



Baština
Dusty Covers

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How to Censor a Board Game

The Case of *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures], A Polish Board Game Censored in 1954¹

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This paper describes a case of censorship of a board game in post-war Poland. The source material is the classified *Bulletin* [*Biuletyn*] for censors from March 1954 in which the board game *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures] is described. The game was banned for its imperialistic messages. However, a modified version of the game was published only two years later.

Keywords: board games, children's literature, censorship, imperialism, post-war Poland

Research on censorship of literature in post-war Poland is already well developed but the same cannot be said of the censorship of board games. This article is one of the first attempts (if not the very first attempt) to describe a case of censoring a board game. The source material is the classified *Bulletin* [*Biuletyn*] for censors from March 1954 in which the board game *Przygody w dżungli* was described. The *Bulletin* for censors (Fig. 1) was a confidential, internal journal of the Central Press Control Bureau, then of the Main Office for the Control of the Press, Publications and Public Performances. It presented primarily materials on censorship and the activities of the Office for Control; it published editorial articles and materials from the field (reports, balance sheets and letters sent by censor teams or specific employees of the censorship office, press articles, regulations, etc.), and, in particular, censorship reviews. In *Bulletins*, only parts of the

¹ In some parts, this article is based on fragments of my two books: Wiśniewska-Grabarczyk 2021: 338–342 and Wiśniewska-Grabarczyk 2022: 314–316. More on the censorship evaluation of *Anne of Green Gables* can be found on my project page *Censorship Uncensored/Cenzura Bez Cenzury* (2023).

evaluations were published, but the whole censorship reviews can be found in other archival documents, such as the 1956 evaluation of Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (Fig. 2). The text of the review in the English translation follows below:

In the novel *Anne of Green Gables*, the author describes in an extremely interesting and engaging way the life of Anne – an orphan who ends up in the care of Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert of Avonlea. The theme of the book is particularly focused on the problem of homeless orphans, who, if the right conditions are created, can develop and use their hidden abilities. Such children include Anne, who, thanks to both her abilities and ambitions, becomes a top student in her school.

This petite 10-year-old, freckled and red-haired girl, despite her not especially beautiful appearance, is charming and can disarm the reader with her exuberant imagination and fantasy. Anne is quite a character. Deeply sensitive to beauty, she suffers greatly from her external appearance and feels everything to a high degree. However, she is able to compensate for these various shortcomings and deficiencies with her fantasy and lively imagination, which never fail her. Anne is a very impulsive child, able to love and hate with equal force. She knows how to rejoice and be happy with her whole being, but she can also suffer and wallow in despair. At the same time, she is very ambitious and stubborn, and once she makes up her mind about something, she pursues her goal relentlessly.

The great merit of the author is that she was able to put such a popular theme into original forms (in the character of Anne) which makes the book extremely interesting. It contains so many hilarious and comic situations, which both touch and amuse.

I believe this book achieves its goal, because it stimulates the young reader's enthusiasm and ambition to learn, and shows that with work and self-determination, you can achieve a lot in life.

In terms of its purpose, the *Bulletin* fulfilled a training, instructional, and informational function; in terms of its distribution method, it was a confidential text with deliberately limited distribution.

The colonial states and their plundering policies, as well as the decolonisation processes that took place in the 1950s, were mentioned several times in the *Bulletins*, which wrote about the liberation of African, Asian, and South American countries from the domination of the colonisers. Usually, it was books dealing with these matters that were mentioned, but in March 1954, a board game called *Przygody w dżungli Kombinacyjna gra dla młodzieży* [Jungle Adventures: A Combination Game for Youth] (in the *Bulletin*: *Przygoda w dżungli* [A Jungle Adventure]) was discussed, which, according to the evaluators, supposedly represented an idyllic version of the old imperialist world order (Anon 1954).

