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Children's Poetry: Questions, Doubts, and Challenges from the Polish Perspective

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This paper¹ aims to present children's poetry as a complex phenomenon that eludes strict definitions and classifications, even if scholars attempt to define and classify it. Another objective is to review the Polish situation for an international audience. Children's poetry appears as a significant element of every culture; as such, it constitutes a challenge for poets, translators, editors, critics, scholars, teachers, librarians... The article provides insight into Polish (and to some extent international) research. The place of children's poetry in the corpus of poetry as a whole is considered and the role of illustrations is emphasised. The examples come mostly from Polish literature with several significant foreign works translated into Polish. The article consists of five main parts. Each of them has a question mark in the title which expresses my conviction that there are still more questions than answers in this field. And perhaps this is also the value of poetry – it defies academic formulas.

Keywords: children's poetry, Polish research on children's poetry, poetry illustrations, cross-cultural and cross-generational phenomenon

Poetry – an interest of a minority only?

Some people –
that means not everyone.
Not even most of them, only a few.
Not counting school, where you have to,

¹ This article is based on the ideas presented during my lecture at the Centre for Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Wrocław, in the series "International Voices in Children's Literature Studies", 17 January 2024 (online). I am grateful to the organisers for their invitation and to the participants for the inspiring discussions after the lecture.

and poets themselves,
you might end up with something like two per thousand.

Like –
but then, you can like chicken noodle soup,
or compliments, or the color blue,
your old scarf,
your own way,
petting the dog.

Poetry –
but what is poetry anyway?
More than one rickety answer
has tumbled since that question first was raised.
But I just keep on not knowing, and I cling to that
like a redemptive handrail.

Wisława Szymborska (1993)

Translated by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh.

This poetic manifesto was written by Wisława Szymborska – a Polish poet who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1996. There are three ideas in it which are important for this paper: the first – only the minority is interested in poetry; the second – probably nobody knows what poetry is and all attempts at defining it are dubious and indecisive; and finally – the voice in this poem does not seek to know the definition and – what is more – feels this ignorance is “redemptive”.

Morag Styles, the unquestionable authority on children's poetry, claims almost the same: “poetry remains a minority interest and only a small number of people read, write and buy it” (2004: 416). The Polish poet and the British scholar refer to poetry in such a way that children's poetry seems to be different in this respect. It may be more common than any other literary genre. Perhaps it could be comparable only to fairy tales. It is also a universal “forgotten language” as Erich Fromm (1957) wrote about fairy tales, myths and dreams. It is the language of images, too. Almost everyone can quote a rhyme, verse, poem, song from their childhood. And they are in us, they work in us somehow even though we may be unaware of it. My first claim, then, is that poetry is neither for a minority and neither is it a minority interest. All people, as children at least, are exposed to it and receptive to it.

Quoting Morag Styles again (2011):

Children are hard-wired to musical language – taking pleasure in the rhythm, rhyme, repetition and other patternings of language that are a marked feature of childhood. [...] At around 7 or 8, children enter the domain of playground rhymes, a private club from which adults are excluded, where chants, rhymes and parodies accompany games or are just belted out for the sheer communal pleasure of it, the ruder and more shocking, the better!

Thus, poetry seems to be omnipresent in children's lives. The issue still to be studied is how poetry from childhood influences future adult lives. Serena Trowbridge in her essay confirms that "small children love poetry" whereas most adults do not. And she attempts to answer the question why this is so. According to her, "too many people are put off poetry at school, perhaps by assumptions made by others around them that it's 'boring'; perhaps by exposure to a limited range of poems; perhaps by lacklustre teaching" (Trowbridge 2014). I would add the wrong choice of poems read at schools and the wrong assumption that there is one possible interpretation, and that one needs to "understand" poetry. The great Polish pedagogue, Zygmunt Mysłakowski, wrote in his letter to the eminent poet, Joanna Kulmowa, when she admitted she had problems with reading R.M. Rilke's poems: "One should immerse oneself in poetry as in music, as in the element, and not try to 'understand' it as one understands for example an arithmetical problem" (as quoted in Chęcińska 2024: 143).²

The musical value of poetry appears once again, revealing another field where poetry influences both children and adults: songs. It is not only "young adults [who] rate good lyrics in popular music" (Styles 2011). At least since Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016 "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition" (Nobel Prize 2024), scholars have started to pay more attention to the phenomenon of "sung poetry". Another issue to be given more attention is children's poetry put to music by eminent composers (Zabawa 2013a).

