

STUDIES ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE 48

Alessandro Amenta, Marina Ciccarini
and Bianca Sulpasso (eds.)

**Post-trauma, Gender
and Ecology:
Paths of Slavic Literatures**



PETER LANG

The book explores the dynamic intersections between trauma, gender and ecology issues within contemporary Slavic literatures, offering a critical lens through which cultural upheavals of post-communist spaces are examined. Through close readings of prose, poetry, and hybrid literary forms, the volume investigates how narratives from Russia, Poland and Croatia engage with the legacies of violence, displacement and ecological degradation. Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from trauma studies, gender theory, and ecocriticism, the book highlights how authors reimagine identity, memory, and human-nature relationships in response to ongoing socio-political crises and environmental changes. By foregrounding marginalized voices and experimental narrative strategies, this study reveals literature's transformative potential to engage with both personal and collective wounds, while challenging dominant historical and ecological discourses.

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Post-trauma, Gender and Ecology

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in Central and Eastern Europe**

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Christian Voß

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4 Conflict and Reconciliation: The Relationship Between Men and Nature in *Bliskie kraje* by Julia Fiedorczuk

Noemi Fregara

ABSTRACT

Current fierce environmental disasters caused by mankind have greatly resonated with Western culture, inspiring TV series, films and books dominated by dystopian scenarios which mirror the catastrophes we witness today. Amongst the others, the Polish literary panorama seems filled with new ‘pro-ecological’ narrations, often associated with the influential name of Olga Tokarczuk. However, in Poland, many authors, such as Julia Fiedorczuk, in the quality of scholar and writer, have focused on these topics. In the collection of short stories *Bliskie kraje* [*Near Countries*] (2016), she extensively explores several aspects of the interactions between human and non-human beings. This article examines some of the tales included in the volume, in which the possible declinations of the relationship between mankind and the environment and the role of women emerge. In particular, the analysis highlights its twofold essence: on the one hand, the two species seem to have a profound bond founded on empathy; on the other hand, the atrocious exploitation of non-human beings leading to catastrophic consequences surfaces. Specifically, the dramatic and frightful natural calamities are often interpreted as revenge from Earth, a rebellion aimed at resizing the heretofore predominant role of men.

Keywords: Julia Fiedorczuk, pro-ecological narrations, nature, human beings

Introduction: The Emergence of Pro-ecological Narrations

The terror spread by the climate crisis and environmental disasters has enormously influenced artistic expression. Especially over the past twenty years, Western culture has amassed a wealth of books, films, and TV series that portray dystopian scenarios where mankind, often victims, must fight for survival (Kowalewska 2020). Just a year ago, in the *Guardian*, the journalist Vanessa Thorpe (2023) highlighted the diffusion of works generally defined as ‘eco-fiction’, a macro-category in which many other labels and innovative genres have developed, like ‘eco-horrors’, ‘eco-thrillers’, ‘cli-fis’,¹ ‘extinction

¹ An original genre inspired by the ‘sci-fi’ and addressed with climate change phenomena.

and epidemic dystopias² and others, gaining more and more popularity, notably from the COVID onwards. According to Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler (2013), sensitisation of environmental crises is encouraged by the representation of conflict and critical circumstances. As they state in *Eco-dystopias: Nature and the Dystopian Imagination*: ‘climate change is most commonly, and most forcefully, communicated in the language of disaster, which seems to provide the most compelling and persuasive means of persuading its audience’ (Hughes, Wheeler 2013: 2).³ The common thread of eco-thriller or eco-horror narrations is precisely the transformation of nature as a menacing entity which takes revenge against mankind for the exploitation it has suffered. If these are the typical representations of natural beings, rarer are the depictions of idyllic scenarios in which men live in harmony with the environment. Their peak of popularity was mainly reached during British Romanticism and in the last decade of the twentieth century when a pastoral-romantic vision of nature was widespread (Fiedorczuk 2015).

