

## THE PICTORIAL PRESENTATION OF THE PLAYING CHILD'S NARRATIVE IN THE CIMBORA CHILDREN JOURNAL

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**Abstract:** In this study we attempt to analyse the childhood constructs specific to the Transylvania of the 1920s. To accomplish this goal, we analysed the child image conveyed by Cimborá through the reading of picture narrative by taking into account the criteria of child roleplay, the parent-child relationships and social expectations. The combined aspect of the methods applied (quantity and quality) served as building blocks in our multiple criteria - oriented research. We formulated the tasks of the three-level picture analysis with the basic picture theory, iconographic and iconologic approach. We first studied the information external to the picture (place, time, author, title), and next we concentrated on the inner, deeper meanings. The Cimborá children journal picture repertoire refers to the presence of multiple childhood constructs. In the two pictures under analysis, looking at the basic form of a child's activity, playing, we are confronted with the good child attribute, as it is seen by the adult world. This child ideal is alive mainly in the childhood history narratives determined by the Transylvanian traditional and civil society habits. On the whole, we believe that this work could first and foremost strengthen the way in which research on childhood history is received in Transylvania.

**Key words:** Cimborá, journal, picture analysis, playing child, child image

### 1. Introduction

Without doubt, childhood is the defining period of a person's life. The history of childhood and the way education is understood, are an opportunity for multiple paradigmatic explanations in different ages and cultures. Thus one cannot speak about a universal childhood (Szabolcs 2004). The aim of this study is to highlight a few approaches from this multitude of possibilities and to support the *raison d'être* of the childhood history in Transylvania among other disciplines. In the attempt to reconstruct a part of this childhood history, the mapping of the illustration basis of the Cimborá journal for children (edited by Elek Benedek) was a good path to follow. This illustration basis brings us closer to revealing the microhistory of childhood history, to collecting and analysing pedagogic patterns, through delineating the child image and attitude.

In our study we wanted to see what kind of adult-generated childhood constructs came to life in a given age, which individual and generation-linked traditions were given a greater importance in bringing up children, and how all these had a say in the lives of children.

The picture corpus used as basis for our research belongs to the Cimborá children journal. Cimborá represented the highest - ranked inter-war press organ of the youngest readers and the children and teenagers' pioneer forum. With his magazine for children, the editor targeted mainly primary school students, that are children between the ages of 6 -12, as it results from the preponderance of the textual repertoire, but we can also find here texts for both nursery school children and adults. Jenő Szentimrei started it in February 12, 1922 and the journal was well received in all Hungarian language speaking territories (Balogh, 1981). The title of the journal comes from the editor's childhood playmate, a dog called Cimborá. The journal was printed at the Free Press, Book Printery and Publishing House in Szatmar. With the starting of the 4th number of the journal, Elek Benedek joined the editorial staff and from the 29th number on till the last number of the journal (9 June, 1929) he overtook the editorial work (as it results from the collected and published literary letters of Zsolt Szabó, 1979). Elek

Benedek organized the editing and kept contact with the readers from his own home in Kisbacon, Szeklerland. He usually sent the collected material to the editor in Szatmar by post. The editor in charge for Cimborá was Sandor Denes.

## 2. Methodological approaches

Studying the pictorial support of the children journal one can notice that the readings of the pedagogic thinking and culture of the period can be very well identified. Child role is explicitly mirrored through the filter of the specific adult system of values, world view and interests.

In our opinion, illustrators and authors - who presented childhood in all its minute details but at times only sketched it - intended to reach with this publication the representative segment of teaching practice. It is this medium that transmits such visual products to children, that first and foremost refer to their own, adult world (Ricoeur, 2002). Obviously, at the back of all these childhood constructs and visual supports stands Elek Benedek, the chief editor, who not for a single moment questions the reality-connected interpretation assigned to the visual products (drawings).

The use of applied picture analysis methods (Pilarczyk and Mietzner, 2010; Panofsky, 1984) and content analysis (Krippendorf, 1985) give a good opportunity to map the more latent meanings of text units and words, through a deeper, more structural analysis of the child image of the extant visual supports (Szabolcs, 1999a). To analyse the thoughtfully selected pictures we made use of a personal illustrated child - image standpoint system, which is the result of a combination and adaptation of several in-depth study phases. We divided the process of analysis into three levels.

