



Iwona Chmielewska

*Polish Illustrator Candidate for the
2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award*

IWONA CHMIELEWSKA: bio

Iwona Chmielewska (born 1960) studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, and graduated from the Printmaking Department in 1984. In the beginning of her career (early 1990s) she was illustrating children's classics and Polish poetry. In the beginning of 21st century her books entered South Korean market, where the artist gained huge popularity. Being well known in Asia, Chmielewska was hardly recognized in Poland. The situation changed abruptly in the year 2011, together with *Blumka's Diary's* appearance on Polish market (originally it was published in Germany). The book was loved both by readers and critics and its author with her subtle, melancholic style started to enjoy wide recognition also in her own country.

Iwona Chmielewska has been awarded in Warsaw, Seoul and Mexico City. In 2007 she won Golden Apple of Biennial of Illustration Bratislava, and Bologna Ragazzi Award twice in 2011 and 2013. She has published over 40 books, cooperating with quite many publishing houses both in Poland and abroad.

She lives and works in Toruń.

IWONA CHMIELEWSKA – STATEMENT / overview

Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna

Iwona Chmielewska is an exceptional artist of Polish origins whose artwork has been recognised and highly admired both at home and abroad, especially in South Korea and Germany, as well as in Portugal, Spain, Mexico, China, Taiwan and Japan. She has been awarded in Warsaw, Seoul and Mexico City, in 2007 she won Golden Apple of Biennial of Illustration Bratislava (Slovakia), and Bologna Ragazzi Award twice in 2011 and 2013. There are more than 40 titles in her oeuvre. Her original way of perceiving a book as a unibody of images and text, a perfect container for sequences of pictures and sets of verses, is truly amazing, and bewilders the audience with every new title she has created or contributed to.

Iwona Chmielewska was born on 5 February 1960 in Pabianice, Poland. She studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, and graduated from the Printmaking Department in 1984. She lives and works in Toruń – the city of Copernicus which became a protagonist of one of her books (*Cztery strony czasu* [Four Directions of Time], Media Rodzina, Poznań 2013).

She stepped onto the path of book illustration at the beginning of the 1990s when she was dealing with more “classical” approach to book graphic design when preparing illustrations to world known youth literature (two editions of *A Little Princess* and *Secret Garden* by F.E.H. Burnett and *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery), and collections of verses by famous Polish poets (M. Pawlikowska Jasnorzewska, Halina Poświatowska, J. Czechowicz, K. Iłhakowiczówna and K.I. Gałczyński) – all the titles edited by a Polish publishing house, Algo from Toruń. About 10 full-paged illustrations in each volume were a sort of visual counterpoints to long texts of novels, or pictorial “comas”, or even “pauses”, in thick volumes of rich poetry collections. Especially illustrations from the lyrical books introduced at that time so well-recognised nowadays moods present in later works by Chmielewska, who in delicate contours, subtle colours, in a somehow archaic manner, always in a very quiet, slow and tender way, weaves her own stories, even if they are based on someone else’s texts.

However, the illustrated by Chmielewska books published in Poland till the beginnings of the 21st century did not bring the author wide recognition. The turning point in her career as a

book artist was a meeting with Jiwone Lee, Korean art historian and literary agent, at the Bologna Fairs in 2003. The collaboration between the two ladies led to Chmielewska's original books having been published on Korean market, what happened already one year later with three titles: *A Thought* (Nonjang, Seoul), *On Wandering while Falling Asleep* (Nonjang, Seoul) and *A Blue Stick/A Blue Box* (Sekyejul, Paju/Seoul). Only the second of them, under the title *O wędrowaniu przy zasypianiu* (Hokus-Pokus, Warsaw 2006), has been edited in Poland by now. Till today Korean publishing houses have released over 20 books by Chmielewska, of which only one concept had had a sort of premiere in Poland (*Dzień dobry, Europo* with a text by Agnieszka Niezgoda, Algo, Toruń 2004, *Good Morning, Europe* - text and images by Chmielewska - Borim, Paju/Seoul 2010).

The first international recognition Chmielewska gained thanks to *Thinking ABC* (Nonjang 2006) - a book for Korean children learning an English alphabet, which was based on an earlier concept of "thinking" Korean ABC (Nonjang 2005). The book was awarded a Golden Apple in Bratislava in 2007. As a result of this success, four years later Chmielewska was appointed as a member of the international jury for the competition of the 23rd Biennial of Illustration Bratislava 2011. The abc books were also followed by *Thinking Numbers* (Nonjang 2007), and to some extent, the general concept was repeated in *abc.de* (Warstwy, Wrocław 2015, whose German edition was nominated for the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis in 2016), a book which is an interesting lexicon of German culture and the artist's creative echo of Karl Philipp Moritz's *ABC-Buch* (1790), most certainly *Neues ABC-Buch* with Wolf Erlbruch's illustrations (Kunstmann, Munich 2000). The German artist is among those truly admired by Polish illustrator. And just exactly as the blurb from this latter book says: "a book to learn how to read, how to think and how to look at". This a perfect description for books which are created or co-created by Iwona Chmielewska. With the aim of these volumes she wants to teach the possibly widest audience to read carefully to understand the world, to look attentively to explain the world, and to think profoundly to realise everything what surrounds us. She does it with the use of the simplest means in terms of technique and form, style and contents.

Chmielewska often uses pencils, crayons, she cuts out pieces from old notebooks and journals, she embroiders with one colour thread. Her drawings are clear, sometimes slightly naïve, always neat and studious. She tries to follow the reality, still she comes out with most

poetic atmosphere. The artist leaves a lot of empty space in her illustrations. Her favourite colour seems to be blue, what decides a spiritual and melancholic character of many of the books she has been engaged in. The artist uses subtle patterns, sometimes almost pale, slightly visible and therefore she obviously directs our attention to a tiny detail which may become a visual key to a whole story. Let it be a letter knife and a slit in a sheet of paper from *Czarownica* [Witch] (text by K. Iłakowiczówna, Wydawnictwo Miejskie Poznania, Poznań 2015), a red berry in a bird's beak from the book *Girl's Kingdom* (Changbi, Seoul 2011), or a brown cotton thread from *O tych, którzy się rozwijali* [About Those Who Unwound] (Media Rodzina, Poznań 2013). Chmielewska is somehow inspired by North European painting, drawing and graphic art from the turn of the Middle Ages but also 19th century printmaking and Biedermeier aesthetics. She also happens to use some citations from well-known works of art.

Iwona Chmielewska's books are mainly about people and relations between them: *Two People* – Sakyejul, Seoul/Paju 2008, *Dwoje ludzi* – Media Rodzina, Poznań 2014; *A Girl's Kingdom* – Changbi, Seoul 2011, *Królestwo dziewczynki* – Entliczek, Warszawa 2014; *Eyes* – Changbi, Seoul 2012 awarded Bologna Ragazzi in 2013, *Oczy* – Warstwy, Wrocław 2014; *A House of the Mind: Maum*, with a text by Heekyoung Kim, Changbi, Seoul 2011 (which won the author's first Bologna Ragazzi Award in the same year), *Maum. Dom duszy* – Warstwy, Wrocław 2016, among many others. The emotions, feelings, experiences are so ordinary and so unique, just like our existence is always one of a kind as it is ours. Therefore they are both universal and individual as we are the ones to interpret these simple though eternal stories introduced to us by Chmielewska in her books. With these tales she orders up the world around. Like letters which are arranged in an alphabet, our lives are arranged within the web of cardinal directions, time charts, interpersonal relations, cultural orders, names, cases and exceptions. Sometimes it is enough to stop and think over the situations which happen to us. Chmielewska's books offer such an interval in our every-day lives. She also tries to focus our attention on extraordinary lives of people both well-known and anonymous. Highly appealing was her tale of an orphanage in Krochmalna Street in Warsaw run by Janusz Korczak included in *Pamiętnik Blumki* [Blumka's Diary] (Media Rodzina, Poznań 2011). German version of this book was nominated to the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis 2012. Biographical elements were also included by Chmielewska in a book entitled *Na wysokiej*

górze [On a High Mountain] (Wydawnictwo Miejskie Poznań, Poznań 2013) which is a lyrical portrait of Krystyna Miłobędzka and a visual equivalent of a poem by her. A similar concept was used in the case of *Czarownica* [Witch] (Wydawnictwo Miejskie Poznań, Poznań 2015) with a poem by Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna. Yet another moving collective portrait, this time of Jews from Lublin, was created by Iwona Chmielewska on the base of Adam Zylberberg's glass negatives in her book with poems by Józef Czechowicz *Dopóki niebo nie płacze* [Until the Sky Cries Down] (Ośrodek "Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN", Lublin 2016)

The artist loves dichotomic structure. As the main scheme it appears in the majority of her book concepts, occasionally starting already at the level of a title: *Two People, Eyes, Obie* [Both] and *Halfway Full or Halfway Empty?*; this "two" happens to be multiplied, e.g. *Cztery zwykłe miski* [Four Ordinary Bowls], or *Four Directions of Time*. In other books we can see alternating arrangement which resembles a structure of a dialogue: a question and an answer – pages with holes for the eyes and various images behind them in *Eyes*, a repeating double shape sticking out of a kid's pocket and the actual object hidden there, in a book entitled *W kieszonce* [In My Little Pocket]. The books are also often based on opposites. The contrasts show the whole spectrum of sensations, moods, possibilities, situations we may experience throughout our lives (compare: *Where Is My Daughter?*, Changbi, Seoul 2011). If we look carefully we will always find *recto* and *verso*, a left and a right side, light and shadow, plus and minus. Chmielewska bears in mind a pattern which results from the very organism of a book which quite naturally decides this dual construction. Even though she is not responsible for graphic design of her books, there is no doubt that her pictorial concepts clearly suggest the co-operating artists the final appearance of the covers, endpapers and flyleaves, typography, etc.

Iwona Chmielewska's sensitivity encourages us to find sense in every simple object as it can become an intriguing beginning of a story, or it might tell us about something very important in very plain words. She begins her book *Four Ordinary Bowls* with a sentence: "Anything can come up as an idea for a book", and she proves it. Her imagination and a deep sense of form allow to build up intimate worlds but they also invite to creative adventure. As in the case of a book *Trouble* (Nonjang, Seoul 2010; *Kłopot*, Wytwórnia, Warsaw 2012) where a main character is an iron stain burnt on a white table cloth. The success of the book concept

resulted in a continuation prepared by the publishing house as an activity book *Moc kłopotów* [Loads of Troubles], Wytwórnia, Warsaw 2016.

The artist claims that she creates books for everyone. They can be perceived on different levels. The younger a reader is, the more mediation they may need, and this builds an essential role for parents, guardians or tutors. Whereas children can also teach adults a lot thanks to their unlimited imagination and primal sensitivity, what is an and additional value of Iwona Chmielewska's artistic work that simply cannot be overestimated.

Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna

<http://znak-zorro-zo.blogspot.com/2011/03/iwona-chmielewska-wywiad.html>

ZORROBLOG

28 march 2011

An Interview with Iwona Chmielewska by Monika Obuchow.

“And the Oscar goes to... Iwona Chmielewska!”

This is not a big exaggeration. This award, given during the Bologna Children's Book Fair, has the same importance to the illustrators as the famous golden statue of a man does for the filmmakers. This year, the Bologna Ragazzi Award, in the category of non-fiction, was given to Iwona Chmielewska from Toruń for her *House of the Mind: Maum*.

· **You open your eyes and see...**

I see my dog, Puma, who's lying next to my bed. As a well-mannered person who observes the quiet hours, she expresses her excitement only after she sees that I'm fully awake. I also see a wardrobe crammed with my husband's clothes. One of his shirts is usually jammed between the wardrobe doors, which became an inspiration for *A House of the Mind: Maum*.

· **How important are the things that one sees and surrounds him/herself with, and places where he/she lives?**

I'm not sure. It's not very important to me. I grew up in Pabianice, which is a smoggy working class town. From my window, I had a view of a dozen or so factory chimneys. I still remember the sweet smell of cotton. Every place can be inspiring. I don't think that the nomads living in the desert or people from the North have duller inner lives because they are surrounded by homogenous landscapes.

You can also live in a house designed by a brilliant architect, but not truly see it. Perhaps because you've got other priorities. You look at the world with your inner eye, which looks at things differently, depending on the individual. There are two relations to be considered in the act of seeing: comparison, a reference point in space, and individual interpretation.

