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Teresa Ferenc's Poems for Children

Teresy Ferenc wiersze dla dzieci

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ABSTRACT

The poetry for adult readers of the author of *Wypalona dolina* [Scorched Valley] is based on her traumatic experiences from the past. During her childhood in 1943, Teresa Ferenc survived the pacification of her family village in the Zamość region and the death of her parents. In her works for adults, the poet returns to these events, encoding them in the images of places and people (especially her mother). Ferenc's experiences are also recognizable in the works of her loved ones: Zbigniew Jankowski and their daughters. The poetry and prose of the elder daughter, Anna Janko, such as *Mała zagłada* [Little Extermination], are subjects of research in the fields of memory studies, its epigenetics, and post-memory narrative. It is significant that in her poems for children, Teresa Ferenc separates the young recipient from the images of the atrocities of war and her own autobiographical memory. The poet practices the poetics of growth and relationships, which is, in fact, a tribute to life and its affirmation. She points to natural development and community (human-non-human) bonds as universal factors conducive to the well-being of the child, which also translate into the child's contact with the environment, based on careful and tender observation, care, and responsibility.

In two poetic books, *Najbliższa ojczyzna* [The Closest Homeland], 1982, illustrated by W. Majchrzak] and *Drzewo dziwo* [A Tree of Wonder], 1987, illustrated by A. Kurłowicz, Ferenc uses the focalizing volatility of description, observing the cycle of nature and the phenomena occurring in it (such as a storm or the hydrodynamics of the sea) without losing sight of the particles of reality (such as a stone, a snowflake, and a leaf) and, sometimes, a human being. Ferenc's poetry draws attention to the world, revealing the bonds and entanglements between subjects and objects, and emphasizes their relational nature.

Agency here is dictated by natural factors, bioticty, or vegetativeness, but it also results from the act of creation and meta-reflection, often imposed on these spheres. Most of the poems that make up both books of poetry were first published in the 1970s and 1980s in *Świerszczyk* and/or *Głos Pomorza*. Selected poems by Ferenc were included in well-known anthologies of poetry for children, which proves the popularity of the poet's works from Sopot and the recognition of her work aimed at young readers at that time. Even today, many of these works can be read in the context of environmental humanities.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

poezja dla dzieci,
książka poetycka,

Teresa Ferenc,
trauma wojenna,
poetyka afirmacji

Poezja dla dorosłych autorki *Wypalonej doliny* ufundowana jest na traumatycznych doświadczeniach przeszłości. Teresa Ferenc w dzieciństwie (w 1943 roku) przeżyła pacyfikację rodzinnej wsi na Zamojszczyźnie i śmierć rodziców. W twórczości dla dorosłych poetka powraca do tych wydarzeń, kodując je w wyobrażeniach miejsc i osób (szczególnie matki). Doświadczenia Ferenc dają się też fenograficznie rozpoznać w utworach jej bliskich: Zbigniewa Jankowskiego i córek obojga. Poezja i proza (np. *Mała zagłada*) starszej z nich, Anny Janko, jest nawet przedmiotem badań w obszarze studiów nad pamięcią, jej epigenetyką, narracją postpamięciową. Znamienne, że w wierszach dla dzieci Teresa Ferenc separuje małego odbiorcę od obrazów wojennego zła i własnej pamięci autobiograficznej. Uprawia poetykę wzrostu i relacji, która jest w istocie hołdem dla życia, jego afirmacją. Wskazuje na naturalny rozwój i wspólnotową („ludsko-nie-ludzką”) więź jako uniwersalne czynniki sprzyjające dobrostanowi dziecka, przekładające się też na jego kontakt z otoczeniem, oparty na uważnej i czulej obserwacji, troskliwości i odpowiedzialności. W dwóch książkach poetyckich: *Najbliższa ojczyzna* (1982, il. W. Majchrzak) oraz *Drzewo dziwo* (1987, il. A. Kurlowicz). Ferenc stosuje fokalizacyjną zmienność opisu, przyglądając się cyklowi przyrody i zachodzącym w niej zjawiskom (jak burza czy hydrodynamika morza), nie tracąc z pola widzenia drobin rzeczywistości (jak pestka, płatek śniegu, liść), do których, przy zastosowaniu ruchomej skali i perspektywy, należy niekiedy także jednostka ludzka. Poezja Ferenc wymusza uwagę dla świata, ujawnia więzi i sploty pomiędzy podmiotami i przedmiotami, uwypukla ich relacyjny charakter. Sprawstwo jest tu podyktowane czynnikami naturalnymi, biotycznością czy wegetacyjnością, ale wynika również z aktu tworzenia i metarefleksji, nierzadko nakładanych na te pierwsze sfery. Większość utworów, które złożyły się na obie książki poetyckie, miała swój pierwodruk w latach 70. i 80. XX wieku na łamach „Świerszczyka” i/lub „Głosu Pomorza”. Wybrane wiersze Ferenc weszły w skład znanych antologii poezji dla dzieci, co świadczy o popularności wierszy sopockiej poetki i uznaniu dla jej twórczości adresowanej do najmłodszych w tamtym czasie. Również i dzisiaj wiele utworów można odczytywać w kontekście humanistyki środowiskowej.