All in all, children's poetry should be treated as a phenomenon that concerns everybody and as such should be studied in a broad cultural and social context. It is a field of interdisciplinary studies.

Poetry vs. children's poetry?

Another important issue connected with poetry for children is the problem of its relation to poetry as such. Karen Coats claims, touching on the subject of popularity discussed above (2013: 127):

Much critical work on children's poetry, indeed on poetry in general, begins with a lament: poetry has lost its pride of place in culture at all levels; it is an unpopular form in the marketplace; it has become *the insular property* of creative-writing programmes and small presses, *an elite product* available only to *the enlightened few* who understand and can evaluate the good from the bad. If this marginalisation from the mainstream is the case for poetry in general, the argument goes, it is even more so for children's poetry. Except that it is not, at least as far as the first two complaints go. (Our emphasis).

The eminent British scholar starts her article from almost the same statement as the two authors quoted in the first part of this paper. But she also repeats the term "poetry in general" in contrast to "children's poetry". The question is what the definition of children's poetry is if we agree that it exists, which is not so obvious. Even the Professor

² Translations from Polish into English are by the author of this paper, unless otherwise stated.

of Children's Poetry (probably the only one in the world), Morag Styles, admits: "I am tempted to say there is no such thing as poetry for children" (2004: 396). And this is not so difficult to prove in practice, given the examples of poets who wrote both for adults and for children not telling the difference between them. One Polish example has already been mentioned, Joanna Kulmowa who compiled her selection of poetry from the poems previously published in books for children as well as in volumes not specifically addressed to young readers. In her essay "Is it Worth Writing for Children?" she wrote: "The authentic poet comes to children with poetry that is one and the same for the young and the old" (Kulmowa 1991: 4).

Answering the question about the difference between "contemporary North American children's poetry" and "contemporary North American poetry for adults", Krystal Howard answered with one word: marketing. Then she added: "There also seems to be more of a focus on verse narratives and illustrated or picture book poetry for young readers and less of a focus on poetry collections that are not illustrated" (Svonkin et al. 2023: 340). This is obviously connected to marketing, too. It must be noted that illustrated poetry books are not restricted to a child audience, with the need only to mention probably the most famous example, William Blake's poems (by the way, readily included in children's anthologies). Another issue for thorough study is the relation between children's verses and pictures. The popularity of picturebooks in academic research does not seem to carry over to picturebook poetry.

JonArno Lawson – the Canadian children's author – points out another feature that distinguishes children's poetry from poetry in general: the tendency "to avoid deliberate obscurity" (Svonkin et al. 2023: 340). His further self-reflection could also be inspiring for scholars. Lawson talks about his own experience as a poet (ibid):

When I write a poem now, *I don't think about the intended audience* as being a child or an adult, but *I used to. When my kids were small* and a lot of my daily conversations were with them as babies, toddlers, or small children, then I did think more in terms of the little phrases and word combinations I thought they might get a kick out of. I was writing for them – engaging as much as I could with what interested or entertained them. But beyond that, if I was just sitting down and writing, I tried to write what was interesting and entertaining to me, though often what set a poem in motion for me was still wordplay. (Our emphasis).

Perhaps it is a good idea to take into consideration poets' experiences while discussing children's poetry. It may lead to studying a special subgenre that could be called "family poetry" where poems are dedicated to the author's own children (grandchildren), explicitly or not (Zabawa 2013b; Kwiatkowska 2023).

