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Youth Literature on the Polish Publishing Market in 2008-2018 (Trends, Currents, Phenomena)

ABSTRACT

In 2008-2018, the Polish market of young readers' books was subject to various fluctuations related to economic determinants, demography and changing cultural trends or fashions. The dynamics of sales was determined by best-selling fantasy series coming mainly from the Anglo-Saxon literature. Although *Harry Potter* was not followed by an equally successful novel cycle, the main elements of its marketing strategy have been duplicated and continued. An important reinforcement of the message was the screening of a particular plot, and thus its multiplication in various media channels. Fantasy themes often referring to the elements of horror, Gothic novels, and even dystopian thrillers dominated. Generic syncretism and even various formal experiments in the spirit of deconstruction have become characteristic of the contemporary youth book market. In contrast, the list of awards of the Polish section of the IBBY stands in opposition to this trend, which promoted, in the overwhelming majority, novels of morals nature, addressing difficult and controversial problems of adolescence, interpersonal relationships, otherness, etc. In this context, we can observe a change in the values promoted and a transition from an educative normative system to glorifying freedom and tolerance towards a wide range of behaviors and attitudes.

KEY WORDS: young readers' books, Poland, publishing market, publishing repertoire, 2008-2018

STRESZCZENIE

Literatura dla młodzieży na polskim rynku wydawniczym w latach 2008-2018 (tendencje, nurty, zjawiska)

W latach 2008-2018 polski rynek wydawniczy książek dla młodzieży podlegał rozmaitym fluktuacjom związanym zarówno z determinantami ekonomicznymi, demografią, jak i zmieniającymi się modami oraz trendami kulturowymi. Dynamikę sprzedaży wyznaczyły bestsellerowe cykle fantastyczne pochodzące głównie z kręgu literatury anglosaskiej. Po Harrym Potterze nie pojawił się już wprawdzie równie dobrze sprzedający się cykl powieściowy, ale główne elementy jego strategii marketingowej były w dalszym ciągu powielane i kontynuowane. Istotnym wzmocnieniem przekazu stawała się ekranizacja określonej fabuły, a co za tym idzie jej multiplikacja w różnych kanałach medialnych. Triumfy święciła tematyka fantastyczna odwołująca się często do elementów horroru, powieści gotyckiej, dystopii, a nawet thrillera. Charakterystyczny dla współczesnego rynku książki młodzieżowej stał się synkretyzm rodzajowy oraz rozmaite eksperymenty formalne w duchu dekonstrukcji. Niejako w opozycji do tego nurtu stoi natomiast lista nagród polskiej sekcji IBBY, w której promowano w przeważającej liczbie książki o charakterze obyczajowym, podejmujące trudne i kontrowersyjne problemy dojrzewania, kontaktów międzyludzkich, odmienności itp. W tym kontekście można obserwować zmianę propagowanych wartości i przechodzenie od wychowawczego systemu normatywnego ku gloryfikacji wolności i tolerancji względem szerokiego spektrum zachowań i postaw.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: literatura młodzieżowa, Polska, rynek wydawniczy, repertuar wydawniczy, lata 2008-2018

It is undisputable that reading literary texts during adolescence, apart from providing temporary entertainment, influences the psychosocial development of a young person, broadens his or her thought horizons, shapes the language skills needed in adult life and the ability to think creatively. The development of teenagers' readership seems to be one of the important educational activities that constitute a civilizational challenge at the beginning of the 21st century. At the same time, the book in its mission has to struggle with the competition of other media outlets, which on the one hand can support its popularity and on the other hand – limit it. The phenomenon of media convergence has become an important element of

market strategies in the latest decade of the publishing circulation between 2008 and 2018. We should be aware that on the current book market, we are observing a progressive process of publishing specialization. This can be seen, for example, in the way the assortment is organized in an average bookshop, where the number of individual thematic sections is increasing. In our case, a specific target group, previously referred to as youth, is important, but nowadays it differentiates between the younger tweens and the older so-called young adults. Youth literature includes works perceived as particularly interesting for young readers, i.e. not only those written with that readership in mind, but also those originally addressed to adult readers, which however attracted young audiences, leading to their later reclassification. In practice, a common (though not the only one) indicator of this type of literature is the appearance of a juvenile main character. This distinction is important for statistical reasons, but it is pointless to consider specific examples of "borderline" literature in this context.

