



## From Empathy to Ethical Reflection: Polish Children's and Young Adult Literature (19<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Century) in a Cultural Animal Studies Perspective – Selected Problems

### Abstract:

The goal of this article is to analyse the changes in the depiction of animal themes in Polish children's and young adult literature in the context of cultural animal studies (CAS). The focus is mainly on Polish prose created in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but older texts, starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are discussed with the use of animal studies tools too. The starting point of the article is the assumption that empathy towards animals, inscribed in the majority of works for children and young people, may become the basis for further ethical reflection. The author analyses texts at the centre of which are such aspects of the human-animal relation as hunting, animal treatment and protection (e.g., veterinary clinics, sanctuaries, reserves), using animals for work (mines, army), as well as ethical aspects related to meat-eating.

### Key words:

animals, animal studies, human-animal relation, Polish children's and young adult literature, posthumanism

### Od empatii do refleksji etycznej. Polska literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży (XIX–XXI wiek) w perspektywie kulturowych studiów nad zwierzętami – wybrane problemy

### Abstrakt:

Celem artykułu jest analiza modyfikacji przedstawiania tematyki zwierzęcej w polskiej literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży w kontekście kulturowych studiów nad zwierzętami (CAS). Autorka koncentruje się głównie na polskiej prozie XXI wieku,

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ale przy pomocy narzędzi kulturowych studiów nad zwierzętami omawia też wybrane starsze teksty, począwszy od XIX wieku. Punktem wyjścia artykułu jest założenie, że postawa empatii wobec zwierząt, wpisana w większość dzieł literackich dla dzieci i młodzieży, może stać się podstawą do dalszej refleksji etycznej. Przedmiotem analizy są teksty, w których centrum znajdują się takie aspekty relacji człowiek – zwierzę jak łowiectwo, leczenie i ochrona zwierząt (np. kliniki weterynaryjne, sanktuaria, rezerwaty), eksploatacja zwierząt użytkowych (kopalnie, wojsko), a także kwestie etyczne związane z jedzeniem mięsa.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

zwierzęta, studia nad zwierzętami, relacja człowiek – zwierzę, polska literatura dziecięca i młodzieżowa, posthumanizm

## Introduction

**P**eter Singer (2002) argues that we should provide young readers with “picture books and stories that encourage respect for animals as independent beings, and not as cute little objects that exist only for our amusement and table” (p. 215). Singer’s postulate is in fact a proposal to create children’s and young adult<sup>1</sup> literature that is non-chauvinistic towards non-humans. Is it possible to include conclusions from the discussion and present practical solutions regarding ethical human-animal relations in the form of literary fiction for young readers, written by an author with a pro-animal attitude? If so, is it possible to specify the exact conditions that must be met by such a fiction?

Singer (2002, pp. 1–6) often referred to analogies between the struggle for animal rights and feminism. He argued that feminism resulted in works that included reflection on women’s rights and often postulated specific legal solutions regarding gender equality. However, the issue of the direct impact of children’s and young adult literature on the practice of animal rights seems problematic. Some texts that will be discussed in this article show exemplary model stories about what the human-animal relationship should look like from the perspective of animal studies (however, reading such a fiction as unambiguous

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I am writing about children’s and young adult literature together, although it is sometimes separated. However, in terms of the issue of animals I am discussing, I do not see any significant differences between children’s and young adult literature. Perhaps the taboo on the use of animals is still stronger in literature for small children, but it is not a rule anymore.

postulates can be difficult<sup>2</sup>). It seems that in children's and young adult literature, above all, space is opening to develop empathy for animals, which in turn becomes the starting point for further ethical reflection or discussions on attitudes towards animal welfare (Hübben, 2016, p. 52; Małecki, Pawłowski, Sorokowski, 2016). Cora Diamond (1978), who polemised with Singer about arguments in favour of vegetarianism, emphasised that such arguments should not be based on intellect but on feelings. The author also states that it is easier for us to change our approach to animals if they appear to be 'the same' as us (p. 475). Literature evokes this similarity and awakens a sense of commonality between human and animal fate (especially children's literature shows it 'literally,' thanks to the anthropomorphisation), which opens the door to empathy and respect for animals. When we begin to see animals as 'human,' as our companions, we use such concepts as 'grief' (slaughter of animals) or 'dignity' (animals in the circus). Diamond rejects, therefore, the vegetarian 'propaganda' in literature, which may not be effective, because it refers only to the intellect and does not postulate a poetically expressed community of existence that affects the level of emotions (p. 474). Such an approach, in opposition to Singer's, does not exclude children's and young adult literature, but makes it more valuable since the field of shaping empathy, or a sense of community with animals, remains open even in older books that were inspired by the traditional way of looking at non-human beings and their rights. This is because the modern construct of the child includes closeness to nature, and the child as a recipient of literature in Poland (as well as in Europe) from the beginning is shaped as empathetic towards the animal world.

Some aspects of human-animal relations that are nowadays perceived as requiring legal regulation, such as hunting, animal work in heavy industry (i.e., mining), and service in the army, were and are popular topics of (not only)

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<sup>2</sup> There are classic texts for children and young adults that discuss the status of animals in the human world and reveal the truth about suffering caused by human abuse. Their authors seem to anticipate Singer's concept of pro-animal literature for young readers. In Poland, Janusz Korczak, one of the classic children's writers, was sensitive to animal rights. However, as noted by Maciej Skowera (2018) who commented on his *King Matt the First* (Korczak, 1922/2005): "In a fragment of [this book], soaked in 'colonial sauce,' the titular protagonist refuses to eat the 'African king.' We would be inclined to interpret the decision of the little king [...] not only as a condemnation of cannibalism, but also of eating meat in general... if not for the fact that, elsewhere, Matt categorically demands a 'kielbasa and cabbage' to eat." Such "inconsistencies," "paradoxes," or "dissonances" (Abramowska, 2010, pp. 136–137) – as valued today, from the point of view of animal studies or our changing sensitivity to animal rights – are frequent in children's and young adult literature. (All translations, if not otherwise indicated, are made by the author of the paper – Ewelina Rąbkowska.)

