

**PLAY AND TOYS**  
**AS THE THEME IN POLISH PAINTING AND POETRY**  
(XVIII c. – XX c.)

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Motto: **zabawa to prawdziwy uniwersytet dziecięcy /**  
**play is the real children's university**  
(Carl Gustav Jung)

>A Playing Child< is the popular [artistic and literary] subject of Polish painting and poetry. The Baroque portraits of daughters and sons from the royal court and magnate families are the oldest extant artistic works presenting the motif of playing children in Polish paintings. This motif in Polish poetry appeared not till than in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Age of Enlightenment, Polish and foreign [working in Poland] artists painted scenes of children's play – in light and bright colours, according to the style predominant in Europe at that time. They tried to show happiness of playing children in their paintings. Children were posed and simultaneously they were presented as playing with their pet kittens (dogs or birds) and with a trace of smile on their lips. A playing child is presented on *Portrait of Julia Duhamel* (1781, now: National Museum in Poznań) painted by Marcell Bacciarelli, or on *Portrait of Anna Linowska* (about 1790's, now: National Museum in Warszawa) painted by Józef Wall. The emotional relationship between a portrayed child and her / his animal or bird non-exists in these portraits. It seems that painters (only for decoration of children's portraits) have used animals and birds – the friends of children.

Playing children with their animals or birds were also depicted in a more natural [and simultaneously sentimental] manner in Pre-Romantic and Romantic paintings. We may see playing children on portraits depicted by Karol Schweikart [see: *Portrait of a Girl with a Bird* (1820, now: National Museum in Wrocław) and *Portrait of Two Girls [with Birds]* (1823, now: Silesian Museum in Bytom)]. These works are full of childish charm and also they are imbued with a play-like atmosphere.

An interesting (for this paper) although ineffective (in artistic aspect) painting *A Girl in a Garden* (before 1825, now: National Museum in Kraków) by an Unidentified painter presents a girl who is dancing with a rosy band in a garden.

Polish artists of Pre-Romantic and Romantic periods were attentive observers of life and play of children. They showed different children's play on their paintings:

- (a) blowing soap bubbles on painting *Boys Blowing Bubbles* by an Unidentified painter. This play is also depicted in beautiful poem *Bańka z mydła (A Soap-Bubble)* written by Stanisław Maykowski (in the 1st half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.),
- (b) playing cards on pencil-drawing *A Child Playing Cards* (1849) by Marcei Maszkowski,
- (c) building card houses on *Portrait of Zygmunt Krasiński as a Child* (1814, now: National Museum in Warszawa) by Beata Czacka, and also on *Portrait of Fryderyka and Rafał, the Children of the Artist* (1844-1845, now: National Museum in Wrocław) by Jan Maszkowski, and also
- (d) mimicry play of a girl playing at a coquette on *A Coquette* (1868, now: National Museum in Warszawa) by Leopold Horowitz.

Among numerous themes in Polish painting and poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., the theme of play with national aspects seems to be very popular. I would like to say that Polish painters of the late Romanticism period depicted original play of Polish children as:

- (a) ridding a wood-horse on oil-portrait *Portrait of Władysław Poller* (1833, now: National Museum in Kraków) by Jan Nepomucen Bizański, or
- (b) dubbing a knight on oil-work *Grandpa Dubs a Knight* (1869, now: National Museum in Poznań) by Józef Szermentowski.

These play were the result of patriotic education of Polish boys in their families in the period of the partitions of Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

Ridding a wooden-horse as children's play was also presented in Polish poetry for children (in poems written by Stanisław Jachowicz, Maria Konopnicka, and Władysław Bełza; see: Z. Baran, M. Walas, A. Wróbel, 1997). This play was presented on paintings in next periods (a motif of ridding a wooden-horse on paintings of Witold Wojtkiewicz, or a gouache *Chłopczyk na drewnianym koniku / A Little Boy Rides a Wooden-Horse* (about 1960) by Juliusz Studnicki). Also a motif of ridding a wooden-horse exists in charming poem *Sztuka Makowskiego / Painting of Makowski* by Jerzy Harasymowicz: *My jedziemy zdobywać we czterech śmietnik / na jednym drewnianym koniu. We in four ride a wooden horse to attain a dustbin*).

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., the subject of playing peasant child / playing peasant children appeared in Polish painting and poetry. Play of peasant children were presented in some of Aleksander Kotsis' works [e.g. *Boy Shooting with a Key* (before 1864, now: National Museum in Kraków) and in beautiful painting *Girl with a Doll* (about 1865, now: National Museum in Warszawa)]. That second painting is presenting a little peasant girl who plays with her doll. We may find playing child also in painting-work of Stanisław Witkiewicz under the title *In the Pasture* (1875, now: National Museum in Warszawa). It presents a girl-shepherd who is playing with a little lamb. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Poland, play of a village child with a home animal (e. g. a cat, a dog, or a lamb) was natural play [as play of a girl of the middle-class family with a doll].