The discussed decade (2008-2018) begins with a clear turning point which was the publication of the last volume of the *Harry Potter* saga (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*) in January 2008. Of course, the direct sale of this global bestseller will continue to influence the functioning of the domestic publishing market for some time. In the following years there would be more screenings of the last volumes of J.K. Rowling's books and several Potter-related books would be published, discounting the extreme popularity of the fantasy series. The English author would return to the wizard of Hogwarts years later, creating the stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, which would be published in book form. In October 2016, the title also appeared on Polish bookshelves (Media Rodzina), which was accompanied by a media campaign, characteristic

¹ According to M. Zając, books for the so-called net-generation should meet four conditions: interactivity, intermediality, non-linearity (hypertext character) and appropriate visual attractiveness. Idem, Net-Generacja i jej książki, "Biblioteka Analiz," 2012, 6, p. 18.

² Cf. M. Zając, Zagubiony (w statystyce) sektor, "Biblioteka Analiz," 2006, 8, pp. 22-24.

³ Literatura dla młodzieży, "Ruch Wydawniczy w Liczbach," 2013, p. 11.

⁴ It is worth noting at this point that in the era of developing generic syncretism, a much more objective category of division is determined by the *usus* than by the specific structural features of a literary work. It is not the purpose of this text to pose questions of the kind whether books by Prus, Sienkiewicz, or any 19th century *bildungsroman* author should be considered as literature for young people or not, but it should be noted that many works for them headed by *Harry Potter* refer to such a plot scheme.

⁵ The most popular fantasy saga will become a reference point for similar work, and many other books will be published with a recommendation that takes advantage of *Harry Potter*'s popularity. For example, Patrick Rothfuss' novel *The Name of the Wind*, published in 2008, was considered to be "A *Harry Potter*, only more dark and directed to an older audience." Electronic document [accessible at]: http://www.patrickrothfuss.com/content/reviews.asp#orsonscott.

for subsequent volumes of the relevant book series, which contributed to high sales. The magic of the title was also revived in the case of the 2015 re-edition of the first volume of the saga with Jim Kay's illustrations. In a way, Harry Potter paved the way for other best-selling series that began to appear in Poland, accompanies by a smaller or larger marketing campaign. In 2009, all four volumes of S. Meyer's Twilight series, a saga about vampires living on the west coast of the United States, were first published. The sagas were re-edited over the next few years, especially as their popularity grew thanks to the feature films and was connected with the creation of a broader fashion for this type of literary substance. 6 In 2009-2010, three volumes of the Suzanne Collins' series, The Hunger Games, which are thematically situated in a dystopia, were published, popularized in subsequent years by a four-part film adaptation. It seems that the closer to modern times, the greater was the role of the cinema in creating a particular story. Book sales were secondary in this respect and increased significantly after the film premieres. This phenomenon also applied to older literature regarded as a classic of the genre, which aroused great interest as a result of the new cinema adaptation, e.g. The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien (the Hollywood premieres of its parts took place in November 2012, December 2013, and December 2014). In recent years, instead of Hollywood block-busters created produced over a relatively long period, novels for adolescents are promoted by TV format series broadcast on digital platforms such as Netflix or Showmax, while scenarios of the adaptations often go beyond the book stories. 7 It is also worth noting in this context that the visual message associated with this type of productions has been virtually dominated by posters and stills from movies in the netosphere.

The annual report on the Polish book market, "Ruch Wydawniczy w Liczbach" allows us to estimate the scale of production in the sector we are interested in. Only fictional works are included in the youth literature category. The total youth literature market, understood in this way, accounts for only about 4% of total sales of fiction books. For the period 2008-2017 there are complete statistics only on the number of titles (Fig. 1), while the data on edition volumes was only recorded until 2012. In the period 2008-2012, those edition volumes grew and fell more or less

⁶ The Dolnośląskie company has issued its Czytaj po Zmierzchu [Read after Dark] collection, comprising paranormal romance novels, including Phyllis Christine Cast's and Kristin Cast's Nyx in the House of Night, Tessa Gratton's Blood Magic, Libba Bray's A Great and Terrible Beauty, and many others.

