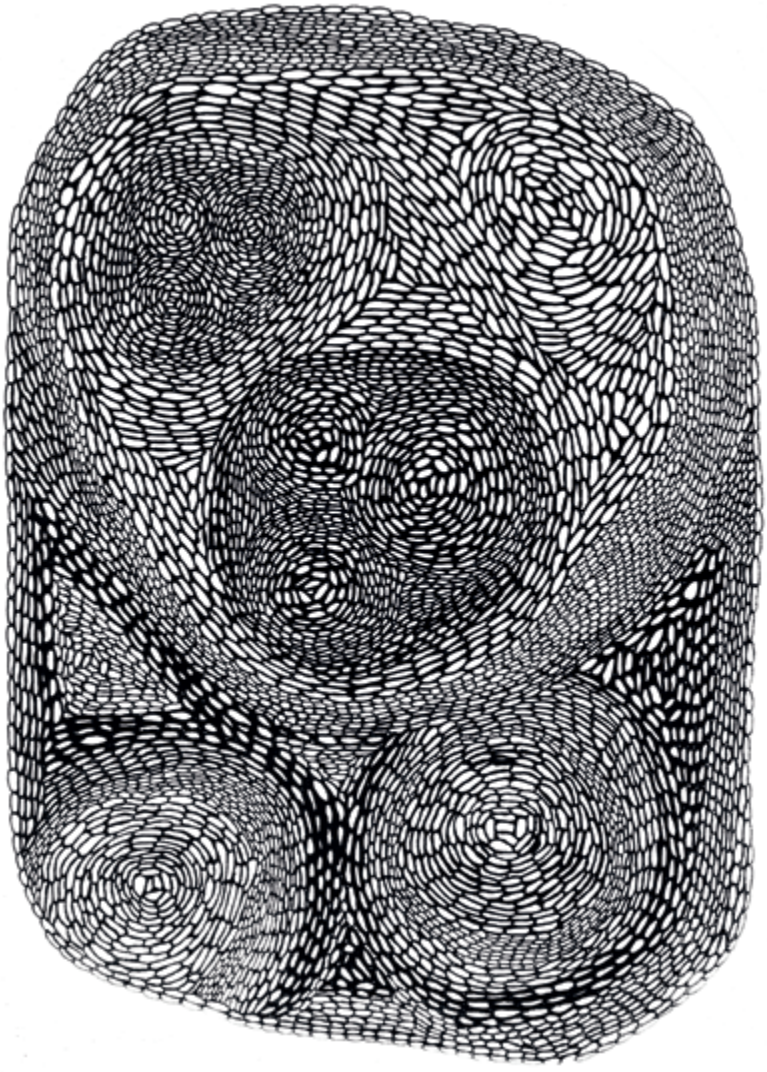
SYMBIOCEN COLLECTION
SYMBIOCEN COLLECTION

AGNIESZKA PRANDZIOCH – *THE HUMAN AS HOLOBIONT* (SPATIAL OBJECTS)