· **Is Toruń important to you?**

It's important as a place which allows me to work in peace, since it gives me anonymity. Toruń has the right scale that suits me. I created a book about Toruń, *The Four Directions of Time* (published by Sakyejul), which is a proof that I love this city and am moved by its history, I guess. Toruń is important to me, but I don't feel that I'm important to Toruń.

· **What influenced your life choices?**

I could say it was a so-called controlled accident. I see myself as a person who's rather brave in following my dreams, and I value independence, which I have always pursued. I arranged my life accordingly. Every independent artist dreams about his/her own art book. I'd also like to immodestly add that I've always worked very hard to make my dreams come true.

· **Who inspired you? Who is your favorite artist?**

I'd have to give you a long list—I constantly keep adding to it. I like simple, humble people who worked hard to achieve great success in whatever their field is. In art, I'm inspired by the Dutch and Italian masters and architects, whose works are not about expressing their egos but exposing the idea.

· **Can you say something more about your career development? What happened between *I like Cats* and *Maum*?**

When it comes to making books, I'm self-taught. I majored in graphic techniques and my professors scorned any traces of narration in an image. I created my first books very intuitively, making my way bit by bit, so I was allowed to make mistakes. I started when my children were very little, and at that time I didn't know what picture books were. I had a great opportunity to work with Algo Publishing in Toruń, whose owners gave me a free hand to illustrate poetry but also children's books. I could experiment. This was when I illustrated *A Little Princess* in two versions, *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Irish Fairy Tales*. These were the times (early 1990s) when some guy in a print shop drew over the black and white illustrations in my first book with a pen because he thought they were not defined enough.

At that time, I already had an intuitive need to give my illustration narrative that would be independent from the text. When I was illustrating poetry, I didn't try to

reflect the poem's content literally, but rather tap into its mood and create something that would be my own, images that would run along the poem. Usually, these illustrations, that would take a whole page, were put next to a poem at random—for technical reasons. After the book was published, I remember analyzing the poems accompanying particular illustrations; it gave me a lot to think about. It turned out that with Józef Czechowicz's poems, for example, the accompanying illustration matched the text perfectly. It was like magic, but I realized that if I create images that are underdefined and open to different interpretations, they can be more independent, so everyone can find what they are looking for in them.

When a person has a life goal and a great desire to achieve it—there's nothing that can stop him/her. Even failures or poverty. I just had to, and I hope I will always have to, make books. First, they were only for myself. Fortunately, this determination resulted in participating in the exhibition of Polish illustrators in Bologna. There I received two awards, and it was my first time going to the Bologna Children's Book Fair. There, I showed two book mockups. Such were the times (2003) that Polish illustrators had no published books to present... The most serendipitous event in my life was meeting Jiwone Lee, who should be awarded the Order of the White Eagle for her relentless popularization of Polish books in South Korea. Then I began my amazing adventure and the best period of my life. I received commissions for my art books and for illustrations for Korean books. Up until now, thirteen such books were published. Recently, I've submitted three new books to Nonjang Publishing. I'll see their mockups in Bologne. Another book has just been published by Changbi Publishing.

Jiwone claims that it's a precedent in South Korea for publishers to accept completed projects, especially if they were created by foreign artists. Putting a book together for publishing in Korea is a long and painstaking process, since the text and illustrations are carefully analyzed and edited. Luckily, I rarely have to make any alterations, and when I do, I'm very grateful for the suggestions, as it's for the benefit of the book. Thanks to the diligence of the experienced and competent editors the book then becomes even better. I also have the best agent in the world, who protects my rights and doesn't allow any negligence. Sometimes, however, we have to practice Buddhist patience.

· **Have your Korean collaborations changed your perception of art?**

I'll talk about art that is closest to my heart—art for children, which actually is art for everyone. Art for adults, when presented to a child in a proper way, becomes art for children. In Poland, this topic is held in disregard, or absent from social discourse or media. Korean picture books for children are diverse and multi-threaded—this is their strength. I attend Bologne book fair every year and I noticed that South Korea is becoming an internationally acclaimed leader in the field of picturebooks. Their art and design is of highest quality, and after all, a book is the first artwork in one's life. I learned that you can make a children's picturebook about any socially relevant topic. Art is a powerful tool that stimulates sensibility and creativity, but it also shapes our social education, compassion, and tolerance, which is the foundation for democracy. This can be achieved thanks to artists, who, with the help of their intuition, without scientific theories, can move and educate their audience. I learned that children's book can be a masterpiece, a socially relevant masterpiece. Since I became familiarized with such books, I've been collecting them around the world and sharing them with students, for example. I also became more skeptical about the social impact of contemporary art, which is exhibited in galleries and seen by few. Picturebooks can have the same effect, but a wider range of impact, since are distributed in thousands of copies, catering art to children and adults.

· **Which book is the most important for you, and is it your favorite?**

I don't think I can pick the most important one. Recently, the charts have been pointing to *Trouble* and the books that followed it in the series about different shapes. I'm looking at how it affects the readers, especially adults, even though it's just a simple book for children. I've heard the adults' opinions, and most of them said that every time they read this book, they are touched, even though they know how it ends. South Korean blogs show children working with this book; Nonjang Publishing attached a high-quality paper notebook to every copy of this book, so children can draw their own versions of the story. I'm in awe with the Koreans' attitude towards children and I'm proud that I can work with them.

- ***Maum* is a story very important for the author, Hee Kyoung Kim. What does *Maum* mean to you? What is your *Maum*?**

I'm very grateful to Changbi Publishing for accepting my vision of the book, including putting the mirror on the last page, along with the romanized word "Maum." This text was very challenging to me, and I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to rise up to the occasion. I created a separate visual narrative that was coherent with the idea of animating the images while turning the pages. *Maum* means a soul—it's invisible but it's also the most important thing in our lives. Yet, I still don't know what my *Maum* is.

- **How did you feel about the jury's explication in the Bologne contest? Did they understand your message?**

Receiving this award is an unbelievable experience to me. When I first went to Bologne book fair, I was looking at the winning books with reverence. It was like that every time I went there. I couldn't even afford these amazing works of art. I can't even tell you how I feel about this verdict because I still can't believe it...And the jury's words simply touched me. I like that they used Bachelard's quote about a clear vision, profound analysis, and hard work. Everyone, including the jury, gets to know my message in this book in their own way.

- **What do you need to create?**

Actually, I don't need anything. I don't have any requirements that must be met. In my case, 80% of the book is created in my mind, and this is the most difficult and important part of the creative process. And a head works always, regardless of the conditions. I take a lot of time to prepare for my books, but their execution is very quick. At this stage, I need a desk, naturally. In the meantime, I can cook dinners for my numerous family, or do all the "regular," ordinary things. I'm not the best example to be used to demonstrate how the famous surge of inspiration is bestowed by the muse. The muse attacks me when I least expect it.

· **Are you the collector of “scraps of reality,” like other illustrators?**

Yes, indeed. I do collect strange scraps, sometimes I even take something from a trashcan, embarrassing my children. I never know which scrap of reality will inspire me. For example, I can read the same illustrated magazine about interior design over and over again. Depending on the book I'm working on at that moment, I always notice something new in old photographs, which I didn't see before because my perception was not programmed to look for these things. I remember that I felt inspired to solve one riddle by the cracks in the pavement. Yet, another book was inspired by an empty table. I also analyze human behavior and note them down in my mental diary.

· **What is your soft spot in creating art?**

My soft spot is exploiting the same motif many times in the same book. It's some kind of an obsession. Whether it's a shape or a word, or characterization—I always create a framework for myself and try to stick with it. Instead of looking for freedom in art, I restrict myself. Restrictions inspire me the most. They allow me to explore the theme thoroughly, within the framework, which opens another dimension without limits.

· **What are the things Iwona Chmielewska can't work without?**

I always have my tools with me, which are my head and two hands. The rest changes, depending on needs. The last book, for example, was sewn from little pieces of cloth—I didn't draw a single line in it.

· **Do you know “what children need,” since it seems that everyone in Poland does?**

If somebody knows exactly what other people need, it's a very dangerous sign, and we know cases like that from our history. I have four children, and each one needs something different. This shows that it's impossible to answer this question on a global scale. Every child reader is an individual with individual needs, and it would be ideal if bookshops and libraries were able to offer a variety of choices, so the child could get what he/she needs or likes. It might turn out that, in a month or two years,

they will like a different aesthetic that one child wanted a year before, and another child doesn't want at all. How do you estimate it? I believe that it's good to confront art and books that you don't like. It's important to know that it exists, even though you prefer different styles. A child can have different books: high-brow, low-brow, analytical, "sensory," easy and difficult. But the most important thing is for the child not to get used to one style only.

Do you refer to your own or your children's childhood for inspiration? What was your childhood like? Did your parents support your creativity and offer you books and pictures?

My childhood was happy; I was an only child for sixteen years and my parents gave me a lot of love. Then my brother was born. I learned how to read quite early and I grew up with fantastic, wise books from the '60s and '70s. I remember this special kind of tension I felt when looking at more challenging artistic illustrations, but I was never afraid of books and was aware of the conventionality of fairy-tales containing violence. I liked to spend time with my father, who was in his twenties at the time. He would spend hours showing me different maps and atlases. We'd also make up contests and riddles. I would regularly get my *Miś* monthly, a later *Świerszczyk*, which, despite their weak spots, tackled social problems and taught children patriotism through great literary texts and illustrations, which was rather uncommon in those days. Perhaps what I'm saying wouldn't be generally agreed on, but I found values that shaped identity in the books from that period. I was a leftist and a slightly elevated child, a dreamer, a loner, and sensitive to social inequality. I was made of contradictions, but along with my dreams I was also taking great care of my Math notebook. I still love solving arithmetic equations. In high school, I was in a class with focus on math, and I still refer to that use of logical thinking- maybe a bit too much.

Do you have a favorite childhood book?

I like non-fiction books, informative books, and books that have great illustrations. In the '60s these types of books had a very high quality. I was very happy that I received my Bologna Ragazzi award in this category, as I think it's the most demanding genre- as it combines art with education. Recently, I bought book online that I loved when I

was little, *Nature's Voice*, in two volumes. The illustrations in this book were an incredibly important discovery for me as a child. I chose graphic design as my major because of them. I know that Jiwone Lee buys Polish non-fiction books from the '60s for the Korean Museum of Children's Books collection, as she believes they are one of the best representatives in their category. When it comes to my children's childhood—we fondly remember it but I don't use it as a reference in my books.

· **To paraphrase a line from a Polish cult movie: where does this melancholy in your eyes come from? Are you a melancholic person and does it influence your art?**

Indeed, people who don't know me well might think that I'm a melancholic person. Yet, it's not true—I love humor, especially situational humor, and surprising jokes which appear spontaneously. I also maintain a healthy distance from myself and I think I know how to make fun of myself. However, if I was to be an entertainer, I'd rather be an illusionist than a comedian. I like people with a good sense of humor, because humor is correlated with intelligence. A good sense of humor comes from the ability to balance tragedy with comedy—the inescapable elements of our lives. In my opinion, the most important and moving children's books are the ones that have an equal amount of joy and sadness. Children need this tension coming from balancing these two emotions. They learn that real life is not only about fun and play but also about obstacles, sadness, sickness, or even death.

I'm a great sceptic; I'm sceptical about everything and I always see negatives in positive things and the other way around. I'm able to appreciate problems and see their good sides. I think it influences my art, which is reflected in my books, especially in *Where is My Daughter?* (Nonjang Publishing).

· **What can you offer to Korean readers that Korean authors can't?**

I have no idea. I should ask them. Perhaps they like my metaphors—all my books are based on metaphors.

· **Where would you be if you hadn't follow "the Korean path"?**

I'd have to have really deep drawers in my desk for storing my book projects in. After so many year, I'd probably feel discouraged and quit. I don't know how I'd

support myself—perhaps by making pierogis. I have to say that I'm pretty good at that. I could also draw portraits, but not realistic ones, just metaphorical.

· **What should we know about Iwona Chmielewska?**

I rarely talk about myself—it's embarrassing. I don't know what else I can say. I've never told anyone so much about myself before. In general, I'm not a very interesting person, but I'm happy—I have a great family, and I love what I do. I prefer to talk about my books. I hope this award will allow me to make books with even more humbleness and respect for my readers.

[00:01] Very often questions are asked about inspiration and I know that authors often dislike the question: what inspires you?