Polish children's and young adult literature. Animal diseases treatment is also an important issue, as vets, clinics, and recently shelters, asylums, and reserves constitute settings for many narratives. The latest trend is to break the taboo associated with showing the flesh of animals in young adult literature. Gradually, (post)modern discourses on animal rights infiltrate young readers' fiction, contributing to a slow change in the description of these rights.

The perspective of cultural animal studies, as one of the trends of posthumanism,<sup>3</sup> allows for a new look at the literary canon for children and young adults, revealing the complex image of animals preserved in it and the human-animal relations. The aim of this article is to show that today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the outlook on nature in Polish children's and young adult literature is very clearly marked by posthuman awareness: starting from the selection of topics particularly valuable from the point of view of animal studies, which I mentioned above, through the modification of the anthropomorphisation of the animal protagonist, to changes in the valorisation of animals not only from the point of view of humans. In Polish children's and young adult literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, along with crossing the anthropocentric, humanistic paradigm of raising a child with the help of instrumentally treated animal themes, the ethical and empathetic dimension is re-oriented, and the cognitive horizon opens a new perspective on cultural relations between non-human animals and humans.

The development of animal-friendly literature, as Singer understands it, which is very restrictive, is slow and difficult. But today, it is clearly visible that many Polish children's and young adult works boldly cross the borders of

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<sup>3</sup> Posthumanism can be defined as a revision of the humanist tradition, especially regarding the term 'human.' The posthumanist trend assumes going beyond the paradigm in which only entities defined on its basis as 'people' emancipate. This – as it is also called – new humanism recognises manifestations of such exclusion as ideology and calls for the inclusion in the group of subjects of both people not yet fully covered by the definition of humanity (such as women, children, ethnic or sexual minorities) and non-human beings (e.g., monsters, animals, plants, machines). Thus, posthumanism is also characterised by anti-anthropocentrism (Hoły-Łuczaj, 2015, pp. 45–61). Cultural animal studies, as a new research area (rapidly developing in Poland only for about a decade), can be seen as part of posthumanism. The overriding goals of writing about animals from the perspective of cultural animal studies are: placing the animal related to its reality at the centre of reflection (an attempt to free animals from thinking about them as symbols, motifs), and a strong reference to animal ethics. It is important to see animals as living, sentient beings (not only protagonists) and to be respectful of the difference between humans and animals. Such a research attitude results in writing about animals in culture from their perspective or in their interest, without assuming axiological neutrality.

anthropocentrism and take the side of animals. However, I have presented the discussion between Singer and Diamond to defend children's literature, which talked in the past and still talks about animals in various ways. For example, popular Swedish books about Mamma Moo (e.g., Wieslander, 2003/2005) would be for Singer an unacceptable lie to children and a hiding of the inconvenient truth about the real situation of cows, and for Diamond – as I can conclude – the value of this fiction would be related to the concept of anthropomorphisation, which depicts a cow 'like a human,' and thus, it can evoke empathy towards the protagonist. And this attitude may constitute an argument in the discussion on animal rights.

In the next parts of this article, I will analyse the way in which the images of the following issues in Polish children's and young adult texts have changed over the years: hunting, eating animal products, animal work, and the treatment of animals.

## Hunting: From Henryk Sienkiewicz to Tomasz Samojlik

### *In Desert and Wilderness*

When it comes to literary texts addressed to children and young adults, hunting is the motif that underwent the most significant modification out of all the issues discussed here. This path can be summarised as follows: from apology to condemnation. "The theme of hunting is widespread in all traditional epic genres, including fairy tales – both [...] the European [...] and exotic [...]" (Waksmund, 2016, p. 113). In European fairy tales, there was a common theme of a hunter as a positive figure – Ryszard Waksmund mentions *Snow White* in which the hunter opposes the death sentence passed on the protagonist by her stepmother (p. 119).

In the Polish prose for children and young adults, until the end of the interwar period, the ethics of hunting was not discussed at all, only poaching was considered unethical (Budrewicz, 2016, p. 225). Thanks to the presence of this topic, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children's and young adult literature ceased to be associated in Poland only with women as writers and a children's room as the setting; it entered the world of male adventure and, therefore, answered to the needs of teenage boys at the time (Olszewska, 2016, p. 348). The hunts presented in literature of that period served didactic purposes: they were supposed to familiarise the readers with the richness of nature, show landowners' customs, promote patriotism and love of the homeland's beauty (p. 357).

