The Experience of Refugeeism and Its Portrayals

The current social significance of this issue is clear. The sources of subsequent waves of refugees are military conflicts, ecological catastrophes and economic inequalities, and the history of Europe and the world is full of examples of such events at smaller or larger scales that found their way into literary and artistic creation.

The refugee experience is often the source of traumatic events, but sometimes it also happens to be – as testified by those who have been exiled and refugees – the beginning of artistic creation (or its significant evolution), or of reconfiguration of old and assimilation of new cultural codes and aesthetics. It is not a coincidence that Józef Wittlin wrote in 1959 about *Nędze i blaski wygnania* (Misery and Glory of Exile).

There are also other approaches at play, built on myths or – quite the contrary – on anti-myths; factographical and counter-factual narratives; stories focusing on the collective fate or individual biographies. Some of the narratives come together to form the founding myths of imagined communities, others exemplify critical conversations with the old myths. All of these decontextualisations and recontextualisations of plots that create a symbolic universe are initiated as a result of 'relocation' of their authors into new cultural spaces.

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> It is also of interest how subsequent generations discover and confront the refugee experience of their parents and grandparents; how the assimilation processes go and how a certain refugee 'isolationism' develops and consolidates.
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> No less important is the issue of the relationship between the refugees and the hosts of the countries, regions and local places where they seek either temporary or permanent shelter. The influx of people from either alien cultures or related ones forces the natives to reconfigure the notions of hospitality and the established approaches to the other. The societies of migration destinations, their literature and book markets open up towards and close themselves to refugees in multiple ways.

The excerpt quoted above comes from the letter sent out to literature and culture scholars both in Poland and around the world by the editorial office of "Porównania." We were hoping the topic would garner interest. The massive response to our invitation to create a monographic journal issue exceeded our wildest expectations. We had received a large number of submissions, thus making the necessary selection process difficult. We would like to apologize to those whose submissions were rejected – mainly due to the limited page count of the journal. We hope that there will be a future opportunity to return to the topic of refugeeism.

From among the submissions, we selected those which provided a broad approach to literary representations of refugeeism, rather than those devoted to individual works or a relatively small text corpus. The proposals we selected offer a cross-sectional approach and focused on a historically, territorially, existentially, anthropologically and discursively important theme or issue related to the experience of refugeeism – which ultimately always fulfills itself in individual lived experiences of exile, uprooting, flight and attempts to adapt to a new cultural space and a new life. It was important to us that this issue and the articles collected therein present refugee episodes taking place at different points in time and in different geographical spaces – therefore including various historical and socio-political contexts.

We wanted the articles to be concerned with the fate of numerous ethic, religious and geographical groups, to tell real and imagined stories, as well as to relate to different aesthetic and figurative aspects of the subject matter.

As a result, this will be an opportunity to read about contemporary traces of, as well as the methods for ethnographic preservation of the heritage of, the Olenders – 16th-century religious refugees from the Netherlands, and, in later

centuries, those displaced from German states – relics discussed in the context of reflections on contemporary discourses of cultural heritage. Additionally, we will study the issues of expropriations and displacements caused by extensions of coal mines in Poland.

The readers will have a chance to peruse fascinating linguistic considerations regarding the lexeme *uchodźca* (refugee) and its derivatives, found in Polish lexicography and corpus texts, as well as learn about the fate of German refugees who took part in a series of forced marches from their homes in Lower Silesia and East Prussia at the end of the Second World War, thus discovering the perhaps indelible feeling of tension between knowledge and emotions experienced by those who, having inherited the memory of these traumatic events, recount them years later by immersing themselves in complex processes of re-discovery and (self-)therapy.

The readers will learn about the ways in which emigration-related issues were tackled in the Paris-based "Kultura" (Culture) monthly and compare the approaches taken by Józef Wittlin and Emil Cioran in dealing with the experience of exile. We will visit Israel, Turkey, the present-day refugee camps for Ukrainians, as well as the "re-remembered" Masuria and Romani caravans. We will examine the possessions of refugees from Syria, Sudan and Mali, and reflect on the rules governing the post-migration world, the existence of which evokes ever new literary formulas for experiencing and presenting the life of a refugee. And finally, the readers will be able to challenge the accuracy and appropriateness of literary approaches undertaken by contemporary poets, who are aware of the immense importance of this experience found in individual biographies – their own or those of others.

We hope that the series of case studies collected in this issue of "Porównania" will form a sort of map of the fate of refugees, which unfolds itself in different historical, geographical and socio-political contexts, yet strikingly similar in existential, anthropological and philosophical terms. We trust that we were successful in outlining a multifaceted array of artistic representations of the matter of our interest.

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