The one-page material was accompanied by a photo of the game board, which shows a white man dressed in the traditional clothes of a coloniser (Fig. 4). He is looking at the black inhabitants of a stereotypically depicted African village as they engage in play, perhaps a ritual dance. This particular graphic element was controversial because, according to the *Bulletin's* editors, the concept of the drawing offered an idyllic version of the coexistence of the colonisers and the colonised, and idealised “white imperialist colonisers while showing the ‘savagery’ and ‘inferiority’ of dark-skinned people” (Anon

1954: 47). However, it appeared that the game was viewed favourably “by the censors of ephemera at the GUKP [the Main Office for the Control – comment by the author], who failed to notice the erroneous depiction and harmful message of this drawing” (ibid). This omission was discovered at further stages of the censorship work, and the consequences of this lack of vigilance on the part of the censors put the Toy Industry Cooperative, “which had submitted the project for printing, at risk of material losses” (ibid).

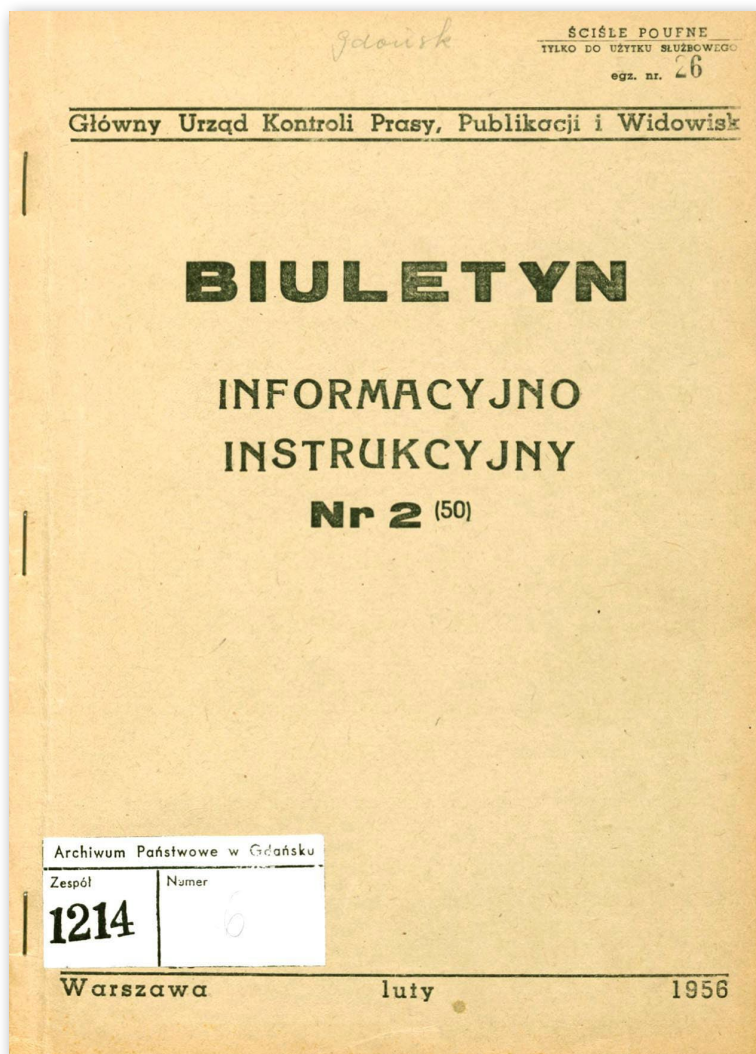


Fig. 1. The cover page of the *Biuletyn* for censors published in February 1956.²

Sl. 1. Naslovna stranica *Biltena* za cenzore iz veljače 1956.

² All the presented visual materials are in the public domain. Svi prikazani vizualni materijali dostupni su u javnoj domeni.

29

**GŁÓWNY URZĄD KONTROLI PRASY,
PUBLIKACJI i WIDOWISK**

Dział Publikacji Nieperiodycznych

1. Tytuł i podtytuł		"Ania z zielonego wzgórza"	
2. Autor (rzy)		Lucy Maud Montgomery	
3. Przedsiębiorstwo wydawnicze		Nasza Księgarnia	
4. Wysokość nakładu	50205	5. Książka nowa, czy wznowienie	wznowienie
6. Praca oryginalna, czy tłumaczenie	tłumaczenie	7. Język oryginału	angielski
8. Data przekazania pracy recenzentowi		2.VI. 56r.	