On the first level, by the use of the means of picture analysis methodology we looked at the pictures through the filter of visual communication, concentrating on information external to the picture: time, place, author, title, type of illustration, technical execution, and the interpretation domain belonging to the picture. In this gradual process, after the external elements, we aimed at the pre-iconographic traces of the picture under discussion.

The second level of analysis represents approaching the level of iconographic analysis proper, where we are faced with a large spectrum of representations, stories and allegories. For an iconographic interpretation one needs to know the literary sources, to have expertise in the many-layered area of the subject matter, and to be well informed as regards concepts.

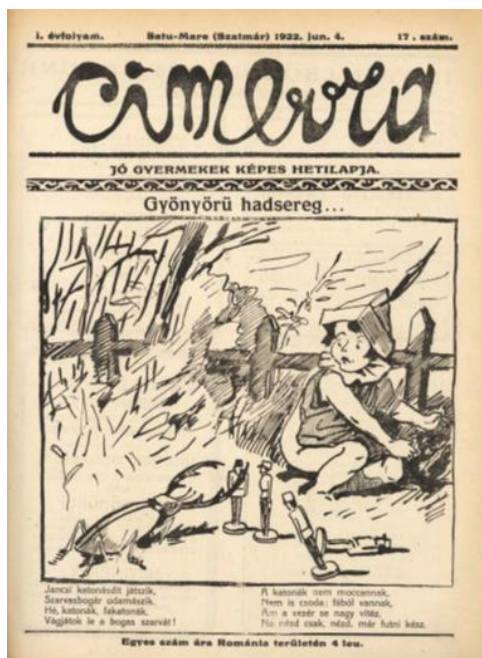
The most important momentum in all this process is, to recognize and then analyse the illustrator's, author's real intent (Pilarczyk and Mietzner, 2010). With regard to our study, in our intent to identify pictorial patterns, we highlight and get closer to the anthropologically oriented dimensions, thus slightly diverging from the research methodology considerations, as applied by Geczi and Darvai (2010). We wish to support the content differentiation mainly through a type of research directed towards a practical Transylvanian child-image and mentality history.

Therefore we study the dimensions signalling the frames of the human body (posture, gestures, mimicking, look, feelings, hairstyle, clothing, accessories) as being the primary characteristics of the anthropologic space. Next we study the child's immediate surroundings, by means of the multiple material instruments at hand, alongside with the activity structures and interactions carried out in the environment. With this type of research, we have as target the defining elements that make up the second anthropological space.

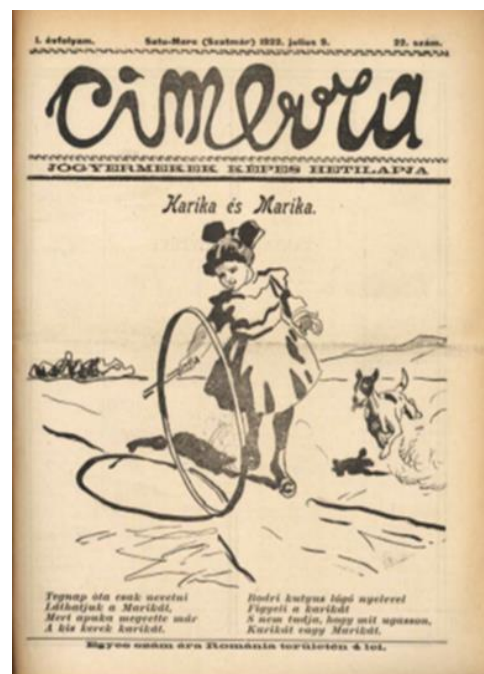
The third level of analysis is meant to dissect the inner meaning contents. We discuss those cultural elements that can be found in the dimensions that determine the pictorial world. We keep in evidence this act of interpretation as the iconologic approach. The „synthetic intuition” described by Panofsky gets a dominant role in pictorial interpretation, to which, the analyst's thorough grounding comes as a necessary requirement (Panofsky, 1984). We need to know the historical context, to identify the formal components of images, to recognize the many-layered meaning of basic pictorial attributes and patterns, as well as to find out the pictorial characteristics, contradictions and identities. In shaping our method we aimed at revealing the deep structures of picture contents, by studying the deliberately or unintentionally generated blending of pictorial aspects. We attempted to make an impact examination of the actual meaning and latent contents of the illustrations.

