

*Polish Literature for Children and  
Youth in a Comparative Perspective  
(Selective Problems)*

RYSZARD WAKSMUND  
DOROTA MICHUŁKA

**Abstract.** Literature for children and youth in a comparative perspective is a wide and complex problem. The issues in this article are organized mainly in relation to such problems and categories as cultural topography, comparative history of children's literature, cultural domination, international exchange, research on translation, on canon formation and multicultural education. We should analyse these theses selectively, especially when we see literature for children as a product of modern times, which has two bases: the classics for adults on the one hand, and the folklore on the other – two fields of creation that children's literature simply had at some time been compared to.

As far as Poland is concerned, it is worth noting that initially French and German influences were dominant and shaped the themes of novels, fairy tales and didactic poetry for children. The child reader had contact with a rich canon(s) of translated literature from many languages also within the framework of Polish language and culture education.

Undoubtedly, we could see that foreign literature is a particular preparation for children to receive other cultures and to develop a dialogue between other cultures even though cultural differences exist. Since people all over the world may have similar problems, foreign literature should help children as readers to comprehend others' experience.

**Keywords:** culture studies, intertextuality, translation, canon formation, multiculturalism, comparative history of literature in historical context, "culture domination"

## Historical context of children's literature

That literature for children is a product of modern times has two bases: the classics for adults on the one hand, and the folklore on the other – two fields of creation that children's literature simply had at some time been compared to, e.g. Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699) compared to Homer's

Odyssey (8 BC), La Fontaine's *Les Fables* (1668) to Aesop's Fables, Charles Perrault's fairy-tales to folklore. Not until the 19th century had theatrical fairy-tales, robinsonades, historical novels for youth, periodicals for children, illustrated books, etc. appeared. As commonly known, children's literature is also a product of Western civilization and reached Poland mainly through original publications aimed at teaching French or German, later as more or less faithful translations and adaptations. Evidence for this may be found in tables of chronology in academic textbooks, in which the first column lists dates and titles of Polish classics, while the other contains publications for children and youth: Polish or Polish translations on the one hand, and foreign language on the other. Dates go as far back as the second half of the 17th century, when works such as Comenius' *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658), La Fontaine's *Les Fables* (1668), Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* (1697), Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1697), D'Aulnoy's *Les Contes de Fées* (1687/1698) were published. At that time, Polish original writings were almost non-existent, marked only by one title: Jan Szcześny Herburt's *Artes Dobromilenses* (1613). It is a collection of civil instructions directed towards young gentry, so it does not belong to belles-lettres, similarly to prayer books and catechisms for children (Kaniowska-Lewańska 1973: 429).

Behind the interest of literary historians in non-adult literature lies a school Jesuit play, which, as a product of the European Counter-Reformation, must have had its national variations, connected at least with the worship of local saints. The Enlightenment, which in Western Europe was associated with bourgeois values, acquired a peculiar undertone in Poland in connection with the predominance of manorial and gentry culture, which saturated texts for children with sentimentalism and patriotism, especially after the Napoleonic Wars when the prospect of independence had become unclear. As a result, Polish literature for children has for centuries been burdened with the obligation to sustain a patriotic fervour and belief in the state's resurrection. For this very reason, Western literary novelties were thoroughly filtered not only by the external practitioners of censorship but also by the internal one which banned books that allegedly failed to bring formative effects. Therefore, it prohibited ludic literature but supported moralising and educational themes. Because of this, publications such as Grimm's and Andersen's fairy-tales, Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* had difficulties reaching Polish, while robinsonades (e.g. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*), historical novels (e.g. Scott's *Rob Roy*) travel books (e.g. Verne's *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*), and novels for girls (Alcott's *Little Women*) were preferred. It was particularly successful with *Cuore*, a novel by Edmondo De Amicis (1886), which had several translations and initiated a

trend for memorial prose in Polish schools. Tolerance for fairy-tale and fantasy occurred as late as the Modernist period, when didactic literature appeared to be too uninteresting and one-sided, and readers' freedom to choose became impossible to control by adult middle-men.