U W A G A: Recenzja powinna między innymi dawać odpowiedź na następujące kwestie:
 a) Tematyka i problematyka książki,
 b) Ideologiczne i społeczno-wychowawcze znaczenie książki.

RECENZJA

W powieści "Ania z zielonego wzgórza" autorka w sposób niezwykle ciekawy i zajmujący opisuje życie Ani- sieroty, przyciemnionej drogą przypadku przez Mateusza i Marylę Cuthbert z Avonlea.

Tematyka książki skoncentrowana jest szczególnie wobec problemu bezdomnych sierot, którym gdy tylko stworzy się odpowiednie warunki potrafią rozwinąć i wykorzystać swe ukryte zdolności.

Do takich właśnie dzieci należy zaliczyć Anię, która zarówno dzięki swoim zdolnościom jak i ambicjom staje się prymusem w szkole.

To drobne 10-letnie, piegowate i rudowłose dziewczątko mimo swej niezbyt pięknej powierzchowności jest czarujące i potrafi rozbroić czytelnika swą nadmiernie wybujałą wyobraźnią i fantazją. Ania to naprawdę ciekawa osoba. Jej natura głęboko wrażliwa na piękno, cierpi bardzo z powodu swego wyglądu zewnętrznego i wszystko odczuwa do potęgi. Te różne niedostatki i braki potrafi sobie jednak wynagrodzić przy pomocy fantazji i żywej wyobraźni, która ją nigdy nie zawodzi. Ania jest dzieckiem bardzo impulsywnym, potrafi z równą siłą kochać jak i nienawidzić. Umie się cieszyć i być szczęśliwą całą swoją osobą, ale umie również cierpieć i szaleć z rozpaczą. Jest przy tym wszystkim bardzo ambitna i uparta i gdy sobie coś postanowi dąży zdecydowanie do celu.

Wielką zaletą autorki jest fakt, że tak popularną tematykę potrafiła ująć w oryginalne formy /w postaci Ani/ co czyni książkę niezmiernie ciekawą. Jest w niej tyle przezabawnych komicznych sytuacji, które na przemian wzbudzają i bawią.

GUKP — wzór Nr 1 (PN)
 Druk PIGO. Zam. 443. — 10.000

Fig. 2. The review of the Polish translation of *Anne of Green Gables* written on 12 June 1956, AAN, GUKPPIW, file ref. no. 3078, p. 29r.

Sl. 2. Recenzija poljskoga prijevoda romana *Anne of Green Gables* [*Ania od Zelenih zabata*] koji je napisan 12. lipnja 1956., AAN, GUKPPIW, dok. br. 3078, str. 29r.

Uważam że książka ta osiągnęła swój cel, pobudza bowiem w młodym czytelniku zapał i ambicję do nauki i pokazuje że pracą i samozaparciem nad sobą można w życiu uzyskać bardzo wiele.

9. Proponowane ingerencje i ich krótkie uzasadnienie:

10. Wniosek recenzenta (niepotrzebne skreślić):
 a) udzielić zezwolenia
 b) nie udzielić zezwolenia
 c) ~~udzielić zezwolenia po dokonaniu ingerencji~~

11. Tomasz Szura
 podpis recenzenta

12. Decyzja: udzielić zezwolenia

16.V.50 r.
 data

U w a g a: w razie braku miejsca wziąć dodatkowy arkusz

Fig. 3. The review of the Polish translation of *Anne of Green Gables* AAN, GUKPPiW, file ref. no. 3078, p. 29v.

Sl. 3. Recenzija poljskoga prijevoda romana *Anne of Green Gables* [Anne od Zelenih zabata] iz 1956., AAN, GUKPPiW, dok. br. 3078, str. 29v.



Fig. 4. A photograph of the game board of *Przygody w dżungli. Kombinacyjna gra dla młodzieży* [Jungle Adventures. A Combination Game for Youth] in the March 1954 *Bulletin* (Anon 1954: n.p.)

Sl. 4. Fotografija ploče za igru *Przygody w dżungli. Kombinacyjna gra dla młodzieży* [Pustolovine u džungli: kombinacijska igra za mladež] u *Biltenu* iz ožujka 1954. (Anon 1954: n.p.).