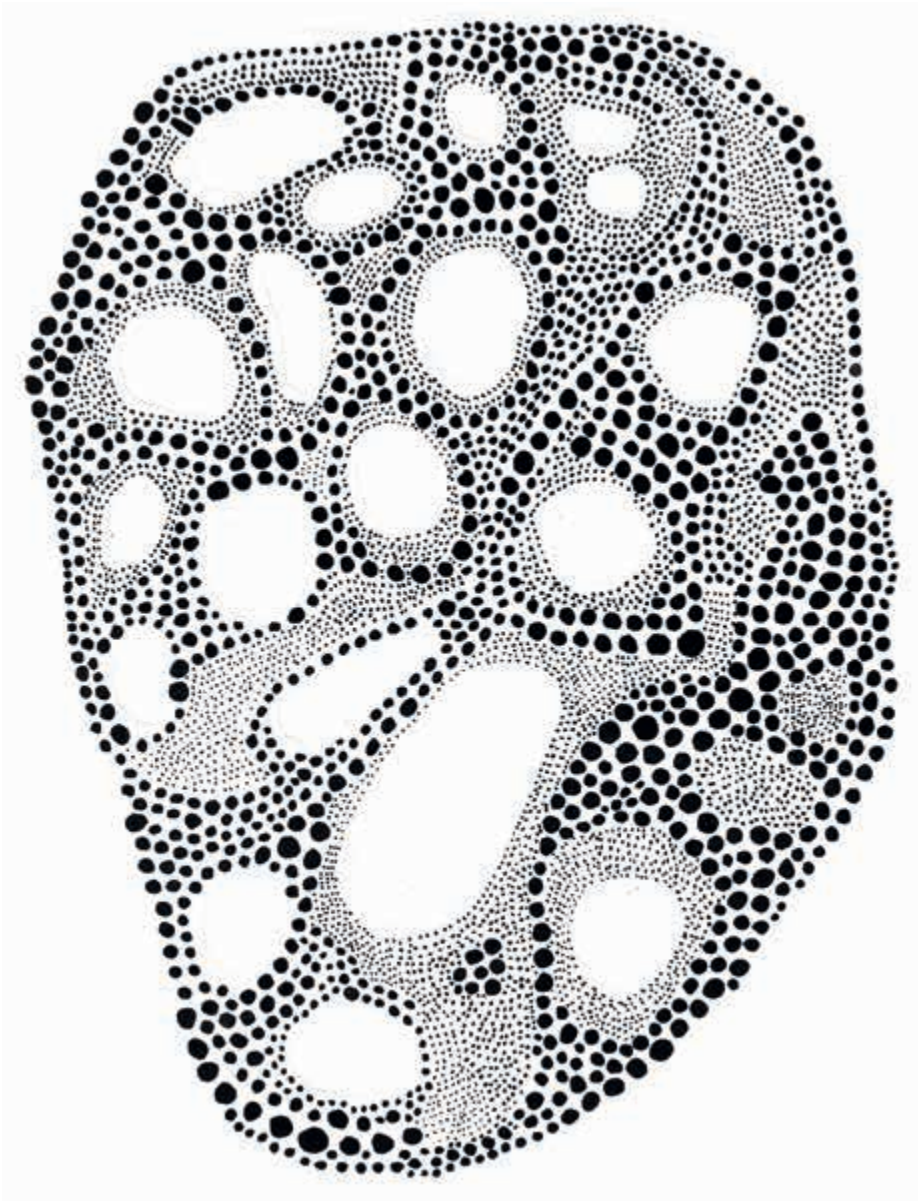
Commentary by Dorota Nowak-Rodzińska, head of the Screen Printing Studio: *This work offers a visual reflection on the idea of the human as a holobiont – a being composed of and sustained by a community of many organisms. The soft sculptural forms are covered in patterns reminiscent of bacterial flora, lichens, or vascular maps – symbolic traces of the life that coexists within the human body. It is a subtle yet powerful narrative about the interdependence we carry inside us.*

WERONIKA STASICA – *SYMBIO-MANDALA 1*

Artist's statement:
Struggling with intrusive thoughts and constant anxiety, I sometimes find it difficult to endure being inside my own head. Living often in discord and conflict with myself, I find solace in my relationship with the surrounding world – especially with nature. It is nature that becomes the foundation of my inner peace.
I believe that through art, we can shape a space of understanding with the natural world. This direction – aligned with the idea of the Symbiocene – inspires me to create forms that draw on organic motifs and interconnectedness.



