

Iwona Chmielewska

Polish nominee for the
2018
Hans Christian Andersen
Illustrator 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. Iłakowiczówna 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 Poznań, 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

IWONA CHMIELEWSKA: AWARDS AND HONORS

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 Asociacion) for *Master and a Cat* (unpublished).

IWONA CHMIELEWSKA: bibliography, selection

Kopciuszek (Cinderella), with text by Zofia Stanecka, Muchomor Publishing, Warsaw 2004.

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.

O wędrowaniu przy zasypianiu (On Wandering While Falling Asleep), Hokus-Pokus Publishing, Warsaw 2006.

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), Wytówrnia Publishing, Warsaw 2012.

O tych, którzy się rozwijali (Great Lives Unravelled), 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.

Cztery zwykłe miski (Four Ordinary Bowls), Format Publishing, Wrocław 2013.

Oczy (Eyes), Warstwy Publishing, Wrocław 2014.

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

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

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

Czarownica (The Witch), with text by Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna, Wydawnictwo Miejskie Posnania, Poznań 2015.

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.

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

<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.

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

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.