The work of authors who divided their efforts between writing for adults and creating literature for children, particularly those whose childhood was marked by World War II, presents a unique phenomenon. Creators born around the 1920s and 1930s consistently separate their traumatic wartime experiences from their writing for children, withholding these memories from their works for young readers, possibly as a form of (self)protection. This tendency is especially noticeable among poets who often create two distinct streams of expression within this (non)transmission of the past: one for adults and one for children. This separation occurs regardless of whether they equally engage in both literary fields, as seen in the works of Joanna Kulmowa or Jerzy Ficowski, or only occasionally publish children's literature. Among authors who produce literature for children, as it were, on the margins of their works for adults, there are two notable poets born in 1934: Stanisław Grochowiak and Teresa Ferenc. Grochowiak (who authored two poetry books for children illustrated by Maria Sołtyk—*To było gdzieś* [Somewhere in the Past] and *Biały bażant* [The White Pheasant])—and Teresa Ferenc, whose children's poems, though less well known, maintain the high standards of poetry for young readers.

The poetry for adults by the author of *Wypalona dolina* [Scorched Valley] includes images of the pacification of her hometown, the death of her parents, and her orphaned childhood. The burning of the village of Sochy in the Zamość region and the massacre of its inhabitants by Nazi troops on June 1, 1943, have been extensively described in historical studies and literature. These events continue to interest historians, and as long as the few remaining witnesses, who were children at the time, are alive, their poignant stories and biographies remain a vital testimony. On that tragic day, Teresa Ferenc's parents, along with other relatives and neighbors, were murdered before the eyes of horrified children who managed to escape with their lives. This childhood limit-experience shaped the trajectory of the poet's life. Ferenc's works, along with those of Zbigniew Jankowski and their daughters, reflect a quest for the voice and words that would be able to figuratively and metonymically capture (at least partially) the totality of these experiences (Dąbrowska, 2015; Wądolny-Tatar and Klimczuk, 2017). Additionally, Anna Janko's *Małą Zagładą* [Little Extermination] shed light on the intricacies of family life in the shadow of wartime hardships, underscoring the imperative to explore the challenging legacy passed down through generations by the law of epigenetics, a legacy now explored within the extensive realm of post-memory studies.¹

1 Memory studies are currently being conducted on a large scale across many fields. In relation to the topic at hand, I will list the works of Justyna Tabaszewska (2013, 2016), the collective monograph *Od pamięci biodidaktycznej do postpamięci* [From Biodidactic Memory to Postmemory] (Szostek et al., 2013), and Anna Mach's monograph (2016). Detailed studies have also examined Anna Janko's work as a representative of the 2G generation (Artvinska, 2016; Nowacki, 2019; Grzemska, 2020; Kasińska, 2022).

I touch on these issues briefly, as they have been explored in various studies, though only a select few are mentioned above. My goal is to emphasize the sidelining of themes motivated by Teresa Ferenc's most difficult personal experiences in her work for children, which, despite this, remains somewhat separate from her main artistic endeavors. In the 1980s, Ferenc, an established poet based in Sopot (who has recently passed away) published two volumes of illustrated poetry. Thus, this was not the beginning of her creative journey, but rather a period of intensive involvement in the country's literary scene, spanning various regions where she lived, from Lower Silesia to Pomerania (Tri-City). She published poetry collections at most every few years, with notable releases for adult readers in the 1980s such as *Pieta* (1981), *Grzeszny Pacierz* [The Sinful Prayer] (1983), *Nóż za Ptakiem* [Knife Behind the Bird] (1987), and *Kradzione w Raju* [Stolen in Paradise] (1988). These works, characterized by a poetic exploration of elemental themes interwoven with the complexities of theodicy, delve into the intimate dimensions of Ferenc's biography, heavily influenced by the hecatomb of war and a biopsychosocial sense of orphanhood.

In her illustrated books for children, the lyrical focus is on growth and development, and the acceptability of the world in its natural order. These themes had already shaped Ferenc's poetic imagination in her earlier works for adults, before she fully explored autobiographical memory (Pietruszewska-Kobiela, 2011) in collections like *Zalążnia* [Seed Case] (1968) and *Godność Natury* [Dignity of Nature] (1973). In *Najbliższa ojczyzna* [The Closest Homeland] (1982) and *Drzewo dziwo* [A Tree of Wonder] (1987), these themes gain new expression through both micro- and macro-observations of the surrounding world.

Unlike Joanna Kulmowa's poetics of "gazing in awe" or Anna Kamińska's (who had a friendly relationship with Ferenc and Jankowski) blending of traditional and children's folklore as seen in her earlier volumes *Pod jabłonią* [Under the Apple Tree] or *Dębowa kołyska* [Oak Cradle] (Zarębianka, 2011; Drożdziejcka, 2018). Ferenc employs a focalizing descriptive style. She observes the cycles of nature and various phenomena, such as storms or the sea's hydrodynamics, without losing sight of the minutiae of reality, like seeds, snowflakes, and leaves. This shifting scale and perspective sometimes include the human being. Ferenc's poetry demands a close look at the world, revealing the ties and entanglements between subjects and objects and highlighting their relational nature. The sense of agency in her work is driven by natural factors, biotic elements, and vegetative growth, as well as the creative process and metareflection, often superimposed on these natural aspects. At the intersection

Among the authors of published and unpublished doctoral theses in this field are Natalia Żórawska-Janik, Kamila Dzika-Jurek, and Katarzyna Bielewicz-Jędrós.

of biological and artistic processes, she works towards a unique poetics of growth and relationship, so ultimately a poetics of affirming life.