⁷ The popularity of this type of communication was also shared by the *Game of Thrones* fantasy series based on the saga by George R.R. Martin, *The Song of Ice and Fire*. Children's and young people's literature also includes the *Stranger Things* novel by Gwenda Bond written in parallel with the show aired on the Netflix platform, also in Poland.

in proportion to the changes in the number of titles, with the average edition of a fictional book for young people stood in the range of 2,600-3,500 copies. Certainly, the bestsellers that appeared at that time had the greatest influence on the edition volumes. Their presence in the market was, to a large extent, influenced by the size of incomes. Since 2008, a gradual decrease in the level of turnover from 81 million PLN at the beginning of the period, to 33 million in 2013 was recorded. In the following years there was a stabilization, and even some progress. The statistics on the number of titles of literature for young people display a preponderance of literature translated over native production. Within the foreign literature assimilated to the Polish reader, the largest group (about 80%) have been translations from English, while French, Italian or German books enjoyed a significantly lower popularity. It is worth noting that Scandinavian literature which is an important part of the bulk of children's literature in translation in the case of works for young adults accounted for a negligible proportion.

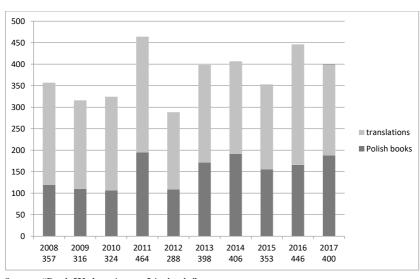


Figure 1. Number of Polish and foreign book titles published in Poland in the years 2008-2017

Source: "Ruch Wydawniczy w Liczbach."

The annual production ranged from 300-400 titles, reaching extreme values about halfway through the period 2011-2012. This fluctuation was probably due to the introduction of a 5% VAT rate on traditional printed books, which had an impact on market strategies and the temporary

Ł. Gołębiewski, P. Waszczyk, Rynek książki w Polsce 2015. Wydawcy, Warszawa 2015, p. 159.

reduction of orders by major retailers, distributors and wholesalers. In recent years, a very shy upward trend could have been observed, almost imperceptible in comparison to the growth recorded in the children's book market at that time. When confronting these two sectors, it should be noted that the number of titles of children's literature was four times higher at the beginning of the analyzed period and 6.7 times higher at the end of it. While in the 1980s and 1990s youth literature was represented by specialized publishing houses (Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Wydawnictwo Iskry), at the present time this market sector does not have such a specialized representative. Individual titles are edited by various publishing companies known for promoting children's literature (e.g. Olesiejuk, Nasza Księgarnia, Media Rodzina) and also those representing a broader range of literary fiction (e.e. Firma Księgarska Olesiejuk, Znak, Mag, Wydawnictwo Otwarte, Amber, or Nova Raes). Since for the majority of the entities, this type of activity is complementary, if not marginal, it is difficult to resist a certain impression of randomness in the selection and presentation of the literary offer. This may be linked to the high unpredictability of this market sector due to the vulnerability of teenagers to transient fashions. As far as the promotion of new books for young people is concerned, the role of magazines usually presenting shorter literary forms is also worth emphasizing. The youth literature market is a particularly demanding book sector in Poland. In order to satisfy teenagers' reading needs, publishers must constantly follow not only Polish and foreign book novelties, but also emerging cinema screenings, TV series or computer games. 10 Thus, some of the above-mentioned publications gain exclusivity contracts with certain, usually well-promoted authors, while others mainly publish classics. One can notice a certain specialization of the offer of particular publishers: some focus on the promotion of Polish authors, while others base their offer on translated books.

An important phenomenon in the last two decades which is the activity of tiny publishing houses in the youth literature sector has been much less active. These publishers compete on the market mainly using the avantgarde artistic level of their publications; however, this applies more to specific graphic design, illustrations, original media and topics related to younger target groups. There is a range of books designed for teenagers. As an example, the thriller trilogy *Meto* by Yves Grevet, or the knight story *Letter to the King* by the Dutch Tonke Dragt were published by the metropolitan publisher, Dwie Siostry. The publishing offer of the Hokus-Pokus company

⁹ E.g. in the "Nowa Fantastyka" magazine, the first known piece by Paolo Bacigalupi, known for his novel *The Windup Girl* appeared in 2009.

