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Contribution to the Search for the Genesis of the Polish Picturebook

Introduction

A picturebook is a special type of an illustrated book. The phrase 'book with pictures' does not describe it sufficiently. Its core is a double message: communicated via pictures and words, often with a significant dominance of the visual aspect. This message is mutually dependant; the pictures either completely substitute the words or reinforce their meaning and understanding. The character of a picturebook is expressed by the combination of aspects of applied arts – such as printed graphic design, typography and illustration – into a harmonious and formally justified whole.

A picturebook addressed to children should be distinguished by professionalism of editing and graphic design given the fact that what the children see has great significance for their development. In its cognitive and educational intentions, the picturebook is aimed at stimulating the development of a child. Hence, it is important to make it cognitively inspiring, stirring emotions and curiosity and to influence imagination and develop an aesthetic sense. The subject matter of a picturebook should be diversified – encompassing educational issues both in the area of natural and geographical world and culture. Social thematic issues deemed 'difficult' may be of vital importance here.

The purpose of this paper is to present the source materials, sometimes forgotten, which comprise a chronological overview of selected book publications where illustrations play a significant role, equivalent to the text. A document analysis technique, derived from the historical science methodology, was used here. The selected book publications, addressed to children, on account of the dual message code, can be classified as picturebooks. The selection was made among Polish publications from the turn of the 20th century and later ones. In the author's assessment, these are representative works, attesting to the independent searches and evolution of the

Polish school of picturebooks. All of them were made before the year 1963, when one of the most famous picturebooks of the 20th century was published – an original proposal *Where the Wild Things Are* designed by Maurice Sendak, introducing the readers to the amazing adventure of little Max (Cackowska 2017). In this place, it is also worth mentioning the adventure of Polish Mateuszek written by Stefania Szuchowa and published two years earlier, in 1961. Mateuszek's adventures were colourfully and dynamically illustrated by Janina Krzemińska (Photo No. 1) with the use of watercolour and the procedure of warp greasing (Szuchowa 1961).

The stories of Mateuszek and Max manifest analogies between the motif of a journey and meetings with other creatures which directly affect the formation of the characters' stances and their self-awareness. Mateuszek claims:

Let nobody worry about me
I have an ass, a cart, a whip
Goodbye grandma, mum
Mateuszek is setting off on a journey
(Szuchowa 1961: [n. pag.]).



Photo 1. Illustration by Janina Krzemińska in the book by Stefania Szuchowa, *Mateuszek on a Magical Island* (*Mateuszek na zaczarowanej wyspie*) of 1961

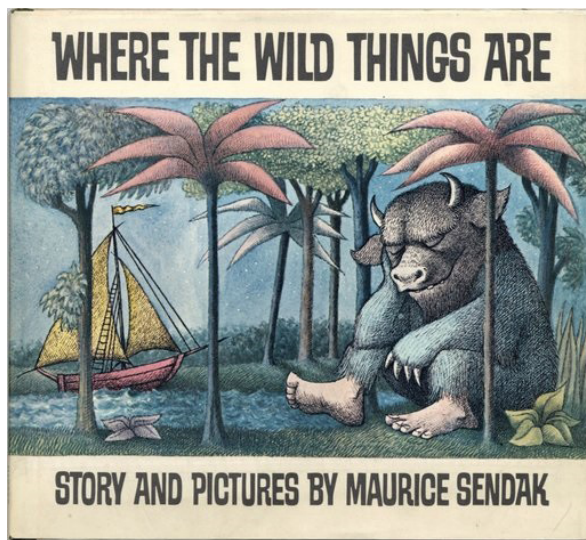


Photo 2. Cover of the original publication of *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak of 1963

Little Max sets off on a similar journey of the imagination (Photo No. 2). The imagined world adopts real-life forms – the forest growing in a room, ocean and the meetings with the creatures are all very real:

And an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max
and he sailed off through night and day
and in and out of weeks
and almost over a year
to where the wild things are.

(Sendak 2014: [n. pag.])

Such proposals enchant children, touching on the very nature of their imagination and the necessity of fantasising. Similar ideas, yet with a different dose of didacticism, make the child aware of the value of social standards, the bases of which they learn in their families. At the same time, the character's disobedience and violation of the commonly applicable standards only results in a valuable lesson of life for him and does not cause rejection by the family. This is an excellent example of events where certain anti-models of conduct are transformed and reflection ensues, along with recognition of own emotions. In many aspects, Mateuszek's world is comparable to Max's world. A picturebook is a useful tool of communicating with the young audience. This was the basis for the initiation, in the 1950s, of a series titled 'World in Pictures' ('Świat w obrazach') which, given its impressive size, has a special place in this analysis.