The two poetry books in question should be regarded as visual and compositional wholes, perhaps even as co-authored works, given the crucial role of illustration in these artistic ideofoms. Words and images can have an equal share in creating a complex message for young readers, catering to their aesthetic, ludic, cognitive, and compensatory needs (Leszczyński, 2015, pp. 267–289). The contiguity of words is never haphazard, although it is usually the poem that comes first in the sense of an impulse or signature created earlier, awaiting the counter-signature of the illustrator. The images can complement, comment on, foreshadow, transcend, or even negate the verbal message. Every act of communication is possible here, depending on the mutual intent and agreement of the (two) authors on the way and order of presenting content (Centner-Guz, 2017).

In the working on her poetry books, Teresa Ferenc collaborated with two illustrators: Wiesław Majchrzak and Adam Kurlowicz. The first artist, Wiesław Majchrzak, whose work is less frequently cited today than that of his wife, Bożena Truchanowska² (with whom he carried out many projects, such as illustrations for the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm), created the illustrations accompanying Ferenc's poetry collection *Najbliższa ojczyzna* [The Closest Homeland]. I deliberately use the participle "accompanying" because of the representational and realistic nature of the illustrations. In this poetry book, the relationship between word and image is also characterized by a certain selectivity; the illustrations correspond to specific poems and do not form a narrative sequence, although there was potential for a more interdependent arrangement of word and image content due to the poet's respect for the rhythm of nature, as inscribed in the calendar (Ożóg-Winiarska, 2001, 2002, 2016). The poetry collection includes twelve works with the names of months in the titles, presented in a chronological but non-linear sequence, as they are interspersed with other poems, though also most often related to nature's four seasons and their symptoms, and effects of cyclical changes, as well as the habits of people and animals.

According to Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna, Wiesław Majchrzak's illustrations and paintings, which embrace cultural, historical, architectural, and even exotic themes

2 There is no mention of the artist in the publications of Eliza Leszczyńska-Pieniak (2019) and Barbara Gawryluk, 2019. However, in the lexicon *Admirałowie wyobraźni. 100 lat polskiej ilustracji w książkach dla dzieci* [Admirals of Imagination: 100 Years of Polish Illustration in Children's Books], edited by Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna (2020), Wiesław Majchrzak's work, due to the concept of the publication, is subordinated to the categories described in the individual entries, concerning styles, techniques, themes, and artistic conventions. Majchrzak is recalled in this compendium as an illustrator of Polish and translated works by Janusz Korczak, Alina Centkiewiczowa, Jan Aleksander Zaremba, Franciszek Fenikowski, Zachariasz Topelius, Jean Ollivier, Italo Calvino and others.

and motifs, when incorporated into short prose pieces for children or rhymed narrative works:

evoke strong associations with colorful compositions for fairy tales and poetry. These works seem to be woven from tiny elements, meticulously painted miniature flowers, petals, leaves, twigs, and snowflakes. The composition and ornamentation used in these pieces are reminiscent of medieval and Renaissance embroidered textiles or even tapestries with narrative themes (2008, p. 240).

The illustration expert further notes that the characters, props, and elements of the world depicted by the artist often blend into the background, becoming components that are largely transformed graphically. The details of the images emerge from a tangle of dotted and seemingly vibrating lines, forming a grid or the effect of cracks on a wall or frost patterns on glass. As Wincencjusz-Patyna states, they give the impression of having been made “with a tracing wheel” (2008, p. 238). The eye is drawn not only to the ornamental details but also the overall decorativeness and finesse of Majchrzak’s representations, which use a full range of colors, and, as if to counterbalance these tangled and fading shapes, often enclose and stabilize the image with a frame.

When creating illustrations for Ferenc’s works, the artist often employs floral motifs, for example, constructing artistic dendrography with landscape elements. The series of poems about individual months, scattered throughout the volume, has its illustrative counterparts. The poet fully personifies the months, making them into thinking, speaking, and acting first-person constructs or, in some cases, merely anthropomorphizes them by giving them human characteristics and movements, presented by another I speaker. This is how August is depicted:

August sat down,
he is resting,
after a hot summer.

He mowed the grass,
he mowed the rye.
Now he’s waiting for autumn.