### National and world literature

Polish resumption of independence in 1918 opened an opportunity for changing the development paradigm of children's literature, especially since it "couldn't match the output by other nations in the West", remarked Kazimierz Króliński (cited in Białek 1987: 356). Furthermore, Ludwik Bandura postulated abandoning the martyrological tradition and exchanging it for the Promethean ideal that glorifies the toil of the civilisation foreman, represented by a doctor fighting epidemics or an engineer as a champion of progress. The ideal was not meant to conform to cosmopolitanism: "Children's literature's masterpieces from other nations should be translated, since it is the native literature whence a child learns national values, which deepens their sense of nationality" (cited in Białek 1987: 389). Well-meant pacifism does not hinder these values.

Soon after, in France, Paul Hazard published his famous essay *Books, Children and Men* (1932), deemed a comparative text par excellence, in which he compared the beginnings of children's literature in France, England, Germany, Spain and Italy. Based on this, he formulated a thesis of the North's superiority over the South, which comes from the fact that, in his opinion, Latin nations "possess no sense of the essence of childishness" (Hazard 1963: 98). Moreover, he ventured to remark on differences in children's literature between the countries. He noticed that the French have a tendency for rationalism and creativity, and the ability to co-exist with others; the English are realistic, practical, and have a sense of humour; the Italians fancy grandeur, aestheticism, and conquering power. Unfortunately, Hazard was not interested in the axis West–East, as out of Slavic writers he mentioned only Pushkin, Gogol, and Chekhov, allegedly writing for children (Hazard 1963: 95). According to Hazard, the Olympus of children's literature is inhabited by Robinson in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Friday in *Dragnet* (1951), Gulliver in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Don Quixote in *Don Quixote* (1605), Cinderella in *Cinderella* (1697), Gribouille in *La soeur de Gribouille* (1965), Princess Snow White in *Snow White* (1812), Gerda and Kay in *The Snow Queen* (1845), Pinocchio in *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* (1883), General Durakin in *El General Durakin* by Condesa de Ségur (1950), Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* (1894), Nils Holgerson in *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*

(1906), and Peter Pan in *Peter and Wendy* (1911), which indicate the canon that every child should read if they want to make their life meaningful.

Only a dozen or so years ago, a German scholar Emer O'Sullivan published her great monograph titled *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik* (Heidelberg 2000), in which the issues in question were organized in relation to such problems and categories as cultural topography (perception of the Other), comparative history of children's literature, international exchange, and research on translation, on canon formation, and on intertextuality in books for children.

### Cultural domination of Polish children's literature

As far as Poland is concerned, it is worth noting that initially French and German influences were dominant and shaped the themes of novels and didactic poetry for children (Waksmund 1989). Stanisław Jachowicz, the first Polish poet for children, used the Biedermeier prose stories of Schmidt, Hey and Hoffmann to create easy-to-remember didactic rhymes. Some poetic works were written as ekphrasis for illustrations and illustrated books imported from Germany (Cieślakowski 1985), in which Maria Konopnicka was extraordinary, as she also used publications from Sweden (Teodorowicz-Hellma 2004: 54–65). However, she always gave their works a native and local flavour, which often appeared to be beyond the capabilities of less gifted poets. It was probably the origin of the most valuable Polish fairy-tale of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – *O krasonoludkach i sierotce Marysi* (*Little Orphan Mary and the Gnomes*, 1896) (Cieślakowski 1974). What is more, Grzegorz Leszczyński claims that it was Lucien Laforge's illustrations that inspired Bolesław Leśmian to change the style of his adaptation of the Arabian Nights (Leszczyński 1993: 49–53). During the partition of Poland, Russian literature for children was completely ignored, although Janusz Dunin suggests (Dunin 2003: 5–44) that *Struwelpeter* was adopted for children as *Złota Różdżka* (*The Golden Wand*). However, its brutality was softened not before the adaptation by Artur Oppman. The first exception was Korney Chukovsky's fables, inspired by the English poetry of nonsense, translated to Polish by Władysław Broniewski, who sympathised with the Bolsheviks. These fables were the beginning of truly ludic poetry for children in Poland, to which the pioneers are believed to be Jan Brzechwa and Julian Tuwim. Prominent poets and graduates of tsarist gymnasiums, they were also known for their translations of Russian classic writers in communist Poland. Because of the pressure by the communist government, many Soviet writers' works were translated into Polish. However, their impact on Polish literature for children and youth was not as significant as the poetic school of Tuwim and Brzechwa.