The most famous Polish hunting novel,<sup>4</sup> *In Desert and Wilderness* by Henryk Sienkiewicz (1911/1917), was an indisputable reading success (Axe, Bujnicki, 2012). The descriptions of hunts in the novel can be controversial from today's point of view. Since changes are taking place not only in the sensitivity of people, but also in terms of ethical human behaviour towards animals, *In Desert and Wilderness* is increasingly subjected to critical rather than historical readings.<sup>5</sup> The story describes the adventures of two children: Stas Tarkowski, a 14-year-old Polish boy, and Nelly Rawlinson, an 8-year-old English girl, kidnapped by Mahdi's supporters during the Mahdi uprising (Sudan, 1881–1899). The children run away from the kidnappers and try to return to their fathers. Most of the plot is filled with their journey through the African desert. From the safe sphere of parental care, Stas and Nelly fall into the world of hostile people, but it is not the fight against people that is the theme of the novel, but the fight against nature. The nature described here is quite different from the gentle land idealised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The forest and the desert are full of cruelty and struggles for survival. At one point, Stas gets hold of a gun and must kill a lion to protect himself and Nelly. After that incident, he kills many more animals – not always out of necessity – and shoots at two people. For Stas, hunting is a dream come true, a male adventure that he read about in children's books. He kills African animals such as an antelope, a zebra, and an ostrich to eat them, a buffalo and crocodiles to practice hunting, and a panther to proof his status as a hunter.

The initiation of a young man is inevitably associated with cruelty. Grzegorz Leszczyński (2016, p. 25) writes that hunting in William Golding's (1954) *Lord of the Flies* becomes a rite of passage for the group of boys staying on the island, and also constitutes a prelude to killing a man. Above all, Sienkiewicz's book shows the boy's initiation into adulthood through hunting. An important element of animal-friendly literature for young readers is – from the perspective of animal studies – not to show such an initiation through harming/killing sentient beings. Meanwhile in Sienkiewicz's novel, it is shown as a natural sequence: a man has the right to kill animals not only out of necessity, but also to confirm his masculinity. The character of Nelly is antagonistic

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<sup>4</sup> Zofia Budrewicz (2016, p. 224) provides a set of determinants of a hunting novel: the hero is always a boy who wanders into the space of the forest and, by improving hunting skills, matures to humanity.

<sup>5</sup> From the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Sienkiewicz's book is being critically read from the perspective of postcolonial studies (Mazan, 1990; Koc, 2007; Kosowska, 1998; Turaj-Kalińska, 2001). New critical readings of this novel are very important, because to this day Sienkiewicz's novel is a set book in Polish primary schools.

to the main protagonist, and her opposition is aroused by the question: “Why should you want to shoot at them?” asked by the girl when Stas puts his hands together at the beginning of the plot for a mock shot at the birds (pelicans and flamingos). “Girls<sup>6</sup> don’t understand such things,” replies Stas. Later in the book, this division is portrayed in such a fashion: an empathetic girl as a representation of female culture and perception, and a cruel boy – of young masculinity. A 14-year-old who dreams of hunting “big animals [...] in Central Africa” (Sienkiewicz, 1911/1917) receives from his father a rifle with bullets and a saddle for horse riding – the arsenal of a real hunter. This is a signal that Stas is reaching manhood, whose attribute in the novel is the exercise of power over the life and death of the animals subject to him. Nelly’s opposition to her companion is weak in comparison to his male pattern of development, which is gradually gaining fullness and the boy becomes a man, representing traits highly valued by a patriarchally oriented culture.

Therefore, the novel is above all an apology of hunting as adventure, as an initiation into adulthood, and as a kind of sport confirming male strength, courage, and social position. Stas does not kill only in self-defence or for food, he also kills for pleasure. Although the text reveals considerations about the nature of animal hunting, the hunt is not criticised. In Sienkiewicz’s novel there are, however, no descriptions of a dying hunted animal, such suffering would go beyond taboos. The threads of animal suffering have been intentionally omitted in the novel. The convention of the story for children allowed the fiction of ignoring the suffering of animals. Therefore, from today’s perspective, there is a space for a critical reading of this text. Anna Barcz (2016) writes that an ecocritical reading may consist in “reading in the future” (p. 15). After all, from the perspective of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of our present era is the future. Therefore, one can critically look at this text that seems to perceive animals only as a ‘harvest’ – inexhaustible goods, having the power of self-rebirth. This work presents the world of colonialism and fascination with the wilderness only to subordinate or use it. Is this ‘forgetfulness’ a characteristic feature of people? Jacques Derrida (2006/2008, p. 26) wrote that the human tendency to ‘forget’ about the

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<sup>6</sup> The original text uses not the word ‘girls’ but ‘women.’ This emphasises even more strongly the gender antagonism in the original. The word ‘girls’ leaves hope that one day a girl as an adult woman will be able to express her point of view. The word ‘women’ closes this path. Stas has already defined Nelly as the one who “does not understand,” in fact not wanting to listen to her, neither now nor in adulthood, when they become married and symbolically become one. This means that the English translation in this sentence softened the original text.

suffering of animals, which lies behind centuries of philosophical tradition, by setting the categories of 'animal' and 'human,' prevents writing about animal suffering at all. Yet, it does not matter if animals are intelligent or can speak; instead, we should ask if they are suffering (Bentham, 1789). Their rights depend not on their ability to think or to speak, but on the fact that their suffering – just like the suffering of people – is important.

In today's posthumanist thinking, there is a concern for animals. Hunting 'for sport' is widely objected, and various practical solutions are proposed that would reshape our relationship with the animal world to minimise the use of animals on the one hand and the suffering inflicted on them on the other (Nussbaum, 2006)<sup>7</sup>.

### *In Białowieża*

Elements of the hunting novel appeared in Polish literature for young readers in the interwar period and were continued in the post-war works of authors such as: Ferdynand Ossendowski (*Przygody Jurka w Afryce* [Jurek's Adventures in Africa], 1932; *Jasnooki łowca* [Bright-Eyed Hunter], 1946), Czesław and Alina Centkiewicz (*Anaruk, chłopiec z Grenlandii* [Anaruk, a Boy from Greenland], 1937; *Odarpi, syn Egigwy* [Odarpi, the Son of Egigwa], 1949), Arkady Fiedler (*Mały Bizon* [Little Bison], 1952), Sat-Okh (*Ziemia słonych skał* [The Land of Salt Rocks], 1958), and Kamil Giżycki (*Nil, rzeka wielkiej przygody* [The Nile, a River of Great Adventure], 1959). Hunts shown by these writers have most frequently a practical dimension and are presented as a condition for the survival of indigenous people (the Centkiewiczzs, Fiedler, Sat-Okh).