He hung the sickle
over the barn –
the silver sickle of the moon.
(“August,” *CH*, 50, excerpt)³

3 Poems and excerpts from the poetry book *The Closest Homeland* by T. Ferenc (1982) will be marked directly in the main text with the title abbreviation (CH) and an indication that the text is an excerpt if it

The month of August is depicted as a figure that makes decisions and acts on a macro scale, while also being very human (needing rest on a hot day and cultivating fields and meadows). Mowing represents general agrarian activities and evokes images of buildings and places where harvested grain and grass are stored. One such place is the barn, illuminated by the moon at night. Ferenc's imagery of the moon's shape corresponds to the metonymic wordplay, using cultural naming clichés. Majchrzak, on the other hand, enhances the rural character of this imagery by giving the barn a concrete appearance: a wooden structure of mixed construction (partly timbered), covered with plant material (reeds or straw), with massive open doors, a tree with leaves resembling ash leaves nearby, and sheaves of grain or hay gathered in front of the entrance. The framed section of the landscape is also decorated with a full moon, the only element that transcends the features of the poetic painting, and in fact stands in contradiction to them. It is difficult to decide whether the viewer's confusion from these semantic differences is intended by the artist. I would rather be inclined to assume that it results from Majchrzak's possible misreading of the poem, or perhaps the use of ready-made illustrative material created before the poem was written. Nonetheless, the differences between the verbal and pictorial messages can be educationally valuable, and serve as an exercise in perceptiveness when reading the poem with a child.

is not cited in full. A similar notation will be used for excerpts or complete works from the poetry book *A Tree of Wonder* by T. Ferenc (1987), using the abbreviation TW to denote the title of that volume.

SIERPIEŃ

Usiadł sierpień,
odpoczywa
po gorącym lecie.

Skosił trawy,
skosił żyta.
Czeka już na jesień.

Sierp zawiesił
nad stodołą –
srebrny sierp księżycy.

Sierpem kiedyś
żęto zboże –
księżyc w niebie wisił...

Sierpień w sierpniu,
w końcu lata,
ma swoje uroki.

Sierpniu, sierpniu,
do jesieni
już tylko dwa kroki.

50



Illustration 1. Scanned pages from *The Closest Homeland* (Ferenc, 1982, pp. 50–51)

The month of September, as the I speaker of the poem, is fully personified. The protagonist is aware of his own duality, resulting from the change of seasons, and says:

It's no longer summer
within me,
not yet autumn.

My one pocket
holds warmth,
and the other
cold.
("September," CH, p. 54, excerpt)

The design of the character is guided by the principle of inclusion and later efficiency, directed towards the recent past, when September declares: "I will spread heather / throughout the forest. // I will light the trees into autumn piles" ("September," *The Closest Homeland*, p. 54, excerpt). The poet employs cultural metaphors of carpet and fire to describe the forest space, illustrating changes in the ecosystem both horizontally and vertically, with a selection of warm colors opposite to green. Majchrzak's illustration portrays one "side" of September, still close to summer, with just a hint of blooming heather signaling the approaching autumn. It depicts an oak-hornbeam area rather than a forest, indicated by the low tree cover and vegetation typical of wetlands. However, the point is not to trace incongruities between word and image. The artist, using his imagination of natural spaces, creates iconotexts that align in their overall lyrical and nostalgic tone with the poems.

WRZESIEŃ

Już nie lato
we mnie,
jeszcze nie jesień.

Jedną z ciepłem mam,
drugą z chłodem
kieszeń.

Na początku
sierpień pożegnałem
godnie.

Pod koniec
jesień powitam –
jej pierwsze tygodnie.

Po całym lesie
rozścielę wrzosy.

Zapalę drzewa
w jesienne stopy.

54



Illustration 2. Scanned pages of *The Closest Homeland* (Ferenc, 1982, pp. 54–55)

Ferenc rarely uses the conventional genres of children's poetry, with exceptions indicated by the titles of her poems, such as "White Lullaby," "Drawing Book," "Questions and Answers," "Fir Lullaby," and "A Christmas Carol." However, her children's poetry follows repetitive patterns similar to children's folklore (Skotnicka, 1994). Ferenc's poems create imagery through changes of grade or scale that intensify or diminish the lyrical situations, as seen in "Spring" and "Old Windmill," or prolong their duration, as in "Dream of a Rainy Week." This can also involve enlarging or reducing the scale of people, objects, and phenomena, as in "Storm by the Sea." Common stylistic devices include enumeration and various forms of repetition, with and without variation, such as refrains or anaphors in the whole poem or only its parts. Additionally, in her poems, questions posed on behalf of a community, according to the cues in the verses, seek answers that take into account those about whom or on whose behalf the question was asked. "May, / our May, / what will you give / to the meadows, / to the birds, / to the trees, / to the children / besides the sun, / besides the warmth, / besides the May leaves, / besides the green wind?" (May, CH 30, excerpt). In another piece, polyphonic questions and answers create a riddle-poem that does not identify the culprit but instead repeats an alternate name using a negative indefinite pronoun. This invites young readers to participate by recognizing signs of winter: "The icicle from the roof is gone. / Who attached the icicle? / Nobody! / What do you mean nobody? / And who pinches our noses? / Who pinches our ears? / Who blows white snow in our eyes? / Nobody ("Nobody," CH 21, excerpt)." Many similar examples of such iterations can be found in the author's poems.