WERONIKA STASICA – SYMBIO-MANDALA 2



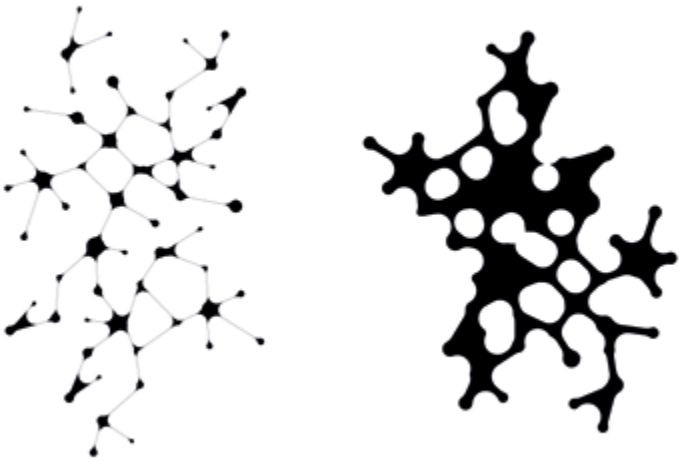
PAWEŁ PROKOPOWICZ – *SERIAL ENDOSYMBIOSIS*

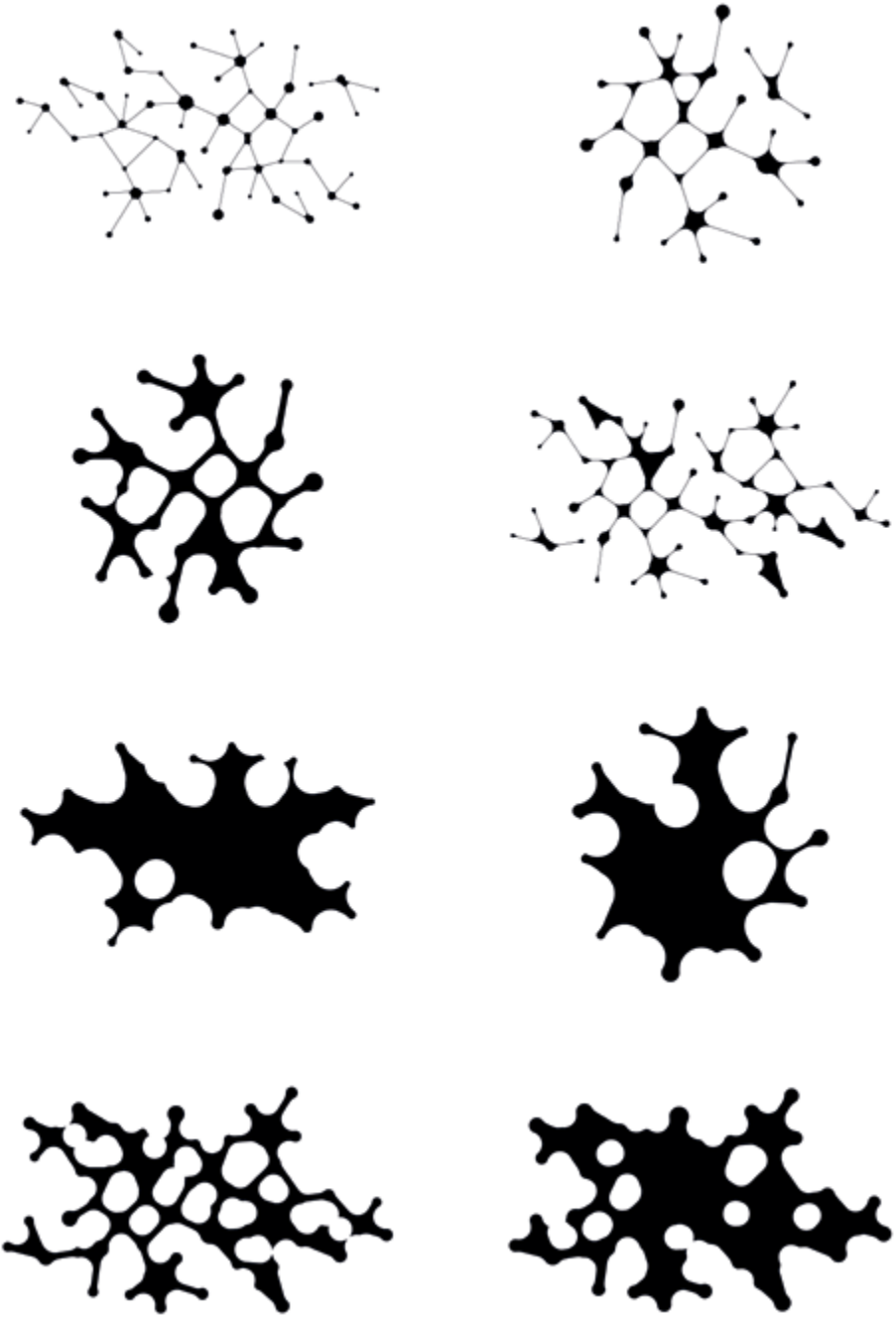
Artist's statement:
Evolution is a funny thing. How is it possible that from a single particle arises the complexity of processes and fully formed life? How is it that both living and non-living matter can create a dynamic of growth – and endless joy?
We spin around the Sun, surrounded by the vastness of purity – or at least that's the utopia I carry in my mind. Uninterrupted, spontaneous, bold. Was life at the very beginning just like that?