One of the possible solutions to the problem of terms and definitions could be to distinguish childhood poetry as a subgenre of poetry in general. It will contain not only poems written especially for children, or verses written by children, but also poetry about children and childhood. Such types have already been included in children's anthologies such as Sara Teasdale's classical collection, *Rainbow Gold: Poems Old and New* (1922), featuring poems by Samuel Coleridge, Thomas Hardy, Alfred Tennyson, and others, which were not originally intended for children.

What is children's poetry (and attempts at classification)?

Nowadays, most scholars agree that children's poetry is a part of poetry in general and should be treated in the same way as any other poetry. It is important to realise that the boundaries have always been blurred. More and more scholars seem to recognise this fact, including authors of studies on children's poetry in monographs devoted to poetry as such. *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Contemporary American Poetry* (Svonkin and Gould Axelrod 2023) is a good example. Another is a Polish book by literary scholars from Poznań about Polish women poets of the 20th century (Kwiatkowska 2020). The monograph *Od rymu do wiersza* [From Rhyme to Poem] (Ungeheuer-Gołąb and Wądolny-Tatar 2023a) published in Kraków, even though it deals exclusively with children's poetry this time, may be a good example of interdisciplinary academic interest, proving that it is not only scholars who specialise in children's literature that want to study the subject.

Thus, the situation of children's literature scholarship and publishing seems to be improving and there is hope that the bitter words of eminent scholars will soon prove not to be true. However, they still seem important and inspiring. In her paper "The Case for Children's Poetry", Styles concludes: "This poor relation status for children's poetry is also evident in the children's literature academic conference circuit with few papers or keynotes on the subject" (2011). Joseph T. Thomas, Jr., effectively sums up the discussion on children's poetry (Svonkin et al. 2023: 351):

Children's poetry is the shabby step-daughter of the children's literature discipline, and to those who study poetry for adults, it's the miller's third son's cat (and before he got those big buckled boots). As a result, children's poetry hasn't gotten much critical attention over the years.

In Poland, the situation is not disastrous, but it is far from ideal, either. The state of research is up-and-coming (Zabawa 2013b), still being developed and enriched (Ungeheuer-Gołąb and Wądolny-Tatar 2023b). Ryszard Waksmund's groundbreaking and much cited work *Poezja dla dzieci: Antologia form i tematów* [Poetry for Children: Anthology of Forms and Themes] (1987) has remained the main source until now (its revised edition appeared in 1999). The scholar divided poetry written for children into four subgenres: verses for children, children's verses, lyric poetry for children, and children's lyric poetry. The first group consists of purely didactic verses, the second encompasses entertaining verses such as counting-out rhymes, riddles, short tales, which are used just for fun. Lyric poetry for children is rooted in romantic ideas and folklore. Included in this group may be religious poems, songs (lullabies), pastoral and "orphan" poems. The last group, which Waksmund calls children's lyric poetry, is defined as poetry from a "child's point of view" (1987: 30–39), eliminating the borders between child and adult audiences, based on childhood mythology, imagination, dreams, reflections.

Another eminent Polish scholar, Alicja Baluch, enumerates a few models of children's poetry: didactic, songlike, folk, "childlike", avant-garde, linguistic, meditative, reflective and creative (Baluch 2002: 303).

Previously, I proposed yet another category, poetry in prose (Zabawa 2015). It has all the features of lyric poetry except for the composition in lines (sometimes we may describe it as a Bible verse). Poetry in prose often appears in picturebooks, for example in Iwona Chmielewska's works (Zabawa 2015). It is worth analysing such works of art as Michael Rosen's *Sad Book* (or books by Sven Nyhus, Beatrice Alemagna, and many others) as volumes of poetry. Then, it turns out that the definition of poetry should be broader, and should not exclude any reader. Although the books mentioned above were designed for children, they certainly also appeal to adults.

Baluch gives examples from Polish poetry written for children.

Michael Joseph (2024) writes about the popularity of poetry picturebooks in the 20th century, but it seems their characteristics were different from what appears as the 21st-century poetry picturebook. This is another subject to be discussed and studied.