[00:12] I have no issue with this question because my answer is very simple.

[00:20] I am mostly inspired by simple, everyday things.

[00:26] The simplest situations which we can experience on the street, walking to the store or reading about something ordinary.

[00:38] I also view a lot of photographs because I like to confront with the real world.

[00:46] Once we take these ordinary things and usual heroes, and gift them with unusual qualities,

[00:56] putting them in the most unexpected situations, we can create connections between the real and the imaginary world.

[01:13] Then, we have a chance to create poetry, a visual poetry.

[01:19] I think there are many examples of visual rhymes, but we can rarely confront ourselves on a really deep level with visual poetry.

[01:37] And I always look for such books in the world, collecting just those that sometimes even bring me to tears.

[01:46] It's because they touch on the most important, and the most hidden emotions which we, as adults, often feel ashamed of.

[01:56] It also raises the question of whether these books are meant for children, or people of all ages?

[02:03] Or perhaps they are meant for the child that lives on within adults, including the elderly.

[02:11] I think that books have to be prepared so that people with different scopes of experience: children with small experiences as well as the elderly, with far-reaching ones,

[02:30] could all relate to the book.

[02:35] What we have to prepare is a kind of extract, an essence, which anyone can dose according to their need, their willingness, or their readiness for the experience.

[02:54] Quite often, people think that a book for children is something less important than an adult's book,

[03:05] that children's books, or picturebooks, do not mention things such as emotion, illumination, catharsis, revelation.

[03:21] Meanwhile, at meetings I have a chance to see how strongly adults are affected by these books.

[03:32] It happens because they touch not only the child's soul within them, but also the grown up one.

[03:42] I am constantly inspired by the fact that a book, even when it's already printed and ready, is a variable being,

[03:51] which in confrontation with various recipients can turn out to be something completely different. It is also what always surprises me at meetings, when people view my book as their own personal story. It makes me really happy.

[04:10] Because, the most important thing in a book is what happens outside of its bounds, what goes on within the life of the recipient.

[04:21] When there's such a welcoming, empty space between the text and images, where there's room for human issues and emotions,

[04:36] there's also a way for anyone to feel like a co-creator of the book.

[04:48] I also take great care not to say and show too much. As I get older, I clean up my work, extracting the essence,

[05:05] not to show too much, but at the same time to convey as much as possible.

[05:10] I like to use everyday, universal objects in my work. Those that are relatable for people of all cultures

[05:24] - everyone of us uses a bowl, thread, our arms, a pen or a pencil.

[05:34] A book is a universal being which, hopefully, never stops inspiring us as an item in itself:

[05:45] how the sheets bend in one way and not the other,

[05:52] how the sewing is in its place,

[05:58] how it opens, how neighboring pages relate to each other,

[06:04] and what happens when we close it, put it back on the shelf for a few years and don't look inside.

[06:14] After all, the heroes live there, have their internal affairs, get used to each other and have to learn to live with each other. I like to sometimes imagine it.

[06:30] The author does not have to predict how the stories would be processed in their recipient's heads, but they have to encourage them to have that freedom, to make themselves comfortable within the space created by the author.

Bilderbücher – nicht nur für Kinder

Renommierete Illustratorin Iwona Chmielewska zu Gast in Straubing

Sie gilt als eine der bedeutendsten Bilderbuch-Illustratoren der Gegenwart: Iwona Chmielewska. Sie lebt im polnischen Thorn und unterrichtet an der dortigen Kopernikus-Universität Buchgestaltung. Am 7. und 8. November ist die mehrfach ausgezeichnete Illustratorin und Autorin im Rahmen der Partnerschaften für Demokratie zu Gast in Straubing. Bei der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde und in der Stadtbibliothek spricht sie zu ganz unterschiedlichen Themen und dabei wird klar: Bilderbücher sind nicht nur für Kinder da.

Ihr neuestes Werk trägt den Titel „Bevor der Himmel weint“. Es handelt vom jüdischen Leben in Lublin vor dem Jahr 1939. Chmielewska verknüpft darin ihre Illustrationen mit Bildern eines unbekannteren Lubliner Fotografen und den Gedichten des polnischen Poeten Józef Czechowicz. „In dem Buch verband ich zwei Welten, die durch den Krieg getrennt wurden und davor jahrzehntelang zusammengehörten: die polnische und die jüdische Welt“, beschreibt die Autorin. Auch durch ihr Buch „Blumkas Tagebuch“ sei sie in besonderer Weise sensibilisiert, wenn es um die Bewahrung des Andenkens an die polnischen Juden gehe: „Ich wusste, dass ich ein Buch erschaffen muss,



Die mehrfach ausgezeichnete Bilderbuch-Illustratorin Iwona Chmielewska kommt nach Straubing.

das angemessen und würdevoll an die Menschen erinnert.“ Am Montag, 7. November, stellt sie nun genau dieses Buch erstmals in Deutschland im Gemeindesaal der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde vor. Die Veranstaltung erfolgt mehrsprachig – auf Deutsch, Russisch und Polnisch. Beginn ist um 19 Uhr, der Eintritt ist frei.

Einen Tag später, am 8. November, hält Chmielewska einen interaktiven Vortrag in der Stadtbibliothek zum Thema „Bilderbücher RICHTIG lesen“. Dabei geht sie auf die Bedeutung des Bilderbuchs in der Pädagogik und als eigene Kunstform ein. Chmielewska selbst hat bisher rund 30 Bücher veröffentlicht. Bisher sind drei von Chmielewskas Büchern auch in Deutschland erschienen, weitere Veröffentlichungen gab es unter anderem in Frankreich, Spanien, Mexiko, Israel und natürlich in Polen. Für ihren ästhetischen Reichtum und ihre innovativen Ideen wurde Chmielewska schon mehrfach ausgezeichnet, zum Beispiel mit dem Goldenen Apfel der Internationalen Illustrationsbiennale in Bratislava für „Thinking ABC“ und zwei Bologna Ragazzi Awards für „House of the mind“ und „Eyes“. Ihr aktuelles Buch „abc.de“ ist für den Deutschen Jugendliteraturpreis 2016 nominiert. Beginn des Vortrags in der Stadtbibliothek ist um 18.30 Uhr, der Eintritt ist frei.

Das Johannes-Turmair-Gymnasium sowie eine Kindertageseinrichtung sind weitere Stationen des Besuchs in Straubing. Dort werden ihre Buchinhalte pädagogisch-inhaltlich eng mit den Themenbereichen der Partnerschaften für Demokratie verknüpft. -red-

Iwona Chmielewska

abc.de

Review by Ewelina Rąbkowska

“Nowe Książki” 3/2016

(transl. Katarzyna Wasylak)

Abc.de is a very mysterious picture dictionary. Why mysterious? On its pages the dictionary gathers words and their explanations in four languages: German, English, French, and Polish. However, if you want to use it to learn a new language, you'll be tricked because this dictionary is actually a non-dictionary.

The author suggests in the introduction to her book that the words she chose for the dictionary were inspired by German culture. Therefore, in the book you'll see many famous German names, like Bach, brothers Grimm, Ernst, Strauss, Freud, Luther, Eckhart, Einstein, and more. Chmielewska familiarizes the reader with these names from the perspective of her childhood; she refers to growing up with her grandmother, Hulda Jager. The unique character of this non-dictionary comes also from the fact that it presents German culture through the eyes of a child. The language of the word is not that important; it's more fascinating to compare four different combinations of the letters which different nations use to name the same thing. Moreover, sometimes these words are very similar, like *der Apfel* and *apple*, and sometimes surprisingly different, like *pomme* and *jabłko*. Thus, the book is about the conventionality of language, which is funny to a child who begins to learn and plays with words, mixing and matching letters and meanings. This way Mr. Strauss becomes an ostrich (*der Strauss*), Mr. Bach rests at the edge of the stream (*der Bach*), Master Eckhart stands in the corner (*die Ecke*), and a boy doesn't want to eat in the city of Essen (*essen*). These semantic and semiotic plays are the actual protagonists of this dictionary.

Other important characters in the book are objects. *Abc.de* makes us reflect on the representation of objects, visual and verbal, and how it is rooted in the culture which we grew up in. Is the meaning of words given by culture, or is it the other way around—do objects have an innate meaning and exist independently from how we define them? This question is valid in contemporary humanistic thought as well. Which of these two is closer to us: the object itself or its name that we gave to it? There is no clear answer to that.

What is important, *abc.de* expresses the value of common ideas across European heritage through time. A common ground found in the quotes, references, visual humor, and historical stylizations that will be recognized by a German, English, Polish, and French reader alike. Fundamental elements of European culture, encapsulated in letters due to Gutenberg's invention (Gutenberg appears in the entry for the word "idea") are passed to children in schools. Therefore, "learning process" is so important for Chmielewska. After all, it starts with learning the simplest words, like "apple," "stream," "bridge," and "book." Chmielewska shows children wearing historical attires from different epochs to emphasize that childhood has always marked the beginning of the educational path: children look, listen, and learn. In this light, we are all like children—we start our education not only in our homes but also in a broader context of our country and cultures surrounding us. These act like communicating vessels—they draw from each other—thus the similarity in words and associations. After all, as children, many of us were scared of Shockheaded Peter (*Struwwelpeter*), and laughed at Max and Moritz's pranks.

Chmielewska is bewitched by the letters. She evokes the experience of a child's wonder at "squiggles" that cover book pages, and the struggle of learning how to read and write. The author adds a personal touch to her interpretation of German culture. Thus, the reception of this book will also involve subjective attitudes towards that culture, which is neither simple nor painless. In this regard, Germanness is something every Pole has to come to terms with on their own, just like Stefan Chwin did in his *Hanemann*, or Andrzej Stasiuk did in *Dojczland*. That's what Chmielewska does in her non-dictionary as well—she reflects on the importance of German culture for Europe, but from the perspective of a child, unclouded by the adult's bias.

Iwona Chmielewska
Blumka's Diary
Review by Joanna Olech
"Nowe Książki" 2/2012
(transl. Katarzyna Wasylak)

For many years, Iwona Chmielewska remained unknown in Poland, until she started publishing her books in South Korea, all of which received awards and recognition. The next step for her books was to enter the Anglophone world. In 2011 Chmielewska celebrated another great success—the Bologna Ragazzi Award for *A House of the Mind: Maum* (Changbi Publishers, South Korea).

Blumka's Diary was first published in Germany and later in Poland. Chmielewska's style is easily recognizable—she uses muted, faded out, ashy colors. She also likes to use collage techniques, with old textures, illustrations, and vintage style ink drawings. These techniques give her illustrations the nostalgic feel of an old family album, filled with various trinkets, and bookmarked with dried flowers. This poetic stylization suits *Blumka's Diary* perfectly. Even though this uplifting diary expresses hope for the improvement of the lives of children taken care of by the Old Doctor, knowing the fate of the children from Korczak's orphanage gives it the undertone of melancholy and sadness.

Chmielewska does not try to be "pretty"; she doesn't want to please her readers with pictures of happy children with rosy cheeks. Each of Blumka's eleven friends described in the book is burdened with the hardships and pain of being an orphan, but the caretakers want to bring out only the best in them. In her short text, Chmielewska captured the essence of Korczak's pedagogical philosophy. She managed to express all the surprisingly contemporary and revolutionary pedagogical methods founded on the respect for children's autonomy in several line notes. The book's illustrations become a poetic commentary to a text. They include objects and children's "treasures" from the past century, which transport the reader back in time, to occupied Warsaw. The yellowed page from a school notebook, on which Blumka writes down her memories, becomes in turn a tablecloth, cradle, thermometer, ladder, tallis, etc.

This type of narration, typical of Chmielewska, is creative and complementary to literature. The author does not embellish the text with her illustrations, but she

tells a parallel story—unconcluded, ephemeral, and enigmatic. Chmielewska attaches the illustrated “footnotes,” which open the text to various interpretations. The IBBY award was not given for the illustrations specifically—there are many other Polish illustrators who are as talented but not as creative. Chmielewska has been recognized for her storytelling talent, creating the unique atmosphere in the book, by expressing serious and difficult themes visually. The author found a way to talk to children about serious and difficult topics (war, orphanhood, hurt)—without infantilizing, and without pomposity, but in a simple, friendly, and wise manner. This book is one of my favorites and is on my personal list of the books that should be mandatory to introduce in schools. Young readers can learn much more about Korczak from it than from many school textbooks.