### 3. The Pictorial Presentation of a Boy's and a Girl's Activity – the Narrative of the Playing Child

From the extant corpus we chose two child-image conveying illustrations, that differ in the gender of the children presented. According to the pictorial codes of the illustrations we can analyse not only the children's system of activity but we can also put into evidence the characteristics of the playing child's narrative.



1.  
Wonderful Army  
Indian ink drawing  
Drawn by: Istvan Csengery  
Source: Cimborá, 1922  
First volume, nr 17, front cover



2.  
Karika (the Hoop) and Marika  
Indian ink drawing  
Drawn by: Istvan Csengery  
Source: Cimborá, 1922  
First volume, nr 22, front cover

#### Picture 1-2. The External Characteristic of the Drawings

The two problem-oriented drawings shown above (Picture 1 and 2) represent full body illustrations, where the large and simple portrayal seemingly appears as simplistic, but at a closer look, it changes into a complicated message for the receiver. Looking at the pictorial sources, right from the first sight it becomes obvious that we are faced with a realistic depiction, which, far from being artistically perfect, reinforces repeatedly its practicality. As regards technical procedures, both illustrations are black and white Indian ink drawings. From the point of view of visual products the above shown drawings can be ranked into the category of pictorial renderings similar to rough translations.

Having in view the creation of the iconographic context and starting from the object of our study, we can state that the origin of Picture 1 can be dated to the interwar period. The place where it can be located is the front cover of Cimborá, children journal (number 17, 1922). We can also state that drawing nr 2 also belongs to the interwar period, and it appeared on the front cover of Cimborá children journal (nr 22, 1922).

The illustrator of both drawings is Istvan Csengery, who, as a matter of fact, illustrated the whole number 17 of Cimborá. It is evident that the illustrator considers it as his duty to interpret the textual rendering, and he makes an attempt to illustrate the creator's intent, so that the given cultural medium in which the event occurs is highlighted. In the case of Picture 1, we do not know if it was the text or the illustration that appeared first. With regard to the illustrator of Picture 2 and his intent, we can state that it completely matches the expectations of the poet. We do not know for sure in this case either, whether it was the poem or the drawing that appeared first.

It should be mentioned that in both drawings it is surprising that the illustrator – endowed with pedagogical ambitions – is present. In this case, we can follow the presence of the illustrator on the line of a dichotomy. In the case of Picture 1 the illustrator's attitude towards the creative child and the individual, is very well put into evidence through the protest against the alienation generated by the new world (Skiera, 2005). In Picture 2 the stress is laid on the attention paid to the child.

Comparing the title of the first drawing (Wonderful Army) – which also functions as a signal of poetic peculiarity – with the pictorial presentation, the contradiction becomes quite obvious. It is as if a discrepancy can be traced between the title and the picture content. Although the stanza under the drawing tries to interpret the narration, it's very simple to reveal the difference between the grammatical classification of words and the proper message and formal focal point.

This means that the multitude of wooden puppets in the foreground comes into the shadow for the viewer, while, seemingly, it is the child figure, the somewhat raw background and the insect, that are emphasized. And yet, it is this miniaturized heap of objects that represents the real addressee (Wonderful Army). In the case of Picture 2, it seems that it is only the drawing that has a title (The Hoop and Mary) and this proves that this is a proper illustration and not an independent medium. On the other hand, the textual rendering would be the untitled coded form of the message, of the transmitted child image.