In the post-war period, more and more popular quasi-hunting fictions no longer show hunting per se (Szkłarski, 1957, 1958; Giżycki, 1959<sup>8</sup>), but still

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<sup>7</sup> The hunting culture in Poland consists of the principles of ethics and hunting tradition, customs, and ceremonies (e.g., hunters' briefings, oaths, etc.). Hunters have their patrons (e.g., St. Hubert). Most importantly, there are hunting music and a special hunter's vocabulary. The analysis of this vocabulary shows that it is neatly avoiding the enormity of torment and horror experienced by animals placed on the official "List of Game Animals" (Kruczyński, 2014, pp. 21–38). A manifestation of hunting culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the custom of a bloodless safari, described, inter alia, in the – popular in Poland – book series about a girl named Nela, published by National Geographic (Rąbkowska, 2019). In traditional cultures, the practical dimension of hunting (for meat) dominates, and in modern countries, it has a marginal meaning, but the 'relaxation' dimension begins to dominate (Waksmund, 2016, p. 114).

<sup>8</sup> In Szkłarski's and Giżycki's novels for young readers, the boy characters do not kill but only catch animals to sell them to the zoo.



only poaching is condemned (Bahdaj, 1982). It was not until the 21<sup>st</sup> century that hunting was criticised in Polish children's and young adult literature. An example of the sharpest criticism of the destruction of a particular forest and the animals inhabiting it is the work by Tomasz Samojlik, a writer who is also a biologist, concentrating on the Białowieża Forest. As an author of children's books (comics, illustrated non-fiction, etc.), he focuses almost exclusively on nature, and his fiction is located in the space of the Białowieża National Park in Poland.

Anna Nosek (2015, p. 195) emphasises that the European bison (known also as the European wood bison, wisent, the zubr – Polish *żubr*) is the symbol of Białowieża in regional literature, but it was only in Samojlik's work that it became a real animal. In such children's books as *The Last Bison* (Samojlik, 2009/2011), *Żubr Żorż* [*Żorż the Bison*] (Samojlik, 2010), or a series of short stories about a bison called Pompik (Samojlik, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d), the author not only makes his hero a full-fledged, attractive character, but also provides knowledge about the biology of these mammals (diet, habits, etc.) and their history. In fact, the history of the bison as an endangered and intensively reintroduced species becomes the centre of Samojlik's fiction.

*The Last Bison* is a children's comic book that presents the history of the exploitation of the Białowieża Forest and the destruction of the European bison species. The tale begins in 1915, when an area of this huge forest was destroyed by retreating Russian troops using scorched-earth tactics. In the years 1915–1918, the forest became a booty for the German occupants, while since 1918, after Poland regained independence, its fate as a nature reserve was at stake. On the one hand, there are real heroes depicted in the comic, such as the authentic figure of Władysław Szafer, a naturalist, explorer of the forest, founder of the Białowieża National Park (in 1921), and initiator of the reintroduction of the European bison, who values this space as a national treasure. On the other hand – there are authorities trying to exchange this treasure for material goods by reselling the rights to forest felling to an American company. The theme of the comic book plot is, therefore, the conflict between Szafer and American envoys, full of dramatic twists. The three villains are essentially hunters whose task is to kill the bison in the forest, because only these rare animals stand in the way of complete grubbing up of the forest and the use of the land for construction. As long as the bison exists, the ecologists may demand protection of this species and the areas in which it lives. The main character of the comic book is a bison calf who has no name yet and lives in the Białowieża Forest. Already at the beginning, the calf loses his mother – hunters from America manage to shoot her; therefore,

the 'boy' becomes the titular 'last bison.' He flees alone from the hunters in search of the legendary Heart of the Forest his mother told him about. In this mysterious place, the protagonist – he is convinced of this – will find help and his parents.

The Heart of the Forest is a place between reality and dream (the bison has a vision of it when he falls asleep), where the ghosts of all dead animals reside and where the memory of the forest is kept. Here, the mystical bond between the forest and its inhabitants is revealed, and the power of the forest comes to the fore; it resembles a living organism and can defend itself against violence. The Heart of the Forest is, therefore, not only a metaphor, but also a description of a very specific experience related to the integrity and duration of nature as a space of interaction between fauna and flora. Barcz (2016, p. 59) notes that such a place resembles a strict nature reserve: here, animals can die a natural death, not at the hands of a hunter. It is also an original ecosystem – Barcz continues her observations – where, like in Noah's Ark, pairs of animals and plant seeds are kept for breeding.

Anti-hunting discourse started to occur in Polish 21<sup>st</sup>-century children's and young adult literature, and Samojlik's comics have gained massive popularity among young readers, but no less popular is another author related to Białowieża and anti-hunting topics – Adam Wajrak. The names of Wajrak and Samojlik are often mentioned together because of the writers' similarities. As a duo, they created the comics *Umarły las* [Dead Forest] (Wajrak, Samojlik, 2016), *Nieumarły las* [Undead Forest] (Wajrak, Samojlik, 2017), and *Zew padliny* [The Carrion Call] (Wajrak, Samojlik, 2018). Wajrak is an activist for nature protection, a journalist who has lived in the town of Białowieża since 1997, and here he writes books and articles about nature. Wajrak's works are, in fact, reports on life in the Białowieża Forest in which the author demonstrates knowledge of not only problems related to the management of the National Park, but also the nuances of the existence of various animal species in this area and the research carried out on them. The reporter's works reveal his extremely personal and close attitude to the forest's wildlife, and his books elude the category of popular science non-fiction.