At this moment, however, considering the catastrophic depiction of nature taking the cue from the disastrous effects of non-human beings’ exploitation, many authors have imagined the possibility of reconciliation between mankind and all other living creatures. Particularly interesting is that their rapprochement is often promoted by those figures seen as minorities according to the patriarchal society, such as women. They seem to have a particular relation and sense of empathy with non-human beings, a feature carefully analysed by ecofeminists who have pinpointed a historical, experiential, symbolic and theoretical connection between them (Mellor 1997). This field of study aims at defending women’s, environment’s, and animals’ rights, which are intertwined on behalf of their forms of oppression and part of the ‘logic of domination’ or ‘colonisation’ (Warren 2000). A demonstration of their common suffering can be the contamination of the techniques of exploitation female and animal figures experience, for instance, the phenomena of the ‘sexualisation’ of animals and the ‘animalisation’ of women (Adams 1990). However, their bond is more ancient and can be traced back to the old beliefs in the goddess Gaia, the incarnation of nature, who introduced new

² Further information about innovative eco-genres can be found in Kowalewska (2020) and Muzzioli (2021).

³ For further framework information, see Malvestio (2021, 2022).

reference values in contrast with the ones later promoted by patriarchy. The main features are a new kind of justice, a system of ‘heterarchy’, renovated nature-based wisdom, empathy, and compassion towards all living creatures (Diamond, Orenstein 1990).

Moreover, the connection between female figures and non-human creatures seems to derive from the former’s reproductive powers: they traditionally embody the models of a caring mother, nurse, guardian of the house and, by extension, of the whole community thanks to their acute sensibility and sense of protection towards the weakest (Mellor 1997). According to various ecofeminists, her reproductive powers explain why women feel compelled to fight for the sake of nature, peace, antinuclear, and health. Nevertheless, this presumed ‘biological determination’ has been considered dangerous by some feminists, starting from Simone De Beauvoir, who did not identify with the model of ‘breeding and caring mother’. Furthermore, some believe this viewpoint could also encourage the oppositional dualism of men against women promoted by androcentrism, which is the cause of the refusal of female counterparts from the cultural sphere of society currently under the domination of men.

The Polish Literary Panorama

Within Western culture, the Polish literary panorama has proved to be particularly sensitive to ecological issues and the recent trends giving space to the minorities ‘category’ according to androcentrism. Considering these themes, Olga Tokarczuk, the 2018 Nobel Prize for Literature winner, can be recognised as one of the most influential, well-known writers and reliable opponents of this perspective. However, other Polish authors have manifested a strong interest in pro-ecological narrations. From pioneering artists, mentioned by Anna Barcz (2016), we can find Stanisław Lem, Eliza Orzeszkowa or Bolesław Leśmian, who, in their works, give voice to natural elements and criticise their exploitation by humans. Barcz also references more recent poets and writers such as Jolanta Brach-Czaina, Julia Hartwig, Małgorzata Lebda, and, ultimately, Julia Fiedorczuk, the focus of this chapter. She is a poet, writer, translator, and scholar widely known to have divulged the idea of ecopoetry in Poland, where she teaches at the University of Warsaw and has co-founded the Environmental Studies Centre. Her attention to