Status of Studies on Picturebooks

Specialists from various fields of science and art are the experts on the post-war illustrated books in Poland, including Andrzej Banach, Janusz Dunin, Janusz Sowiński, Stefan Szuman, Irena Słońska, Janina Wiercińska and Danuta Wróblewska. These issues are also tackled in the studies of Anna Boguszewska, Małgorzata Centner-Guz, Małgorzata Komza, Aniela Książek-Szczepanikowa, Beata Mazepa-Domagala, Krzysztof Migoń, Elżbieta Szeffler, Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna and others. The above listed researchers tackle the themes of a picturebook in the context of analyses related to the illustrated book. Janina Wiercińska initiated the studies on the Polish picturebook in Poland. Małgorzata Cackowska is also examining these issues. Grażka Lange, Krystyna Lipko-Sztarbałło and many other authors and illustrators are thoroughly acquainted with the graphic design of children's books, including picturebooks. Key publications pertaining to picturebooks are monographic studies: *Look! Polish Picturebook!* and *Książka obrazkowa. Wprowadzenie*.

Search for the Genesis of the Polish Picturebook

Locating the phenomenon of the Polish picturebook in the historical context is of vital importance. At the threshold of the 20th century, Janina Mortkowiczowa drew attention to the values resulting from looking at the works of art in the process of children's education. Mortkowiczowa clearly highlighted the necessity of developing perception and reception of image, claiming: 'Pictures and picturebooks which are put in the child's hands since early childhood exert a serious impact on the aesthetic development and may become a first-rate tool of aesthetic education' (Mortkowiczowa 1904: 15). On account of reliability and to avoid attribution of the sources of the Polish picturebook exclusively to the artistic accomplishments of foreign cultures (for example by treating the aforementioned book *Where the Wild Things Are* by Sendak as the model), domestic works must be remembered. Janina Wiercińska believes that the earliest Polish picturebook was the *Fairy Tales (Bajki)* by Stanisław Jachowicz with illustrations by Wojciech Gerson (manually coloured woodcuts). The edition was re-issued in 1876; in 1880, Ignacy Krasicki's *Fairy Tales and Parables (Bajki i przypowieści)* also with manually coloured woodcuts of Ksawery Pillati and Antoni Zalewski was published. The prototype of a fully Polish proposal corresponding to the understanding of a picturebook is the *Fairy Tale of Kasia and the Prince (Bajka o Kasi i królewiczu)* by Lucjan Rydel published in 1904. The cover and the illustrations which are dominant here and which make references to folk stylistics and font were designed by Stanisław Dębicki, who used a large, innovative format and narrated with the use of colour. The opinion of Mieczysław Treter, written twenty years after the publication of the book is worth quoting here: 'Stanisław Dębicki [...] manifested a peculiar talent when painting children; he was capable of

sensing their souls, understanding their separate world of interests, and he offered an excellent expression of it in his magnificent illustrations' (Treter 1924: 25). From the modern perspective, the *'Fairy Tale of Kasia and the Prince'* may be considered a forerunner of the Polish picturebook, which at that time was often rejected rather than appreciated by the critics and the social opinion.

The *'Nativity Play' ('Jasełka')* of Maria Konopnicka published in 1905 with a comprehensive graphic design by Jan Bukowski is another successful proposal where images were used to tell the story. Subsequent titles deserving attention with respect to picturebooks, solidifying the new type of book include *'Halusia's Book' ('Książeczka Halusi')* by Bronisława Ostrowska of 1906 and *'How Children in Bronowó Played' ('Jak się dzieci w Bronowie bawiły')* by Konopnicka of 1911. In 1917, Zofia Lubańska (later Stryjeńska), made her début with the book *'Christmas Carols of Seven Songs' ('Pastorałki z siedmiu kolęd złożone')* published by Warsztaty Krakowskie, embellished with dynamic and beautiful illustrations.

Tadeusz Dobrowolski distinguishes three basic directions in the art of the Polish inter-war period, the impact of which was fundamental for the form of children's illustrated books. There was the continuation of forms from the Young Poland period, creation of new art, i.e. the avant-garde and Colourism (Dobrowolski 1989, Michalska 1986).