*Wilki* [Wolves] (Wajrak, 2015) is a work that testifies to the author's nascent delight over wolves – a species of predators endangered and almost completely destroyed in many European countries. Wajrak describes his history of slowly, gradually getting to know these animals, which begins with Kazan – a tame wolf – that walks with him in the Forest. The author also writes about human cruelty towards wolves. People have ruthlessly persecuted this species in various ways: by hunting, looking for wolf puppies to kill them, and laying

snare. A suggestive description of a dying wolf is the content of the “Wnyki” [Snare] chapter. Wajrak also shows why the fear of wolves, which justifies their possible shooting, is unreasonable, and why the idea of protecting wolves as a species is also in the interest of mankind. Wolves hunting in strong complete packs regulate the herbivore population, as well as that of forest scavengers. Under normal conditions, they also never approach human settlements or invade farm animals – they are forced to do so only by hunger, when a weak, depleted pack cannot cope with the hunt. Therefore, it is also in the human interest to provide the wolves with strict protection.

From the perspective of animal studies, hunting is condemned as cruelty to animals, and the examples of Polish children’s and young adult literature testify that hunting issues have evolved, ranging from explicit apology at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to a critique in some literary examples from the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Other Aspects of Ethical Attitudes Towards Animals

### *Flesh*

Most books for children and young adults reflect the social reality of people, which also includes various human relations with particular animal species. Eating meat from the so-called slaughter animals is part of this reality and is shown as the norm. In Poland, only about 5 percent of population declared a few years ago that they limited meat or did not eat it at all (Gzyra, 2014, p. 9). Our attitude towards animals in both social life and culture is very ambiguous. We do not eat many species, calling them companion animals, and others, as slaughter animals, are treated as things, raw materials. We can speak here about a notion of “moral schizophrenia” (Francione, 2000, pp. 1–102), when we cherish our pets and butcher other animals. Imaging animals in children’s and young adult literature is a complex issue, especially in the context of animal studies. As I have already written, paradoxes that have never been noticed before are now clearly visible (vide footnote 2 above). This literature reflects our ambivalent and inconsistent attitude towards animals. For example, in the Polish novel *Małomówny i rodzina* [Tight-lipped and the Family] by Małgorzata Musierowicz (1975), a chicken is saved from being eaten by a sensitive girl who names it F. M. Since then, as a pet, the chicken lives with the family (which does not mean that the family stops eating broth from other, nameless chickens). This example also shows that the taboo is already happening at the linguistic level. In the word ‘meat’ (or

in this example 'broth'), we are dealing with an absent referent – an animal (Adams, 2010, pp. 66–67).

On the one hand, the postulate for children to be gentle with animals and care for them appeared very early in European literature.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the issues of death and sex became taboo in children's literature – young readers are symbolically closed in the sterile surroundings of the nursery. There is a rule to protect children from scenes of excessive cruelty, death, and eroticism. Moreover, Joanna Papuzińska (1981) wrote that, in the eyes of adults, the absence of descriptions of blood, agony, or sex became one of the determinants that distinguish children's books from 'universal' literature. The dominant principle of children's and young adult fiction is an unequal relationship between the sender and the recipient, understood not only as a "difference in the level of consciousness," but also as a unilateral decision of the sender about what will be said and what should be hidden (p. 127). However, in children's literature "everything" can be said that is intended for the ears of those whom a given culture considers as children (Czabanowska-Wróbel, 2013, p. 13); taboos in children's literature are primarily culturally conditioned (Sehested, 2012, p. 19). Therefore, in the case of the issue of human-animal relations, children are shown what is appropriate for them in a given culture and at a given time. This literature, however, is not limited to a very serious discourse on the suffering of animals or presenting their real situation in society. Changes in how children are culturally imagined as the recipients of such content have a key role here. Breaking the taboo of eating animals in children's literature is – in Carol J. Adams's language – recalling an absent referent: an animal destined for slaughter.

There are still a few texts revealing the backstage of human-animal relations in the field of meat-eating. These include, for example, the provocative book by Akumal Ramachander (1993), *Little Pig*, as well as earlier, more subdued examples: *Babe: The Gallant Pig* (King-Smith, 1985) or *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952). In children's literature – due to strong taboos – such provocations could take place not directly, but with the use of reversing tactics. Particularly controversial are the literary examples in which an animal

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<sup>9</sup> Thanks to the English philosopher John Locke (1693/2007) who postulated that children should be 'kind' to animals. He warned that a child left alone with an animal will hurt it; therefore, it is necessary to constantly pay attention to the child while he or she is with the animal. Many Polish authors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, remembering Locke's warnings, reminded children of not harming animals (Stanisław Jachowicz, Władysław Bełza, Maria Konopnicka, Zofia Urbanowska).

intended for slaughter does not want to undergo the final sentence and its insubordination reveals its own fate of being turned into meat. Such an example can be a humorous poem, well-known in Poland, *Wacky Ducky* by Jan Brzechwa (1939/2017). The heroine of this poem, unlike all ducks, disobeys her fate:

Near a river, if you're lucky,  
You might meet Ms Wacky Ducky.  
Being wacky was her passion,  
in her life, her moods, her fashions.