The same author also notices a remarkably interesting phenomenon, which is the contemporary verse novel in children's literature written in English: "The verse novel has drawn many young readers to poetry – becoming 'one of the most [...] commercially successful genres in Anglo-American children's literature'" (Joseph 2024: 175). Whereas in Polish literature the genre was popular around the middle of the 20th century, it almost disappeared in the 1990s (Waksmund 2000: 300), and now there are no valuable works of this genre (the few translations did not gain popularity or critical praise, either).

Children's poetry as a challenge?

"A challenge", according to *The Britannica Dictionary*, is "a difficult task or problem: something that is hard to do" (<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/challenge>). Many essays and research articles on poetry start from this point. For example, Alice Landy writes at the very beginning of her chapter on poetry: "today poetry is often regarded as the most sophisticated or difficult of literary forms" (1988: 429). Most of my students, both from philological and pedagogical faculties, agree with this statement. Poetry is a challenge for them as future teachers. Practising teachers are of the same opinion, which is confirmed by Alicja Ungeheuer-Gołąb, who wrote about her experiences of reading lyrical poetry with children in primary schools (2007: 38–44). It is not the teaching aspect and didactic context of children's poetry that is the main subject of Ungeheuer-Gołąb's article, but it seems to be worth signalling that using poems for children in education is an important issue which is well represented in Polish research (Alicja Baluch can be seen as a precursor with her 1984 book on contemporary poetry in primary schools). The source of the problem which still exists, despite scholars' attempts to solve it, may be libraries where it is difficult to find good books of poetry for children. My own (unpublished) research on the libraries in southern Poland shows that there are usually no separate sections where one may find children's poetry, which is certainly under-represented.

But children's poetry is seen as a challenge not only by teachers, educators, and librarians, but also by poets themselves. It is connected with the situation in publishing houses: the editors are reluctant to publish new books of poetry for children, especially

lyrical poetry (Zabawa 2013b) because they are not profitable, with a few exceptions of national classics (in the case of Poland, there are three poets whose books are still popular: Maria Konopnicka, Julian Tuwim, Jan Brzechwa).³ However, in the 21st century there are a few Polish publishing houses that have tried to meet the challenge. The most interesting case is Biuro Literackie – the leading publisher of poetry books. At the beginning of the 21st century, it started a book series called *Dziecinada: Książeczki z wierszykami dla dzieci* [Childishness: Little Books with Little Verses for Children]. The title of the series is worth noting: from the very start it diminishes the importance of this publishing endeavour. The word “childishness” means something which is not worthy of adults’ attention because it belongs exclusively to early childhood and seems to be connected with children’s play and even with nonsensical, useless activities. The editor decided to use diminutives which also usually suggest a kind of neglect, although the poetry books in question are not little in the sense of their formats (just the opposite, they are big, hard-covered and edited with utmost care). The poems themselves cannot be called “little verses” either. The reason for this wording could be the desire to follow the common opinion that children’s poetry is something less important, less “artistic” or sophisticated, which is certainly not true.

Everything that has been stated above shows what a serious challenge children’s poetry is for scholars and critics. No wonder this field of studies is not pursued by many academics. The main problems that need to be resolved before starting research on poetry for children are:

- the terms and definitions, and the borders (or lack of borders) between children’s poetry and poetry in general;
- difficulties with availability since children’s poetry is often distributed in magazines and anthologies, and volumes of such poetry generally have a small circulation;
- literary critics’ neglect of the volumes of children’s poetry written by widely recognised poets, writing predominantly about their work without this “minor” part (this is at least the Polish case);
- including poems which were not meant for children in children’s anthologies; the problem of so-called “school poetry” (Joseph writes about schoolroom poets, 2024: 168–169) – whether it should be called children’s poetry at all;
- the status of the anonymous works of children’s lore and nursery rhymes.

One of these problems may be a Polish problem only: there are no children’s literature critics who are recognised in society and among scholars, despite the fact that there are quite a few reviews of books for children, especially on the internet and also in magazines. The problem is even more serious where children’s poetry is concerned. There are no prizes for children’s poets or books of poetry as there are in the English-speaking world.

³ Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910), Julian Tuwim (1894–1953) and Jan Brzechwa (1898–1966) are all much appreciated Polish poets from the past.

However, Grzegorz Leszczyński – an eminent Polish scholar and critic, also editor of Polish poetry classics for children – states that the situation in the world is not much better: there are not many poets among the winners of the Little Nobel Prize (the Hans Christian Andersen Award) (2023: 27). Joseph also notes: “In 1999, the United Kingdom created the position of Children’s Laureate to recognize major contributions to the field of children’s literature. In contrast to the position of Poet Laureate, after which it was modelled, to date [2024] only two poets, Rosen and (...) Joseph Coelho, have been honoured with the position” (2024: 172).

Children’s poetry as a cultural, multi-cultural and inter-generational phenomenon?

“Poetry is an important cultural phenomenon” (von Fircks 2022: 475) and this seems especially true while discussing children’s poetry which accompanies our lives from the very beginning. What is more, it also stays with us until the end of our lives.⁴ Much has been written about lullabies and their role in children’s lives as well as about poetry which is not meant just for children (Ungeheuer-Gołąb 1999; Wądolny-Tatar 2014). As the Polish scholar claims with regard to lullabies (Wądolny-Tatar 2014: 352):

They [lullabies] are a natural continuation of child experiences; they affect a cultural shaping of imagination and behaviour through forming communicative, social and even gender models, as well as intertextual and intergenre relations. Their intertextuality refers to folk motives and child folklore, other literary texts, as well as the ways of creating them.⁵

Besides lullabies, there are poetic texts that shape our childhood and familiarise children with rhythms, rhymes, absurdity and the sheer joy of playing with words. These are simple verses and counting-out rhymes. Even in 1888, the American bibliographer of science, Henry Carrington Bolton, published a fascinating monograph entitled *The Counting-Out Rhymes of Children: Their Antiquity, Origin and Wide Distribution: A Study in Folklore* (there were a few reissues of the book in the 21st century, including the one in 2006, proving it is still a valuable source of information). The author collected and analysed rhymes in 20 languages (among them in Japanese, Greek, Swedish, French, German, Spanish, Italian; unfortunately, not in Polish or in any other language from Central and Eastern Europe). Thus, he could claim that this kind of childhood poetry is widely known and used all over the world. In the 1960s, Jerzy Cieślowski, an eminent Polish literary scholar and folklorist, classified and discussed children’s folklore, paying special attention to its different literary forms. He wrote about scholars’ fascination with “children’s poetry” (Cieślowski 2007: 428). His statement, made over half a century ago, seems to be still true (ibid):

⁴ During the last visit to my 95-year-old grandmother I recorded her reciting poems she had learnt by heart in the first classes of her primary school before World War II. She remembered very long poems and said them without any hesitation or mistakes.

⁵ Translated by Aleksandra Budrewicz.

[...] the majority of interests and works of teachers and scholars writing about children's folklore focuses either on the genesis and history of those forms, their history within cultural and social changes, or on their values or aesthetic qualities useful at present in primarily physical education.

Cieślakowski's groundbreaking study was written from a literary scholar's point of view. It could be a great source of information and of verses for contemporary academics who would like to continue his work, concerning different questions, for example about the influence of children's folklore and its forms on poets who have published volumes of poetry for children (and not only for them). These poets certainly carry children's rhymes in their minds as the first lesson of poetry.

Another issue connected to children's rhymes is worth considering: their popularity among adults in the 21st century. One of the invariant features of children's folklore, according to Cieślakowski, is "its existence in memory (recollection)" which means that (2017: 429):

[...] the sender and recipient of folklore at large, and especially of children's folklore, are illiterate. In this case, a text is transmitted aloud and with the use of images, with the help of verbal language as well as the language of gestures.