the relationship between human beings and nature emerges in many of her academic works, amongst the most considerable are *Ekopoetyka* [*Ecopoetry*] (2015), of which she is co-author with the Mexican poet and translator Gerardo Beltrán and *Cyborg w ogrodzie: Wprowadzenie do ekokrytyki* [*The Cyborg in the Garden: Introduction to Ecocriticism*] (2015). Besides, she shows her interest in these topics in her prose and poetic productions, like *Bio* (2004), *Planeta rzeczy zagubionych* [*The Planet of Lost Things*] (2006), *Tlen* [*Oxygen*] (2009), *Psalmy* [*Psalms*] (2017), *Pod Słońcem* [*Under the Sun*] (2020), *Dom Oriona* [*The House of Orion*] (2023), *Autostrada z girlandami* [*Highway with Garlands*] (2023) thanks to which she was awarded many important recognitions like the PTWK – Polskie Towarzystwo Wydawców Książek [Polish Society of Books Publication], Hubert Burda Prize, and the prestigious Polish Prize Nike. In addition to these poetry collections, she has published prose works like *Bliskie kraje* (2016), a collection of short stories in which she explores all kinds of relationships between human beings and nature, alternating between conflict and reconciliation. Human connection to other living beings is represented almost as a mission aimed at rediscovering a lost harmony generally restored by female characters. In this chapter, I will present a brief analysis of the short stories *Orgaspace*, *Medulla*, *Zetka*, *Mech* [*Moss*], and *Mamo, moje ciało chce tańczyć* [*Mom, My Body Wants to Dance*]. This analysis aims to illustrate, on the one hand, a form of rebellion, almost revenge, by the forces of nature against human beings, and on the other hand, the possibility and necessity for humankind to rediscover an authentic and profound bond with other living creatures.

The Conflict: A Struggle for Survival

The form of short stories in *Bliskie kraje* allows the author to explore different facets of the relationship between mankind and nature in which phenomena of reconciliations and conflicts occur. By ‘conflict’, I mean a situation of oppression suffered both by non-human beings and by humankind. In the first instance, the circumstances may involve various forms of exploitation linked to the climate crisis, often symbolised by the suffering of nature, with humanity being the oppressive species. In the second case, depictions of a vengeful nature revolting against its oppressor, namely human beings, are included. The dystopian atmosphere where nature has revealed all its

devastation is portrayed in *Orgaspace*, a short story in which Fiedorczuk presents a real apocalypse determining the end of humankind's life on Earth. The protagonist of this tale is an anonymous writer who tells his story in a faraway future indicated as 20–. According to his recounting, an environmental crisis exploded a few years before, probably due to the Earth's perpetual and prolonged exploitation, which has become a barren land for all human beings. The story opens with the protagonist telling a hypothetical reader the last months of his life before the cataclysm that constrained him to seek refuge on Orgaspace, the name of the new alternative floating home created by the survivors:

I woke up on a ship. And precisely on Orgaspace, that is – in case you didn't know (I don't know when you will read these words) – a sort of little floating world. Otherwise, on the ultramodern Noah's Ark on which we have sought refuge, we, inhabitants of the Earth – and more precisely those among us who could afford that – when the Earth, the land, the hard ground beneath our feet has abruptly started to shorten. Some other worlds presumably exist like this one... also other lands exist. Continents exist, or to be precise, what is left of them. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 247–8)⁴

From the protagonist's words, we understand that Orgaspace is an artificial world created by human beings to escape a huge environmental disaster. It is structured as an enormous ship with cabins: the most fortunate ones have little windows, but others, like the writer, do not. Additionally, new rules have been implemented in this unfamiliar environment, such as the prohibition on leaving the cabins except on rare and specific occasions. This renders Orgaspace a distressing and suffocating place, in stark contrast to Earth, which has no borders or limitations. In effect, as the protagonist confesses, life as it is in this new world does not look like a life: 'Now... now there is no more hope or future. I live in a few square metres of safe space, the temperature is always comfortable, the air humidity is ideal, the diet is balanced... yet I live – I live nowhere. No, I don't live. I last. Among thousands of others just like me' (Fiedorczuk 2016: 253). As the writer later says, in Orgaspace, men have also tried to reproduce some characteristics of the planet to become independent and give themselves the illusion that they have never left their

⁴ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

true household. Amongst other things, the protagonist informs that they have attempted to create favourable conditions to grow some plants in an indoor garden, even if they had to reutilise the natural resources of the planet as though, even during a cataclysm, the separation between humankind and nature could not be possible, or their connection could not be avoided by any means: ‘Orgaspace must sometimes land – I guess that we take the water from the land... and topsoil for our vegetable gardens’ (Fiedorczuk 2016: 248–9). Human adaptation seems to recall primitive times when men had to learn how to cohabit with the environment, and their relationship was closer than in modern times. The fact that they have to return to that original condition could be interpreted as a necessary change of course to a wiser life, a kind of punishment that works like a second chance for men to improve their cohabitation with nature. The catastrophic floods could stand for a reply to the domination of men. They have been constrained to flee and create an alternative world, changing and reversing the usual roles of predator and prey, which makes humans feel weak and impotent:

Some years later, the sea has overflowed. Migrations had started earlier when almost nobody would have expected a sudden flood. When the continents shortened, wars began. Floating worlds had been created, such as Orgaspace. Their inhabitants, sufficiently wealthy to pay for their salvation, have interrupted any link with the land. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 277–8)

Regardless of their intentions and efforts, men in Orgaspace cannot replicate what they have lost on Earth. The writer notes that they have even attempted to grow trees, but these do not resemble the plants from Earth because they do not survive for long:

Of course, we have trees here, we have everything here, but our trees are small, they’re more like saplings than proper trees, and they don’t live for long. Although the ship is gigantic, its size doesn’t allow for the accumulation of sufficient soil for the plants to grow deep roots. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 266)

Despite the construction of restaurants by the shore and the planting of trees and small vegetable gardens, the alternative world of Orgaspace cannot be compared to Earth; thus, it represents a bitter defeat for humanity. The structure of the story, composed of memories from the final months on land and the lack of action on Orgaspace, can serve a symbolic function:

mankind is left without perspectives, nothing truly merits living for, and the only feeling remaining in humanity's hearts is regret for having ruined their natural home.

The New Alliance Between Women and Nature

Halfway between conflict and reconciliation is the alternative depicted in the short story *Medulla*, which previously appeared in the collection *Poranek Marii i inne opowiadania* [*The Morning of Mary and Other Stories*] (2010). The protagonist is Leda, a character who recurs quite often in this volume and more precisely in two other tales: *Święto niepodległości* [*The Independence Day*] e *Wiersz dla Matyldy* [*Poem for Matilda*]. The girl can be considered an ecofeminist heroine: she seems to be in charge of the reunion between nature and the human species, a role aimed at strengthening their bond and impeding the oppression of the environment. Furthermore, she accomplishes this task by carefully and attentively cultivating an illegal garden at the top of her building. Other residents appear scared of the plants growing excessively and invading their flats, a kind of trespassing perceived as a violation of domestic walls that, at a symbolic level, can indicate the plants' re-conquest of a space stolen by men. The environment is rebellious and threatening in the eyes of human beings because it passes from a 'colonised object' to an aggressive 'colonising subject'. The event is so incredible and unsettling that it is also told in the local newspaper, where plants are described as dangerous entities for the whole of humankind:

PLANTS ATTACK, says one of the headlines. 'In the building of 2 Parkowa Street, an illegal garden has been discovered. The roots of the plants have managed to penetrate the ceiling of the building, which is a threat to the residents. An evacuation has taken place. The antiterrorist squads prepare to enter the danger area'. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 221)

Leda appears as an ally of nature with whom she collaborates to demolish the hierarchical order imposed by the androcentric perspective, which considers men superior power holders. In strong opposition to this idea, the girl also reflects on the animals' calls, traditionally reputed as a form of inferiority and communication limit, which, on the contrary, the protagonist considers as a fascinating diversity that man cannot comprehend

or reproduce: “‘Kra, kra, kra”. That’s what I hear, although, in what it says, there is no “k”, nor “r”, or “a”, not even any of the sounds that could get out of my mouth, of my highly developed speech apparatus’ (Fiedorczuk 2016: 207). In this quote, Leda’s attempt at reconciliation emerges. She puts herself on the same level as nature, a position boosted further by discerning some similarities with the world of plants and animals. The girl even considers simple natural phenomena like plants growing, for example, particularly fascinating and miraculous, especially considering the whole process and the spectacular transformation from a little seed to a strong tree. Another opposition between the rhythm of ‘culture’ and nature seems to emerge. While the first one is rapid and aimed at a presumed ‘progress’, the second one is slow but stronger, with robust roots, and follows an innate and profound wisdom and knowledge, as the writer describes:

The time of seeds flew so slowly that if someone had wanted to measure it using a watch, the hands would have to turn in a circle like crazy. The entire months, and sometimes years, seeds waited for the right moment, feeding only on that which had in itself apparently dead, motionless like little pebbles. It sufficed, however, a little humidity and warmth, and they began to absorb water and swell up. First, roots pierced the seedcase and entered the ground like microscopic earthworms. Then sprouts appeared, pale and bare, with a great hunger for the sun. Roots became branches and grew deeper and deeper, tending to the warm centre of the planet. On the surface, sprouts became greener, and leaves came out, the tissue production moved, photosynthesis. If a plant were a tree, it would grow for several years. Its stem would harden and cover with the cortex, and inside, the transport of goods would continue. Roots would become so hard that they could make concrete explode. And they would burst. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 210–11)

By reading this passage, we understand that Fiedorczuk considers the human being ‘an unprivileged element of the biosphere’ (Fiedorczuk 2015: 28), as he is an inhabitant of the Earth just like other creatures. Mankind should not only observe and learn from the miracles and deep knowledge within nature, which are often taken for granted, but they should also fear its power, which is stronger than human constructions like concrete.

Analogously to Leda, another significant mediating figure represented in *Bliskie kraje* is Zetka. She is an outcast from society, whose life is comparable to that of a beggar, due to her childhood experience. When she was young, her mother told her that she needed to manage her own affairs and be

independent. As a result, she found a job and sought various ways to satisfy her needs. For instance, her habit of constantly moving from place to place and retrieving her clothing from the rubbish demonstrates her unconventionality. Besides her interest in nature, it is precisely this quality, amongst the others, that distinguishes her from other people and makes her the ideal embodiment of the ecofeminist heroine. Furthermore, from an early age, Zetka started to reject the feminine stereotypes promoted by patriarchy, dismissing those stereotypically feminine behaviours, such as focusing and caring about appearance and physical attributes, which was originally aimed at catching men's eye since women were supposed to be objects of desire. All considered, these characteristics, much like those of Leda, can position Zetka as an innovative figure of a mediator between humankind and nature, and make her a staunch ally in support of the non-human beings.

At the beginning of the story, we learn that the protagonist has a strong, genuine interest in nature and is firmly committed to its protection. Zetka is constantly surrounded by animals, she actually lives in her house with a dog and a group of cats who followed her to her place: 'In time, joined her [Zetka] a mangy black dog, big and clumsy, and a little herd of stray cats, which with gratitude for her hospitality peed one after the other on the ripped rug, on the pile of magazines and on Zetka's bed' (Fiedorczuk 2016: 227). Moreover, the story unfolds with the first scene of Zetka rescuing a squirrel which has been run over by a car:

'A car hit you, sweetie!', says Zetka, bending over that thick tangle of suffering. The little animal managed to grab on with its claws to the asphalt and move a little towards the roadside. If someone had done an x-ray, they would have seen a shattered pelvis, damaged bladder, hemorrhages. There is no doctor here, there is no machinery, there is only Zetka. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 222)

In this passage, Zetka's point of view immediately emerges: her thoughts are concentrated on the animal, which she sees as equal to any other living being. The protagonist realises that she is the only hope for the squirrel, as there are no nearby doctors who can help. Particular attention to the animal is also reserved when Zetka interprets the squirrel's state of mind by observing his eyes and his movements: 'In the squirrel's eyes there is no fear, in its eyes there is no sadness, there is black, there is night, fogged now, cloudy from pain' (Fiedorczuk 2016: 223). The ability to capture the animal's

feelings seems to be the element at the core of Zetka's character role, who, just like Leda, seems to feel invested in a mission to save nature from human exploitation and indifference:

the squirrel wasn't run over as a blood hash yet, although it cannot be ruled out that it would have been better like this. However, Zetka has the impression that she must protect that little, that she must save her... death, because surely, it's not life, life already escaped through those dark eyes, through those hidden small holes in that ginger snout. [...] Any movement, any warmth, pulsing and pain slowly leaves the squirrel. It dies. Zetka thinks about the squirrels' paradise, about the crowded paradise of road accident victims, full of dogs, cats, hedgehogs, frogs, and deer. Again, she takes the squirrel between the twigs, the ginger creature doesn't fight any more, and she hides its body under a large wild rose bush. She covers it with leaves, she places those two twigs beside it, forming a cross. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 223–4)

The woman ultimately reveals herself as the saviour of nature: not only does she rescue and protect animals, that are victims of road accidents, but she also takes care of them by providing a decent burial. The act of burying the animals and the sign of the cross on the burial seem to elevate her to the role of priestess for nature's living beings, responsible for their spiritual needs – something men ignore and even fail to comprehend due to society's cultural tradition. In this context, the cross can symbolise Zetka's reinterpretation and reappropriation of Christian values, which would not consider natural living creatures to possess the same dignity as human beings, since the former are not believed to have a soul. Therefore, this action reflects the protagonist's profound respect for nature and challenges the hierarchical structure established by the anthropocentric and androcentric perspectives. In this light, both Leda and Zetka emerge as two figures on the fringes of society, uniquely positioned to mediate between human and natural realms, drawing on the special connection between women and nature.

Reconciliation: Return to the Original Home

Connection to the environment is encouraged mainly by women in Fiedorczuk's works, as happens in *Mech*. This short story is dominated by two female figures: a little girl who tells the story of her childhood and her grandmother. The former narrates some meaningful episodes of her life, during which she seems to appropriate biocentric values and viewpoints

transmitted by her grandmother. In the story, the latter seems like a magical creature who can recognise the similarities between human beings and nature, which are later shown to her niece on many occasions. For instance, during a stroll in the woods, she captures some likenesses between plants and humans, also from an outer point of view:

Look – she says sometimes – that leaf reminds of a palm. And the veins are like rivers. In rivers, life flows. – Where? – I ask – Where does life flow? – To the sea – Grandma answers without thinking – Everything came out from the sea, and everything goes back to it, only, sometimes, it deviates. Sometimes, very slowly. Sometimes very quickly. [...] And later, she shows me some twisted roots. – Look – she says – they are like my fingers. She opens her spidery palms, and she smiles. – That tree is old – she says. – Old like your grandmother. – she laughs – When one dies, they revert to musk. They will be so tired that they will sleep for a thousand years. Thousands upon thousands. [...] In a short time, we find a fallen tree. It sleeps on the moss, leafless and with removed bark. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 81–2)

The similarities that the grandmother observes and shows her niece suggest a deep bond with nature: they have similar configurations and can find elements in common with any natural element, be that a tree, a river, or others. Their connection is underlined by the use of ‘animal-like’ adjectives concerning human body parts, such as ‘spidery’ for the hands, and ‘human-like’ verbs about natural elements, like the tree, which is described as if it was sleeping. According to the grandmother, human beings are naturally and spontaneously in harmony with the environment, all that exists belongs to the same life cycle, which begins and ends in the sea, as mentioned previously, or in the ground, whether be they objects, animals, plants or human beings, as she later observes:

That burgundy dress is not there anymore. I don’t know where it ended up, but I can imagine that it is where the flannel clothes often go, that is to say, cut into strips that were initially used to dry the dishes, later to remove dust, and finally to mop the floor. [...] When the rag landed on the rubbish, it didn’t distinguish itself much from the soil. And then it became soil. [...] Then the dog died. [...] I don’t know if that happened in the courtyard next to the little wooden house or if it has gone somewhere to die in solitude as animals do. It’s not important now because now it’s only soil. [...] The dead grandma’s child is now only soil. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 76–81)

An interesting suggestion concerning waste can be found in this extract. If read from an eco-critical perspective – which is quite familiar to Fiedorczuk

since she investigated this aspect and widely described it in her work *Cyborg w ogrodzie* – the cycle of life inspires a more ecological way to employ debris. That is in contrast to the consumption of goods associated with capitalism and consumerism, which can lead to pollution, resource abuse, and disregard for natural resources. It derives from the anthropocentric perspective since it is based on the idea of man as the centre of the world as long as the rest of the living beings can be used, appropriated and exploited on his side.