However, her defiance is fully revealed when a chef decides to cook her:

One sad day, a nasty crook  
said: 'Your goose is truly cooked!'  
Having plucked our little duck,  
he stuck her on an oven rack!  
But dear Wacky wouldn't have it –  
she just turned into a rabbit!  
Served with beetroot, because  
That's how wacky she was!

This poem shows, however, not only the duck's disagreement with her fate, but also her inevitability. The duck, despite turning into a rabbit, will be eaten anyway. Of course, to recall this example in this context may seem shocking, but cultural animal studies look at literature in a new, problematic, non-historical way. Trends such as bioethics and biopolitics are increasingly influencing the subject of eating animal meat in Polish literature for young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These examples are especially valuable for animal studies.

Marcin Szczygielski in his novels *Tuczarnia motyli* [The Butterfly Feedlot] (2014) and *Serce Neftydy* [The Heart of Nephthys] (2017) makes the motif of eating animal flesh not only an element intended to evoke a feeling of disgust or horror in the reader (descriptions of being covered in blood and touching tissues in *Serce Neftydy* perform such a role), but also the issue of the ethics of meat-eating. Consuming the tissues of beings that are killed for this purpose, shown in *Tuczarnia motyli* and *Serce Neftydy*, as a way of organising the presented community, takes the author's meat poetics to the rank of considerations on biopolitics and bioethics and contains explicit references to Western civilisation. Similarly, the theme of the lively chicken carcass in *Rutka* by Joanna Fabicka (2016) is brave and provocative. One of the chickens gets out

of the store and follows two girls – the heroines of this magical realist story about the Holocaust – who decide to take it in and name it Tuptuś. Wearing a red knitted hat, Tuptuś becomes a pet. The animal's insubordination seems to be significant. The chicken breaks out of its foil prison, comes alive while remaining a dead carcass, and speaks volumes on modernity and its involvement in violence. Thanks to these examples, the bold and modern discourse on meat-eating (e.g., Carol, 2009) enters Polish 21<sup>st</sup>-century literature for young people. We are at the beginning of a significant change.

### Work

Stories that discuss animals working with people are particularly susceptible to being read in the spirit of animal studies. In Poland, these are mainly military and farm animals. One should value this literary fiction, because – similarly to Éric Baratay's (2012) book – it draws the reader's attention to the contribution of non-humans to the progress of human civilisation. The effort of animals means – as in the case of human workers – not only privileges, but also suffering related to work<sup>10</sup>.

In Polish literature, animals that are involved in wars are especially appreciated. The fighting animal is portrayed on the one hand as unique, privileged, obviously surrounded by care because of its extraordinary talents. On the other hand, such an animal suffers a lot<sup>11</sup>. An example of a war animal in Polish children's and young adult literature is the bear Wojtek – a private in the army of Anders. The latest Polish story about Wojtek addressed to children is the book *Wojtek. Żołnierz bez munduru* [Wojtek: A Soldier Without a Uniform] by Eliza Piotrowska (2017). It is an animal's 'autobiography': Wojtek himself tells

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<sup>10</sup> Dariusz Piechota (2018) notices that in Polish literature of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a shift in the description of interspecies relations. On the one hand, the empathic attitude of positivists, and on the other, a shift towards the description of everyday life resulted in the "empathic realism" (p. 77). This period resulted in a literature rich in descriptions of the suffering of animals working together with humans (e.g., Dygasiński, 1908; Konopnicka, 1893; Prus, 1886; Świętochowski, 1896).

<sup>11</sup> The most popular in Poland during the post-war decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the dog Szarik, who fought alongside the Polish People's Army during World War II, shown in the book (Przymanowski, 1964) and in the TV series (Zespół Realizatorów Filmowych "Syrena," 1967). Other titles that talked about the use of animals in war include: *Nigdy nie zapomnę* [I Will Never Forget] (Boguszewska, 1946), *Wilk z partyzantki* [The Wolf from the Guerrilla] (Zechenter, 1949), *Psia służba* [Dog Service] (Koszutska, 1951). The most recent image of a dog used in World War II is a book *Szczury i wilki* [Rats and Wolves] (Gortat, 2009).

the reader the story of his life, which ends at the Edinburgh Zoo. Memories, just as it happens with people, are evoked in the bear through the smells of meadows, forests, and water – the smells of freedom. The first moments of the animal's life, just after birth, are recalled along with a memory of the mother's soft fur. It is not known what happened to her, and in the next part of the book the reader meets the 'father' of the bear – and this is the man who gives the bear the name Wojtek (Wojciech – 'happy warrior'). The name turns out to be significant. From now on, Wojtek lives among the soldiers of the Polish army of Anders stationed in Iran. In Piotrowska's book, the series of events from the life of the bear clearly forms the story of maturing to the role of a soldier. From a pethood full of playfulness, as well as recklessness, through the stage when Wojtek realises his role, his usefulness, to the 'decision' to take part in the battle on the front. Then, Wojtek becomes a hero as a bear carrying missiles during the battle of Monte Casino.