WIKTORIA REJOWSKA – *CONNECTIONS*

> *I come here to listen, to settle myself comfortably among the roots, in a soft hollow of pine needles, to rest my back against the column of a white pine and turn off the voice in my head until I hear the voices outside: the wind in the branches, water trickling over stone, the tapping of a nuthatch, rodents rustling underground, falling beech nuts, a mosquito in my ear – and something more – something that is not me, that does not use words, this voiceless being of others, in which we are never alone.*
>
> Robin Wall Kimmerer

Artist's statement:
No form exists in isolation – everything is relationship, everything is part of a larger whole. The elements of our reality have always coexisted with nature, even as we continually attempt to subject it to our expectations. With this series of works, I wanted to show that the Symbiocene does not begin today – it has always been here. What has changed is our awareness: now is the time to consciously recognize that we share the Earth with countless other beings.
My project is an invitation to think in terms of interdependence. The world of the future will not consist of separate, autonomous entities, but a pulsating network of relationships. The Symbiocene is an era in which we learn to be together – not despite our differences, but precisely because of them.





The text portrays the symbiotic relationship between wolves and ravens, though it does not name it explicitly, leaving space for the reader's own interpretation.

Agata Płócienniczak

YOU

Look up there. Black shapes drift across the sky above the world we know. Who are they? Life? Death? Everything. Nothing. Wisdom. Foolishness. Joy. Sadness. Fullness. Hunger. Understanding. Unawareness. Simply that. Everything and nothing. The duality of knowledge. They begin where we end, and end where we begin. We have known them for so many years, and yet we know nothing about each other. They are important, yet nearly invisible in our world – as if they weren't there at all. Sometimes they only let out a faint caw above our heads and then vanish for good. Or so it seems… only that… they never actually leave us. Not even for a moment.

We can manage without them, but when we do, our life feels empty. Incomplete. Lonely. We would only realize it if we lost them. That's how the world works: you lose something, and only then do you understand that you loved it. You cannot truly appreciate the world without slowly losing parts of it. And in the end, only emptiness remains. Nothing more.

Now look down there. Grey-brown shapes move through a world we do not know. Who are they? Everything. Nothing. And us? This is our place. We don't know any other way. We need to be free, unbound. We don't know how to settle in one place permanently. We soar among the clouds, and yet so often we yearn for what's below. We are full of uncertainty. Full of contradiction. They don't know about us. Or so it seems. They run through green valleys, and we follow. So different, and yet so similar. We search for something that can become a common ground between us. Often, it happens. In the end, we sit down to a shared meal. We never eat alone.

Loneliness is terrifying. It suffocates with its breathlessness, tightens the throat, clouds the mind. But we are never truly alone. We support one another, even if it's not obvious at first. We become a family. Imperfect. So different. And yet a family supports itself in every way it can. It doesn't always live in unity, but it always complements itself. It never denies. It always watches over. Somewhere nearby.

We are unity.
We are difference.
We support each other – constantly.
We are everything.
We are nothing.