



Croatian picture books – traditional and modern expression

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Abstract:

From the 1880s up to nowadays the traditional expression in Croatian picture books developed into various modern forms and contents. Contemporary authors try to follow modern global trends, but at the same time trying to remain original, expressing themselves through striking words and sentences or breathtaking illustrations. Children's librarians tried to choose the best among them, creating the list of ten picture books, having in mind the idea of presenting different decades, genres, styles and types in the Croatian picture book production. Several criteria for evaluation were followed, but the main idea was to choose picture books which librarians themselves like the most and recommend to their users, wishing to share the joy of reading.

Croatian picture books appeared in the 1880s. At the beginning, there were no Croatian illustrators, but the illustrations were ordered from abroad and then added to the appropriate text. One of the first picture books in Croatia, *Domaće životinje* (Domestic Animals), located in the School Museum in Zagreb, was created in 1885. The text is written by Josip Milaković and illustration was made by a German illustrator.



Domaće životinje by Josip Milaković

The first Croatian picture books were organized thematically, in areas that dealt with: animals, children's everyday life, children's games or the alphabet. Text that appears regularly with the picture is a **short nursery rhyme**. This was the most common literary form in picture books until 1945. These poems are similar to the standard production of poetry for children of that time. Mainly two models were presented: one illuminating, moralizing, outspoken, pathetic, patriotic, and other anecdotal, sweet and sentimental.

At the beginning, the **prose texts** in Croatian picture books are very rare. If we find them, they are mostly **short didactic stories** and one such story relates to one image. Didactic stories and **fables** represent the earliest form of prose for children, and can be found not only in different calendars, but also in books intended for children's entertainment.

Andrija Maurović was the most prolific Croatian **illustrator** between the two world wars. He illustrated picture book *Dodo i Buco* by Slavko Ježić.



The most prolific **author of texts** for picture books was a journalist Dinko Chudoba, i.e. **D.T. Vragoba**.

But the **first complete Croatian picture book** (whose author and illustrator are Croats) is the **children's textbook on health** (*Dječja čitanka o zdravlju*) from 1927. Ivana Brlić Mažuranić created the text and Vladimir Kirin illustrated it.

Ivana Brlić Mažuranić (1874. – 1938.) has been praised as the best Croatian writer for children. In her book *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* (*Priče iz davnine*), published in 1916, Mažuranić created a series of new fairy-tales, but using names and motifs from the Slavic mythology of Croats. It was this that earned her comparisons to Hans Christian Andersen and Tolkien who also wrote completely new stories but based in some elements of real mythology.¹ “Her use of language and her style are still honoured today as a model of linguistic purity, musicality and beauty; and her works are not just a part of Croatian cultural heritage, but, with their fascinating tale-telling charm, continue to interest, delight and captivate children.”²

Many artists have illustrated her stories, but the most memorable works are those of **Cvijeta Job** (born in 1924.). Unfortunately, those picture books are no longer available for purchase, but two of them (*Potjeh* and *Regoč*) can be read on-line at the International Children’s Digital Library (ICDL).



Both Potjeh and Regoč describe the battle between Good and Evil

¹ PICOT, Edward. *Twice-told Tales*. Web resource available at: <http://hyperex.co.uk/reviewcrotales2.php> (last visited 12/5/2012)

² *Lutke iz davnine Ivane Brlić Mažuranić*. Zagreb: Međunarodni centar za usluge u kulturi, 1994. ISBN: 953-96010-2-9

In the **post-war decades** the production of picture books in Croatia has developed, following the global trends and introducing various contents: songs and stories in rhyme, proverbs, riddles, stories about events, objects, animals, the environment, problem stories, stories about life, fiction, fairy tales.

With the development of children's libraries, children's librarians in Croatia had a very important role in introducing "**good picture books**" to their users. They had to consider several **criteria for evaluation**: high quality (language, illustrations, equipment), the adequacy for different age groups regarding the child's psycho-physical development, the content and format, reflection of diverse values and opinions, compliance with the role and the mission of the library.

In the 1980s the **didactic approach** prevailed, while in the 1990s and later there were changes in trends; "**problem picture books**" appeared, talking about feelings, dealing with problems in communicating and growing up, from the simple to serious problems - fear, parental divorce, illness, death, domestic abuse. These picture books are also used in the bibliotherapy.

The list of 10 Croatian picture books was created by children's librarians – members of the Children and youth Services Commission – a professional body of the Croatian Library Association³. The Commission was founded in 1999, within the Public Libraries Section. The objectives of the establishment and operation of the Commission are: monitoring developments in the field of library services and programs for children and young adults in Croatia and in the world, participation in the work of professional bodies and groups of experts who work on the development of children's libraries, active participation in relevant meetings and conferences, cooperation with other committees and sections that operate in the Croatian Library Association.

One of the most recognizable activities of the Commission is creating the **list of the recommended books for children and young adults**. The list is made annually, it consists of ten (10) categories, covering Croatian and other authors, all age groups, including parents and caregivers, fiction and non-fiction.

Starting with this experience, each librarian made the list of her favourite Croatian picture books, following the given criteria, and then the selection was made, according to the number of „votes“.