It may seem that Wojtek's story is a great anecdote, an extraordinary story about incidents that make readers pause or wonder. Here is an animal – perceived stereotypically as 'irrational,' only instinctive – that turns out to be capable of sacrifice for a human cause, of friendship with people; in many aspects, the bear becomes close to people, to such an extent that it passes the 'human' path of maturing to being useful in the society. Wojtek the Bear testifies that animals have the ability to act morally, they understand such abstract categories as good and evil. They are characterised by their loyalty. Their emotions are like human's: joy, sadness, fear. And this is how Wojtek the Bear, unfortunately, can easily become an instrument that allows it to convey not so much his own autonomous history as the story of educational values, which concerns only human issues. In the book, the story of the animal is largely autonomous, but it also serves as a carrier of historical content related to World War II, the Anders army campaign, the situation in Poland after the war. The figure of the bear becomes here a symbol not only of a military formation, but also of independence and patriotism. Importantly, according to the narrator of this book, the fact that Wojtek – after years spent among Poles – reacted to the sound of Polish speech at the Edinburgh Zoo becomes a sign that he was a Polish 'patriot' and took the 'right' side. The bear knows perfectly who Hitler is, who Stalin is, what the Soviet Union is and the Cold War. This causes a dissonance between the desire to show the 'autobiography' of a real animal entangled in a war of people and the explicitly educational purposes of the book.

The most interesting, from the perspective of animal studies, are those aspects of the bear's life among people that show how difficult it was. Some

of them were characterised by Piotrowska in the story (the unmet need for contact with water, the fear of bullet explosions, the attachment to the human protector and longing for him after the war, and finally the stay at the zoo). Other were completely stripped down (the death of the animal's mother at human hands, the bear's addiction to alcohol, which was given to him in the army, where he was also fed lit cigarettes, tying the animal on a chain at night to prevent it from escaping, and Wojtek's boredom and alienation in the human environment). The frontal fight was also not Wojtek's 'decision,' but the effect of gradually getting him used to the battlefield and skilful training. At the end of his life, the bear became the object of a political conflict between the new Polish authorities and the émigré community. There was a dispute about taking the bear to a zoo in Poland, and publications about him were censored behind the Iron Curtain. To sum up, the book in a simplified and interesting way – thanks to the figure of a bear cub – familiarises the recipient with the basic events and concepts of World War II and the first years after, but it may discourage the reader by using the animal's history too instrumentally.

An analysis of animal characters in the context of their work indicates that these characters are presented in an ambivalent way: admittedly, the creators of these characters are trying to show the true history of working animals, but this truth is quite easily suppressed by literary pictures where an animal becomes a symbol (of patriotism, freedom, history – as in the case of Wojtek).

### *Animal Welfare*

Empathic descriptions of suffering animals and attempts to help them are by far the most valuable element of Polish children's and young adult literature from the perspective of animal studies. Veterinary clinics, shelters, reserves, the issue of adoption of homeless animals – these motifs, related to the well-being of non-humans, are richly represented in literature, which should be appreciated. Individual titles cover topics such as the safety of pets in transport (Włodarczyk, 2017), abduction of purebred animals (Maleszka, 2016) or smuggling them from abroad for a living (Piekarska, 2007), animal helpers of the disabled (Kozioł, 2014), and even a criticism of exhibitions and animal competitions (Kern, 1963; Groński, 1987).

Polish children's and young adult fiction does not only represent the physical suffering of animals, but – more importantly – also their mental pain. Roman Pisarski's (1967) story of Lampo, a dog who travelled by rail,



shows an animal that was wounded not so much on the body as on the soul. Mira Marcinów (2015) issues Lampo with a detailed diagnosis: “Crazy traveler, pathological tramp, suffering from poriomania and dissociative fugue” (2015, p. 27). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be diagnosed in many animal heroes who have gone through a lot. Another form of trauma of the pictured animals is that associated with the Holocaust, to mention the German Shepherd from the novel by Gortat (2009), the ‘Jewish’ dog Szlemiel pictured by Groński (2010), or finally the animals in the Warsaw Zoo traumatised by war described by Szczygielski (2013)<sup>12</sup>. Addressing the suffering of animals is becoming a priority in the pro-animal literature for young readers in Poland.

Among the topics raised by Polish authors, there are detailed issues that we can combine not only with care or empathy towards animals, but with attempts to intervene in various areas related to the relationship between humans and non-humans, located in the field of legal regulations. Samojlik in his books for young readers pictures animal life in the area of the reserve, which is the Białowieża National Park. In each publication, he raises a different problem. In *Ryjówka przeznaczenia* [The Shrew of Destiny] (Samojlik, 2012), he talks about littering and pollution of the natural environment, which has catastrophic consequences for animals. *Norka zagłady* [The Mink of Doom] (Samojlik, 2013) deals with the issue of threatening the local fauna by implanting alien species by humans (here, the American mink displacing the national species of mink). In *Powrót rzęsorka* [The Return of the Neomys] (Samojlik, 2015), the habit of burning meadows is criticised as especially dangerous for the creatures inhabiting them. All this in an attractive comic form in which the plot reflects the author’s fascination with the fantasy genre. In turn, the western-styled comic books created together by Wajrak and Samojlik (2016, 2017, 2018) discussed such problems as the presence of bark beetles in the forest or the balance between individual species of forest birds.

Barbara Gawryluk (2012) pictures the custom of organising firework shows, which is often the subject of disputes. The dog Baltic escapes in terror on New Year’s Eve, stunned by the explosions. He almost drowns in the

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<sup>12</sup> In the context of the link between research on the Holocaust, animal studies, and children’s literature, Anita Jarzyna (2019) notes very interestingly that the “new” (p. 197) children’s literature is “pioneering” (p. 198) in how it depicts animals harmed during Shoah. Their suffering is not infantilised, yet it is not a figure of human suffering. Autonomous stories of animal suffering are told because they have become important as such and not for, for example, didactic or stylistic reasons.