Since the 1960s, nonsense verse started to gain popularity in Poland, first due to the Polish translation (1961) of Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense*, later because of an increasing number of limericks by Polish poets who published in magazines for children: Hanna Łochocka, Marcin Brykczyński, and Maria Strzałkowska. A separate collection was published by a famous writer and researcher of children's literature: *Limeryki i inne łódzkie wierszyki* by Joanna Papuzińska (2007). The limerick-mania was especially manifest in the intellectual (academic) circle of Krakow gathered around Wisława Szymbowska – the Nobel Prize winner in Literature in 1996, whose nonsense verses can be found in a collection titled *Rymowanki dla dużych dzieci* (Tarnogórska 2013). In recent years, such a play with poetry has found its amateurs even among underage poets.

As far as fantasy is concerned, Poland had hardly any imitators of Lewis Carroll, whose *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) inspired many generations of poets also because of its poetic inlays. A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) has had two translations, of which the second by Monika Adamczyk was called a failure because of its excessive literality. However, it should be noted that a figure of teddy-bear as a protagonist of children's story was known in Poland seven years earlier (in 1919), when Bronisława Ostrowska published her *Bohaterski Miś czyli przygody pluszowego niedźwiadka na wojnie* (*Brave Bruin or War Adventures of a Teddy-Bear*). Nevertheless, it was Milne's idea of an animated toy that inspired Czesław Janczarski to create *Miś Uszatek* (*Teddy Floppy-ear*) – known to children from the magazine *Miś* and a stop motion-animated TV series. Similarly, Carlo Collodi's *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* inspired Janina Porazińska to write *Kichuś majstra Lepigliny* (1924); and J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* stimulated Jan Brzechwa to create a children's guidebook to imaginary lands: *Akademia Pana Kleksa* (1946). Moreover, Krystyna Kuliczowska noticed the influence of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on Woroszyński's novel *Cyryl, gdzie jesteś*, the impact of *Winnie-the-Pooh* on Agnieszka Osiecka (*Dzień dobry, Eugeniuszu*), and traces of Milne and Carroll in the works by Ludwik Jerzy Kern (*Ferdynand Wspaniały, Proszę słońca, Karampuk*) and Maciej Wojtyszka (*Bromba i inni*). However, Kuliczowska's observations were challenged by Monika Adamczyk-Grabowska, who claimed that "usually it is impossible to judge what is a real influence and what is a writer's invention" (Adamczyk-Grabowska 1968: 170). Still, there is no doubt that the motif of time travel, presented first in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and soon after in Edith Nesbit's *Five*

*Children and It* (1901) (which also includes child characters), was successfully imitated in Poland by writers such as Antoni Gawiński (*Lolek grenadier*, 1912), Maria Krüger (*Godzina pąsowej róży*, 1960), Ewa Nowacka (*Małgosia kontra Małgosia*, 1975) (Papuzińska 1989: 155-164), and more recently, Beata Ostrowicka (*Tajemnicza szkatułka*, 1996 *Eliksir przygód*, 2006) (Waksmund 2007: 101–109).