Oral storytelling, dialogue, formulaic elements, and links to kinesthetics are also fundamental aspects of children's poetry in Ferenc's works. The poet also weaves folk adages and proverbs into her poems ("A dog runs through oats," *Milenia's Story*, CH 8, excerpt), paremias associated with the names of the months ("March," "April"), and provides elements of etymological explanations (like in "June" and "October"). Occasionally, she integrates attributes of folk daily life into her works, admonishing the importance of matters and things that are small, simple, first (Pawlik-Kopek, 2019). For instance, in her collection *The Closest Homeland*, the protagonist receives a clay pot and a painted wooden bird from her parents. The girl attempts to preserve both fragile objects, as well as makes a successful effort to breathe life back into the wooden toy. The poem evokes biographical associations and tropes, guiding readers familiar with Ferenc's mature oeuvre towards contexts present in her works for adult audiences, her memoirs and interviews and literary vivisections of the poet's life in the works of her daughters, especially Anna Janko (Kwiatkowska, 2015). These contexts often explore Ferenc's traumatic experiences – psychological anxieties and family dysfunction – as well as her rural childhood, brutally interrupted by the war, the pacification of her hometown, and the death of her parents, all recorded in her poetry. The dream of the

healing power of water, of rejuvenation and vitality, reminiscent of folk imagery and fairy tales, can only come true in poetry and finds expression in lines like "A living drop / flashed in the beak. / The bird swayed / the air. // The grain sang in gold, / in the pot – the clay, in the hedge." (CH, 7, excerpt). The poet respects the rules of the construction of a child's world: transitioning from familiar spaces to the distant and unknown. While the title's "closest homeland" initially refers to the home and backyard, it also encapsulates the generational childhood experiences of people born before 1939, particularly those who grew up in rural areas.

The opening poem of *The Closest Homeland* hints at the loss of a mother-daughter relationship. Here, alongside the universal theme, the rural setting and the poet's decision to give one of the heroines her own real name (Tereska) reverse the usual dynamic of daughters searching for their mother, a theme frequently explored in poems for adults (e.g., "Mother in Ash Trees," "Mother Shot," "Mother in Conversation," "Mother Burning," "Mother Wooden," "Mother with Me," and "Mother with a Flake of Fire"). In this children's poem, it is the mother, amidst nature, who seeks her daughters, who are gradually becoming independent. This narrative likely reflects not only Ferenc's personal experiences but also offers a broader poetic message about adolescence, the period when children begin to distance themselves from their family and home. Simultaneously, this message does not exclude the interpretation of the lyrical situation as a playful game of hide-and-seek, ultimately ending in the inability to find those hidden. The poem follows a bracketing structure, opening and closing with a three-verse statement conveying a sense of hiding or "flying away," while also introducing a fairy-tale-like atmosphere: "The mother had daughters. / They grew wings, / and flew away into the wide world" ("Mother Had Daughters," excerpt). Meanwhile, the central part of the poem is filled with the mother's searches and calls, as she looks into bird's nests and explores the yard.

The conceptual dominant feature across many of Ferenc's works for children is the poetics of growth and well-being fostered through connection with nature. The title character of "Mother Earth" embodies qualities of care, nurturing, and tender presence.

She curled up and fell asleep
beside the fox's son.
The beaver family nestled
close to her.

And how much grain

who can count it -
does the Earth,
prudent, thrifty,

all-nourishing,
keep in her pockets?
("Mother Earth," CH 66, excerpt).

In Ferenc's poetry, images of nature and its cycles lend themselves to focalization, offering a range of visual and sensory perspectives through close-ups and zoom-outs, as well as different viewpoints from various characters. She portrays trees as ever-renewing entities that impart vitality to their surroundings, starting as small beings and growing into powerful forces over time. She captures the miraculous transformation of an acorn into an oak, the majestic king of trees under the nurturing influence of the sun, rain, and soil:

In the acorn shell,
the oak found its cradle.

Still without a crown,
without oak's majesty.

Still under its head,
a royal cloak rolled up.
("Oak Cradle," CH 23, excerpt).

In the following two excerpts, poetic phraseology introduces humor into the poems while also highlighting the speaker's tenderness and the anticipation of the seed's metamorphosis into a plant.

A little apple tree lives inside the apple,
So tiny it could easily get lost in the grass,
Should it decide to venture out.

The little apple tree feels cramped inside the apple,
Calling out, knocking, tapping.
The apple's doors opened,
And off to the orchard she went.
("The little apple tree," CH 28)

When my pine
was in the tiny cone,
all morning, all evening,
all day and night,
it grew in the grain.
("Pines All Around," CH 34, excerpt).

The micro-perspective, such as a view of a grain, leaf, or snowflake, is complemented by the macro-perspective of the cosmos, often serving as a reference point of location, scale, and time. The Milky Way appears as a cosmographic motif in works like "A Walk with Father by the Sea" or "The Path Behind the House," creating an impression of openness, infinite existence in many incarnations, and a sense of belonging to a larger cosmological order. In Ferenc's poetry, the small order is home, while the cosmos is defined by the *oikos*.

The absence of the mother disrupts this personal space, making it feel dead, divided, and alien to the child. The house's furnishings function differently, serving as reminders of separation, even if the parent's departure is temporary, as depicted in the poem "Home, Mom, and Me." By framing the lyrical situation as a temporary absence, the poet refrains from conveying the possible permanent absence of the mother, thus shielding the young reader from a deeply traumatic experience which she experienced in childhood. In her children's work, she sets a boundary of emotional safety, which she never crosses. However, in the final parts of the poem, she articulates the essential need for connection in terms of a dyad, or rather a triad: "Because me, home, and mom / is one. // Because mom, home, and me / is a living body" ("Home, Mom, and Me," CH 71, excerpt). The changing order of the words in this triad is noteworthy.