In the 1920s, the premises of the concept of the 'beautiful book' focused on perfection of the typographic composition. Potential presence of illustrations and decorations, most often in the form of woodcuts, was technically and formally subordinate to typography. In principle, they did not form the necessary element of a beautiful book, thence the 'typographic' understanding of the book's graphic design was dominant. In this period, sophisticated books compliant with the preferred idea were created by Edmund Bartłomiejczyk and they may be classified as picturebooks. In 1922, the artist designed print and illustrations inspired by folk stylistics for the text of Józef Kraszewski *'The Old Man and His Wife' ('Dziad i baba')* in the woodcutting technique. The innovative nature of the publication consisted in a comprehensive architectural approach to the form of the book and a picture-based narrative. Another project of 1923 is a narrative illustrative graphic design intertwined with text by Julian Ejsmond titled *'About Janek the Chimney-Sweep and the Smoking Stove of King Staś' (O Janku Kominiarczyku i dymiącym piecu króla Stasia)*, distinguished in 1929 at the National General Exhibition in Poznań with the golden medal (Photo No. 3).

The following texts by Zofia Rogoszówna were provided with rich illustrative layer designed by Zofia Stryjeńska: *'How The Magpie Cooked Grouts' (Sroczka kaszkę warzyła)*, *'Children's Tales Written From Folk Accounts and Childhood Memories' (Gadki dziecięce spisane z ust ludu i wspomnień dzieciństwa)*, Helena Sobańska's *'Where the Dwarves Got Their Hats From' (Skąd krasnoludki dostały swoje czapeczki)* and Janina Porazińska's *'Jaś and Kasia' (Jaś i Kasia)*. The artist created dynamic and humorous illustrations with a characteristic style inspired by Formism and Polish folk art.



Photo 3. Cover designed by Edmund Bartłomiejczyk for the book by Julian Ejsmond *O Janku Kominiarczyku i dymiającym piecu króla Stasia* of 1923

Stanisław Bobiński prepared a picture story for the book titled ‘*In Wojtuś Chamber*’ (*W Wojtusiowej izbie*) by Janina Porazińska (1925), popular in the inter-war period, and short stories of Lucyna Krzemieniecka published in 1930 under the title *Łap-cap*.

Stories selected from the rich heritage of Maria Konopnicka were published in a similar way. Bogdan Nowakowski enriched the content of the text in ‘*School Adventures of Pimpus Sadelko*’ (*Szkolne przygody Pimpusia Sadelko*) (1928) and *Filus, Milus and Kazia* (1929) with narrative illustrations, introducing succinct grotesque drawings and excellent slapstick.

Józef Birkenmajer was the initiator of a series of books classified as picture-books – they should be mentioned here on this account – even though the scope of understanding of the term ‘picturebook’ in that period does not overlap with the present one. The series was published in Poznań by Wydawnictwo Polskie Rudolfa Wagnera in 1931. Each of the short, funny poems oscillating around a single theme was provided with a one-page colour illustration. These are chromolithographic prints of unknown origin, probably English. It may be assumed that the author of the poems was an excellent translator of English and Classic literature and had a broad insight into the contemporary foreign publications. The following titles comprise the series: ‘*Tic-Toc*’ (*Tik-tak*), ‘*Do You Already Know It?*’ (*Czy już znacie?*), ‘*I Love Dogs*’ (*Kocham pieski*), ‘*At The Dwarves’ Place*’ (*U krasnoludków*), ‘*Friends*’ (*Przyjaciele*). Each publication features a sub-title *Picturebook*. A copy of the volume titled *Friends* is kept in the Jagiellonian Library. Each centrefold features a full-page



Photo 4. Centrefold of the book *Friends* written by Józef Birkenmajer in 1931

colour illustration and an accompanying poem (Photo No. 4). It recounts facetious events from the life of cats and dogs, with their behaviour portraying the stances or conduct of children.

A picturebook, which is a specific type of an illustrated book, has gradually solidified its existence and developed towards the dominance of a picture-based narrative. In the 1930s, illustrations definitely acquired a greater share in preparation of the form of books for children¹. The publishing house of great merit for the popularisation of the Polish culture set up by Jakub Morkowicz in 1937 issued ‘*The Needle Danced with the Thread*’ (*Tańcowała igła z nitką*) by Jan Brzechwa with the graphic narrative by Franciszka Themerson in 1937. The publication was greatly successful and that is why a re-issue was already made in 1939. In 1938, the *Locomotive* (*Lokomotywa*) by Julian Tuwin, seminal for the development of the Polish picturebook, according to the designed by Jan Lewitt and Jerzy Him, was published. The publication was prepared by the company of Marek Przeworski, inherited from his father Jakub, which was intent on publishing novelties. Tuwin’s poem remained the model of the modern picturebook in Poland for many years to come. In the post-war graphic designs of *Lokomotywa* by Ignacy Witz, Jan Lenica and Jan Marcin Szancer, the idea of the picturebook is also present (Boguszevska, 2013b).