Fig. 5. The board game of *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures], Spółdzielnia Przemysłu Artystycznego "Światowid", Warszawa. The box of the game published in 1956. Material from the private collection of Marek Rutkowski.

Sl. 5. Igra na ploči *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u džungli], nakladnika Spółdzielnia Przemysłu Artystycznego "Światowid" iz Varšave. Kutija igre objavljene 1956. godine. Iz privatne zbirke Mareka Rutkowskoga.

The game *Przygody w dżungli* was therefore suspended, but not for long, as it quickly re-entered the market in 1956. It was not easy to find as, unfortunately, other than the (imprecise) title, the bulletin did not note the game's publisher or any other details. Moreover, in the case of PRL's board games, there are often problems in identifying the publisher, since, as board game enthusiast and expert Michał Stajszczak concludes:

[...] during the communist era, board games were produced by cooperatives of invalids and by craftsmen's cooperatives. In the latter case, the game was, of course, produced by a particular craftsman, but they could not sell it themselves. Often the box provided no information about the creator, only the name and address of the cooperative.³

Courtesy of Marek Rutkowski, I was able to find the original game from 1956 (Fig. 5), which, as we can read on the box, was published in Warsaw by the "Światowid" Artistic Industry Cooperative.⁴

The game consists of a set of instructions (Fig. 6, Fig. 7), a box of tokens, a board, and four pawns (Fig. 8, Fig. 9).

The instructions from the first page of the instructions in the brochure, entitled "Objaśnienie" i.e. "Explanation", are given on the web page of the game at *Stare Grady* (*Przygody w Dżungli* n.d.):

The game can be played by 3, 4 or 5 players.

The pawns represent travellers who set out on an expedition to the jungle in order to obtain specimens of the animal and plant world, as well as minerals.

In each game, one player represents independent jungle safety. He does not have a pawn and plays by moving any discs [tokens] with red inscriptions.

There are three types of discs:

a) discs with green inscriptions – they represent specimens and prey and other items that the travellers aim to collect;

b) discs with red inscriptions – they represent different kinds of danger the travellers are exposed to;

c) discs with blue inscriptions – give special powers to the player during the game. These are either parts of equipment that protect against certain dangers, or means of moving faster through the jungle.

During the game, travellers try to get as many discs with green inscriptions as possible. The security player tries to surround the travellers with red discs to prevent them from leaving the jungle, and from keeping their assets.

General rules:

1. All the players advance on light green fields of the board, each time by any number of points, but only in a straight line, without changing direction during one move. [...]

³ Excerpt from the author's correspondence with Michał Stajszczak about *Przygody w dżungli* (email correspondence, 25 January 2020).

⁴ Locating the game published sixty-five years ago was not easy. I would like to thank users of the boardgamegeek.com and boardgamegeek.pl forums, as well as board game enthusiasts who helped me find the game: Marcin Leszczyński, Przemysław Gumułka, Wojciech Chuchla and the user nicknamed "hamanu". See, for example, BBG (n.d.). However, the game can also be seen online on the web page *Stare Grady* (see *Przygody w Dżungli* n.d.).

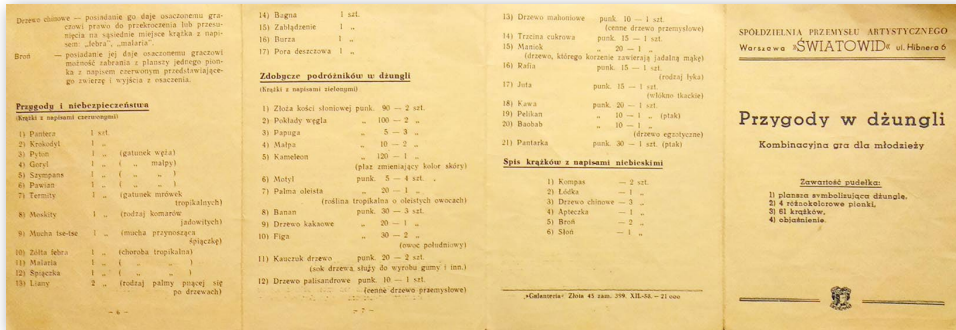


Fig. 6. *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures]. The brochure with instructions, front page, 1956. Material from the private collection of Marek Rutkowski.