³ *Hrvatsko knjižničarsko društvo*. Web resource available at: http://www.hkdrustvo.hr/en/strucna_tijela/ (last visited 12/5/2012)

THE LIST:

1. Author: Pika Vončina

Illustrator: Pika Vončina

Title: Emilija u zemlji kotača (Emilija in the land of wheels)

Publisher: Leykam International

Year: 2009.; ISBN: 978-953-7534-34-9



In this picture book the author presents Emilija - the sheep, and her numerous sheep family. Emilija loves to eat, she grows with time and one day she discovers that she can say "no". It is precisely her stubbornness that leads her into a true adventure. She refuses to go for a walk with the family, she takes her favourite toy and leaves. Her walk is cheerful at the beginning, but soon, the Lamb, Emilija's favourite toy, loses a wheel. The search for the toy parts brings Emilija into a strange land of wheels.

The text is simple and short, appropriate for children just trying to read on their own. Illustrations merge with the text and express the motives that are not always expressed in words.

2. Author: Sunčana Škrinjarić

Illustrator: Ana Kadoić

Title: Plesna haljina žutog maslačka (The Dance dress of the yellow dandelion)

Publisher: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga

Year 2004. , ISBN: 953-212-220-6



It is hard to see through the mysterious life of flowers, because flowers do not talk, preserving in such a way the secret place and the secret time of the annual flower-ball. Most of the flowers are gorgeous, beautiful and fragrant, just a dandelion considers himself unworthy to go to the ball. And when everything seems completely hopeless, the dandelion will get some help, given to him by somebody from whom such a thing would never be expected. Insignificant until recently, this small flower with no odour nor colour will suddenly shine and dazzle all the participants with the most beautiful and most amazing fluffy dress.

This poetic story talks about generosity and love that lie deep in every heart. Even those who seem to be the most brutal and untouchable individuals hide some goodness that sometimes needs to be slowly revealed.

3. Author: Stanislav Marijanović

Illustrator: Stanislav Marijanović

Title: Knjiga čarobnih formula (The Book of the magic formula)

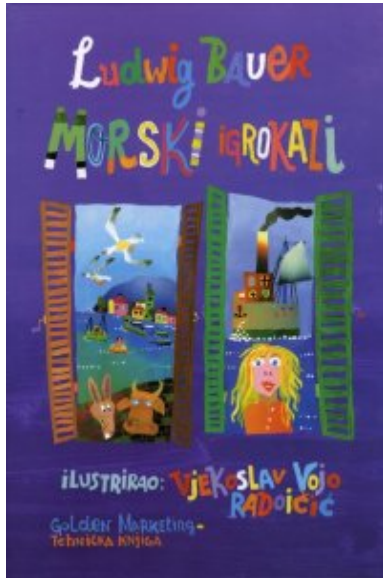
Publisher: Sipar

Year: 1999. , ISBN: 953-6415-20-8



This unusual and witty tale introduces readers to the world of small, ugly, vicious and naughty monsters that are essentially sweet, kindhearted and likeable. They live near us, with us, inside us and make our lives different and happy. Small home-monsters show the characteristics and behavior of children and adults, and the recognition and identification with the characteristics and with names that represent those characters makes the process of reading very amusing. In the story, the family goes on vacation convinced that they left their old house empty. But, that is not the case. Although the most of the monsters are hidden in the car, the two perky monsters remain at home. They find the "Book of magic formula" which, surely, has to be tested and tried out. The story of monsters is rich in humour expressed through imaginative illustrations.

4. Author: Ludwig Bauer
Illustrator: Vjekoslav Vojo Radoičić
Title: Morski igrokazi (The sea plays)
Publisher: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga
Year 2005. , ISBN: 953-212-245-1



The book contains two witty role-play dramatisations, "Treasure Hunt" and "Pearl Diver" that are the result of joint creative work of two excellent Croatian authors. Visually very appealing and interesting as an independent work, it also serves as a template for some further work, such as setting the play on the stage. It is a sort of instruction for staging, and each reading reveals a new value in the written text and in colourful illustrations. Some pages of the picture book contain "windows", with some of the characters in the play, or even whole scenes hidden behind, which contributes to the liveliness of the book, like a stage.

5. Author: Svjetlan Junaković
Illustrator: Svjetlan Junaković
Title: Ljubav spašava živote (Love saves lives)
Publisher: Algoritam
Year: 2007. , ISBN: 978-953-220-498-8



In this picture book the author succeeded to restore harmony within the world of children and the world of adults. With interesting solution the author divides the story into two parts. A smaller part describes the experiences of a girl called Ela, while the greatest part depicts Dad's reflections on them fishing together. Ela is a vivacious girl who is convinced that her dad is too busy and too serious, and he needs to relax. For Dad fishing means enjoying the peace and quiet, which is impossible with Ela. For the imaginative girl daddy's hat represents a perfect boat, she releases bait-worms and leaves them to play, and throws stones exactly where her dad envisioned complete peace ... Although the different perceptions are intertwined through some fun, joy and gladness, dad is not always amused. However, children's sincerity and open heart demonstrate the importance of socializing, playing and having fun, and the true value of love that saves lives.