Going beyond the external pictorial features, in order to make the preiconographic description, we had a thorough look at the elements composing the drawings. In Picture 1 the viewer can see a child who has stopped playing. The boy is standing in a garden corner, among weeds and is playing with soldier-resembling wooden figures, when his calmness is disturbed by the appearance of a big stag beetle. This sudden apparition of the bug with long feelers, apparently scares the child and makes him run away. In the composition the child figure drops out from the point of intersection, and, according to the strict editing principles, this draws the pictorial balance to the right side of the drawing. In the second drawing we can see a little girl playing with a hoop. It seems that there are no objects in the empty space to distract the viewer's attention. The little girl, wearing a white dress, becomes the focal point for the viewer. She slightly bends, signalling the fact that she has already started and now continues, playing. The elements coming into the foreground of the drawing are the contours that reinforce the girl's body. The shadow accompanying the little girl's figure, the hoop and the dog, alludes to the chronology of events, to the sunny afternoon weather.

### The Pictorial Patterns that Define the Playing Child's Narrative

From among the pictorial patterns and peculiarities, we first analyse the children's faces, the illustrated emotional manifestations. In this case, for Picture 1 there should be fear and alarm showing on the child's face – the direct motive for trying to run away – because, apparently he realizes the danger and bad effects of the situation. Although in a slightly exaggerated way, the illustrator was able to highlight the negative emotions of the frustrated child, by means of strengthening the marking features of the face. The fear-induced action, the attempt to run away, is reflected not only by the direction of movement but also by the rendering of a slightly open mouth, and the penetrating force of the dotted, not well-contoured eyes.

The child's face reflects the conventional portrayal signs of the age, which originate in a romantic outlook on the child figure representation: a rounded, chubby angel-like face, an immaculate look (Keri, 2001) a softly traced, turned up nose. The adult illustrator's view is unequivocally shown in the drawing by the bitterly serious facial expression of the child. The situation is similar in Picture 2. Scrutinizing the little girl's look and facial traits, there is little emanation of joy after having got a present, owing to the rather sketchy portrayal. Here, too, the look is emphasized with only a minimal signal value. At this point, the drawing shows a discrepancy (Pilarczyk and Mietzner, 2010) between the text and the pictorial rendering. The graphic communicative signal under the drawing tells us about the joy and happiness of the little girl, that she has experienced for a longer period of time. The look that goes right to the toy does not meet the receiver's look, and the smile, which is the non-verbal signal suggesting informality, and which can trigger positive feelings, is completely missing from the child's face, a face impregnated with white colour (N. Kollar and Szabo, 2004).

The hairstyle, head posture and clothing of the children, as well as the toys set in the foreground of the drawings as meaning carriers of the first anthropologic space, adjust perfectly to the children's gender. In Picture 1 we can only have some guesses about the child's hair, when we look at the longer, girlish, even adult-like hairlocks emerging from under the shako. In the period under analysis, the hairstyle, similar to dressing, differed from region to region. During this period in Seklerland, for example, the very short haircut or baldness were in fashion (Gazda, 1980). Most likely, the illustrator, who is unknown to us, may have used a certain hairstyle that reflected his belonging to a certain region. But it is also a reasonable opinion to say that this hairstyle represents the indispensable attribute of a new type of child ideal. The girl in the drawing wears half-long hair, tied at the back. The large ribbon on top of her head only reinforces the fashionable wear culture of the age. Studies point out that the Transylvanian women's hairstyle was determined decisively by their age and family status.

The clothes and wear that facilitate identification represent the strong reading of the child image and child perception. In the given timeframe, the children's wear was determined to a great extent by the region, climactic factors, age and gender, family status, the occasion for dressing, the belonging to a certain social category, community, region, ethnic group (Keszeg, 2008). The feather-decorated shako on the boy's head - which is, in fact, a paperhat, a product of a childhood imitative activity - is activated as an object for the viewer, but in truth it functions as a sign of war wear. As a motive, the paperhat often appears in the drawings of Cimborá and it functions as an indispensable accessory of a boy's wear. Feathers, used as decorations, are a sign of pride in folk tradition (Pocs, 2001) and in war situations they were seen as symbols of victory. We know from war history sources that in the 18th century, the shako was overtaken and used in a number of European infantry regiments (Grant, 2007).