Sl. 6. *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u dżungli]. Brošura s uputama, prednja strana, 1956. Iz privatne zbirke Marka Rutkowskoga.

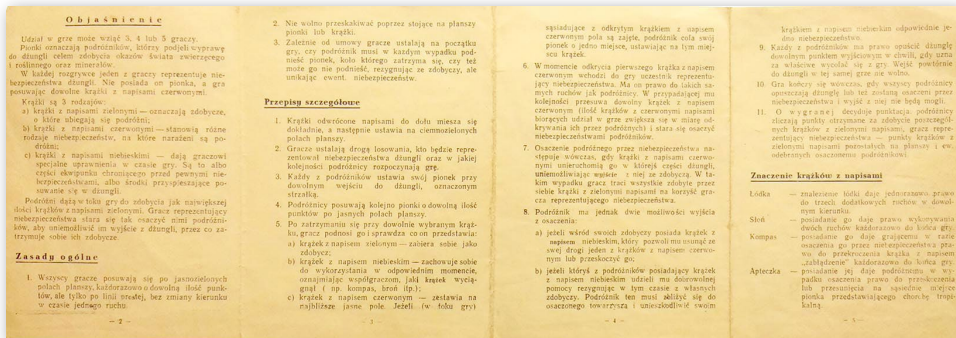


Fig. 7. *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures]. The brochure with instructions, back page, 1956. Material from the private collection of Marek Rutkowski.

Sl. 7. *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u dżungli]. Brošura s uputama, stražnja strana, 1956. Iz privatne zbirke Marka Rutkowskoga.

A comparison of the material preserved in the archives with the published version allows us to state that only half of the game board was shown in the *Bulletin*; the other half depicts a small body of water (a lake or a pond) and an island onto which a hippopotamus is climbing (Fig. 10). Everything is surrounded by vegetation, in which a monkey and exotic birds are hiding.

A comparison of the boards illustrates a more significant detail, namely, a change introduced in the part of the drawing that shows the “white coloniser” surrounded by villagers. Evidently, one of the problems noticed by the censors in 1954 was removed, because instead of an adult man looking down at the inhabitants with a clearly condescending bodily posture, a young girl who joined the play (ritual) was introduced (Fig. 11). This “saved” the board from the accusation of emphasising the superiority of the coloniser, but, in my opinion, further highlighted the validity of the second accusation of idealising colonisation.



Fig. 8. *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures]. The board game with game tokens (discs) and pawns, ready to start. Material from the private collection of Marek Rutkowski.

Sl. 8. *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u dżungli]. Igra na ploči s kružnim žetonima i igraćim figurama, spremna za početak. Iz privatne zbirke Mareka Rutkowskoga.



Fig. 9. *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures.]. A close-up of four pawns and tokens (discs) with green, red, and blue inscriptions, such as “drzewo kakaowe 20 pkt” [punktów], that is “cocoa tree, 20 points” in green, “bagnó”, that is “swamp” in red, or “kompas”, that is “compass” in blue. Material from the private collection of Marek Rutkowski.

Sl. 9. *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u dżungli]. Krupni plan četiriju igraćih figura i žetona s natpisima u zelenoj, crvenoj i plavoj boji, primjerice „drzewo kakaowe 20 pkt” [punktów], tj. „kokosovo stablo, 20 bodova“ zelenim slovima, „bagnó“, tj. „močvara“ crvenim slovima, ili „kompas“, tj. „kompas“ plavim slovima. Iz privatne zbirke Mareka Rutkowskoga.