6. Author: Sanja Lovrenčić
Illustrator: Tomislav Zlatić
Title: Kako je dobro sa svim tim životinjama (It has been so good with all these animals)
Publisher: Leykam - International
Year: 2009. , ISBN: 978-953-7534-36-3



In a small house there is a place for everyone, for people and many different animals. They all live together in harmony although they are of very different habits, needs, characters, sizes and colours. No one is angry, and one does not bother anyone, like it is said in a saying: "where the inmate is not angry, no house is too small". Of course, there can be even more animals, all are welcome and no one will be chased. Love for animals raises the goodness in every person. Children filled with love will become happy adults, and this is one of the ways how to teach children to accept tolerance and respect diversities and a harmonious life together.

7. Author: Grigor Vitez
Illustrator: Tomislav Torjanac
Title: Kako živi Antuntun (How Antuntun lives)
Publisher: Mozaik knjiga
Year: 2009. ; ISBN:



The book is based on the Grigor Vitez anthological poem which many generations of readers enjoyed for over a hundred years. The poem carries a strong message of accepting differences among people which is important to develop in an early age, because Antuntun was kind-hearted and a very special person, different from all. Perhaps he sometimes looks weird or behaves in a way that no one expects or performs in the real world, but that in fact is his value. Imaginative illustrations of good-hearted and unusual Antuntun with lots of funny scenes represent delight for the eyes and soul of children and adults.

8. Author: Dubravka Pađen-Farkaš
Illustrator: Dražen Jerabek
Title: Gospodin Otto i stari naslonjači (Mr. Otto and old armchairs)
Publisher: Sipar
Year: 2010. , ISBN: 978-953-6415-75-5



This story is about Mr. Otto who is a master upholsterer. He repairs the old chairs and covers them with beautiful new materials of amazing colours and patterns. Anyone who sits in a refurbished piece of furniture, sails away in a different world and feels marvelous. Master Otto has a neighbour, a curious little girl who loves to watch him through the window of her room. She is very curious about the blue haze which envelopes his home while he is working. When the old master and a small neighbor finally meet, the girl will discover the whole unknown world.

Thanks to the unusual master she will find out the secret - how, with lots of knowledge and skills, some good will, and a little magic, to restore not only the old chairs, but people as well, their already worn ties and relationships. With a little imagination (or green mist), they become - like new.

9. Author: Sonja Zubović
Illustrator: Marijana Jelić
Title: Čudesna kuharica Lize Brljize (The amazing cook-book of Liza Brljiza)
Publisher: published by the author
Year: 2010. ; ISBN: 978-953-56354-0-6



We all know that our fondest memories are related to storytelling, delicious food and odours spreading from the mother's or grandmother's kitchen. The most precious moments are spent with those who we love, and today's lifestyle does not leave enough time to enjoy the togetherness. The kitchen is a place where everyone can hang out, cook and try

out various dishes, and The amazing cook-book of Lisa Brljiza, with its simple homemade recipes and verses encourages both children and parents to enjoy preparing meals together and to read poetry. It is still nice and comfortable to be in such homes where families often hang out at the table.

10. Author: Želimir Hercigonja
Illustrator: Marsela Hajdinjak-Kreč
Title: Vodenjak i stara kruška (Water-sprite and the old pear tree)
Publisher: Naklada Haid
Year: 2005.; ISBN: 953-6897-49-0



Once upon a time everything was different, the air was cool and the water in wells was crystal-clear, with special flavour, all thanks to the diligent water-sprites. There was a little water-sprite who looked after a well, placed in the shade of an old pear tree. His life was beautiful until the old pear dried up and was left without fruit, and out of sadness he neglected the cleanliness of the well. Crying for the past times the water-sprite could not find solution. With a simple advice an owl startled the sprite, and soon the water in the well became clear again. The well is proclaimed Caesarean, and he became a Caesarean water-sprite.

The text reveals to children the beauty in everything that surrounds them, and is complemented by melancholic illustrations.

Children's librarians chose these picture books following several criteria, but the main idea was **to choose and present picture books which the librarians themselves like and recommend to their users**, considering them books of a good quality, due to the general impression, remarkable text and breathtaking illustrations. Some technical aspects like the font and the quality of paper were considered as well.

The other criterion was children's book awards and prizes that these picture books or authors have won. This was not the most important criterion, but it served as one of the "guidelines" to librarians. There are numerous Croatian awards for illustrators and authors, most of the authors and illustrators from the list have been rewarded with prizes, and some of the authors have been internationally recognized and awarded (Andrea Petrlik Huseinović, Svjetlan Junaković, Dubravka Kolanović, Manuela Vladić Maštruko, Vjekoslav Vojo Radoičić, Ana Đokić, Pika Vončina, Tomislav Torjanac, Marsela Hajdinjak Kreč, Ana Kadoić, Dražen Jarabek).

The Croatian Children's book Center, a branch of the IBBY, was also included in creating the list, providing information on the awarded books and authors.

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