In the case of adventure and travel fiction, the most prominent are robinsonades, based naturally on Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* novel (Szymkowska-Ruszała 2000). We should mention here *Wyspa Robinsona* by Aleksander Fiedler, a famous writer and outstanding traveller, who questions in his novel the myth of the white race long before the trend for postcolonial discourse: the protagonist, a European castaway of Polish origin, comes to conclusion that he will never be able to turn shipwrecked Indians into obedient Fridays. Halina Skrobiszewska categorised this novel as an anti-classic, as she did with Nora Szczepeńska's *Dziki Anda* (1961) and *Ucho wodza* (1963), which both refer to the trend of books about Indians (Skrobiszewska 1971: 318–326; Bobowski 2013). The most distinguished Polish adventure novel *W pustyni i w puszczy* (*In Desert and Wilderness*) by Henryk Sienkiewicz (1912), which includes the theme of a young Polish boy taking care of a little English girl, is more than a mere robinsonade (Szymkowska-Ruszała 1995) but refers to Jules Verne's *Un capitaine de quinze ans* (1878). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we witnessed also the development of Polish sea literature, represented by Bohdan Pawłowicz (*Franek na szerokim świecie*, 1927), Kornel Makuszyński (*Wielka Brama*, 1936), and Janusz Meissner (*Opowieść o korsarzu Janu Martenie*, 1972). It was undoubtedly inspired by the English prose: *The Red Rover* (James Fenimore Cooper, 1827), *Peter Simple* (Frederick Marryat, 1834), *Battles with the Sea* (R. M. Ballantyne, 1883), and *Captains Courageous* (Rudyard Kipling, 1897), rather than *Przewodnik po współczesnej...* (Joseph Conrad, 1989).

Translations and adaptations of foreign literature in Polish culture education after 1999 (as an introduction to the dialogue of cultures)<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of book as an intercultural and intergenerational link cannot be overestimated in the contemporary world. It may reduce potential problems

<sup>1</sup> Some of these examples were discussed at the conference *La voix du traducteur à l'école* (Wrocław, 26–27 April 2013) organized by Elżbieta Skibińska *et al.*

with understanding and accepting the peculiarities of other nations and people that look different, think different, and believe in different things. A foreign book helps fight stereotypes, promote tolerance, understand other people and get closer to them. What seems to be of utmost importance is to adapt books to the language and abilities of young readers. With increasing frequency, such books are claimed to make overcoming differences between countries simpler in the adult life, to emphasize the necessity of forming bonds between different communities, and to unveil “the abundance of human experiences and our cultural output”,

remarks Bogumiła Staniów (Staniów 2006: 7–8).

Translations of foreign literature give the young reader the knowledge that despite the differences between nations and cultures, problems of all people are similar (Staniów 2006). At the same time, however, by necessity it summons a foreign (and strange) cultural context. “One translates not only languages, but also translates from one culture into another,” says Anna Kamieńska (see Balcerzan 1977: 377, 381). Cultural differences are visible typically on the level of proper names or “culturally foreign phenomena that make up the culture of given language community, such as names of institutions, meals, clothes, forms of entertainment, measurement units, play on words, or historical and literary allusions” (Skibińska 1999: 27).

Yet, they manifest themselves also on the level of the protagonist’s cultural origin. Rose-Mare Vassallo writes:

[...] teddy-bears and bunnies have traces of origin as clear as characters of Faulkner, Stein or Pum. In any case, British bears have this annoying tendency of reciting nursery rhymes and constantly drinking tea, while American bears are dressing up as skeletons for Halloween and showering everyone with candy-pink hearts for the Valentine’s Day [...]. (Vassallo 1998: 187)

A broad cultural context together with cognitive-didactic aspects were considered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century reviews of translations of popular adventure novels for youth, e.g. James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* (1841) translated by M. Zaleska (*Mieszkaniec puszczy*, Warszawa 1884):

the reworking of the novel [...] spans a 50 year period, from 1750 to 1803, and contains battles between the English and the French over North America; the latter are aided by some Indian tribes. The protagonist is kind Nataniel Bumpo, who sides with the English. He is a Christian, uneducated but morally flawless, respected even by ‘wild’ Indians. The book vividly depicts customs and concepts of Indians: their way of fighting, their suffering, brutality,

scalps of human skulls, declaring war with a blood-stained twig, respect for handicapped beings, etc. The content is very educational, but because of many violent scenes it is not recommended for the youngest and sensitive. (*Katalog rozumowany...* 1895: 164–165)