The impressive picture of Stanisław Witkiewicz depicts the girl who is seating on the ground. The solitary girlish figure appears against the background of the sky. This girl rivets the attention of a spectator by her natural beauty and the fervour of her impassioned attitude towards a little lamb that is a friend of girlish play. The softly modelled face of girl with a straight nose, the low-curved eyebrows, the delicately marked eyelashes framing the shuteyes and the half-opened mouth form the beauty of this peasant young girl. The landscape of the pasture creates a lyrical mood enhancing the expressiveness of presented scene. This beautiful painting is distinguished by great simplicity of composition and also by natural coquetry and exceptional expressiveness in rendering of the girl's figure.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Polish painters depicted children who are playing with their toys. A doll as children's toy was shown on painting (of Polish artists) very often. For example, a doll may be found on *Portrait of Two Sisters Maria Róża and Róża Maria Karolina Kronenberg with a Dog* (1860) by Józef Simmler, and also on beautiful painting *A Girl with a Doll* (about 1865) by Aleksander Kotsis. Alojzy Rejchan presented play with a doll on the portrait *Children of the Artist*. Also in Polish poetry of that time we may find a motif of doll as a toy (see: *Lalka. Gawęda dziecinna / A Doll. A Children's Tale* – written by Władysław Syrokomla).

Many artists and poets of >the *Young-Poland*< period (the end of the XIX c. and the beginning of the XX c.) treated the artistic subject of **A Child** in their works as valuable and topical but they rarely presented playing children. Stanisław Wyspiański (on his lyrical pastel drawings of children), Józef Mehoffer (on *The Strange Garden*), and Jacek Malczewski (on symbolical and allegorical paintings) used in their works the motif of child as a medium for the expression of philosophical ideas on life and death, creative work, artistic fame etc (see: Z. Baran, 1995). Children portrayed by Stanisław Wyspiański 'listen to' their own existence.

Symbolical aspect of children's play and toys was also presented in Polish poetry of the Young-Poland period. Leopold Staff wrote his poems *Kieszka* (*A Pocket*) [in poetical collection *W cieniu miecza* (1911, *In the Shadow of a Sword*)] and *Lalki* (*Dolls*) [in poetical collection *Łabędź i lira* (1914, *A Swan and a Lyre*)]. One of the most interesting poetical examples of symbolical aspect of the child's toys is the lyrical poem *Lalka* (*A Doll*) of the cycle *Postacie* (*The Figures*) written by famous Polish poet – Bolesław Leśmian, and edited by him in his poetic collection *Napój cienisty* (*A Shade-Giving Drink*). The Doll, the heroine of poem, is the excellent >literary creation< in poetry of Leśmian. The Doll – the child's toy plays both a structurally (as a lyrical speaker) and thematically (as the title heroine) important role in the poem. The lyrical >interior< monologue of *title figure* of Leśmian's poem is in reality the stream of consciousness, in psychological aspect. Polish poet presented a tender intimacy between a girl (mentioned by the Doll) and the Doll. Leśmian showed >life< of Doll [and each anthropomorphic-like toy (e.g. a doll, a jumping-jack, a puppet etc.)] as >the non-existence< (in Polish: nieistnienie, niebyt) in philosophical aspect. Each toy is only the toy, the dead-thing or rather it is >the being< in >the non-existence<, >the being< using only for playing. A smile of Doll is only >the imaginary<. In reality, this smile does not exist in the empty inside of Doll. The poet showed also the magical ability of each child 'to animate' the toy – during children's play. Through childish **fantasy**, the girl imagines that her doll is real and alive:

Dziewczyńce, co się **moim** bawi **nieistnieniem**,  
 Wdzięczna jestem, gdy w dłonie **mój niebyt** porywa,  
 I mówi za mnie wszystko, różowa natchnieniem,  
 I udaje, że wierzy w to, iż jestem żywa.

(I [= The Doll] am grateful that the girl grasps **my non-being** in her palms (of hands) when she plays with **my non-existence** and that she speaks in my behalf and simulates (that) she believes in it that I am living)

The >life-lot< of doll is dependent on playing child (on playing girl) in this poem written by Bolesław Leśmian):

Pilnie wróży mi z ręki, że w najbliższym maju  
 W świat wyruszę...