¹⁰ Ł. Gołębiewski, P. Waszczyk, Rynek książki w Polsce 2015, op. cit., p. 161.

included the *Creation* by Bart Moeyaert, an original variation on the biblical book of Genesis, as well as the poetic *Lato Adeli*, with a teenage protagonist the reviewer Maria Poprzęcka described as: "No child, no woman, no girl, no adolescent, not a teen, not a Lolita, only everything pointlessly messed up." ¹¹

Youth literature revolves around several important thematic trends. Some of them have been particularly promoted in recent years on the wave of popularity of bestsellers such as Harry Potter (fantasy), The Hunger Games (SF), Twilight (vampire novel, gothic novel), or numerous Scandinavian crime stories that are de facto intended for the adult reader, but also have "lighter" mutations written with an adolescents or even children in mind. It is worth noting that this type of literary development, which does not avoid conveying drastic or controversial content, is in line with the trend towards faster maturing of contemporary youth and liberalization of standards related to their upbringing. This is of course controversial in terms of moral nature which fits the eternal intergenerational discourse. An example of such a literary work standing somewhere between adult and youth literature is a trilogy by Ransom Riggs, Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children, combining characteristics of fantasy and thriller. 12 An important trend related to the way contemporary youth literature is created is composing shorter or longer sagas. This seems to be not only a literary strategy, but above all, a marketing one. It allows to multiply profits by multiplying the degree of influence in the case of this type of communication. The editions of subsequent book volumes are associated with appropriate promotional activities, retardation of tension, and the possibility of various speculations regarding the fates of the characters. The marketing machine is additionally supported by a more or less developed multimedia environment in the form of film adaptations, computer games, videos, various websites, gadgets, illustrations etc. The principle of multiplier effects, typical for the market, works in this respect. It is also worth noting that the popularity of a certain title often paves the way for other books on similar subjects. The Stephanie Meyer vampire saga has brought popularity to the entire paranormal romance genre, which combines supernatural and adventurous elements with a Harlequin-style love story. Most of these types of plots have been addressed predominantly to female adolescent readers. It seems, however, that in terms of readership needs there has been a kind of gender equality process in recent years, which has resulted in the blurring of the traditional division into boys' and girls' literature. According to

¹¹ Electronic document [accessible at]: http://www.hokus-pokus.pl/ksiazka/145/index.html

¹² It is also worth mentioning that young adults have eagerly reached for e.g. controversy-arising erotic novels by E.L. James (the *Grey* trilogy), J. Laskowska, *Rynek książki dla dzieci i młodzieży w Polsce*, "Jednak Książki," 2017, 7, pp. 204-205.

opinion polls, teenage girls show much greater interest in books, while the male gender moves on from typically children's books goes straight to fantasy and science fiction intended for adult readers. ¹³

A puzzling phenomenon in youth literature is the continuing preference for fantasy fiction, which takes the reader into unreal worlds, full of characters with supernatural abilities, or into universes based on the laws of physics, but in this or another way transformed into a utopia or an anti--utopia. A constant element of postmodern fashion is the creation of this type of fictional, unreal "conworlds" organized in a very systematic way, having their own history, geography, customs, or culture. 14 However, one should not give in to the hasty impression that contemporary youth literature is only phantasmagoria. In 2012, John Green's novel of manners The Fault in Our Stars was published in Poland. The book describes the love story of two ill teenagers, difficult and even dangerous to their lives. The book was moderately popular at first, even though it became a bestseller overseas. It was only after the successful screening in 2014 that it became widely read in our country as well. 15 Several other novels by the same author, who is considered to be a follower of the already cult writer Jerome David Salinger, have also been taken up. In the context of realistic prose, it is also worthwhile analyzing the list of winners of the Polish IBBY section award in the last 10 years. This prize is awarded annually in several thematic categories, including young adult fiction (Tab. 1).