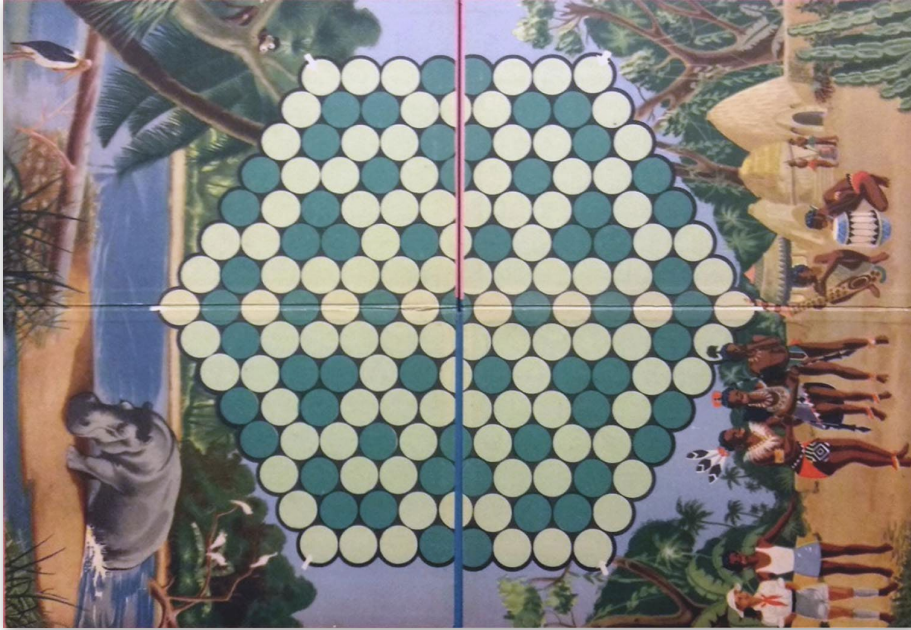


Fig. 10. The game board of *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures], 1956, in a horizontal position. Material from the private collection of Marek Rutkowski.

Sl. 10. Ploča za igru *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u džungli], 1956., u vodoravnem položaju. Iz privatne zbirke Mareka Rutkowskoga.

As we can see, this did not stop the game from resurfacing in 1956. Perhaps the censors did not notice that the drawing allowed for such an interpretation. Admittedly, due to the figure of the “white coloniser” which dominated the whole, the first illustration suggested these associations much more clearly. In the second case, hyperbolisation was abandoned in favour of a more balanced depiction of the figures, but I think that the attempt was unsuccessful. It is hard to imagine that in 1956 a black girl from an African village could stand in solidarity with her white peer; the ghosts of colonialism remained for a long time to come.

Let us draw attention to another “detail” that is important in this context. In the new version of the game board, a young girl is depicted with a characteristic red scarf tied around her neck – could it be that the white coloniser was replaced by a Soviet pioneer? Such an interpretation of the drawing seems highly probable and would justify allowing the game to be distributed.

What is indisputable, however, is the assessment of the censors’ decision in 1954, with which it is difficult to disagree. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that a game with such blatant colonial imagery would be published today. However, it must be presumed that the rationale behind the decision of the officials from 1954 was at least somewhat

different from what it would be in 2023. The main difference, of course, is that it was a state institution – which dictated the terms of evaluation – that made the decision. The censorship office used the decolonisation that followed World War II for political purposes. The liberation of dependent territories from English or French rule was treated as an indicator of the decline of the plundering policy of imperialist colonisers, to which, after all, the People’s Poland had never belonged (conversations about “Polish colonialism” were yet to come (Sowa 2011; Thompson 2011)). Therefore, the release of the original version of *Przygody w dżungli* on the Polish market in 1954 could be seen as acceptance of Western colonialism.