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12 Visual Narratives of Death and Memory

The Holocaust in Two Contemporary European Picture Books

*Magdalena Sikorska and
Katarzyna Smyczyńska*

In Samuel Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the Mariner must tell his story to expiate for his sin, killing the albatross. As the Mariner appears to have been immortal since his misdeed, unceasing repetition of the story over centuries becomes his punishment, and yet, telling it also offers him uneasy and fleeting relief sustained by the hope that the day may come when the story will no longer need to be retold. Every person the Mariner meets has no choice but to listen to the story, as if inexplicably drawn by its power and the magnetism of its teller. Instilled in the listener are a sense of guilt, an awareness of suffering, and a remote hope for recovery, which accompany the teller and reflect the crushing power of the Mariner's rime. The story of the Holocaust resonates similarly: those who have been witnesses cannot stop telling it, even if only to themselves; those who have heard it at least once cannot forget. They live their lives trying to comprehend the story, with a perplexing mixture of guilt,¹ pain, and hope that compels them to retell the story endlessly in one form or another.

Neither the authors of this chapter nor the writers and illustrators of the two picture books that are its focus have any personal experience of the Holocaust. However, they somehow cannot **not** tell the story again and again; nor can they forget, as they all seem compelled to contemplate the death, share the knowledge, and cultivate the memory. Once someone has learned about the Holocaust, it will always be there: dark, incomprehensible, yet highly affective, not least because of the profound fear. For those experiencing it vicariously, the intensity of the mental and emotional visualization prevents the Holocaust from ever becoming a truly *past* event. Numerous critics and philosophers have recognized the difficulty or even impossibility of representing a past event, asserting that the only way for the past to exist is in its retelling or communication in the present (for example, Kokkola 8–9).

Iwona Chmielewska's *Pamiętnik Blumki* [*Blumka's Diary*] (2011) and Antón Fortes and Joanna Concejo's *Fume* [*Smoke*] (2008) are two recent examples of the Holocaust past presently retold. Despite some similarities between them – a child as a narrator in each story and a child character in extreme circumstances, confronting his or her present dreary situation and remembering being at home with family – the books differ in terms of form

and adopt different narrative conventions. They also represent different genres, different kinds of realism. *Fume* is a fictionalized historical narrative, inspired by knowledge about the death camps and yet turned into a universal story, whereas *Pamiętnik Blumki* blends the characteristics of non-fictional narrative and fictional diary, in which the characters can still be recognized as children of the Warsaw orphanage on Krochmalna Street supervised by Janusz Korczak.

Retelling the story of the Holocaust inevitably means broaching the subject of death; for many, the Holocaust actually was and still is only death. While children may at the very least find the general subject of death difficult, comprehending Holocaust death may well exceed their intellectual or emotional capacity. It is also more ethically challenging for writers and visual artists to present a non-sentimental story of the Holocaust to children, as compared with death related to everyday circumstances. The main questions, therefore, are how much to tell and how much to withhold and whether to address the subject realistically or to assume a more symbolic or metaphorical representation, despite the belief of some writers and critics that the Holocaust defies metaphorical rendering at all (Kokkola 15).

The authors and illustrators of these two books cannot rely on their own personal histories, nor can they count on the individual memory of the implied readers. Thus, the dilemmas are not only *what to tell* or *how to tell* but also how to bridge the two worlds, that of the deceased who should be honored by the stories and that of the living who should be informed, engaged, and moved. In her discussion of books about the Holocaust, Lydia Kokkola writes about a specific responsibility transfer that often occurs when writers and illustrators have not been open enough to present the story of the Holocaust as fully as possible or when their narratives contain substantial information gaps that readers cannot identify and consequently may lead to misinterpretation or misinformation. The weight of explaining the meaning of the story falls then on intermediaries, most likely parents or teachers. While to a certain extent this is understandable, extensive responsibility transfer in Kokkola's view is ethically dubious (39). Neither *Pamiętnik Blumki* nor *Fume* leaves the reader unguided as to its intended meaning or misinformed about the context of the narratives. Yet, by no means is either book rendered simply, straightforwardly, or univocally.²

Both picture books open up to multiple interpretations with repeated readings. First readings bring the main narrative lines to the fore, with their overwhelming awareness of the Holocaust and the characters' deaths embedded in the historical context. The text of *Fume* is rough and direct through the child's reporting of what is going on in the camp and what his reactions to events are; this roughness or toughness of the text coincides with the delicacy of aestheticized images. This juxtaposition of tones may make the process of reading the book both intense and highly emotional, at least at first. With *Pamiętnik Blumki*, the story may be read less emotionally, both as an account of the reality of everyday life in the orphanage and as a story commemorating Korczak's philosophy of childhood. While *Pamiętnik Blumki* appears to address a younger audience, as much of the verbal and

visual narration is protective towards the child reader, *Fume* in some places drastically forsakes protection for the power of direct, uncensored expression, perhaps being aimed at an older audience of adolescents.

Consecutive re-readings of both picture books reveal the polyphonic nature of the narratives, complexity of characterization, and masterly intricacies of the artistic techniques used. In *Pamiętnik Blumki*, for instance, readers can decipher the narrative allusions to the children's real situation and detect ominous symbols. Yet the most striking discovery may be that, although the story of the Holocaust, however individually treated, cannot be told alternatively in terms of narrative closure, it can be told from different narrative perspectives. The contemporary point of view of *Pamiętnik Blumki* and *Fume* has enabled the authors to convey their stories with a profound moral understanding that does not succumb to the haunting vision of death.

The density and elaborateness of the portrayal, especially of the visual narrative lines, may render the meaning-making process tentative at first and the interpretative conclusions less obvious. Another cognitive and cultural challenge is the moment of confrontation between the contemporary and historically contextualized visions and positions of death. Tony Walter observes that "the typical death is no longer that of a child but of an old person" (50), the twenty-first-century western normality. A contrasting perspective occurs in the writing of Holocaust survivor Henryk Grynberg, who reveals his own perspective as a child growing up in Poland during the war: "In death I saw nothing special. It was an inseparable part of life then. I simply did not see a boundary between life and death, which was most often associated with absence" (7; our translation). The reader's task in *Fume* especially, but also in *Pamiętnik Blumki*, is to negotiate meaningfully between the two perspectives. Once the contemporary reader has grasped the deviant everydayness of Holocaust death, the interpretation of *Fume* gradually moves from the nihilism of the first readings to a more inclusive reading.

Fume, in both the text and illustrations, gives the power of expression solely to the victims, refusing the perpetrators any prominence, perhaps judging them ethically unworthy of a story. The image of Nazi soldiers appears only once in the first opening where they are recognizably dehumanized, portrayed as big black birds of prey. With their deformed, ugly, mechanical bodies, stencil beaks, and vampire-like countenances, they seem more like zombies than humans, suggesting how morally destructive evil is for its practitioners. This is also a powerful ethical statement about the ultimate effect of the totalitarian dehumanized system, which turns its followers into zombies. The only other visual allusion to their influence is the presence of numbers, denoting the tattoos of the camp prisoners. Although the text mentions soldiers or Nazi doctors more often than the illustrations do, it never attributes any moral significance to them. Unsurprisingly, however, their actions and decisions determine part of the story, irreversibly leading the characters to a certain death.

Holocaust literature has developed its own symbolism rooted in the historical context, and the concept of death in the Holocaust has also been given detailed and specific iconic and verbal representation.³ Thus, the reader of

Fume will not find references to the more traditional death-related symbols or rituals. Instead, the picture book shows, both in text and illustrations, the train, ramp, and orderly barracks as elements of foreshadowing and, more directly, the barb-wire fences, gas chamber, and crematoria. The illustrations most frequently deploy two colors, black and blue, to indicate death. Black is obviously related to death in western culture, and here this relation reverberates in such visual elements as bare winter trees, the smoke rising from the crematoria, and the interior of the gas chamber. Yet, blue, through its connotations of heaven, gains an even wider meaning spectrum in this context. It gives death a radiance resulting from transcendence and lightness of the spirit. The representation of death follows the Horatian *non omnis moriar* theme, for the characters' physical annihilation is by no means their ultimate or total end.

Apart from the Holocaust and other recognized symbols, Concejo introduces and develops more original death-related symbolism of transcendence. Water, stones, and flowers reference, in different contexts, both this and another world. The indeterminacy present in Concejo's overlaying technique is also present through symbolism: a powerful visual statement that encompasses figures of dismembered bodies floating in the air and placed within nets (11th opening) is characterized by dual meaning, as it evokes fear and relief simultaneously, fear for its immediate reference to hanging and relief for the epiphany that the floating spirits are beyond suffering and pain. In the third opening, the recto shows a group of women and the child protagonist who appear to be asleep, a reading that the accompanying text reinforces. Yet, their eerie appearance and unexpected body posture may also suggest that the characters are caught between sleep and death.

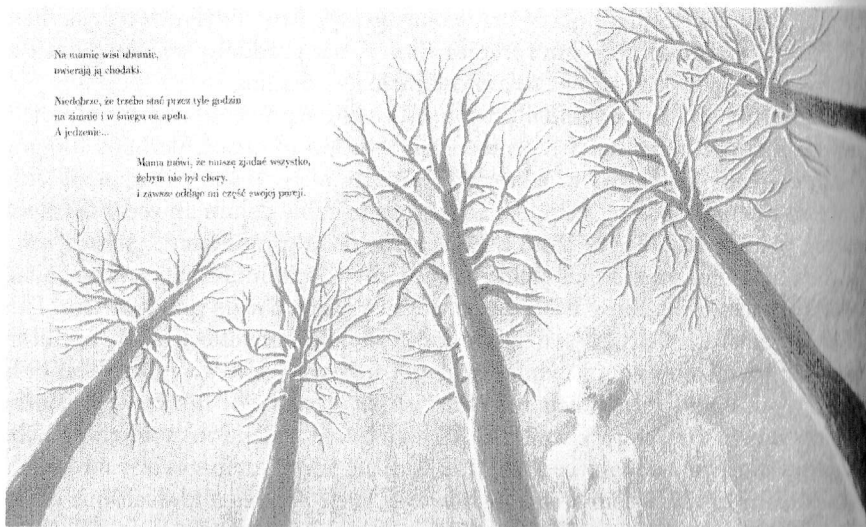


Figure 12.1 Illustration from Fortes and Concejo, *Fume* (Pontevedra: OQO Editora, 2008).

Bearing in mind that the title of Fortes and Concejo's picture book translates as smoke, readers cannot avoid making the most immediate associations, which point to the dark, destruction- and erasure-oriented meaning of the word. It may seem that the historical context of the Holocaust and the portrayed reality of death camps leave no place for any other meanings or more subtle connotations; however, a careful analysis of the illustrations prevents readers from treating a nihilistic interpretation as the definitive one. Although there are several visual allusions to this particular reading of smoke through the references either to crematoria, subversively drawn in cartoonish style in a child's hand, or the distant view of the smoke cloud on the back cover, there are visual elements that defy the 'nothing' mark. In the ninth opening verso, the smoke gradually transforms into blue ink or penciled human-shaped figures floating into the sky (it is part of the child's drawings of crematoria). Five openings later, another scene depicts delicate blue figures in the sky over the death camp buildings and barb-wire fence. While the literal interpretation insists on readers perceiving the figures as the spirits of the dead, a metaphorical reading leads towards seeing them as forms of invulnerable and independent memory, present everywhere since their deaths. The unrestrained forms of memory become the tragically ironic response to the Nazis' annihilation of the victims. Their lives, once physically terminated, begin proliferating in memory.

Further aspects of memory are demonstrated through a number of visual metaphors, of which some address the protagonist's pre-war life (family photographs in endpapers and the boy's dream vision in which he sees his parents and home), his personal experience of the death camp (landscape and other iconic images such as bunk beds, barb wire, a gas chamber), and finally the most unspecified or intangible type of memory communicated through Concejo's artistic technique of creating overlayers. In most openings, alongside the dominant penciled or color penciled illustrations, are other drawings or sketches: some in green or red ink, some in blue ballpoint, a few in pencil. Many images are easy to read as they thematically and stylistically correspond to the main visual line or are obvious intrapictorial references, such as sketches of the children shown in the endpaper photographs drawn in blue pencil in the sixth opening. But there are other drawings than these whose nature and meaning are more problematic to decipher. In many full-scale drawings, there appear straight ink or ballpoint lines and doodles, as if in a very young child's hand; fragments of an older child's drawings; and delicate yet clearly visible sketches of plants in an artistically gifted hand. Many drawings are filled with single or connected words inscribed on their margins: names of places, the word *home* in several languages, the word *mum* in Polish, and a fragment of a prayer to the guardian angel. They all, more or less directly, address the memory of those who perished: their places of origin, their languages, and the former lives they were now missing.