However, the similarity between mankind and nature can lead the former to empathise with other living creatures and reinforce their bond even more. For instance, that is the case of Aleksandra in the tale *Mamo, moje ciało chce tańczyć*. Together with other stories which have the common thread of reflections of women on the sense and cycle of life, there is the story of Olusia, a child who finds an earthworm in the soil towards which she shows a strong curiosity and tries to communicate directly with the animal: ‘I’m calling you! [...] I’ll immediately take you out. Don’t be afraid, don’t be, don’t be. I can’t hurt you! I won’t hurt you, come on! Yeah, come here to me!’ (Fiedorczuk 2016: 167). In this story, the relationship between the child and the animal appears on the same level and is characterised by curiosity and playfulness: Olusia tries to communicate with the earthworm as though it were a new friend. Despite her good intentions, while playing with it, the animal’s body is cut into two parts, an event which seems to profoundly disturb her, raising a feeling of compassion for the suffering of another living being:

The long body of the earthworm hardens and splits. Shocked, she throws away the stick, covers the hole and presses hard with her hands to create an improvised grave. She’ll bring with her that death for some days. Then someone will tell her that earthworms don’t die for such reasons, that each half of it begins to live separately, it grows, and instead of one, the halves become two big living insects. She will find that strange and probably scarier than the usual death in the soil with earring leaves. (Fiedorczuk 2016: 168)

The construction of the improvised grave can be interpreted as a phenomenon of ‘humanisation’ of the animal in which the earthworm gains the same value as a human being. The grave for the animal as the representation of a place where loved ones are normally mourned and remembered introduces an emotional component that bridges the gap between human and non-human beings and builds a connection between the two species.

Conclusions: From Threat to Harmony

In conclusion, in Western culture, the latest natural disasters have strongly influenced culture and, therefore, literature by showing, on the one hand, devastating conditions in which men become victims of natural elements or creatures which rebel against their exploitation. On the other hand, in other artistic works, the environmental crisis has brought to new light the antique connection between humankind and the earth, which appears more and more necessary. Both trends introduce the female figure, the new nature's ally, who helps its revolt against mankind, in some cases, while in others, strives to reconcile humans with the Earth. The short stories analysed in this chapter highlight the possible oscillation of their relationship between conflict and reconciliation. Although the tendency characterised by dystopian and catastrophic landscapes seems more popular and widespread in the last two decades, some authors like Fiedorczuk also try to imagine a renewed relationship with non-human creatures, which seems increasingly urgent to conquer and maintain. The former appears to be the consequence of an anthropocentric perspective: because of this, men live the tragic consequences of nature's exploitation, a dynamic which allocates its frightening characteristics, as though the Earth, a new predator, wanted to seek revenge on mankind. On the contrary, the latter represents the possibility of reconnecting with the environment, an urgent necessity for which women appear as the mediators and spokespersons. By representing this last scenario, Fiedorczuk seems to follow the theory of Hubert Zapf, who considers literature as a means of education and cultural ecology. Thus, the so-called 'sustainable' texts 'are also simultaneously sites of reconnection, reintegration, and, at least potentially, of regeneration on psychic, social, and aesthetic levels' (Zapf 2016: 12). In this context, as representatives of minorities like nature in the androcentric society, women are the protagonists in the promotion of an ecocentric vision that forces men to renounce their presumed exclusivity and extraordinariness to come back to live in communion with nature.

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