As a result, there are many different versions of a single rhyme, which has no generally accepted written form. As with every text taken from folklore, when it is written down, it loses its authenticity, some meaning and values, and the same happens with rhymes. Thus, a question arises: if books with counting-out rhymes and other childlore verses are published and become bestsellers,⁶ do they still belong to children and children's folklore? Perhaps they have already lost their previous status, which does not mean they have ceased to be an interesting part of children's poetry. However, this time, they belong less to children and more to adults who eagerly go back to their childhood experiences, and with some sentiment. Thus, these rhymes rooted in childlore could especially become an opportunity for inter-generational communication. This is emphasised in particular in the discussion about the recent monographs of children's folklore by Barbara Żebrowska-Mazur (2020). Katarzyna Marcol, in her review of the first volume, claims that it perfectly fits the demands of teachers, parents, educators and scholars who are looking for anthologies of children's rhymes (2022: 118).

In a similar way, poetry picturebooks may be seen as an opportunity for inter-generational dialogue. They often turn out to be intriguing and entertaining for little children, teenagers and adults in parallel. Joseph writes about such iconic and somewhat controversial picturebook poets like Dr. Seuss and Edward Gorey (2023: 174). Some of the picturebooks by the world-famous Polish author Iwona Chmielewska could also be treated as poetry (Zabawa 2015). In 2014 and 2015, the artist created two picturebooks

⁶ To my surprise in 2014 one of the biggest chain of bookstores in Poland announced that the bestseller of the year in children's literature was a book of anonymous verses of children's lore, playground chants and counting-out rhymes, *Pan Pierdziolka spadł ze stołka* (Zysk i S-ka 2013). It turned out to be so successful that additional printing was needed and soon other books in the series also appeared.

containing poetry by two eminent Polish poets – Krystyna Miłobędzka and Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna. These picturebooks seem to be addressed to an adult audience (though the poems were originally written for children) but the youngest may also enjoy them on a different level. In this case, poetry means not only words but also images which may help the perception of both children and adults. This kind of book is still awaiting more thorough research. Donelle Ruwe, in his chapter “Poetry in Picturebooks”, concludes: “Scholarship on poetry and the picturebook is still in its infancy” (2018: 258). In the first book (theoretical introduction) of the Polish three-volume extensive work on picturebooks (Cackowska, Dymel-Trzebiatowska and Szyłak 2017; 2018; Dymel-Trzebiatowska Szyłak and Cackowska 2021) there are only a few mentions of poetry (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2017).

Nevertheless, such poetry picturebooks seem to be a perfect cross-cultural medium as well. Grzegorz Leszczyński enumerates many names of great foreign poets who have never been translated into Polish and suggests that “poetry for children resembles a literary endemic species; it appears in a restricted area, limited by language as if a foreign land does not favour it” (Leszczyński 2023: 27). This scholar raised a particularly important question: why does children's poetry seem to be an exception when poets who write for adults have been translated successfully? His answer is simple: there are few people interested in children's poetry (thus, we come back to the first part of this paper). In this case, it could be the sad truth.

However, there are exceptions, and they may give us hope that although there is much to do, it is still possible. It is no coincidence that there has been picturebook poetry that has been mostly translated into Polish recently. The examples are two picturebook poets mentioned above: Dr. Seuss and Edward Gorey. Both are known to the Polish audience thanks to very good translations (by Stanisław Barańczak and Michał Rusinek, respectively). Another example is Dan Brown's *Wild Symphony* illustrated by Susan Batori, translated into Polish also by Rusinek. Perhaps poetry which is associated with pictures is more attractive to readers and may be a sign of change, encouraging translators to work also on other books of poems for children.

It is worth mentioning that the anthology of Polish children's poetry translated into French by Zofia Bobowicz (*Pourquoi le concombre ne chante-t-il pas? Anthologie. Poésies polonaises pour enfants*, 1973) received an award for the best children's book in France in 1977 (10,000 copies were sold). Consequently, it is possible that the “endemic” status of children's poetry may not only be a question of market and audience interest. Publishing houses and translators should get to know poetry which is worth translating. This is a task for scholars. It is no coincidence that currently the most active Polish translator of children's poetry – Michał Rusinek – also works as a literary scholar.