Describing the house as a space abandoned by the mother makes it feel exposed and eerie, filled with different acoustics (e.g., creaking, squeaking, sighing, floor and door slamming). Let us note that in the poem's title, the lexeme "house" appears first. Only the mother's return can restore the house to its former state and character, as perceived by the child through multiple senses. The house/home, as a space that connects people, can communicate their absence (hence, the noun naming it appears later in two different arrangements between the names of people: the noun and the personal pronoun). Home, as a safe haven, a place of refuge, is like the hermit's hut described by Gaston Bachelard, around which the elements rage (Buczyńska-Garewicz, 2006).

If, following Bachelard (Ples-Bęben, 2020), we adopt the classification of creativity types according to the poetics of elements, which organizes poets' imaginations, it becomes apparent that the phenomenological dominant in Ferenc's poetry is the element of earth, symbolizing stability and sustainable growth (Pietruszewska-Kobiela, 2010). Additionally, motifs and images of fire are prominently featured in her poems, particularly in those intended for adult audiences (Ferenc, 2009). These motifs serve as representations of time, wartime experiences, emotional depth, and poetic intimacy (Kwiatkowska, 2017). Occasionally, in her poetry, there is an increasing presence of aquatic imagery, featuring hydrodynamic and aerodynamic metaphors, which the poet also embraces in her works for younger audiences. An exemplary instance of this dynamic fusion of elemental forces can be found in the poem "The Wind Racing with

Snow.” Here, the poet paints a striking portrayal of interpenetrating atmospheric phenomena momentarily asserting dominance over the world, as if trying to mold them into the form of a winter vehicle.⁴ However, these elements vanish within the fluidity of the moving image, intentionally struggling to constitute themselves:

What is the horse,
what is the harness?
The sleigh has lost its way.

The white harness,
Enshrouded in ice
The coachman in calling
(“The Wind Racing with Snow,” CH 73, excerpt).

The poet’s evident embrace of winter and its allure is striking. In “The Closest Homeland,” poems such as “Winter,” “White Lullaby,” “White Lady,” “White Gentleman,” and “Forest on the Glass” explore this theme. Additionally, in *A Tree of Wonder*, we find “Winter Balcony,” “Winter Orchards,” and “Winter Garden.” Notably, throughout these works, the speaker consistently demonstrates care and consideration for animals and plants during this season.

In another poem, the imagery revolves around the concept of chiasm, or a series of repetitive activities with varying directional forces, portraying the interlocking and alternation of elements. The fluctuating water activity and air movements culminate in the intensity of the storm.

The water dips in the wind
and the wind dips
in the water—
a storm.

A mountain below
and a valley above.
The wind carves a stream from a wave,
the wind scatters streams—
into a storm.

⁴ There are noticeable conceptual parallels present in both Ferenc’s poetry for adults and children. A figure coupled to a vehicle appears in a poignant image, alluding to the death of her mother and the arson of the village of Sochy by Nazi troops in 1943, in the piece *Harness with Mother*: „She – with reins instead of hands / She – with wheels instead of legs / She – drives day and night / A horse white from the heat” (Ferenc, 1984, p. 195). In poems for mature audiences, these motifs (e.g., mother, home, tree, nature) function on a completely different basis.

The sky falls into the water,
 The water rises to the sky.
 A cloud rides on a cloud—
 into a storm. ("Storm by the Sea," CH, 56)

Poetic depictions of natural phenomena, both animate and inanimate, observed with tenderness, meticulously preserved, and nurtured, firmly anchor Teresa Ferenc's work within the realm of environmental humanities today. The poet brings attention to human actions that disrupt balance in nature and result in environmental degradation. In her poem "Water," she directs the gaze of young readers towards the vulnerability of the environment: "What will the yellow grass say, /and the cracked earth, / the empty well and the dry river, /and the Sahara without shade?" ("Water," CH 53, excerpt). In the poems "What Does a Tree Do," and "Fir Lullaby," she explores the essence of a tree. The second poem portrays the speaker's dreamlike experience, recounting a dream of transforming into a fir tree, with birds perched on its branches and a squirrel frolicking nearby. Originally titled "A Tree of Wonder,"⁵ this text serves as the opening piece of a collection of children's poems from 1987, lending its name to the entire collection.

The second collection will not be discussed in detail here because it includes over thirty works previously published in *The Closest Homeland*, along with a dozen new poems written after 1982 or perhaps not included in Majchrzak's illustrated poetry book. Some of the poems republished in *A Tree of Wonder* differ delimitatively from their earlier versions. The cyclical and natural arrangement suggested by the sequence of poems in *The Closest Homeland* is notably loosened in this collection; for instance, not all of the poems titled after months and seasons, which created an interesting poetic calendar, appear. This makes it harder to recognize the compositional theme and the author's intention in ordering the poems. It can be arbitrarily assumed that the new theme is an admiration for nature and a child's sense of wonder at the world, with the essential motif being the tree as the axis mundi (Żukowski, 1988; Tessarowicz). Ferenc maintains a poetics of growth and relationships, reinforcing literary representations of the elements as biomatter in her poems. In addition to the aquatic imagery, *A Tree of Wonder* includes lyric poems such as "Vistula," "The Colors of Water," and "West by the Bay." The poem "Fire" is similar to a poetic riddle, with its solution given in the title and ending. The poet refers to the anthroponomic features of fire though along with their negation, highlighting the contradictory nature of fire.