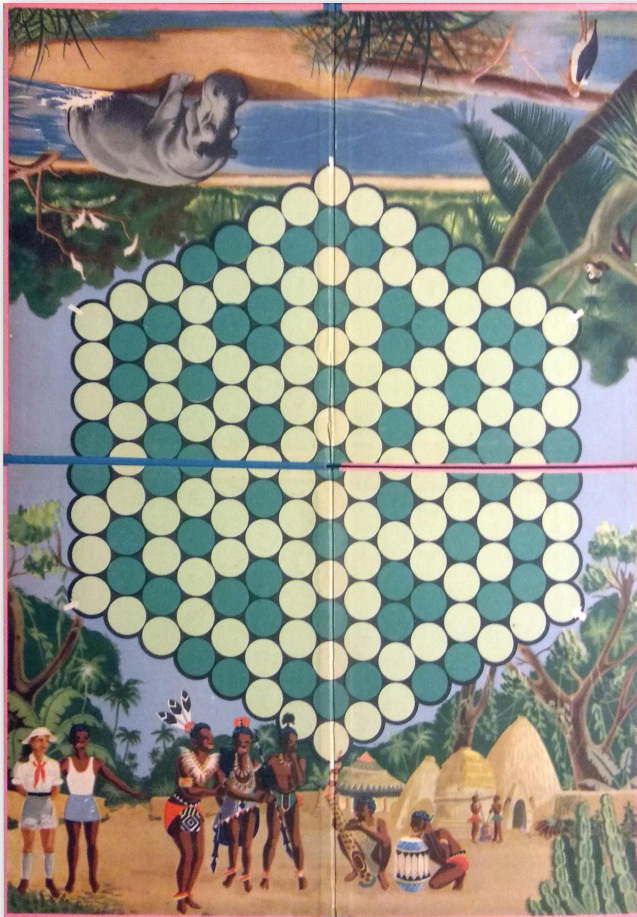


Fig. 11. The game board of *Przygody w dżungli* [Jungle Adventures], 1956, in an upright position. Material from the private collection of Marek Rutkowski.

Sl. 11. Ploča za igru *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u džungli], 1956., u uspravnom položaju. Iz privatne zbirke Mareka Rutkowskoga.

One additional intriguing aspect of the new board illustration is that it is, at least on the face of it, somewhat surreal. What exactly is a Soviet scout doing in Africa? What is the story behind this playful encounter of children from worlds so far away? The picture can be interpreted as an example of something Berislav Majhut and Sanja Lovrić Kralj described as “a children’s republic”. They explain that the essence of the children’s republic is “radical independence from the world of adults and the image of a hyper-playful child, completely unaware of real-life circumstances” (Majhut and Lovrić Kralj 2020: 185, as quoted in Narančić Kovač 2023: 72). The original notion was used to describe characters in some of the works published in former Yugoslavia in the 1950s, but it seems fitting in our context. The idea of “a children’s republic” appears when the life of children is presented as if it was completely autonomous and isolated from the actual political or social situation. The image of a children’s republic glorifies childhood and play (Majhut and Lovrić Kralj 2016).

From this perspective, the interplay of Soviet and African children is not surprising because real boundaries play no role among children belonging to “a children’s republic”. Majhut and Lovrić Kralj claim that “[s]oon after the establishment of the heroic child image and its realizations in a set of literary works, a new literature appeared” (30). This new paradigm glorifies (ibid):

[...] a cult of happy childhood through which the child will be isolated from the world of grownups. According to this picture, the child becomes an inhabitant of the world – free from every social and national constraints. Exactly this sharp change of the paradigms of the child, from the self-aware participant in social and political events to the infantile, playful and protected individual without any special social responsibility.

Perhaps there were some additional arguments for allowing the game to be published. Maybe one should not look for some systemic justification in this case. We know, after all, that a “human” element sometimes crept into the activities of the censorship office, understood as a simple oversight, negligence or simply the isolated decision of a censor. The latter possibility could have gone unnoticed in the case of evaluating materials and topics that were not the most important, such as, for example, a board game about adventures in the African jungle.

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Kako cenzurirati igru na ploči

Slučaj *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u dżungli], poljske igre cenzurirane 1954. godine

U radu se opisuje slučaj cenzuriranja igre na ploči u poslijeratnoj Poljskoj. Izvor je tajni *Bilten* [*Biuletyn*] za cenzore iz ožujka 1954. u kojem se ocjenjuje igra na ploči *Przygody w dżungli* [Pustolovine u dżungli]. Igra je bila zabranjena zbog imperijalističkih poruka. Međutim, preinačena modificirana inačica igre objavljena je samo dvije godine poslije toga.

Ključne riječi: igre na ploči, dječja književnost, cenzura, imperijalizam, poslijeratna Poljska