Figure 12.2 Illustration from Fortes and Concejo, *Fume* (Pontevedra: OQO Editora, 2008).

In many openings, especially those where it appears that the illustrating artist could not determine how to draw the story of the Holocaust, the overlaying becomes an effective artistic solution for signaling the indeterminacy of representation. Additionally, there is a strongly felt sense of many drawers of different age or skill working on this project, as if the spirits have metaphysically added their own layers to the story drawing through their medium, the artist. This artistic solution suggests a barely explicable actuality of the story of the Holocaust, as mentioned earlier. This picture book's text also offers the powerful feeling of presence, but in a different style. The first-person homodiegetic child narrator tells the story about his arrival at the camp with his mother and father, the experience there, and his friendship with Vadio, a Gypsy boy. The story ends with the closing of the gas-chamber door. The voice is unrefined, with simple sentences that are not always stylistically connected. Rather than a comment, they are a direct recount of the immediate experience of camp life. The roughness of the text and its directness significantly enhance the sense of presence, and the voice is distinctly heard.

Although the information provided is scarce, the essence is communicated, and while the rudiments and routine of camp life are given, and these are never reassuring, the emphasis is on the emotions and relationships. Despite the tragic circumstances, of which the narrator seems aware, it appears possible for the characters to care for each other, feel mutual responsibility for each other's health, show a high degree of self-control and self-discipline, avoid punishment and being led to the "building with the chimney," but also to protect others and spare them sadness or suffering. The good moments, however infrequent, are those when the characters meet, communicate, or

manage to save someone from capture or death. Both text and illustrations summon much expressive power to overcome the submissiveness that the circumstances impose. Janina Bauman writes in her memoir that "the cruellest thing about cruelty is that it dehumanises its victims before it destroys them. And that the hardest of struggles is to remain human in inhuman conditions" (x). In *Fume*, as the physical end is also the end of the book in material terms, death is the limit from the narrative's point of view. Still, by no means does it become so from the perspective of the meaning of the picture book. The painfully yet conscientiously preserved humanness and the cultivation of multiple forms of memory overrule death.

Life-affirming ethics, although initially difficult to discern, especially in the case of *Fume*, emerge through both narratives resolutely, if inconspicuously. Both, despite different narrative choices, ultimately offer spiritual sustenance. Compared with *Fume*, *Pamiętnik Blumki* initially appears to be a much more benign story, in which the context of the war is carefully disguised. The book explicitly commemorates Korczak's orphans through the narrative voice of Blumka. This convention thus leaves the deaths of the Holocaust unspoken and unshown to eyes not yet informed historically to see them. The evocations of death and the suggestive yet latent imagery of the war are discerned gradually – the narrative speaks through its eloquent silence.⁴

The apparently neutral format, by no means disturbing or shocking in a cursory reading, reverberates with allusions to the war and deaths in gas chambers, even if it does so with extraordinary subtlety. Death remains an oblique theme throughout the visual narration, yet it is, rather startlingly, accompanied by a sense of composure emanating from the book. This effect is a consequence of both the child narrator's straightforward, yet tellingly mature, perspective and the visual characterization of the home and its residents. Despite the contemporary readers' awareness of the future fate of the characters, an intangible sense of solace can be derived from the way the characters make their lives meaningful in their everyday activities through seemingly insignificant gestures of empathy and acts of compassion. The tragedy cannot be undone, yet, while mourning the dead, the artist appears to retain feeble hope in her story's potential if not to erase the past, then at least partly to liberate humanity from a sense of hopelessness, guilt, and muteness, all of which are inevitably experienced in confrontation with the horror.

Pamiętnik Blumki, like *Fume*, demands from readers both an intellectual and emotional engagement, even if it reveals its poignant symbolism less readily. This authorial tactic of latency and reticence, the refusal to display the inferno directly, is a profoundly ethical gesture, a decision with multifarious implications. It is clearly a result of the artist's sense of responsibility to respect the readers' lack of readiness to confront the horror. Apart from that, however, by abstaining from portraying agony, victimization, and evil, the artist perhaps wishes to remain loyal to Korczak's – as well as her own – vision of humanity. She shares his respect towards the child – be it the child in her story, child war sufferers in general, or readers of her book.

Being aware of the incomplete, fractured, chaotic character of memory, Chmielewska transforms the fragmentation and incompleteness into artistic strategy. The book reconstructs and preserves the memory of the past by reviving selected imagery – isolated signs that are imbued with historical and emotional meaning. In images that appear ordinary and casual, yet which are so carefully revived, the sense of absence becomes obvious and even more poignant. Elements of Warsaw's topography, isolated drawings of pre-war fashion, family photographs, and Jewish craftsmanship all allude to Jewish districts in Polish towns and Jewish trades that disappeared forever. Events from the lives of the twelve children who have been singled out – some probably fictional, others real – are an attempt to restore the memory of life in Korczak's orphanage and his pedagogical goals.

Holocaust imagery has become conventionalized to a degree that the authors of both *Fume* and *Pamiętnik Blumki* have had to seek, and indeed have found, new narrative forms to represent and contain the trauma. In *Fume*, the body and its location in liminal space is a recurrent visual motif and a central metaphor of death and finitude but also of memory and spirituality; *Pamiętnik Blumki* employs a similar strategy in its visual representations of the characters, whose body postures, size, color, and location in space communicate the spiritual subtext. The book thematizes death in the form of visual, often symbolic, references to Jewish and Polish communities that fell victim to the genocide. Accompanying the allusions to transcendence is the faintly marked motif of tears to mourn those who perished.

By reviving fragments of the pre-war past, the artist moves back in time to anticipate the reality of war and to delineate a topography of death. Within the everyday images, there lurk discreet yet sinister allusions to the terror and violence of the pre-war era. An inclusion of a characteristic advertisement column in the twentieth opening evokes a memory of the pre-war pillars with posters announcing the policy of the Nazi government, while an image of a Jewish-owned shoe shop in the thirteenth opening recalls Nazi commands to boycott those institutions for racist reasons. Likewise, the twelfth opening featuring an image of a window in which the shards of broken glass form a symbol of Jewish stigmatization in the Third Reich, the star of David, alludes to the pogrom in pre-war Germany that would become known as *Kristallnacht*.

The symbolism inscribed in the visual text emphasizes not only the fear and suffering of the victims and the evil of the perpetrators but also a sense of communal responsibility for the tragedy and the shared pain, expanding beyond those directly afflicted by the war. For example, illustrating the Doctor's teachings about the necessity to respect and feed animals is a drawing that depicts a mouse hole (the mice are nowhere to be seen) and crumbs of bread on the floor. This kind of juxtaposition may resonate with the fear and hunger of those relegated to the Warsaw ghetto while suggesting the ethical obligations of those outside it. Similarly, the ostensibly accidental blurs of the pen, which can be taken simply as an effect of the girl's palm smudging

the pages of her diary, resemble tears. These are obvious symbols of fear and agony but also of mourning that spans time and connects generations.

The significance of the diary as a form of testimony and token of remembrance is signaled by one of the narrators – a contemporary voice embracing the presumed perspective of a past generation – who initiates the story and provides a frame for it. The fictionalized autodiegetic narrator, Blumka, speaks first about the orphanage and the children living in it and then proceeds to reiterate Korczak's teachings through the Doctor's seminal works *How to Love a Child* and *The Child's Right to Respect*. While the verbal text consists of Blumka's commentary and the internal focalizer's restating the Doctor's pedagogy, visual strategies encourage readers to adopt consecutive perspectives of all the children she describes. This complex layering of the verbal and visual texts infuses the realistic imagery with symbolic suggestiveness. Whereas the metafictional visualization of Blumka's diary in the upper part of each double spread grants readers access to Blumka's and the children's thoughts and dreams, the remaining allusive, symbolic imagery reflects the knowing gaze of the heterodiegetic narrator and, by extension, that of contemporary readers.

The ethical overtones unobtrusively woven into the visual representations enable the narrative to communicate its message with forcefulness and emotional intensity. The Doctor's visually constructed "smallness" and his engagement in children's activities outline his philosophy of childhood so eloquently that the words become almost superfluous. Similarly, images of the children, rendered realistically, nevertheless imply their presence in a liminal space, delineated by their shadowy postures, often with backs turned to the viewer. The ashy, grey bodies of the characters drawn in pencil occasionally turn bluish and are sketched in navy-blue ballpoint, making the reader acutely aware of the children's mortality but also of a spiritual dimension of their deaths. The bodies and selves are fragile, fleeting, yet revived in the story and therefore reawakened in memory.

Similar indeterminacy is conveyed through objects of everyday use and routine activities visualized in the narrative, which acquire ominous – and metaphysical – prominence. Single hairs on a brush, pieces of clothing hanging on a refrigerator, and a tear in the eye of a boy in the shower assume unspoken, ghastly meanings associated with deaths in gas chambers. The fifth opening, which tells a story of a fish's life being saved, is accompanied by an image of open cans of herring and sardines – perhaps an allusion to a Jewish trade, a revival of the gradually forgotten past – the first ominous trope. A well-known symbol of Christianity, the fish represented in the image on the bluish background may be an allusion to Christ's death, whereas the bodies of dead fish placed next to one another in cans conjure up cultural memories of human bodies crammed in cattle cars and gas chambers. On the same double spread, a page from Blumka's diary features an itinerary leading from the orphanage to the bank of the Vistula River, a trip to save the life of the fish. A few years later, children would make a different walk to the *Umschlagplatz*

from the orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto. The modern reader, acquainted with World War II history, recognizes the horrifying allusion.

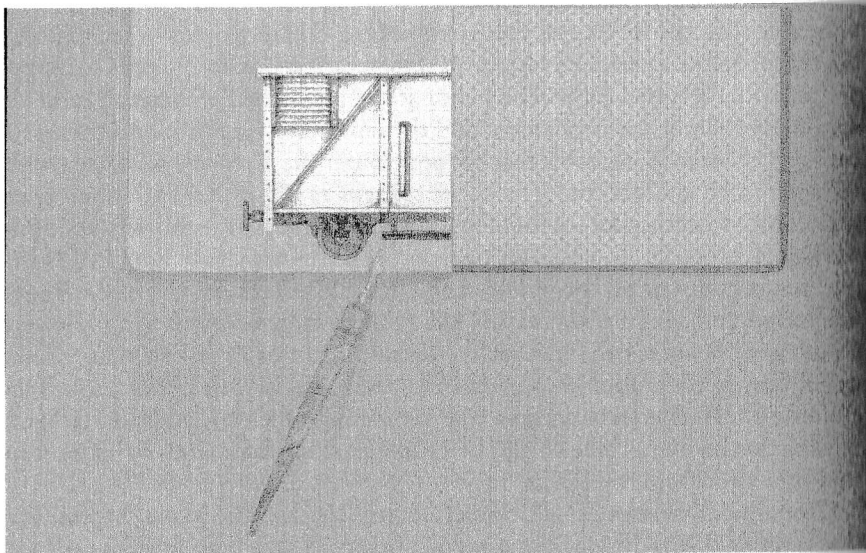


Figure 12.3 Illustration from Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki* (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2011).

Intrapictorial references, which may initially escape the viewer, significantly alter the potential impact of the narration. For example, a slant wagon on which coal is transported for the orphanage (displayed in the seventh opening) functions as a visual premonition of a cattle car on the last pages of the book. The chestnut tree that is featured on the cover, and then on the first pages of the diary simply as part of the realistic rendering, symbolically collapses midway, to be finally wrenched from the ground by a hawk. The star of David reappears in the diary in various forms, discernible in bits of glass and paper, the shapes of snowflakes during the children's play, and a shape formed by seeds for birds fed by the Doctor – all of which signify things vulnerable and frail. The most inconspicuous imagery metaphorically represents the easiness and promptness with which elements indispensable in the world – such as water and food, implying the essence of life – may transform into nothingness.