Table 1. IBBY	' Polish	ı Section	awards	2008-2018
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Year	Author	Title	Genre
2008	M. Gutowska-Adamczyk	13. Poprzeczna	Novel of manners
2009	E. Nowak	Bardzo biała wrona	Novel of manners
2010	M. Szczygielski	Omega	Adventure
2011	Z. Beszczyńska	Jajko księżyca	Fairy tale
2012	Marcel A. Marcel	Oro	Novel of manners
2013	E. Przybylska	Most nad Mississippi	Novel of manners
2014	A. Piwkowska	Franciszka	Novel of manners
2015	M. Warda	5 sekund do Io	Novel of manners
2016	J. Fabicka	Rutka	Historical novel
2017	M. Szczygielski	Serce Neftydy	Science Fiction
2018	J. Jagiełło	Jak ziarnka piasku	Novel of manners

Source: own development.

¹³ Ł. Gołębiewski, P. Waszczyk, Rynek książki w Polsce 2014. Wydawcy, Warszawa 2014, p. 150.

¹⁴ S. Bielawska, Wampiry, demony, upadle anioty... Analiza rynku książki dla młodzieży (2010-2017). Wybrane aspekty, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Librorum," 2019, 1(28), pp. 14-32.

¹⁵ In 2014, 140 thousand copies of J. Green's novel were sold on the Polish market, which became a record achievement. J. Laskowska, Rynek książki dla dzieci i młodzieży w Polsce, op. cit., p. 205.

In the period in which we are interested, the novel of manners won seven times, only once giving way to a typical sci-fi plot (Serce Neftydy), and another time to a surrealistic fairy tale by Zofia Beszczyńska, based on toposes from Alice in Wonderland or even Master and Margarita. 16 Apart from various literary contexts present in e.g. Franciszka by Anna Piwkowska, these novels touch upon typical problems of contemporary teenagers: growing up, making difficult decisions, unrequited loves, illnesses, and relationships with other people. Books for the young generation do not avoid difficult psychological problems. In a variety of behaviors and attitudes, characters mature to make important life decisions. The old model of protection or silence in the face of drastic, borderline situations, violence, suffering, or illness has been replaced by a model of preparation that provokes confrontation with such problems and breaks taboos. Initiation novels that familiarize the reader not only with intimate life but also with the hierarchy of values and eschatological problems have become very popular. 17 The book by Ewa Przybylska, ¹⁸ Most nad Mississippi, showing the history of a friendship between a teenager and an elderly woman is characteristic in this respect. "Two seemingly mismatched people find themselves in a world where old age is pushed to the margins, unnoticed, often exploited; in a world where everyone who does not fit in and stands out from the crowd is either transparent or ridiculed." The theme of rejection is also the subject of Oro. The title character is a kind of a guardian angel, a messenger from the afterlife, a supernatural therapist, or the main heroines'

The theme of the virtual world represented by computer games also appears quite often in native prose. They sometimes part of a dystopian vision of the world (5 sekund do Io), and the basis for making real friendships and confronting the real life somehow. ²⁰ Marcin Szczygielski's novel Omega has an interesting storyline structure. The frame is created by a game

¹⁶ Cf. Review on the website of the Polish IBBY section, electronic document [accessible at]: http://www.ibby.pl/?page_id=1025.

¹⁷ W. Matras-Mastalerz, Nowe tendencje zadania i funkcje współczesnej literatury dziecięco-młodzieżowej, in: Kultura czytelnicza dzieci i młodzieży. Szkice bibliologiczne, eds. M. Antczak, A. Brzóska-Kępa, A. Walczak-Niewiadomska, Łódź 2013, pp. 117-135.

¹⁸ In her work, the author often presents patterns of difficult adolescence in the conditions of a pathological family, showing the cruelty of parents and the egoism of children with the same intransigence. M. Chrobak, Metaforyka powietrzna w prozie Ewy Przybylskiej, in: Żywioły w literaturze dziecięcej. Powietrze, Zakopane 15-16.10.2018 [I do not know if this text has already appeared in print].

¹⁹ M. Świtała, Most nad Missisippi (review), Ryms: http://ryms.pl/ksiazka_szczegoly/1688/most-nad-missisipi.html.