¹ In 1937 in Paris, the methodology and the graphic design of Polish publications for children were rewarded at the International Pedagogical Congress.

Polish Picturebooks in the 1950s. 'World in Pictures' Series

An important confirmation of the presence of picturebooks in the 1950s was publication of the series 'World in Pictures'². This was the first post-war series relying on images and engaging the readers in the narrative. Published since 1950 under the patronage and with the recommendation of the Ministry of Culture and Art, it was addressed to pre-school children. The demand for publications of this type was great. Brochure-like books, printed on stiff cardboard, had extensive coverage on account of a high number of copies (250,000–300,000). The first several volumes (*Strange Animals – Dziwne zwierzęta*, *Mountains – Góry*, *Autumn – Jesień*, *Largest Animals – Największe zwierzęta*, *Household Birds – Ptactwo domowe* [Photo No. 5], *Polish Folk Outfits – Polskie stroje ludowe*, *Your City – Twoje miasto*, *At Preschool – W przedszkolu*, *Spring – Wiosna*, *Games and Toys – Zabawa i zabawki*, *Household Animals – Zwierzęta domowe*, *Winter – Zima*) had their third re-issue already in 1953. The price per volume – PLN 3.00 – was much higher than the price of another popular series, 'Read to Me, Mom' ('Poczytaj mi, Mamo'). The series was published by Państwowe Wydawnictwo Literatury Dziecięcej Nasza Księgarnia.

Each volume was a signature proposal of a picture-based narrative, without words. The artists were free to decide which subject matter to illustrate. The publishing house cooperated with the most brilliant designers engaged in illustrations for children.



Photo 5. Centrefold of a book by Józef Czerwiński
Ptactwo domowe of 1956

² The precedence of the 'World in Pictures' publication series took place in the inter-war period. The preserved 'Nature Series' ('Cykl przyrodniczy') proposed by Stanisław Gartkiewicz pertained to the zoo (No. 1). The visual narrative comprised over one hundred photographs.



Photo No. 6. Centrefold of a book by Mateusz Garyś *Samoloty* of 1956

The individual volumes were illustrated by: Bohdan Bocianowski (*Summer – Lato*), Michał Bylina (*Village – Wieś*), Józef Czerwiński (*Household Birds – Ptactwo domowe*, *In Water – W wodzie*), Janusz Jurewicz (*Forest – Las*, *Treasures of the Earth – Skarby ziemi*), Zofia Fijałkowska (*Mountains – Góry*), Mateusz Gawryś (*Harbour – Port*, *Samoloty* [Photo No. 6]), Maria Hiszpańska (*Jacek and His Family – Jacek i jego rodzina*), Jerzy Karolak (*In Autumn – W jesieni*), Ludwik Maciąg (*Household Animals – Zwierzęta domowe*), Konstanty Sopoćko (*Your Animals – Twoje zwierzątka*), Roman Owidzki (*The Storks Return – Bociany wracają*, *Largest Animals – Największe zwierzęta*), Olga Siemaszko (*Spring – Wiosna*), Zbigniew Rychlicki (*May Parade – Pochód majowy*, *Coal – Węgiel*) Zdzisław Witwicki (*Warsaw – Warszawa*), Ignacy Witz (*City – Miasto*).

According to Zdzisław Witwicki, the managers of the editorial team of the publishing house were not fully satisfied with the effects of the series. The intention was to design an artistic book for children fulfilling the mission of aesthetic education. Obtrusive ideologization was often dominating the narrative, especially the details of presentations. The effects of signature designs were often compromised by the bad quality of print (interview with Zdzisław Witwicki of 17 February 2018 – owned by A.B.).

A format resembling a square was applied (21 cm), a brochure-like layout, twelve cards/images printed on a stiff cardboard with a brochure-like cover. These were books without texts; some volumes contain short descriptions or poems (*Circus*, *Harbour*, *Winter*); the majority of them feature a list of illustrations. The cover with a colour illustration introduced the subject matter; the name of the illustrator was usually provided. The main narrative tool was always the image – the authors remembered that the recipients did not have the ability to read. The design of the series encompassed 24 subjects. The publications also performed a propaganda role.

