



## **The picture books in Romania**

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**Session:**

**99 — *Picture books in libraries now!* — Libraries for Children and Young Adults**

### **Abstract:**

*The paper summarizes data on children's literature and illustrated books as well as the current art book illustrators in Romania. I have also explained how the picture books from the TOP 10 within the project 'World through picture books' of the IFLA Section no. 10 were chosen. I pointed out the obstacles encountered by the Romanian authors and illustrators of the books for children in publishing their works and my solutions from the libraries perspectives and using their tools.*

**Key words:** *picture books, children's literature, illustrators, public libraries*

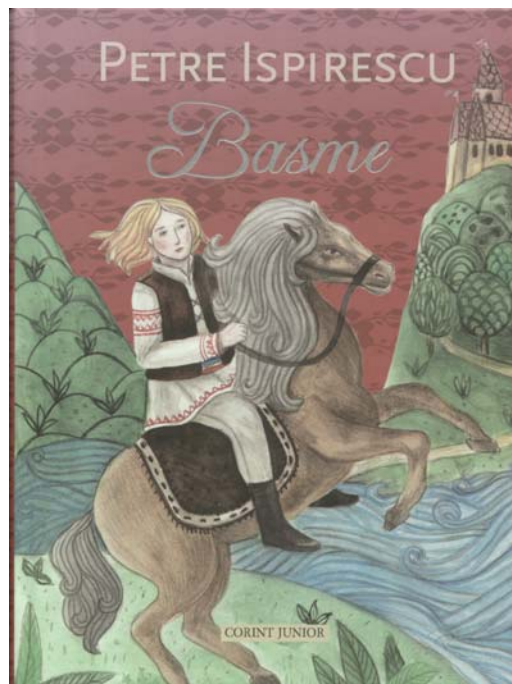
### **Introduction**

The children and youth literature in Romania (1) has its beginning in the traditional art, folk tales and stories that have circulated through the generations and were transmitted orally. Moreover, known Romanian writers were inspired by the folklore, they took and recounted with talent these creations, reshaping them to a classic form and giving them over time the literary success. In Romania, the picture books written by authors are generally written as lyrics, among them the educational and the epic poems being of great success. Much less, the stories and the prose texts also proved to be successful literary achievements, with editorial and public success, being reprinted several times by public's demand. The text, along with the author's illustrations or belonging to well-known artists have entered the consciousness of children and young people to become their favorite books. Their recipe for lasting success is explained by the story itself, built on the conflict between good and evil, with strong characters and clear moral and educational message. On the same time, both the

literary style and the quality of the images contributed to this success (2), providing a model for the little readers' mind and soul.

### **Authors and Books**

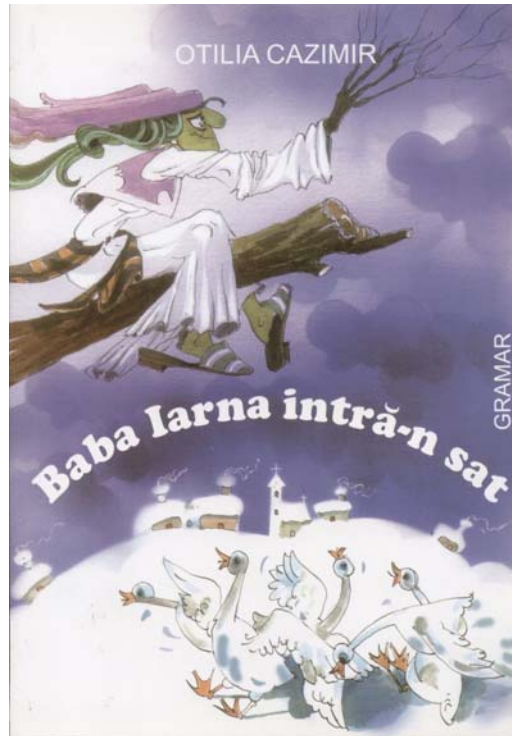
Petre Ispirescu (1830-1887) was an editor, printer, storyteller, folklorist and writer, having a great interest in folktales, which he listened, loved and cherished. Self-educated, he was influenced by the educated people of his time, and at their impulse he began to collect and publish folk tales, carefully noting where and when they were recorded. His main work, the anthology entitled '*The Romanian's Legends or Fairytales. Riddles and Proverbs*', brought together the most beautiful stories and it was published in 1882. The book was acclaimed by the cultural press of the time. Petre Ispirescu was appreciated for his talent as a storyteller and his tales enchanted children. One of the most interesting story is '*Youth without Age and Life without Death*', a profound philosophical tale. It is the only fairytale with an unhappy ending in the entire Romanian children literature. However, the story impressed the children and became a landmark in the little readers' mind, the educational content and the beauty of this fairytale being obvious.