²⁰ Cf. K. Szymeczko, Czworo i kości, Warszawa 2011.

that moves beyond gaming console screens to the streets of Warsaw. The heroine's passing through successive levels is tantamount to her fast maturing by making reasonable choices to continue the game. The name "Omega" can also be read as "0-mega," because each level increases the number of megabytes the game takes. It is not difficult to resist the reflection that a similar though slightly more hidden scheme is realized by the *Harry Potter* saga. Contemporary novels for teenagers also very often take up the theme of competition, which is quite an important phenomenon in post-industrial society. It does not always take as drastic forms as in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. In Kiera Cass' *The Selection*, there is a kind of a beauty contest organized for candidates to marry handsome prince. The fairytale theme here has been transposed into contemporary realities of professional audition.

Another element of postmodern stylistics is genre syncretism, operating with various means of literary expression, as well as intertwining elements taken from fantasy or SF poetics (Most nad Mississippi, 5 sekund do Io) into a seemingly realistic world. An extreme example of successful literary deconstruction is the book *Wreck this journal* by conceptual artist Keri Smith. In principle, it is not a literary work, but a set of commands that leaves the user with a lot of freedom. In this approach, the book is a kind of "readymade thing" intended for individual treatment. Regardless of what one might say about this original idea growing somewhere out of the Dadaistic spirit, it is an example of the amazing fetishism of contemporary reading culture. In this aspect it is the author who determines what happens to the book, and not on the basis of some content, but on the basis of almost divine invocation: Fiat lux. Intriguingly, however, the experimental art received such a good response from young readers. It is possible that this has something to do with the non-linear content structure associated with the Internet, which is common nowadays. Cyberspace is dominated by, firstly, graphic elements that often form the so-called memes, secondly, any content may appear there in different places depending on the context chosen by search engines. A reflection of such a structure are e.g. popular coloring books for teenagers and adults, which, apart from the mnemonic activity of filling spaces with color, also suggest searching for a hidden elements according to a specific key.²¹ A similar concept of a game and even the nowadays fashionable escape room is used by Dimitris Chassapakis' book *Journal 29*, which presents the reader with puzzles the solution of which is necessary to explore the main theme.

Literature for young people at the beginning of the 21st century has come a long way from the didactic model implemented within the

²¹ Cf. coloring books by Johanna Basford: Magical Jungle, Lost Ocean etc.

framework of the binding normative ethics to the considerable freedom of interpretation of the most important axiological issues resulting from the liberal value system. In this aspect there has been a change in the role of the book, which has transformed from a cultural good to a commercial commodity. At the same time, there has been a change in the values promoted, the most important of which are freedom and tolerance (equated with the acceptance of all kinds of differences), the contestation of traditions and authorities manifested both in the anti-pedagogical message and in the often experimental structure of the text itself, along with the promotion of individualism and total autonomy of the individual.²² The lack of unambiguous educational signposts has become, on the one hand, an opportunity to create original texts, devoid of bias and unambiguous subordination to a particular ideology, and on the other hand, a considerable threat that leaves the teenager alone with problems exceeding his or her ability to adapt and presenting only a pessimistic, decadent vision of the world without a constructive program allowing him or her to deal with reality in a positive way.

The development of the domestic market of books for young people took place under the conditions of the market economy, which was influenced by many external factors related to the globalizing of reading culture and the emergence of new global bestsellers, strengthening the power of literary messages through their multimedia representation (films, audiobooks, computer games, fan fiction, netart, etc.) and the increasing availability of information about individual titles in connection with the development of promotion and Internet sales techniques. At the same time, the level of sales was influenced by the competition of other entertainment and leisure activities, as well as the absorptivity of the market itself, which operates in the conditions of demographic decline. It seems that the current market offer for books for young people is relatively poor, based on media coverage rather than expert opinions. This particularly applies to novelties. Publishers have greater confidence in re-editions of older and proven titles, the release of which does not pose a risk. Meanwhile, Poland lacks many books awarded in recent years in prestigious international literary competitions.

²² M. Gwadera, O zagrożeniach płynących z czytelnictwa dzieci i młodzieży w XXI wieku, in: Młody odbiorca w kręgu lektur pożytecznych i szkodliwych, eds. K. Heska-Kwaśniewicz, Z. Gajownik, Katowice 2012, pp. 9-21.

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