The last page from Blumka's diary, which features her notes taken during, presumably, her first lesson of German, clearly refers to September 1939 and Germany's invasion of Poland. The conventional child's note featuring translations of personal pronouns from Polish to German draws the readers' attention to the pronoun "they." This is when a tearlike ink spot appears and when Blumka (subconsciously?) substitutes a correct translation into German (*sie*) for a version starting with a capital letter, thus changing its meaning. The distance implied by the pronoun resonates with the

process of estrangement and increasing alienation of the victims of eugenics. It communicates the unspoken fear and confusion, but it also juxtaposes the innocence and humanity of an individual victim with the anonymity of the dehumanized, institutionally sanctioned evil. The subsequent double spread features a yad pointed towards the cattle car, as if to suggest the inviolability of the invisible passengers. The right side reveals the back endpaper of the unfinished diary – Blumka never speaks again.

Despite the multiplicity of symbols connoting trauma, *Pamiętnik Blumki* signals an idea of transcendence through abundant symbolism. The artist positions her characters in limbo – they appear to hover between their earthly existence and their afterlife. The visual characterization of the Old Doctor – including the blue color of his clothing, his gestures and postures, and his both verbally and visually depicted love for the weak, small, and oppressed – reveals affinities between himself and Christ as well as between their deaths. Visual metaphors such as the color white and allusions to ascension attribute angelic or saintly qualities to the children (4th, 6th, and 20th openings), while their repeated visualizations in sleep or with eyes closed articulate an indeterminate location. Blumka's diary frequently features images of empty orphanage beds and chairs or positions the characters at the top of the page so that their heads are not visible, as if already in heaven.

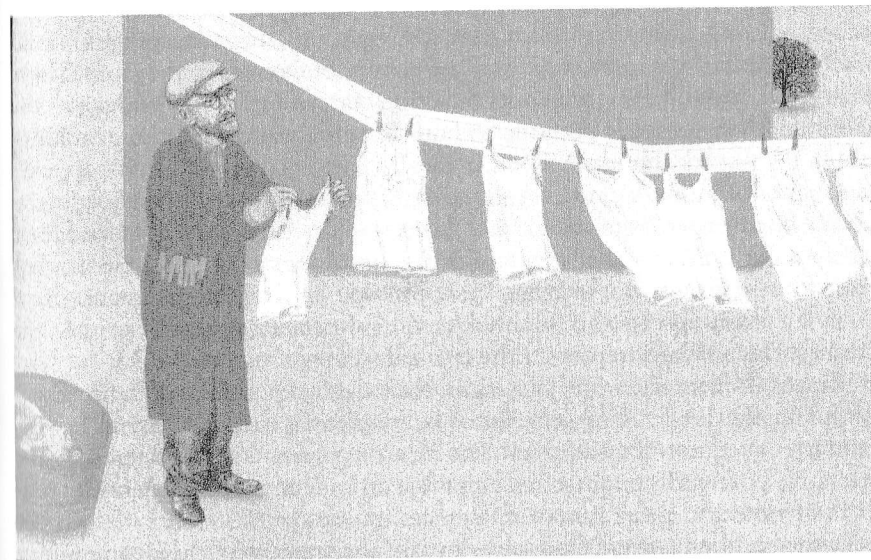


Figure 12.4 Illustration from Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki* (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2011).

In the front endpaper, the children's absence epitomized through a depiction of their white shirts drying on a clothesline still implies spiritual presence. Being an intrapictorial reference to the eighteenth opening, which features the Doctor hanging the wet shirts of his orphans in front of the

house, the image indicates the children's invisibility rather than real absence. The bird's-eye perspective displayed in several openings, if equated with the heavenly perspective, brings a sense of spiritual peace and relief, while the marked physical distance establishes a symbolical ethical abyss between the victims and the perpetrators.

The visual narration abounds in symbols of transcendence that have long been part of the archetypal spiritual heritage of world cultures, among which the symbolism of water, tears, hearts, and trees is particularly telling, suggesting not only ordeal, suffering, and death but also rebirth, reawakening, and redemption. Several illustrations also highlight symbolic meanings of books. The value of books as tokens of memory and forms of testimony addressed to future generations is emphasized in the sixteenth opening, featuring Blumka in her bed, with a design identical to that on the cover and endpapers of her diary. An intimate, as if symbiotic, relation between books and children bridges the world of the dead and living, becoming a form of encounter, a medium of cultural memory.

By portraying children who, having endured enormous hardship, still act empathically – and thus perhaps symbolically undermine the rational underpinnings of Nazi ideology – the book urges the reader to nurture an uncompromising ethical stance irrespective of circumstances. Adhering to this premise, *Pamiętnik Blumki* prioritizes those aspects of reality often too easy to dismiss, overlook, or *unlearn*. Obviously the orphans, but less obviously the mice, sparrows, ants, and bees, are protagonists in the story. These seemingly insignificant creatures function as symbolic extensions of the children, their presence pointing to both Korczak's and Christian teachings about respect for the small. The specifically patterned fabric, which appears throughout Blumka's diary, accentuates this philosophy. Scraps of ordinary, cheap lined paper from an old notebook – a design resembling the fabric of the tallit – are another medium in the narrative, a form of artistic clay, transformed from page to page. They provide an irreplaceable conceptual basis for every spread and the book cover, referencing scraps of orphanage reality, which in turn represent the rescued scraps of memory.

Traces of memory, while varying in their degree of explicitness, are ubiquitous in the book. A forget-me-not is a recurrent narrative signal to the reader – a request not to forget. The idea of connectedness fostered in the narrative potentially endorses an empathic attitude in readers by erasing barriers of time and generational differences. Stories in the verbal text profile how the children engage themselves in an enhancement of their community, while the visual text tells independent stories of their friendships and first loves, reveals memories of their lost relatives, and emphasizes the emotional support of the adult mentors: Stefania Wilczyńska and the Doctor. The visual narration repeatedly focuses on touch, suggestive of bonding, which supports the importance – and naturalness – of ethical acts and responsibilities.

The artistic techniques of the visual texts also imperceptibly steer the emotional and interpretive responses to each story. The meticulous, delicate,

soft pencil and crayon drawings in *Fume* not only integrate the protagonist with the natural world surrounding him but also immerse the reader entirely in the somewhat oneiric imagery. *Pamiętnik Blumki*, which combines pencil drawings with elements of collage – reminiscent of children's activities – creates a sense of empathy but of a more contemplative sort. Moreover, it strangely and paradoxically isolates the viewer from the images and the protagonists from each other, turning them into iconic, individualized, but therefore somewhat static figures. This renders *Pamiętnik Blumki*, compared to *Fume*, a more mystical, meditative vision, perhaps more easily accepted as a reassuring children's book, but the one that more readily buries the past as the *past*. The specificity of visual metaphors in *Fume* – for example, the significantly absent (cremated) body on the cover re-imagined as a living tree – makes immediate responses to the book extremely poignant and emotional, and yet further introspection reveals a dynamic, dramatic, and sincere call for restoration. While the leafless, emaciated branches that substitute for limbs, clad in a child's uniform, may at first evoke a sense of the macabre, the presence of little leaves paving their way up through the uniform ultimately offers a sense of tenuous hope for a certain kind of resurrection.

The picture-book format is, therefore, an appropriate means to reconcile the apparent inarticulacy the Holocaust generates and the unceasing compulsion to retell its story to future generations. Both picture books transcend the communicative barrier and activate profound, multilayered responses precisely because the text is concise and non-intrusive, while the artistically advanced images provide a multiplicity of meanings pertaining to death difficult to articulate in language without resorting to pathos or sentimentalism. They *speak* to the viewer although apparently nothing much is said. Thus, any interpretation of a picture book, despite its compact form, becomes a non-definitive, infinite process, which re-readings and ongoing historical study constantly revise and expand. In both *Fume* and *Pamiętnik Blumki*, the concentration of visual signs requires a patient, detailed, contemplative reading and subsequent re-readings, all of which bring to light the implicit senses of both narrations. Encounters with such artistically sophisticated picture books activate in the readers new cognitive and emotional facets of experience and initiate new, more nuanced responses.

Owing to their challenging visual narration, both these books inspire a profound, multilayered ethical response. They confront readers with knowledge about the Holocaust and death; they instill a sense of uneasiness and pain; and they instigate a disturbing yet necessary sense of co-responsibility for the evil which should not, and cannot, be imagined merely as a narrative of the past. Without attempting to provide easy reassurance about the potential lessons drawn from the Holocaust, they still transform the (imagined) trauma into works of art that offer a wise understanding/teaching of death through an equally wise affirmation/teaching of life. While first readings of the books may prompt despair and powerlessness in confrontation with death, careful immersive re-readings provide opportunities to explore the

emotional impact of the ambiguity of death in pictures and texts. The books achieve more than memorialization of the victims. They contest their status as victims so as to restore their humanness through revealing their moral invulnerability, thus making a definitive ethical statement about the absolute wrongness of the aggressors. Both narratives wholeheartedly work to fulfill one of the tasks of post-Holocaust literature, and art as such, which is to restore the moral order.

NOTES

1. Zygmunt Bauman's *Nowoczesność i Zagłada* [*Modernity and the Holocaust*] (trans. Tomasz Kunz; Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009) has a detailed discussion of the sense of guilt related to the Holocaust in those who have not had any direct experience of it.
2. Laurie Langbauer, "Ethics and Theory: Suffering Children in Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Le Guin," *ELH* 75.1 (2008): 89–108, provides a challenging and stimulating discussion on the moral implications of writers portraying the suffering of children.
3. See Adrienne Kertzer in Kokkola 68.
4. Kokkola deals with this topic more thoroughly in the first chapter of *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature*.

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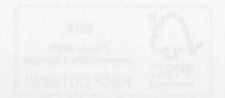
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Part V

Metaphorizing Death

Global Perspectives on Death in Children's Literature

Edited by Lesley D. Clement and Leyli Jamali



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Dedicated to my mother, Margaret Joyce (1928–2014)

LDC

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Circling Around the Clock Tower: A Visual (Her)story of People through Time

Abstract: The essay "Circling Around the Clock Tower: a Visual (Her)story of People through Time" discusses a vision of time and history in a picture book by Iwona Chmielewska, a contemporary Polish picture book artist. Inspired by the artistic credo of the Themersons, the analysis focuses on the unconventional form and multimodal character of the book. Its meaning resides in the interdependence of image and word, and in sophisticated and playful visual metaphors that encourage active and critical response. In her book about Toruń the artist constructs a multifaceted fictional world which becomes a narrative of cultural memory, but also a personal vision of the city's history.

Keywords: picture book, visual narrative, visual humour, time, the past, the present, cultural memory, material culture

Artistic legacy that is both provocative and ethically engaging, diversified in form, and yet conceptually coherent, is arguably rare to find. Perhaps, that is the reason the Themersons' fame does not fade with time. As avant-garde artists they believed in the transformative potential of works which were unclassifiable, innovative, disturbing, and yet unprejudiced. They also engaged in creating and publishing quality books for children. Their ironic distance towards conventional ways of thinking and communicating manifested itself in experimental art they co-authored, in Stefan's poetry and in Franciszka's drawings. It is not a coincidence that they drew inspiration from such intellectuals as Lewis Carroll – the name Gáberbocchus given to the press they founded shortly after the Second World War alludes to the title of the nonsense poem "Jabberwocky" from *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Notably, Franciszka's illustrations of Carroll's work, originally commissioned in 1946 by George G. Harrap and Co., were eventually published in 2001 by the Inky Parrot Press which specialises in illustration.¹ The Themersons' artistic output reveals their belief that critical thinking feeds on avant-garde forms.

¹ Festina Lente announces on its website that it is about to publish Robert Stiller's translation of Lewis Carroll's work with Franciszka Themerson's illustrations. Web. 15 February 2015: < <http://festina-lente.pl/alicia-po-drugiej-stronie-lustra-zwiastun/> >.

The Themersons' goals apparently reverberate in their work for child readers. Franciszka and Stefan complemented each other – he wrote texts that she illustrated. A few of their illustrated books for children were published in Poland in the 1930s and 1940s. Contemporary Polish readers have gained access to these publications only recently: some titles were released for the first time, and some as reprints by two publishers, Festina Lente foundation and Widnokrag, in 2013 and 2014. The Themersons' books for children tell stories whose playful form disguises social themes. All of them are educational in character, some are overtly didactic, which comes as a surprise when the texts are confronted with Stefan's style in his works for older readers. Franciszka's artistic contribution is undeniable – marked for their visual humour and meticulous typography, the books have famously been branded as “bestlookers.” Yet, however original and witty Franciszka's illustrations are, the narrative weight is to be found in Stefan's texts. The illustrations never attempt to usurp the text's authority.