The occasionally worn playsuit has a call sign value and it accounts for relevant differences in lifestyle: shorts with knee-socks as accessories, and the probably white coloured, frilled necked shirtwaist, almost girlish. As the object of industrial impacts, the almost girlish frilled-necked cotton frothy shirtwaist functions as the sign of citizenry, owing to its frilly decoration. At the same time, the fair white frilled shirtwaist represents a motive of traditional costumes and it evokes in the viewer's mind the romantic child image (Golnhofer and Szabolcs, 2005).

As we can deduce from the black and white drawing, the little girl in Picture 2 is wearing a white dress. Studying the elements of the dress we can see that they refer mostly to the function of separation of the genders. The collared, frothy pinafore dress, which looks girlish, is decorated with frills at the shoulders and it covers a vest. Its adultlike length covers the knees and it makes us think of the child as being an adult in miniature. The dress was sewn from a manufactured fair white linen cloth, which not only bears witness to the better-off middle class financial situation, but also shows the impact mechanisms of Western European fashion, industrialization and urbanization. As we have already mentioned, from the children's clothing we can detect the illustrator's affiliation. He was probably inspired in rendering the child figure by his closeness to a geographic center, a city perhaps, to a better way of life, a quicker way to follow fashion and to the influence of financial management. The delicate manufactured attire gave a panorama survey of the social situation of privileged regions (Demeny and Co., 2008).

Alongside with the child figure, in the Indian ink drawings, a special importance is given to certain toys, which function as objects of entertainment. Their visualization requires a historiographic approach. From the wooden puppets in the drawing we can deduce that the well-behaved, playing child, withdrawn from the noise of the world, quietly absorbed in handling his toys and standing for the Frobelian child ideal (Meszaros - Nemeth - Pukanszky, 2005) can only be a boy. At the turn of the century already, Ede Szabo, a toy researcher disapproved of toys for boys that were war-centered, because he regarded these ancestral toys as being mere instigators for fanatic bloodshed. Looking at Picture 2, the viewer's eyes are caught by the big hoop, which is the basis for the little girl's playful activity. Between the two World Wars, one of the movement or body training activities was playing with the hoop. It was exercised in the open, especially in large open spaces, in the alpine meadows. It was played with a stick and it can be traced back to the activity linked to alpine shepherding as it results from the collection of Klara Gazda (1980). The girl figure in the drawing is a bit contradictory, because in the studied period shepherding was considered one of the jobs or duties specifically destined for boys.

## The Inner Pictorial Content – Iconologic Approaches

The semeiology of the drawing titled „Wonderful Army” simultaneously reveals childhood naivety, innocence and playfulness and the vision of atrocity, war and vulnerability. It is likely that the dramatic tension that defines the basic experience, was generated by the illustrator, as the endurer of the explosion-like industrial development, the one who perceives the poor human relationships and the individual who carries along the signs of spiritual emptiness and permanently experiences the marks of alienation. We came to these conclusions by overviewing the social history of the age, its importance being emphasized also by Eva Szabolcs...” The childhood history, and within its frame, the researcher of childhood, cannot forget that whatever research is made in connection with children, it can only be complete with an introspection into the adult world” (Szabolcs b. 1999:64) Based on our rationale, by conveying his pictorial message through the figure of the boy playing with the soldier puppets, the illustrator only wanted to message, to reflect on the morally destructive effects caused by the First World War, the menacing, deteriorated social life circumstances produced by the processes of urbanization, both being specific to the adult world, and yet, substantially influencing the fulfilment of the peaceful, ideal childhood.

Analysing the deeper meaning content of pictorial codes, we mention it as a synthetic intuition (Panofsky, 1984) that the oversized stag-beetle in the foreground, with its lengthened feelers marks a sharp contrast in the drawing. Similar to the wooden toys this is an analogue symbol carrier: it is the emblem of the frightening power dominating the current political field (Foucault, 2000). But owing to the realistic rendering it can also be regarded as the appropriate expression of cultural dreariness generated by modernization (Krabbe, 1998). According to the other version of our pictorial analysis it seems that the illustrator, through his parental instincts and adult attitudes, remarkably defends the infantile life while his peaceful spirit persistently fights against the fanatic world. It is as if this poem illustration was the undeniable imaging of the illustrator’s and the editor’s misanthropic gesture. The boy figure in Picture 1, who loses courage and runs away when encountering problems, contradicts right from the start the manlike qualities proving that he is only a dependent, innocent child, still needing adult care and protective measures. This is the attribute of the romantic child image outliving the turn of the century, the Rousseauian topos (Rousseau, 1978), strongly present in the whole European cultural circle. Here, too, we can come across the favourite perfect child example of the romantic topos, which considers that the child does not need to be raised to be a useful being, but that he should be protected against the harmful factors and effects generated by society.