5 Perhaps this change is dictated by the identical title of a poem written earlier by Jerzy Liebert, created in a completely different convention: mortal-tanalogical. Today it is sometimes recalled in maladic contexts, including in the texts of young researchers (Goniewicz, 2022).

It has no teeth,
yet it bites –
wood in the stove.

It has no hands,
yet it shakes –
a cloud in the sky.

It has no mouth,
yet it swallows –
a gulp of air.

It has no instruments,
yet music,
music plays within it. (“Fire,” TW, 55, excerpt).

Anna Kamińska once wrote a poem with a similar meaning. Her depiction of fire was part of the folkloric and everyday life of families in the countryside during the 1960s (when her volume with illustrations by Adam Kilian was written). Her book of poetry, *Oak Cradle*, can be viewed as a sensory-rich literary and visual project addressed to young readers, catering to their need for multi-sensory exploration of the world (Wądolny-Tatar, 2020).

The processes of creation and biological life, closely intertwined in Teresa Ferenc’s poetry create intriguing semantic affiliations. All the works that feature metareflection and contemplation of nature’s demiurgic power, featured in *The Closest Homeland*, also appear in *A Tree of Wonder*. The illustrations for this volume were created by Adam Kurlowicz, who, unlike Wiesław Majchrzak, only occasionally worked on book illustrations, devoting himself mainly to prints and posters. Kurlowicz crafted visual metaphors that synthesized Ferenc’s poetic words, providing a mental shortcut while generalizing the message. He intuitively responded to the non-literal nature of the poetry, going beyond realistic illustration and inviting the viewer to engage in mental experimentation. He also enhanced the synergy of image and word with vibrant colors. “Drawing Book” in *A Tree of Wonder* features a tree with crayons/roots and birds perched in its green crown. However, he did not strictly adhere to the specific bird species mentioned in the poem, such as tits, wagtails, sparrows, rollers, and warblers.

It’s dark and cramped
within these crayons,
let us out – they ask,
the roller, the warbler,
the leaves and the buds. (“Drawing Book,” TW, 12, excerpt).

The conventional nature of the illustrations does not hinder the interpretation of the poem; rather, it enriches it. Kurlowicz blends meanings, overlays imagery, and merges reality with imagination, opting for metaphorical expression with an aesthetic of excess, accumulation, and close-up detail.

RYSOWANKA

– Wypuść nas wszystkie,
z kredki uwolnij –
sikorki proszą,
pliszki i wróble,
prosi mak polny.

– Ciemno nam w środku,
ciasno w tych kredkach.
Wypuść nas – proszą
kraska, pokrzewka,
liście i pąki.

Ptaki na drzewach
w kucki usiadły,
wnet zaczną śpiewać.



Figure 3: Scanned pages of *A Tree of Wonder* (Ferenc, 1987, pp. 12–13).

MOTYLE

Gdzie podziały się motyle?
Co się z nimi stało?
Jeszcze wczoraj,
niby śniegiem,
motylami wiało.

Jeszcze wczoraj,
razem z trzmielcem,
siedziały na róży,
słodki nektar popijały
z kielichów niedużych.

Paż królowej,
jak to paź,
do pałacu
poszedł spać.
A te żółte
i te białe
także skrzydła poskładały,
tuż przy tronie,
w wielkiej izbie,
na słonecznej ziemi przyzbie...

44

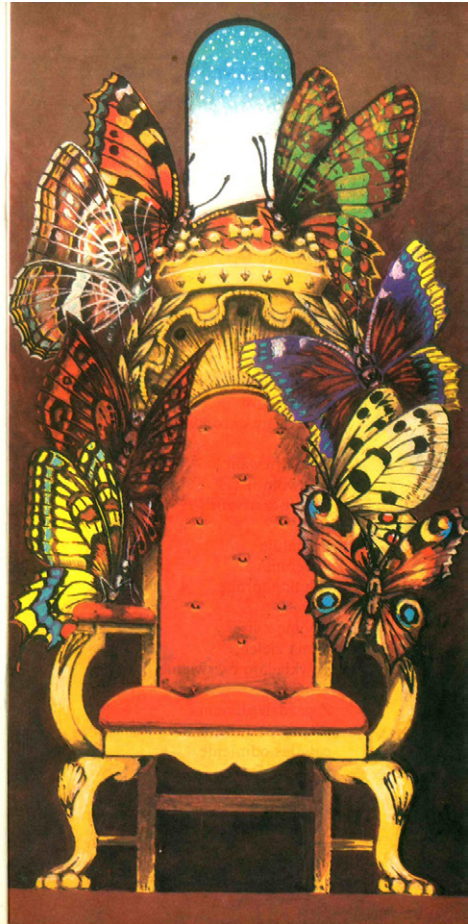


Figure 4: Scanned pages of *A Tree of Wonder* (Ferenc, 1987, pp. 44–45).