([A girl] tells my fortunes from (my) palm of the hand: I will take the road in that May)

Leśmian presented play with own toy as a borderline setting where the >living< child and the >dead< toy meet one another. In reality, the doll's life is only a girl's illusion (I udaje, że wierzy w to, iż jestem żywa / A girl simulates (that) she believes in it that I am living). The state of doll's non-existence is stressed by words "the beyond" (in Polish: *zaświat*) and "the dream" / "with the dream" (in Polish: "sen" / "ze snem"):

Jam – lalka. W mych kolczykach szkli się **zaświat** dżdżysty.  
 Suknia jawa atlasu **ze snem** się kojarzy.

(I am The Doll. The rainy-**beyond** sparkles in my ear-drops and (my) satin dress associates **with the dream**)

The lyrical speaker (it is the Doll) explains that the genetic source of play exists in dreams and fantasies of each child. Fantasy is the basis of each play. It is the distinctive element which is always presented in play (see: M. Sancipriano, 1951: *Gioco* (Play), [in:] *Enciclopedia Filosofica*. Venezia-Roma). Children live in the **World of Fantasy** and they carry this fantasy over into play-action (see: A. S. Neill, 1960: *Summerhill. A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*. New York).

The paintings [with a motif of playing children] by Witold Wojtkiewicz, showing children's imaginary-play, are philosophical and symbolical >fairy-tales< in which children assume different symbolical roles. These paintings are: *Lalki / Dolls* (1905, now: National Museum in Warszawa), *Maski-Kompozycja / Masks-Composition* (1907, now: National Museum in Kraków), *Porwanie królowej / Abduction of a Royal-Princess* (1908, now: National Museum in Warszawa) and *Zjawisko / Vision* (1908, now: National Museum in Wrocław). Also Jan Rembowski's symbolical and poetical painting shows an imaginary-play (*Zaczarowana dziewczeczka / The Enchanted Girl*, (painted: 1915, now: National Museum in Warszawa).

Children depicted by Wojtkiewicz and Rembowski are engaged in **pretend play**, play involving imaginary situations (called also *dramatic play*, *fantasy play*, or *imaginative play*). The pretend play is an important form of play in childhood. Jean Piaget (1962) maintained that children's ability to pretend to do something or to be somebody rests on their ability to use and remember symbols – to retain in their minds representations, or images, of things they have seen or heard. Pretend play is a theme of many Polish paintings and poems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After the First World War Polish painters and poets (except paintings of Tadeusz Makowski) rarely presented a playing child / playing children in their paintings and poems.

Regarding Polish painting, the abatement of interest in subject of playing child is, probably, a result of the birth [and next rapid development] of artistic photography. Or, may be, Polish painters noticed the inconsistency between activity of playing children and passive nature of painting-art, juxtaposing *representations of playing children* in their drawings and paintings with modern psychological knowledge on play as a form of children's activity.

Some Polish poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century favoured children's play as an interesting subject of their poetical creation. That subject often was a literary reflection on play, and an artistic whispered reminder about own childhood.

Tadeusz Makowski, a great Polish painter of the children's world, has shown playing children on his paintings made in French cubism maniera, such as: *Dziewczynka z lalkami z Jawy / A Girl with Dolls from Java* (1906), *Kapela dziecięca / The Band of Children's Musicians* (1922, now: National Museum in Warszawa), *Chłopcy z fujarkami / Boys with Pipes* (about 1928, now: National Museum in Warszawa), *Mała rodzinka / Play at the Family* (1929), *Dwoje dzieci w spiczastych czapkach / Two Children in Pointed Caps* (1930, now: National Museum in Kraków), *Teatr dziecięcy / Children's Theatre* (1931, now: National Museum in Warszawa), *Szermierze / Fencers* (about 1931, now: National Museum in Warszawa). Makowski showed [in all his works] children's play with imaginable plots. His drawing technique (the manner of painting and choice of colours) is related to children's perception of the world. Children playing at the theatre, at the masquerade, or playing musical instruments symbolise an irrational aspect of existence (see: W. Jaworska, 1976). It seems that paintings of Tadeusz Makowski has inspired artistic works on children's play made by modern artists such as Maria Anto [*Portrait of Children with a Fountain and a Deer* (1971)] or Piotr Szadujkis [*A Little Pierrot* (1976)]. Playing children, the heroes of Makowski's paintings, are also literary figures of beautiful poem *Sztuka Makowskiego / Art of Makowski* written by Polish modern poet – Jerzy Harasymowicz.

After the Second World War, Antoni Łyżwański painted his little daughter playing at the theatre on *Portret córki artysty / Portrait of the Artist's Daughter* (1946). The girl is wearing a scenic dress and she is among her toys. Łyżwański painted his daughter's portraits several times. Other Polish painters depicted also playing children in their works [*Pogrzeb gawrona / Play at the Funeral of a Rock* (1957) by Maria Hiszpańska - Neumann, *Bawiące się dzieci / Playing Children* (about 1966) by Kiejstut Bereźnicki, *Zabawa w wesele / Play at the Wedding* (1975) by Jarosław Furgała, and *Kolęda / The Carolling* (1987, now: Regional Museum in Tarnów) by Hanna Łękawa].