Discussions on faithfulness and quality of translations of children's literature have for years focused on selecting an "appropriate" translation strategy. Ritta Oittinen's *I am Me – I am Other. On the Dialogics of Translating for Children* (1993) with its very title suggests preparing the child for contact with other cultures and opts for a creative ("dialogical" in Bakhtin's sense of the word) approach to translation, which should be oriented to the target reader, not the text itself. Göte Klingberg's *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators* (1986) calls for a more faithful rendition of original texts, but also deals with cultural context adaptation, where things, like personal and geographical names and measurements are explained to the child (e.g. in footnotes), who, due to her/his lack of experience, may not understand the foreign or otherwise strange information found in books. Klingberg is concerned about the internationalization of child readers, which he also defines from an adult point of view, stating that context adaptation is a fundamental problem and has to be seen both in relation to the need to maintain the degree of adaptation of the source text, and in relation to the aim of translation work.

Furthermore, Maria Nikolajeva states that

tensions and controversies around translations and adaptations of children's literature focus mainly [...] on interlingual transfer, particularly on the process of domestication and introducing significant changes to translated texts (Nikolajeva 2006: 283).

A good exemplification of the issue is found in opinions on readers' perception of Andersen's works in Poland and their "polonisation" in the translations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The problem is discussed by the translator F. H. Lewestam (1817–1878). At first, many Andersen's works were published individually as reprints in magazines. It was Lewestam who published a whole collection, translated directly from the Danish original. Lewestam himself came from a Danish family that had long lived in Warsaw. His collection titled *Didactic and Fantastical Little Tales* is rather reworking than translation, which, according to Lewestam, gave them a special didactic value: they are closer to the Polish reader. Lewestam reviews his own work in the preface (see Andersen 1859), admitting that he has substituted Polish elements for the Danish ones (typical



Polish background, bits of Slavic history, legends and folklore) in order to help the young reader, if not everyone else.

Among other tales, Lewestam adapted *The Snow Queen* to the Polish reality. The action takes place in Warsaw (real street names are mentioned), while the kids have Polish names: Karolek and Elżbietka. The Queen's castle lies in Kamchatka, and Elżbietka in her search for her brother is aided by two witches: Kamchadanka and Chuvashanka. An important role is also played by the reindeer, who is not only a helpful mount but a mediator between reality and the fantastic world. The fairy-tale ends similarly as in Andersen's original: having come home, the kids notice they have grown up, although they remain children in their souls (Brzozowska 1970).

Many controversies arose around Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and its translations: free but accepted one by Irena Tuwim (*Kubuś Puchatek*) and a faithful but foreign one by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (*Fredzia Phi-Phi*). One of Tuwim's defenders was Stanisław Lem:

A translation rarely happens to be better than the original. I know just one such case. Irena Tuwim's *Kubuś Puchatek* is a brilliant book. However, the lady who out of Pooh created some Fredzia Phi Phi, I would kill her with a blunt knife for what she did to this book. And those people who applauded her... I won't even tell what should be done to them. A text full of very special charm has been simply castrated. Irena Tuwim, on the other hand, has achieved something very rare. She did a truly ingenious transformation into the Polish language. She came up with this lovely name – Puchatek. The book possesses this strange ability to never get old. It passes the most difficult test of all – the test of time. There are books which grow with us; which we bring into adulthood and then discover them in new ways. (Lem 1992)

Woźniak, in defence of Tuwim's version of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, poses the question:

Should we put the same measure and translation criteria to each type of literature? Does a decision to 'domesticate' a text really lead to its infantilization, and is a result of lack of confidence in children's perception, while a strategy of keeping exoticness and recreating all of the stylistic measures will make a translation more appealing to an adult reader? (Woźniak)

Hence, the readers' choice (children's as readers) seems to be a translation strategy that conforms to the child's linguistic and cultural perceptual capabilities rather than the translator's faithfulness to the original.