Franciszka Themerson's own legacy appears to be less known today than her artistic cooperation with Stefan. It is the Themersons as a duo that earned the status of a brand name. However, the artist also worked independently; she was an illustrator, a successful stage designer, and a painter who looked for her individual style through art. She tried to “regain a child-like sensitivity in herself,” with time seeking simpler forms of expression (Sady qtd. in Łupak par. 19). The artist eventually discovered she had developed her own “pictorial language” that would adequately articulate her experience of the world (F. Themerson 12). Franciszka once remarked: “A critic once called my bi-abstract pictures ‘white modern cave paintings’. I liked the flattering comparison. I liked it still more when I went, a few months later, to see the caves at Lascaux ... It was like the essence of life itself, caught by the man who made the pictures 20,000 years ago. Or perhaps it was not a man? I mean – it might have been a woman, might it not?” (12). The comment emphasises great art's timelessness, acknowledges its potential to bring to life lives long gone and to annihilate distance in time, and – last but not least – subtly reminds her readers of the role of women artists.

Iwona Chmielewska, a contemporary Polish artist, author of several picture books published worldwide, somewhat resembles Franciszka Themerson in her search for her own pictorial language. Chmielewska, whose books have been awarded with the most prestigious awards for illustration in children's books in the new millennium, had remained relatively unknown in Poland until recently. She started her work as an illustrator shortly after her studies, but it was the picture book format that turned out to be the most potent form of expression in the artist's case. Iwona Chmielewska's art resists easy judgments; her works have

a distinctive illustrative style. The books' formal simplicity is deceptive – their emotional and intellectual strength can be appreciated by patient and observant readers. While Iwona Chmielewska's artistic sensibility is centred around the child, her books definitely transcend boundaries of age. The expressive and conceptual depth of the stories is contained in the original fusion of image and text. Her picture books evade categorising and formal definitions, as the illustrations alone have enormous storytelling potential; when juxtaposed with the text, they offer even more readings.

The format of a picture book, in which the deliberately concise text and images rich in information depend on each other, and each is an indispensable component of the narrated story (Nodelman viii),² is artistically challenging. It also imposes strict discipline on the authors. Artists who choose this convention make use of the form very differently; therefore it is occasionally difficult to mark the boundary between a picture book *per se* and other types of books that include illustrations. The meaning-making potential of the form is virtually infinite: artists can resort to formal experiments, they can employ different narrative strategies both in the text and in the illustrations, they can play with effects of the juxtaposition of the two modalities in picture books. Associated with child audience, artistically successful picture books are not designed for any specific readership. Therefore, they may provoke very different kinds of response.

Iwona Chmielewska's book entitled *Cztery strony czasu* [*Four Corners of Time*] was published in Poland by Media Rodzina in 2013, three years later than its first South Korean edition. It revives the turbulent history of Toruń, a historic Polish city located on the bank of the Vistula river, a city where the artist lives. The format of the book somewhat diverges from the typical picture book formula in that the relatively expanded text can function independently from the illustrations. It is the illustrations, however, that transform what at first glance may appear a conventional historical account into a humorous visual redefinition of the history of the city and its cultural heritage. The illustrations tell us a fairy-tale-like story about the place which is important to the artist, about people through time, about the transience of life and mysterious cycles of death and rebirth. The illustrations make references to the text in an imaginative manner: they do not merely enhance it by adding new information, but they transform its meaning by telling independent stories that recontextualise the story told in words.

2 The exhaustive analysis of the narrative art of picture books is offered by Perry Nodelman in his work *Words about Pictures, The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*. University of Georgia Press, 1988.

The formal rigour is manifested by the systematic treatment of form: the plot revolves around the clock located in the Town Hall Tower, which is the symbolic centre, the beating heart of the city. Readers are able to see the clock through the eyes of the inhabitants of the four flats in the Old Market Square. Each of the four flats overlooks the Town Hall Tower from a different direction; all of them thus resemble the cardinal points. Throughout the book we see the inside of the four flats, each time at a different time of the day. The narration invariably sets the action of each chapter at the beginning of the subsequent century. We witness glimpses of life in the flats, we observe the people's different states of mind coincided in time.

The shifting perspective activates the readers' spatial perception, encourages a virtual walk through the rooms whose windows face the Town Hall from the four directions; the perspective of the subsequent characters thus allows the readers to continuously move around the Town Hall Tower. Those formal choices have a symbolic dimension – they metaphorically depict (and challenge) the western understanding of time and history. The artist plays with the idea of linear time, as well as the idea of the fixed past. The readers are relocated into the past to see moments in the lives of other people, selected arbitrarily by the artist; the characters' sense of the present is imposed on the readers. Moreover, the four depictions of one moment are every time provided as a sequence, not simultaneously: visiting the rooms, the readers are frozen in the moment, but they need time to turn pages of the book and learn the individual stories.

Contradicting intuitive judgments about the flow of time, the past in the book has the power to return; its spirits visit the present, time is relativised. The plant that is small in Copernicus' times mysteriously reappears in full bloom in the twentieth century. The fish caught by a sixteenth-century fisherman is cut into pieces in the seventeenth century and is eventually consumed by people celebrating the beginning of the new millennium. A female cook emerges as a shadow after five hundred years in the same kitchen, her face strikingly similar to that of a woman cooking a meal in the year 2000. Echoing eastern philosophies and contemporary philosophical reflections on time, the story demonstrates the arbitrariness of the modern collective perception of time through visual analogies between those inhabiting the same space in the centuries gone and in the centuries coming. It is as if they denied the past's past status, implied the cyclical rather than linear character of time, and emphasised the spiritual dimension of intergenerational bonds.

The idea is further complexified by the choice of convention, synthesising the theatrical and literary forms of expression – we are introduced to the characters whom we recognise as figures cut out of paper, characteristic of the toy theatre

tradition. This choice cannot leave the reader indifferent to its multifarious implications. In Stefan Themerson's novel *Tom Harris* the narrator is struck by a sudden thought: "a sort of acute feeling of awareness gripped my throat, as sometimes, on rare occasions, happens in the theatre, it is strange, I thought, that in real life we are still less frequently inclined to notice and accept and respect a drama, or a tragedy, than in literature" (7). Choosing the form, upon which she decides, Iwona Chmielewska, tricks her readers into listening and immerses them in the story. It is not supposed to be a documentary, a dry historical account, but an engaging visual narrative – a tale that encapsulates accumulated spiritual wisdom about the past's *presence* in the present.

The artist's intermedial gesture of transferring the convention of the staged play into the book format restores the memory of the popular nineteenth-century artistic form which inspired a number of distinguished children's authors and avant-garde artists of the era. Perhaps even more significantly, however, it becomes an opportunity to challenge the readers' fixed perception of history. The verbal narration reads like a realistic account, whereas the illustrations counterpoint the assumption, continuously making it clear that the story is enacted. The opening illustrations imply that someone who is the narrator's contemporary, supposedly a parent accompanied by children, is in the process of constructing the stage and cutting out paper figures, clothes, and accessories. The illustrations thus challenge the much used, perhaps clichéd, convention of realism in the theatre, blurring the boundary between reality and fiction. In a metatheatrical fashion, the paper-cut figures are endowed with new identities as their somewhat unnatural faces reappear on the subsequent pages of the book, representing the succeeding generations of Toruń's residents. At the end of the book, their lifeless status is made clear in a scene in which the head of a female figure sticks out from a drawer that bears an inscription "heads," next to another one containing palms. In the same illustration someone's hand is vacuuming snippets that remained after the performance.

Despite the metafictional visual play, the characters are strikingly credible. The sense of realism results from highlighting particular moments in consecutive centuries (6 a.m., February 1500; 9 a.m., April 1600; 1 p.m., June 1700; 5 p.m., August 1800; 8 p.m., October 1900, midnight, December 2000). Some of the characters in the succeeding scenes may be fictitious, but others definitely evoke the memory of real people, only there is no certainty to what extent the moments captured by the artist had been fictionalised. On each double-spread portraying the residents of Toruń the verso features a small drawing of an empty room in the left bottom corner and other visual clues that leave no doubt that the recto will reveal enacted scenes. However, the evocative descriptions, the "zoom in" effect owing to which

the images of the characters increase in size, the collage of old photographs, images of furnishings and objects of everyday use that are characteristic of a given era, immerse readers in the scenes from the past.

The readers are privy to what the characters in the play may not be entirely aware of: the past incessantly haunts the present; living today, we are accompanied by both tangible and intangible remnants of the past. The front cover of the book employs a visual metaphor to illustrate the spiritual link between the past and the present, epitomised by a couple touching each other's palms. The lady, whose costume turns her into a visual allegory of the past, apparently invites the man, the readers' contemporary, to join her in a journey into the past. There are invisible spiritual bonds between the succeeding generations inhabiting the four flats overlooking the Town Hall clock – the symbolic heart of the anthropomorphised old Gothic city. The clock and the tower supposedly signify tradition and stability to many Toruń's residents, but the history of the building, mentioned in passing, functions as another example of death and return. The Town Hall was destroyed in the eighteenth century by the Swedish. Its reconstructed version thus symbolically reconciles and blends its former and present identity; moreover, it establishes a *rapprochement* between what is perceived as distant past and the present.

In its commitment to preserve the cultural memory of the city and its people, the book appears to scrupulously fulfil conventional expectations of sustaining memory. The seemingly familiar imagery entails an inclusion of references to well-known, historic moments and an evocation of characteristic symbols of the city of Toruń, such as the famous cathedral bell Tuba Dei and the Leaning Tower. While reviving the memory, the artist makes use of realistic detail: we see the evolving map of the town, objects of everyday use including soldier uniforms, currency, vehicles, and fashion representing different eras. The name "Toruń," never mentioned in the text, reappears on children's play blocks and on vintage postcards.

Still, the illustrations bestow new meaning on the well-known objects, transform them in an imaginative way, and make them alive through defamiliarisation and recontextualisation, thus challenging the traditional past-present dichotomy. The familiar symbols are humorously transfigured. The symbol of Toruń, the angel, a central figure on the city's coat of arms, is featured in her various incarnations on several double-spreads. It appears in a childlike or female form as a guardian angel of both children and adults; on the front endpaper it adopts the identity of a female papercut inserted into the otherwise familiar image of the city's coat of arms. The sculpture of the Madonna with Baby Jesus – the Beautiful Madonna of Toruń, located in the Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, whose faithful photograph we see on one double-spread, reappears a

few openings later in a surprising context. The artist winks at the readers: we witness baby Jesus dropping the apple which His mother is offering. The presumption of the immutability and lifelessness of the sculpture is thus challenged. Moreover, without the place to which the figure is traditionally attributed, that is the Cathedral, Madonna is seen in a new way. The visual tongue-in-cheek transformation can be read through the prism of John Berger's famous *Ways of Seeing*, where he states, echoing Walter Benjamin, that in an era of photographic reproduction works of art acquire new meaning, or their meanings inevitably multiply, as the sense of uniqueness connected with the place for which they were destined is lost (19).

Intervisual allusions to artistic masterpieces and popular examples of visual arts, for example those known as *toile de jouy*, have a similar destabilising function: they are vague, recontextualised reminiscences of the past for many readers, but they also allow contemporary readers to reconsider the status of relics of the past. The well-known idyllic scenes that used to appear on wallpaper, furniture, decorative paper, or tiles, in the book become associated with Toruń's Midsummer festivities. Similarly, the unexpected inclusion of visual quotations or allusions to well-known paintings endows iconic works of art with a new life and new meanings. Johannes Vermeer's famous *Milkmaid* is echoed in the posture of a seventeenth-century Toruń's housewife, perhaps to honour her mundane work. While certain telling details understood by Vermeer's contemporaries may be overlooked by contemporary viewers, other readings emerge when we confront the painting today in the new context. In other openings we see a wanderer from Hieronymus Bosch's painting and Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *Summer*. Perhaps, these choices are self-reflective: today both these artists are considered as canonical, but, according to Jan Białostocki, their art was truly understood only after the experience of surrealism (74). It could additionally be argued that the symbolism of the wanderer, his pilgrimage through life, is enriched by becoming a central metaphor of Iwona Chmielewska's book.