There is also a trend in children's poetry related to translation to some extent. I called it “cover” poetry in reference to a musical term meaning a new version of an original piece (Zabawa 2018). In the 2020s, a few books of classic poetry were published in an unusual form. One of the examples is *Złota różdżka* (German original: *Der Struwelpeter*) by Heinrich Hoffmann – a classic of children's verses from the 19th century (Dybiec-Gajer

2018: 27–35). Polish adaptations of well-known rhymes are slightly but meaningfully modernised, and together with the avant-garde illustrations by Justyna Sokołowska they form a new entity. A similar strategy is used in *Mama Gęś* (*Mother Goose*) which is a rewriting of the most famous English nursery rhymes. On the cover of the book is the name Małgorzata Strzałkowska who is a popular author of children's verses. Thus, she is not indicated as a translator but actually the creator of the collected poems. In fact, inside the volume it is explained that Strzałkowska "spolszczyła" (in Polish, "polonised", roughly translated) the original. Some of the poems are entirely changed (for example the tongue twister) and to others the Polish author added new verses. This is why I treat these poems as "covers" – a kind of adaptation as well as interpretation of the originals, so that they sound good in a different language and with a different cultural background. What is more, in Strzałkowska's *Mama Gęś* there is no information about the source of the "translation". Only under the last poem is it mentioned that it comes from the cover of the American magazine for children *Harper's Young People* from 1885 but the Polish author adds her own three couplets to the first one taken from the English original (Strzałkowska 2018: 76). Adam Pękalski's illustrations to this volume also contribute to the whole and help children understand the rhymes. Many poems are accompanied by the author's comments about their possible origins and historical meanings. Both books (*Złota różdżka* and *Mama Gęś*) build a new "multicultural track" (Joseph 2024: 173) in children's poetry which seems to be a perfect opportunity for presenting different cultures to a young audience.

Conclusions

All things considered, children's poetry is probably the most common form of literature with the potential for inter-generational communication. However, it still seems to be neglected in literary studies. International research and cooperation, which is so visible in other genres of children's literature, is most needed in the field of poetry. The most influential monographs, companions, encyclopaedias are English-centred (in the latest companion to children's literature and culture, the author of the chapter on poetry admits: "My discussion looks exclusively at Anglo-American children's poetry" (Joseph 2024: 175)). And yet there are many interesting poetry books, poets, and studies on poetry written in other countries of the world and in other languages. Children's poetry, so important for human culture, does not have to be "a literary endemic species" closed within the borders of one country or language. The multicultural potential of children's poetry can be recognised, and international experts should discuss the main issues together in order to help publishers choose the best poems to be translated and published. The third decade of the 21st century is certainly the right time and indeed high time to present a more diverse image of world poetry for children.

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Dječje pjesništvo: pitanja, dvojbe i izazovi iz poljskoga gledišta

Cilj je ovoga rada predstaviti dječju poeziju kao složen fenomen koji izmiče strogim definicijama i klasifikacijama, čak i onda kada ju znanstvenici pokušavaju definirati i klasificirati. Time će se ujedno i međunarodnoj publici ponuditi pregled poljske situacije.

Dječja poezija pojavljuje se kao važan element svake kulture te kao takva predstavlja izazov za pjesnike, prevoditelje, urednike, kritičare, znanstvenike, učitelje, knjižničare... Članak pruža uvid u poljska, ali djelomično i u međunarodna istraživanja. Razmatra se mjesto dječje poezije u okviru ukupne poetske produkcije i naglašava se uloga ilustracija. Primjeri su uglavnom iz poljske književnosti, uz nekoliko stranih djela prevedenih na poljski. Članak je strukturiran u pet glavnih cjelina. Svaka od njih u naslovu upućuje na pitanje koje odražava autoričino uvjerenje da u ovom području još uvijek ima više pitanja nego odgovora. Možda je upravo u tom i bit poezije – ona se ne da posve obuhvatiti akademskim formulama.

Ključne riječi: dječja poezija, poljsko istraživanje dječje poezije, ilustracije poezije, međukulturni i međugeneracijski fenomen