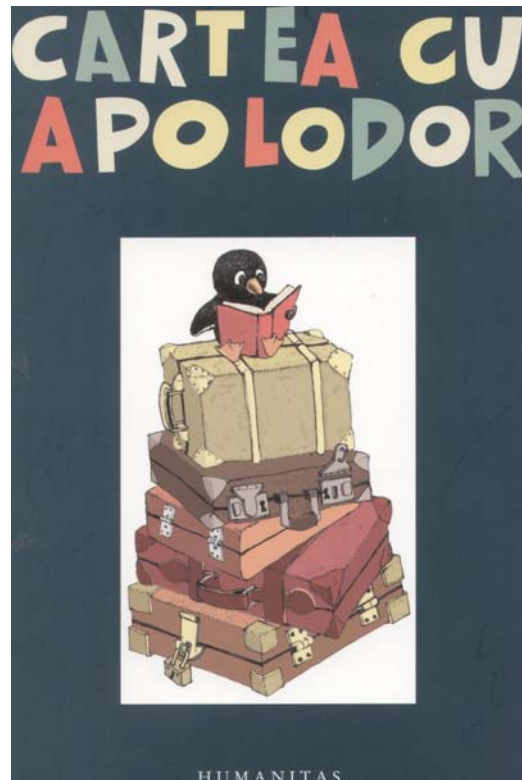
Ion Creanga (1837-1889) and Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889) are the greatest two classics of the Romanian modern literature. They have an important contribution to children's literature with some of the most beautiful and adventurous stories. Not incidentally, their creations draw attention of the book illustrators. Thus, tales such as '*The White Moor*' or '*Prince Charming, the Tear-Begotten*' raised the interest of the most talented illustrators who have given their inspiration extent on these classic children's texts, the illustrations enhancing the imaginative content.



Another generation of Romanian authors, poets actually, have contributed to enriching the children's literature before and after the World War I: Elena Farago (1878-1954), Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967), and Otilia Cazimir (1894-1967). Of course, not all of them are included into the TOP 10 children's picture books that I did within the '*Picture Books*' Project. We'll see below why this happened. Naturally, they signed a new page in the publications for children. Elena Farago has written several poems, in the educational and moral sense, inspired by the events from the sensitive universe of children (3). Author of some anthological pages for children, Otilia Cazimir (4), recreated with delicacy and naturalness the perception of the world through the eyes of the children, very deeply surprising the spontaneity, innocence and child psychology. The works of these two authors have remained until today really read and used both by children and educators.



The Romanian symbolist poet Gellu Naum (1915-2001) is the author of an epic poem, in two volumes, entitled '*Apollodorus's books*', illustrated by the author himself. The main character is Apollodorus, a penguin, which passes through a series of adventures, told with an undisguised understanding and a seductive humor. Instructive and educational, the book impresses with the perfect balance between the fiction and the educational aspects(5), with the lyric beauty, and the moral model suggested with discretion by the unique experiences. The books of Apollodorus are an example of timeless book, successfully transmitting its message both to the children and to the adults.

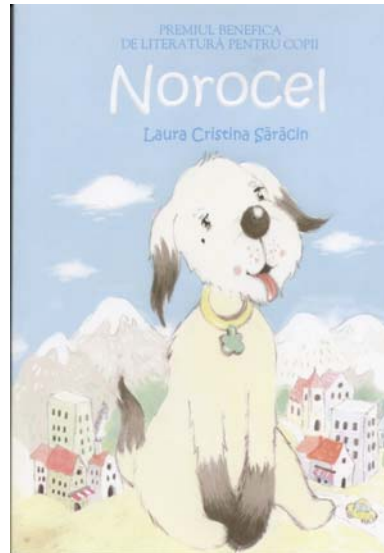


One of the most beautiful picture books of Romanian literature appeared in 2008 under the signature of the poet Ioana Nicolaie: *'The Adventures of Arik'*. Inspired by her own son, the poet imagined the adventures of Arik, the hedgehog, searching and rescuing his brothers from the smoke wasps. The inspired lyrics, the exciting adventures and the attractive illustrations of Marian Mihai, including also puzzle game, were and still are a true delight. In the case of this volume, the inspired text was combined with the suggestive illustrations and also with the publishing investment of the Corinthian Publishing House, the section specially dedicated to the children - Corinth Junior, launching a quality product on the children's book market.