The girl figure in the white dress in the second drawing (The Hoop and Mary), as the imaging of the innocent child narrative gained ground in the painting of the 18th century and it is emphatically present in the child portrayal of the studied period. In a visible manner, the girl playing with the hoop in the drawing correlates with the Apollonian child narrative as it emerges in the reading of the English sociologist Chris Jenks, a reading which is the idealistic carrier of immaculate purity, sublimeness and beauty (Golnhofer and Szabolcs, 2005). The narrative, which arcs over historical periods, condenses adult opinions and behaviour, both being products of modernization, and it presents to the public the social status of the actor of a more promising age yet to come, that of the child. (Szabolcs, 1999b; Pukanszky, 2001). Goodman Nelson (1976:26) believes that “something becomes an image by appearing in such a system of symbols that is semantically dense and relatively replete.” The semantic density and relative repleteness are conveyed by the innocent child figure on the move, performing a seemingly enjoyable childhood activity, who, with his gestures looks like a snow – white spot. The child figure, who can also be regarded as the carrier of strong symbols, is in truth...” the Messianic figure (Key, 1976) of an age labelled with innovative basic phenomena (Wolbert, 2001), whose role is to counterbalance the feeling of homelessness and uprootedness. The child functions as life’s one-and-only promising joyful signal in the drawing, which was composed apparently with having an empty background. The large-sized hoops, that the girl holds in her hands emphasize her figure and get a decisive prominence. The toy, positioned right in the center of the drawing, reminds us unequivocally of Breughel’s Children’s Games, painted in the 16th century, where one can see two children playing with the hoop in the foreground. In this case, by presenting the multi-coloured repertoire of European children’s activities, the painter alludes to the European children’s daily routines and the hoops as toys alongside with their owner serve only as

signs in the pictorial interpretation. In the case of the drawing in Cimborá, in our opinion the large-sized hoop is the requisite of a new kind of child ideal. It is also the metaphoric imaging of the emancipating peasantry, of the life aspirations of a citizenry concentrating within, the signs of unfolding modern capitalism and of the performance-oriented world.

On the whole, we believe that the pictorial segments depicting children's games convey the image of the naturally growing and socializing child, which, by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century had become widespread (James, Jenks, Prout, 1998). The narrative of the innocent child, who needs to be protected, comes to the forefront as well, and it is regarded by Golnhofer and Szabolcs as the narrative that arcs over historical ages and lays stress on the separation of childhood from adulthood (Golnhofer and Szabolcs, 2005:16). Consequently, in pictorialness, the dichotomy-oriented adult constructs of childhood history paradigms can coexist well and simultaneously.

#### 4. The motivation and relevance of the chosen topic

The choice of the topic can be explained by the fact that at the moment there is no larger-sized summarizing and analysing research in Transylvania, as regards changes in the outlook on children, the fate of children of Hungarian minority, the investigation of childhood and education history.

We can understand current educational practices and the many-sided world of children only by revealing our pedagogical past. Therefore, together with Katalin Keri we believe that, for each and every educator it is a must to know the history of education and history of childhood of his/her own country (Keri, 1997).

Our work is primarily destined to strengthen the way in which childhood history research is received in Transylvania. The topic and the way it has been processed, could fill a gap not only for the historians of education or researchers, but also for educators and parents, from the point of view of getting acquainted with a pluralistic outlook on children and that of different childhood constructs.

This research, a rarity in its own, allows an insight into the Hungarian and Transylvanian thesaurus, enriching thus the pedagogical culture of educators and generating changes in their life strategies and value orientation. Following the above mentioned outlook on children, child image and shaping of child destiny, as part of childhood history research, our undertaking unveils a yet unexplored area, and, through its analysis offers new perspectives to further research.

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