ZIMOWY BALKON

Szumi jodła, sosna,
szarpie wiatr gałęzie.
Zachwiało balkonem,
co tu się dzieć będzie?

Kowalik i dzięcioł
stukają o beton.
Zamarzły im smyczki,
zgubił się kamerton.

Przyleciała sówka,
rozpostarła skrzydła,
na niebieskich piórkach
melodia zastygła.

Zawiewa, zacina
mrozami od wschodu.
Odczytać nie można
nuty w grudce lodu.

Za oknem, za drogą
gwizdy wiatru ostre.

Śnieg zasypał balkon
mroźnym, białym ostem.

56



Figure 5: Scanned pages of *A Tree of Wonder* (Ferenc, 1987, pp. 56–57).

ZIMOWE SĄDY

W moim uchu
skrzypi grusza.
Gałązkami ktoś porusza.
Drobny ptak – pewnie sikora.
Szepcze:
– Cała jestem z głodu
chora. Proszę,
sprowadź mi doktora.
Pokaż mu głodne gardło –
jak szeroko się otwarło
na słoninkę,
na okruszek.
Pokaż mu pusty brzuszek.

W drugim uchu:
– trrrrrr – znów słyszę
kołatkę, a może dzwonek.
Głowa to, czy ptasi domek?
Może któryś ptak mi powie,
ćwierkający w mojej głowie?

Patrzę, słucham,
dzwonią dzwonce,
gołębie w górze turkoczą:
– Grochu! Grochu
przynieś,
podzielimy się po trochu.

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Figure 6: Scanned pages of *A Tree of Wonder* (Ferenc, 1987, pp. 58–59).

Ferenc acknowledges the demiurgic power of nature and trusts in the child's creative activity, regardless of its type, degree of inspiration, originality, or the stimuli that trigger it (Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2003). She views the natural environment as a source of creative thinking, as seen when she depicts the world regaining colors after rain in "Painter of the Sky," suggests the haptic nature of experience in "The Poet and the Hedgehog," and promotes joyful solarism in lines like: "The sun / is a golden cache of colors. / It hides them in the evening. / In the morning they spring up / sleepy and healthy" ("Cache of Colors," CH 33, excerpt). Ferenc's meta-reflexive poetry blurs the boundaries between the textual and real worlds, writing and experience, in both processual and communal aspects, as illustrated in "Animals from Brodwino."

My golden, pinewood table,
when it was a tree –
grew tall
above the house,
above the birdsong.

Now it speaks with me
in verse,
talks with me in poetry
about the animals
that it once
loved like its own.
("Animals of Brodwino," CH, 46, excerpt).

A "human-not-human" community (Kil et al., 2015) is made up of the poet, the "primary thing" (Pawlik-Kopek, 2019)—a table made from natural materials—and animals that previously interacted with the tree from which the table was made. In this poetic image, the table functions as an actant in Latourian terms (Latour, 2010). The animals in Brodwino are as much imagined visitors to the tree in the past as they are poetic representations of the wildlife in the Tri-City Landscape Park surrounding northwestern Sopot. This biographical and locational detail also subtly reveals the poet's residence and creative environment. Among the animals, a squirrel engages in a dialogue with the poet, questioning whether the furniture truly participates in the creation of poetry. The poet responds:

Oh, it's true, it's true
Like the fact that you were in the woods,
Like the fact that the chair was
A singing tree,
Like the fact that you're inside the poem
Like inside a hollow tree.
("Animals of Brodwino," CH, 47, excerpt).

The fluidity of boundaries between text (poetry) and reality is captured here by enumerating events as equal. Unlike poets such as Józef Ratajczak, who rely on dream-like auras, nighttime magic, or fairy tale worlds, or Ludwik Jerzy Kern, who employs conventions of humor and bizarre occurrences placing successive characters inside his titular *Strange Stanza* as a spatial-graphic open module, Ferenc opts for the principle of the middle ground. She breaks down the barriers between language and experience, life and death, human and animal, without the need for dreamy atmospheres or fantastical elements. Instead, she embraces a principle of finding harmony in nature while upholding human values like responsibility, care, and positive engagement with the environment.

The majority of poems featured in the two poetry books were initially published during the 1970s and 1980s in *Świerszczyk* and/or *Głos Pomorza* magazines. Ferenc's selected works also found their way into well-known anthologies of children's poetry, such as *Szedł czarodziej* [A Wizard Walked By] (Kot, 1986) and *Księga domu* [The Book of Home] (Onichimowska and Prządka, 1993). This shows the popularity of Ferenc's poetry and the recognition it garnered among young readers at the time. Ferenc's poetic themes of growth and relationships are essentially a tribute to life and its affirmation. She emphasizes natural development and interpersonal bonds ("human-not-human") as vital elements for a child's well-being, influencing their interaction with the world around them, based on careful and sensitive observation, care and responsibility in actions. This message is all the more valuable because it originates from an artist who adeptly shields young readers from the traumas she experienced during childhood, thus safeguarding them from images of wartime atrocities. And perhaps shielding the artist herself from the resurgence of past trauma (Wądołny-Tatar, 2016).

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