Baltic Sea, having found himself on an ice floe drifting far away from the shore. His story has a happy ending, the dog is saved and taken in by the crew of a ship. The publication is evidently interventionist – its task is to sensitise readers to the suffering of domestic animals caused by people's loud celebrations. The author's other two books can also be seen as interventionist. *Klifka*, the story of a seal being looked for by her mother (Gawryluk, 2015), draws the readers' attention to the danger of seals becoming entangled in a fishing net on the Baltic Sea. *Dżok* (Gawryluk, 2007) is the story of the so-called cemetery dog – an animal that, after the death of his owner, wanders unattended in a hospital, at the scene of an accident, or at a cemetery near the owner's grave. The tale of *Dżok* shows not only the fate of animals belonging to elderly or sick people, but also how one can help a cemetery dog. Gawryluk is, therefore, not limited to reporting or testifying to the phenomenon of canine loyalty but focuses on the specific situation in which each pet or its owner can find themselves.

The idea of helping homeless animals is presented in a poetic form for small children (Widzowska-Pasiak, 2015, Kozyra-Pawlak, 2015), as well as in texts for older young readers (Justyniarski, 2014, 2016; Nawrocki, 2018). A shelter dog is the protagonist of Gawryluk's books (2004, 2006a, 2006b), Kowalska's and Jasionowska's (2017), as well as Taborska's (2018). The praiseworthiness of dog adoption was presented to older readers by Marcin Pałasz (2012; a shelter pictured from a dog's perspective, a conscious decision to adopt a dog, caring for an adopted canine). In turn, Wajrak in *Lolek* (2017) presented postulated forms of dealing with a dog hurt by people. In *Sznurek* [String], Adam Lang's (2017) novel for young adults, the situation of animals in the Polish countryside of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the caring attitudes towards them are depicted. Positive figures of animal's caregivers were also outlined by Katarzyna Ryrych (2017), Tom Justyniarski (2014, 2016), and Gawryluk (2007, 2012, 2015).

From the beginning of history of Polish children's and young adult literature, there was exemplary fiction in which the imposed division between slaughter animals and accompanying animals, 'disgusting' and 'decorative' or 'beautiful,' and finally wild and domestic is not accepted. The role of companion animals in this literature is played by a horse (e.g., Konopnicka, 1893), a roe deer (Kownacka, 1957), a lamb (Grabowski, 1966), and a pig (Combrzyńska-Nogala, 2017). This seems to be in line with the strategy of many organisations fighting for animal rights, which see in this extension of the circle of companions a chance to make people aware that all judgments related to e.g., pigs (perceived as dirty and stupid) are to justify their use in meat industry and are adopted a priori. As a consequence of such a strategy,

the image of a pig as a domestic companion as good as a dog or a cat is spreading. According to the words of Diamond (1978): if the use of animals results only from a specific relationship between humans and another species, this relationship should be changed. Such attempts, as is clear in the analysis of the examples presented in this article, are very often made in Polish literature for children and young people.

## Conclusions

A diverse textual world of literature for children and young readers is “inhabited” by a number of animal characters that is difficult to count (Mik, Pokora, Skowera, 2016, p. 9). The advantage of children’s literature (compared to that for adults) is that the child and the world of children’s experience can be a model for creating an alternative relationship with animals and nature (Barcz, 2016, p. 155; Leszczyński, 2006, p. 486). Ethical issues related to the attitude towards animals are presented by literary fiction for children and young adults in Poland by depicting the most basic community of fate, emotions, and feelings between people (often children) and animals. Social discourses about non-human beings infiltrate this literature quite easily because its hypothetical recipient is perceived as particularly sensitive to their fate. The discussion about animals, and even the breaking of strong cultural taboos about their use, becomes one of the trends of Polish 21<sup>st</sup>-century literature for children and young adults. Depicting ways to care for animal welfare or showing aspects of vet care in modern societies is closely linked to attempts to describe reality from a non-human perspective. Threads related to animal treatment are very important for Baratay (2012) in his project of history written from an animal perspective. Singer emphasises, however, that although changes in people’s sensitivity are taking place, they are slow and gradual. The same is true of the discussed literature. It is open to talk about many ethical aspects of human relations with animals and employs various ways of talking about them, both directly and metaphorically. The analysed texts show unequivocal character valuation: negative characters hurt animals and positive ones help them. Issues such as hunting, eating meat, using animals for work, as well as protecting them, have evolved as important topics. The discourse on the above issues ceased to be unambiguously anthropocentric. In addition, new threads are emerging, such as animals’ old age, the right to retirement, treatment, and the eating habits of people. It is very likely that the current issues of human-animal relations (for example, the recent

topic of light pollution – Oziewicz, 2019) will increasingly easily penetrate Polish literature for young people.

The growing social awareness of the ecological threat has a huge impact on Polish children's and young adult literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which in turn evokes not only empathy towards animals, but also ethical reflection. Increasingly, the idea of intervention in specific fields of human-animal relations is inscribed in this literature. Empathy towards animals is not only a tool for learning about human-animal relations, but it also signals ethical issues (Piechota, 2018, pp. 76–77). By strongly targeting the child reader and thanks to the cultural category of childhood inscribed in children's literature by definition, it cannot remain passive towards the topic of harm to animals, there is a child's "disagreement and disbelief" (Barcz, 2016, p. 159) towards cruelty. From the 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children's literature provided arguments for discussion and reflection on animal rights. There is space within humanistic thought for a more 'humane' treatment of animals. Posthuman thought in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, has new arguments to offer. Since "children's literature and posthumanism is [...] a 'natural' pairing" (Jaques, 2015, p. 6), in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Poland (as in many other countries), we can observe an unrestrained exchange of reflections about animal themes in literature for those who will (?) reshape the future.

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