An allusion to Jan van Eyck's famous *The Arnolfini Portrait* is signified in the illustration of a couple reflected in the characteristic convex mirror, which is copied in the book in an almost intact form. The examination of the original painting reveals that the motif on the mirror depicts the Passion of Christ. In the book illustration the scenes from the Passion have become replaced by Roman numerals, arranged in the same way as the numerals on a clock face. Perhaps this is the artist's response to the earlier interpretations of the original. Interestingly, van Eyck's painting becomes doubly echoed. The postures and faces of the spouses imprint themselves on the image of the couple portrayed in the last section of the

book. They become a double allusion that recalls not only van Eyck's painting but also Iwona Chmielewska's playful reinterpretation of his work a few pages earlier.

A closer examination of the turbulent history of the symbols highlighted in the book – Madonna with Baby Jesus is a case in point – reminds the readers how consensual thinking about the past often is. In fact, the Gothic original was lost during the First World War and never found. However, the tangibility of the sculpture may make its contemporary admirers somewhat resistant to the fact that it is a replica, not the genuine Madonna. The artist decides to retell the history of her city, thus reminding her readers of the narrative character of historical accounts. Toruń's history is told from the perspective of a home reality; the military conflicts and disasters are mentioned in passing, remain peripheral. It is Toruń's material culture, its people, often women and children, in their homes, surrounded with objects dear to them, who become the focus of the narrative. The visualised scenes capture ordinary moments from their lives: they prepare meals, put children to bed, or have tea. It is moments such as those that make up their lives; such moments also make history.

Selecting the character types for the story, the artist gives justice to the multiethnic past of the city, portraying the lives of fishermen, shoemakers, bakers producing gingerbread, the Gottlieb family and the Geist family. The narration features both fictitious and real citizens of Toruń, emphasising their different cultural background and reviving knowledge of crafts that are almost forgotten today. The artist does not privilege anyone; her choices are truly democratic, while forms of paying tribute to eminent residents playfully unexpected. The text in the first part of the book mentions Nicolaus, who would become the famous astronomer and Toruń's pride. His image, however, is nowhere to be seen; his monument only appears in the last part that portrays the city in the twentieth century. The readers also visit rooms of two women-artists: the Toruń-born photographer Lotte Jacobi, Sigismund's daughter, and the anonymous picture book artist [sic], whose authentic childhood photo is featured in the illustration. Self-referentiality is another example of visual humour omnipresent in the book, but it also emphasises the artist's emotional bonds with the city.

The vision of time and history in *Cztery strony czasu* [Four Corners of Time], concerned with preserving cultural memory, sometimes subversive and playful, is also ethically engaging. The narration as a whole reflects the artist's emotional attachment to her city and its people. Illustrations alluding to times of war and distress express empathy for the sufferers through visual metaphors. Drops of water falling from the sixteenth-century map of Toruń, symbolising a time when the city was stricken by plagues, resemble tears. The postcard depicting grapes is

torn into half, alluding to the destruction of Toruń's wineries during seventeenth-century wars. A sense of compassion for those who suffered in the past is made tangible through subtle visual signals, such as a hand (perhaps that of a child who is playing with the toy theatre) that is holding a coin over an image of the needy depicted in a vintage illustration. The guardian angels and the beautiful Madonna are recurrent motifs which offer protection, hope, and a sense of solace.

The past reimagined in *Cztery strony czasu* [Four Corners of Time] can thus be read in its various representations: symbolic, philosophical, provocative, and emotional. The artist offers her readers a personal vision of time which reconciles them with life's ephemerality and to the inevitability of change. The narration does not evade the subject of death, but tends to represent it in the context of later rebirth, return, sometimes in the form of a haunting memory or an intangible trace. The dismembered paper figures in the last illustration initially evoke compassion as they are still remembered as "living." Their symbolic end becomes bearable, however, as in the end they are no longer considered "real," and the readers are left with the hope that the actors will soon be "reborn," reanimated in other plays.

Iwona Chmielewska's art embraces all audiences, yet remains exceptionally considerate and respectful towards the child, also the child within the adult. Perhaps, that is the reason why the illustrations abound in visual jokes such as *trompe-l'oeil* – the portrayed people's heads come out of the frames, making readers of all ages smile at the visual illusion. However, the primary function of visual humour in the book is to engage contemporary readers with material culture as a way to understand the past. It fosters a vision of the past always interacting the present, it emphasises the existence of sometimes invisible bonds between the present and the past, between the living and the dead. In the artist's vision, it is the people, the often anonymous residents of Toruń, as well as the humanised symbols and architecture, that make the city alive.

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Cut and Paste. Dreamscapes of Joseph Cornell

Abstract: Joseph Cornell is an artist who poses a problem to anybody especially eager to draw distinct borderlines in the history of art. Certainly, he is not the only avant-garde artist who employed collage as one of the means to express his artistic visions. However, what makes Cornell unusual is the fact that collages and assemblages were his main artistic expressions. Even movies that he made had collage-like characteristics. The shadow boxes, that are wooden constructions within which he assembled various objects, included collages, too. This mixing, cutting, pasting and arranging resulted in dreamscapes of numerous layers open to various interpretations.

Keywords: Joseph Cornell, collage, shadow boxes, everyday objects, Surrealism, dreams, psychoanalysis

...when a collage is in its formative stages,
 an unmistakable alchemy of the image appears
 to be almost casually displayed upon his desk.
 Howard Hussey¹

Joseph Cornell is an unusual figure in the landscape of American artists in the twentieth century. He started to create in the years when a few Surrealists came to the United States during the Second World War and when European art had a big influence on American artists. However, this influence was later treated as a burden and a need for more "American" and distinctly original art occurred. Cornell's easily recognisable style and the medium he used were specific enough to let him function outside any schools or artistic trends. Some claim that he should be included into the group of Surrealists, others recognise some features his art shared with Surrealism but also point out the differences. The distinctive characteristic of his artworks is the use of second-hand material, both when we speak about his collages and shadow boxes, or films.

¹ Howard Hussey, "Collaging the Moment." *Joseph Cornell Collages 1931-1972*. Ed. Mary Laing. New York: Leo Castelli, Richard L. Feigen, and James Corcoran, 1978, p. 22.

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IWONA CHMIELEWSKA: bibliography, selection

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Dzień dobry, Europo (Good Morning, Europe), with text by, Algo Publishing, Toruń 2004.

Lubię kotki (I Like Kittens), Grafitex Publishing, Gdańsk 2006.

Thinking ABC, Nonjang Publishing, Seoul 2006.

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Domowe duchy (Domestic Ghosts), with text by Dubravka Ugresic, Znak Publishing, Kraków 2010.

Pamiętnik Blumki (Blumka's Diary), Media Rodzina Publishing, Poznań 2011.

A House of the Mind: Maum, with text by Kim Hee-Kyung, Changbi Publishing, Seoul 2011.

Kłopot (Trouble), Wytównia Publishing, Warsaw 2012.

O tych, którzy się rozwijali (Great Lives Unravelling), Media Rodzina Publishing, Poznań 2013.

Małe lisy (Little Foxes), with text by Justyna Bargielska, Czarne Publishing, Warsaw 2013.

Cztery strony czasu (Four Directions of Time), Media Rodzina Publishing, Poznań 2013.

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Oczy (Eyes), Warstwy Publishing, Wrocław 2014.

Na wysokiej górze (On the High Mountain), with text by Krystyna Miłobędzka, Wydawnictwo Miejskie Poznań, Poznań 2014.

Dwoje Ludzi (Two People), Media Rozina Publishing, Poznań 2014.

Królestwo dziewczynki (A Girl's Kingdom), Entliczek Publishing, Warsaw 2014.

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W kieszonce (In the Pocket), Media Rodzina Publishing, Poznań 2015.

abc.de, Warstwy Publishing, Wrocław 2015.

Obie (Both), with text by Justyna Bargielska, Wolno Publishing, Poznań 2016.

Jak ciężko być królem (It's Hard to Be a King), Wolno Publishing, Poznań 2018.

Kołysanka na cztery (The Lullaby Counted to Four), Wolno Publishing, Poznań 2018.

Translations [selection] (in Iwona Chmielewska's case however it will be language versions – it is often hard to tell which version is original and which is a translation):

O wędrowaniu przy zasypianiu (On Wandering While Falling Asleep):

Korea – Nonjang Publishing

China – Kangso Children's Publishing

Kłopot (Trouble):

Korea – Nonjang Publishing

Taiwan – 3&3 Publishing

Germany – Gimpel Verlag

Netherlands – Brevier

China – Gwangseo Educational Univ. Publishing

Moje kroki (My Steps)

Korea – Nonjang Publishing

China – Gwangseo Educational Univ. Publishing

Pomysły (Ideas)

Korea – Nonjang Publishing

China – Gwangseo Educational Univ. Publishing

Thinking ABC

Korea – Nonjang

China – Chilin Publishing

Vietnam – Kim Dong Publishing

Cztery zwykłe miski (Four Ordinary Bowls)

Korea – Nonjang Publishing

France – Rue de Monde Publishing

China – Gwangseo Educational Univ. Publishing

Gdzie jest moja córka? (Where Is My Daughter?)

Korea – Nonjang Publishing

China – Gwangseo Educational Univ. Publishing

Dwoje Ludzi (Two People)

Korea – Sakyejul Publishing

Taiwan – Linking Publishing Company

Mexico – Editorial Oceano Publishing

IWONA CHMIELEWSKA

5 titles submitted to the competition:

Pamiętnik Blumki (Blumka's Diary)

Oczy (Eyes)

Cztery zwykłe miski (Four Ordinary Bowls)

Kłopot (Trouble)

abc.de

IWONA CHMIELEWSKA: AWARDS AND HONORS

2018 – Shortlisted in Hans Christian Andersen Award.

2016 – Nomination for Der Deutsche Jugendliteraturpreis for *abc.de* (Warstwy Publishing), category non-fiction.

2015 – Recognition award for *abc.de* (Warstwy Publishing) in the 56th PTWK The Most Beautiful Book of the Year, category: book for young readers, and a recognition award for *As Long as the Sky Doesn't Cry (Dopóki niebo nie płacze, Ośrodek Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN Publishing)*, category: belles lettres.

2014 – Recognition award for *Eyes (Oczy, Warstwy Publishing)* in the 55th PTWK The Most Beautiful Book of the Year competition.

2014 – *On a High Mountain (Na wysokiej górze, written by Krystyna Miłobędzka, illustrated by Iwona Chmielewska, Miejskie Posnania Publishing)* included in the Children's Book's Museum's Treasure List.

2014 – 1st prize in Dobre Strony competition for *On a High Mountain (Na wysokiej górze, written by Krystyna Miłobędzka, illustrated by Iwona Chmielewska, Miejskie Posnania Publishing)*, category: book for young readers.

2013 – Bologna Ragazzi Award 2013 for *Eyes* (Changbi Publishers, South Korea), category: non-fiction.

Awards for *Blumka's Diary (Pamiętnik Blumki, Media Rodzina Publishing)*:

Literary recognition and the Book of the Year Award (category: picturebooks and illustrations) in IBBY's Book of the Year contest, 2011.

Winner of the 10th edition of Świat przyjazny dziecku (Child friendly world) contest organized by the Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

The Mayor of Wrocław's Award in Dobre Strony (Good Pages) contest organized by Wrocław Public Library and Wrocław Good Book Promotion Bureau, 2012.

1st prize in the literary competition organized by The Association of Polish Publishers (category: book for young readers), 2012.

1st prize in Halina Skrobiszewska's Children's Literature competition organized by the Museum of Children's Books, 2012.

Recognition award given by adult and child jury in DONGA literary contest 2012 organized by the Polish Section of IBBY.

Der Deutsche Jugendliteraturpreis nominee, 2012.

Incorporation into Internationale Jugendbibliothek in Munich's The White Raven list, 2012.

Incorporation into the list of the Best Books from all over the World during CJ Picturebook Festival (Seoul).

2011 – *A Girl's Kingdom* (Changbi Publishers, South Korea) included in the list of 100 the Most Beautiful Books from all over the World during CJ Picture Book Festival.

2011 – Bologna Ragazzi Award for *A House of the Mind: Maum*. Illustrated by Iwona Chmielewska, text by Kim Hee-Kyung (Changbi Publishers, South Korea), category: non-fiction.

2007 – Golden Apple at the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava for *Thinking abc* (Nonjang Publishing, South Korea).

2000 – Pro Bolonia Award (Polish Artists Association) for *Master and a Cat* (unpublished).