## Canon formation and decanonization

Some translation strategies may be suggested also by the Polish language school's cultural education and its support for multiculturalism. The reading list of the core curriculum for grades IV-VI consists of 24 texts, half of which belong to world literature: Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937), Carlo Collodi's *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* (1883), Astrid Lindgren's *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* (1973), Ferenc Molnár's *A Pál utcai fiúk* (1906), Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), René Goscinny and Jean-Jacques Sempé's *Le Petit Nicolas* (1959), Jules Verne's *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (1873), Moony Witcher's *The Girl of the Sixth Moon* (2012), Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). This list does not include a free selection of fairy tales, folk tales, legends, carols, poetic, and patriotic texts, as they are not provided with suggested translations or translators. The choices rest on textbook authors.

As a result of "decanonization" and freedom in selection in the last ten years, school reading lists have seen many new additions from various parts of the world translated from numerous languages. These are mostly translations from English, e.g. *The Chronicles of Narnia* (C. S. Lewis, 1950), *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (J. R. R. Tolkien, 1937), *The Old Man and the Sea* (Ernest Hemingway, 1952), *Nomads of the North* (James Oliver Curwood, 1919), *The Prayer of the Frog* (Antony de Mello, 1988); from French, e.g. *Le Petit Prince* (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 1943), *Les Fables* (Jean de La Fontaine, 1668), *Voyage de Théo* (Catherine Clément, 1998), *Oscar et la dame rose* (Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, 2002), *Le Petit Nicolas* (René Goscinny and Jean-Jacques Sempé, 1959); from Swedish, e.g. *Pippi Långstrump* (Astrid Lindgren, 1945), *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* (Selma Lagerlöf, 1906–7); from Italian, e.g. *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* (Carlo Collodi, 1883), *Cuore* (Edmondo De Amicis, 1886), *El Loco* (Alberto Manzi, 2006); from Spanish, e.g. *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* (Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, 1605), *Vamos Aquecer o Sol* (José Mauro de Vasconcelos, 2013); from Russian, e.g. *Весёлый барабанищик* (Bulat Okudzhava, 1965), *Путешествие Алисы* (Kir Bulychov, 1974), *Сказка о царе Салтане, о сыне его славном и могучем богатыре князе Гвидоне Салтановиче и о прекрасной царевне лебеди* (Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, 1831); from Czech, e.g. *Slovo o slovu* (Vaclav Havel, 1989); from German, e.g. *Die unendliche Geschichte* (Michael Ende, 1979), the Brothers Grimm's fairy-tales, *Die kleine Hexe* (Otfried Preussler, 1957), *Tintenherz* (Cornelia Funke, 2003), *Wir fanden einen Pfad* (Christian Morgenstern, 1914),

*Unsre Oma* (Ilse Kleberger, 1964), *Ein Mann für Mama* (Christine Nöstlinger, 1989); from Danish (Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales); from Finnish (Raul Roine's fairy-tales); from Hungarian, e.g. *A Pál utcai fiúk* (Ferenc Molnár, 1906); from Norwegian, e.g. the Vikings series of Torill Thorstad Hauger (1978), *Sofies verden* (Jostein Gaarder, 1991); from Yiddish (excerpts from the books by Isaac Bashevis Singer); from Latin, e.g. *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 8 AD). Such a selection is arbitrary without any language dominance. What is crucial is the knowledge about other people and cultures<sup>2</sup>.

The phenomenon is reflected amongst others in the series of manuals by Agnieszka Kłakówna *To lubię!* (*I like it!*) and its new edition *Nowe to lubię!* (*The new I like it!*). The titles are approached with gradually wider cultural (and multicultural) contexts and almost 80% of the texts come from foreign literature. Some of them come from other European countries, while others are from distant continents (e.g. from New Zealand, America). There is a description of New Zealand's exotic fauna and flora in *Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera (Kłakówna, Jędrychowska, Wiatr 2007: 75–77)<sup>3</sup>, an image of Scottish moors from Eric Knight's *Lassie Come Home* (1940), and the figures of an Indian chief Winnetou and a Spanish heroic outlaw Zorro.