In the course of time, the series grew; in 1961, it had fifty thematic motifs. The 'World in Pictures' series did not have its own graphic mark and its name was not always put on the cover (Jamróz-Stolarska 2014: 99–101). Subjects interesting for children both living in the country and in the city were chosen. By assumption, the books were meant to offer entertainment and educate at the same time. Aligned to the idea of Jan Amos Komeński, author of a popular textbook, 'World in Pictures', from which the series derives its title, the books provided knowledge about the surrounding world, both near the child (*Spring, Forest, Summer, Winter, Games and Toys*) and a bit further (*Harbour, Polish Folk Outfits, the Eskimo World, Coal*).

The themes encompassed nature, with presentations of household and exotic animals (*Household Animals, Largest Animals*), the beauty of Polish landscapes (*The Storks Return, Mountains, Meadows, Sea, The Vistula, Warsaw*) and the rural world (*Fields, Orchard, Village, In Autumn*). Other themes addressed the technology visible in the factories, cities and villages (*Construction, Cars Are Coming, Harbour, Boats and Ships, Planes, Coal*). Polish culture was also presented (*Polish Folk Outfits*) and culture of other friendly nations (*China*). There were also books directly related to the child's life and the child's home environment (*Jacek and His Family, Dog the Friend, In the Kindergarten*). Irrespective of the subject addressed, the principles compliant with the ideological guidelines of Polish People's Republic were followed. Indoctrination with the image in the discussed series is clearly noticeable, both in the layer of realism used in the narrative, as well as the choice of the content and its visual interpretation.

In spite of the limitations related to the propaganda assumptions of socialist realism, the artists created picture-based narratives that were artistically engaging. They include the painted proposals of the debuting Maria Mackiewicz, comprising ten images. The list of images at the end of the book is a description of the exotic story of a boy named Tugto. 'Snow houses built in the Far North, among snow and ice. Small Tugto plays in front of the house', 'Mother prepares dinner – hot fish soup', 'Tugto feeds the reindeer', 'The Inuit hunt bears (centrefold)', 'Tugto rides a dog sleigh (centrefold)', 'Seals on the coast', 'Strange animal living in the north – the muskox', 'Tugto's father hunting the walrus', 'A whale ship towing the hunted whales', 'In the Inuit land, night lasts six months', 'From time to time, aurora borealis illuminates the sky' (Mackiewicz, 1956: [n. pag.]). Similarly picturesque and dynamic in composition and subtle in colour was the proposal by Danuta Heintze for the books titled *Orchard* and *Mountains* by Fijałkowska. Ludwik Maciąg presented household animals better known to rural children with painter's mastery and a pinch of humour. In his works, Mateusz Gawryś used the freedom of watercolour painter's technique adjusted to the demands realistic presentation.

In the publication titled *Meadow (Łąka)*, Eugenia Różańska showed the secrets of this biocoenosis with expertise of a seasoned biologist. She juxtaposed paintings with board-like presentations of specimens, typical for educational books. The book titled *In the Water (W wodzie)* by Czerwiński presents the aquatic residents in the form of educational boards.

disposal, which translated to the smoothness of forms characterised by soft spots and lines, rejecting the stiffness of the schematic presentation of realism.

The end of the 20th century was marked by a crisis and significant reduction in the printing, editing and artistic level of books addressed to children. The first years of the 21st century brought a revival. Works of numerous artists have contributed to this, among them Iwona Chmielewska, Marta Ignerska, Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliński, Marianna Oklejak and Krystyna Lipko-Sztarbałło. Many artists from the new generation specialise in the form of a picturebook, reaching for the well-deserved prizes and manifesting high quality of execution.

Recapitulation

The presented overview of illustrated books for children shows the genesis of the Polish picturebook. The selection, quite narrow due to necessity, contains representative publications, attesting to the formation of independent Polish picturebooks, preserving domestic character, in spite of foreign influences. Books published in the 'World in Pictures' series, greatly popular after WWII, may be qualified as picturebooks in the light of the adopted criteria. In the period of development of the Polish school of illustration, the picturebooks represented high level. Numerous outstanding artists devoted their talent and creative potential to it (Boguszewska, 2013a, Wincencjusz-Patyna 2008). However, it should be noted that without the creative experiences of the inter-war artists, such impressive development of Polish illustration would not have been possible. The genesis of the Polish picturebook should also be searched for in this period.

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Summary

Contribution to the Search for the Genesis of the Polish Picturebook

The main purpose of the paper is to present the sources of Polish picturebooks for children in a chronological order. All the selected books were produced by the Polish publishing houses in the 19th and 20th century or later. Most were published after 1963, which is the publication year of the most popular illustrated book designed by Maurice Sendak. The technique used in the paper relies on document analysis. The presented sources show the genesis of the Polish picturebooks.

Keywords

illustrated book, picturebook, 19th century book, 20th century book

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