Also Polish poets and poetesses > painted < word-portraits of playing children in their poetry. Children's mimicry-play at the state is presented in artistic poem *Zabawa / Play* written by Józef Baran, Polish contemporary poet. Among playing children – figures of the State there are: a king, a king's jester, a policeman (*z pistoletem z bzu / with a lilac-pistol*), a robber (*z brodą i wąsami z lnu / with a flax-beard and flax-moustache*), a worker who is building (*domek z klocków / a block house*), a soldier, and a clerk. Another poet, Jerzy Ficowski, > pictured < mimicry-play of children at the Election of a King in his poem *Grupa dzieci (A Group of Children)*.

Children's symbolic pretend play is presented in a poem *Chwila w Troi (A Moment in Troy)* written by Wisława Szymborska:

[Małe dziewczynki]  
... sprzed lustra  
porywane bywają do Troi.

(...)  
Przeobrażają się w piękne Heleny.

Wstępują po królewskich schodach  
w szumie podziwu i długiego trenu.

[Little girls]  
are kidnapped to Troy  
from before a mirror.

(...)  
They transfigure in beautiful Helens.

They go up the Royal-stairs  
among sounds of admiration,  
and with a rustle of trains (of their dresses).

Tadeusz Różewicz showed also pretend play in his poems:

chłopcy rżą  
rozpuszczają grzywy na wiatr  
biją kopytem  
w niecierpliwą ziemię  
(*Zabawa w konie*)

(boys neigh / they deliver manes against the wind / they strike their hooves / with the impatient ground)  
(*Play at the Horses*)

and:

Mój synek wchodzi  
do pokoju i mówi:  
"Ty jesteś sępem  
ja jestem myszką".  
"Jesteś wilkiem  
ja jestem kózką".  
(*Przemiany*)

(My little son enters / a room and he speaks: / "You are a vulture, / I am a little mouse". / "You are a wolf, / I am a little goat".)  
(*Transformations*)

Pretend play at Napoleon, an emperor of France, is shown in interesting poem *Kłęska na drogach* (*A Repulse on the Ways*) written by Jerzy Harasymowicz. Also pretend play of girl with her doll is presented in beautiful poem *Portret dziewczynki* (*A Portrait of a Girl*) written by Tadeusz Kubiak:

... razu pewnego dostała  
od córki sąsiadów lalkę  
i stała się matką najczulszą  
od tego dnia – lalki szmacianki

(... at one time she (= a girl) got / a doll from a daughter of neighbours / and she became the most loving mother / of the rag – doll, since this day)

We may find many poetical texts with the motif of children's pretend play in Polish contemporary poetry. Barbara Sadowska presented children's artistic activity (as play) in her poem *Rysunek dziecka* (*A Child's Drawing*). She showed child's creative-imagination, and also cheerfulness of a childish artistic work:

... Indianie ze swoją nadprzyrodzoną  
zręcznością zestrzeliwiają hitlerowskie  
samoloty, wykolejają pociągi.

(... Red Indians shooting down Nazi-planes and derailing Nazi-trains with their super-natural deftness)

Mieczysława Buczkówna wrote beautiful poem *Dziecko* (*A Child*) with the motif of first child's play:

[Dziecko]  
Pierwszym wyciągnięciem rączki  
Po strąconą grzechotkę  
Odkrywa ląd przestrzeni.

([A child] discovers the Land in the Space / with first reaching out her/his little hand / for a rattle-box hurled down.)

A motif of typical children's receive play also >exists< in Polish painting and poetry. The probability is that Artur Grottger was the first Polish artist who showed a child listening to beautiful fantastic fairy-tale. On *Self-Portrait of the Artist with Family* painted by Antoni Blank (1825, now: National Museum in Warszawa), the artist pictured his two daughters who are listening to music. Wojciech Korneli Stattler showed two boys who are looking at a painting (a portrait of two girls) on *Portrait of Alfred and Adam Potocki* (1832, now: National Museum in Warszawa). Wincenty Kasprzycki pictured two children (a girl and a boy) who are looking at sculptures and plaster (of Paris) – casts by candlelight on his painting *Dzieci z figurkami* (*Children with Little Carved Figures*) which is now in the collection of the Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk in Poznań.

Each playing child is full of beauty and charm. So as a >Friend of Beauty<, he (or she) was, ever, an attractive *object* of creative thought of Polish painters and poets. That presentation of some selected problems about play, toys, and the playing child as the subjects in Polish painting and as the motif in Polish poetry proves a necessity of regard to works of art and literary works with the analysed theme in researches on children's play.

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