Another example is Grey Owl's *The Adventures of Sajo and Her Beaver People* (1935, trans. by W. Grosz). The textbook editors provide the information about the author and his culture. The author was known under his Amerindian name, which in English means 'Grey Owl'. He was born in England and his real name was George Stensfeld Belaney. He spent many years in Canada among white settlers and natives – American Indians. He lived according to Amerindians laws, was accepted as a brother by the tribe of Ojibwe and married an Indian woman. The story about an eleven-year-old Indian girl Sajo, her brother and little beavers is an actual story. (Leszczyński, Stadtmuller, Zechenter-Spławińska 2002: 148–155)

We should also highlight an excerpt from Zlata Filipovic's *Zlata's Diary* (1993), a memoir about the war in the former Yugoslavia written when the author was eleven. The diary entry is "In Sarajevo" ("among my friends, my family, are Serbs, and Croats, and Muslims") (Bochenek, Zawadzka 2001: 151–156).

<sup>2</sup> *Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej o reformie podstawy programowej, kształcenie blokowe* [The Ministry of National Education on core curriculum reform, block education], Biblioteczka reformy, Warsaw 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Witi Ihimaera (a Maori prose writer), *Whale Rider* (excerpt). Source: Witi Ihimaera, *Jeździec na wielorybie*, trans. Janusz Ruskowski, Wydawnictwo Replika, Zakrzewo 2006, pp. 11–14.

The chapter *Europe is Our Common Cause* within the subject *Colourful Life* features a part translated from Rom titled “Gypsy Song”, an excerpt from Papusza’s *Head* (Bronisława Wajs 1950). The text is concerned with an eternal journey – the Roms’ longing for ‘boundless’ freedoms and colourful lives within the community, full of music, dancing and singing. The image of gypsy life in Polish literature stems from Romanticism (e.g. Kraszewski’s *Chata za wsią*) and Young Poland (Pawlikowska-Jansorzewska’s *Wielki Wóz*). On the one hand, it used to be an element of interest in the exotic, on the other this eccentric way of living became a model for Polish artistic bohemia of the 1840s. Traces of gypsy culture are also visible in Polish children’s literature, for example in Maria Kopnicka’s fairy-tale *O krasonoludkach i sierotce Marysi* (1863), in which the image of gypsy is definitely negative.

At present, gypsy (Rom) culture is duly recognised and increasingly popular, also thanks to Jerzy Ficowski and his promoting Papusza’s (Bronisława Wajs) poetry. The following is two stanzas of her poem, taken from one of the textbooks [tentative translation]. In the poem we can see references to gypsy culture, which is connected also with pictures of “free” nature and clear nostalgia for gypsy freedom.

I grew in a forest like a golden bush,  
 In a gypsy tent that looked like a mushroom.  
 I love fire like my own heart.  
 Winds big and small  
 Lulled the little Gypsy girl  
 And took her to the world far away...  
 Rain washed my tears,  
 The sun, golden gypsy father,  
 Warmed my body  
 And beautifully singed my heart  
 [...]  
 Oh, how pretty it is to live,  
 To hear this all!  
 Oh, how pretty  
 To see this all!  
 Oh, how pretty  
 To pick up berries black like gypsy tears!  
 (Kowalczykova, Mrowcewicz 2000: 116–118).

As the above considerations indicate, a child reader also has contact with a rich canon(s) of translated literature also within the framework of the Polish language and education. We tried to analyse only some aspects of Polish children's literature from the comparative perspective: comparative history of children's literature, cultural and language domination, international exchange (and influences), research on translation (also adaptations) and discussion on canon formation.

Undoubtedly, we could see that foreign literature is a particular preparation for children to receive other cultures and to build up a dialogue between other cultures even though cultural differences exist. Since people around the world have similar problems, this should help children as readers to relate to others' experience. This is another variety that holds primacy, supported not only by stimuli from literature but also from the mass media.

**Ryszard Waksmund**

waxmund@poczta.onet.eu  
Instytut Filologii Polskiej  
Uniwersytet Wrocławski  
Pl. Nankiera 15  
50-140 Wrocław  
POLSKA

**Dorota Michułka**

michdor@uni.wroc.pl  
Instytut Filologii Polskiej  
Uniwersytet Wrocławski  
Pl. Nankiera 15  
50-140 Wrocław  
POLSKA

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