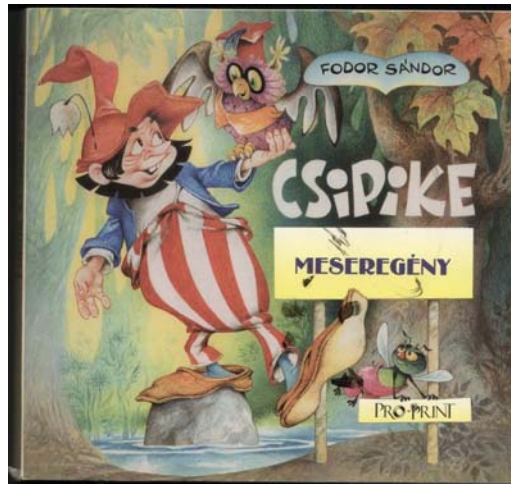


'*Little Lucky*' is the debut book from Laura Cristina Sărăcin, who won the Benefica Prize for children literature. The Benefica Collection for kids intends to print moral books for young children and the present volume is completely appropriate, proposing a close and convincing topic for children. The adventures and also the moral message of the book are perfectly illustrated by the drawings of the illustrator Cristina Pecherle, and the printing and graphic quality recommends the book as one of the most attractive reading for children.



Please allow me a remark about the literary method preferred by the Romanian authors for the children literature. The genre preferred by the Romanian writers is poetry, appearing to be the most appropriate form of sending understandable messages to the children. The past experience shows that the poems with the symmetrical pun, rhythm and rhyme have a great educational value and also a greater impact on the small readers and listeners, open at this age to understand and memorize the lyrics and melody of the literary works.

Among the Romanian illustrated books for children from the TOP 10 in the IFLA project, I have also included two volumes in Hungarian and German, some translated into Romanian, which had a successful career among the small readers. The book entitled '*Csipike, the Giant Dwarf*' by Fodor Sándor, a Hungarian writer, born in Cluj, have been published in many editions and captured generations of young and adult readers through the adventures of the forest dwarf, which gradually learn to respect the others. The literary and educational value of the text is enhanced by the extremely successful illustrations signed by Ruzs Livia. In German, the book of the writer Ricarda Maria Terschak, '*The Fairy Granny*', describes an imaginary journey of a grandmother accompanied by some children, who discover new things about different people and their culture, pleading for tolerance and respect for different civilizations.



## Illustrators

The artists who have distinguished themselves as illustrators, particularly in the literature for children are among those having long and solid careers, being known by the publishers and the public as well. For the quality of their work they have been appreciated by awards granted in the country and abroad, by the exhibitions and events hosted or by their participation to international events such as the Children's Book Fair in Bologna, The International Book Fair in Leipzig, Frankfurt etc. . Anamaria Smigelschi, Walter Riess, Valentin Tanase are among them, their names are often quoted among those of the great illustrators for children books. Walter Riess has registered a great success with the illustrations he made to the volume of *Fables* by La Fontaine, being rewarded in 2008 with an IBBY Prize. There are even special areas, for instance Anamaria Smigelschi particularly illustrated books of the classical authors from the Romanian literature for children (Mihai Eminescu, Elena Farago, Otilia Cazimir), while Valentin Tanase excels in illustrating the historical books, the stories or the adventure books. Mihail Marian has distinguished himself by the imaginative illustration of some recent

publications such as Ioana Nicolae and Anamaria Ferentz's book: '*Oscar, My Wonderful Dog*'. Livia Rusz is an illustrator of Hungarian origin from Romania, who graduated The Art School and has worked as an illustrator for a children magazine in Hungarian from Cluj. In 1987 she took refuge in Germany, then in Hungary, because of the pressure of the Romanian communist authorities. She won celebrity by illustrating the books of JRR Tolkien, '*The Hobbit*', and in Romania the novel of Fodor Sándor. At the beginning of 2012, the Hungarian Cultural Center in Bucharest celebrated Livia Rusz's work as an illustrator in a retrospective exhibition, which made her better known in Romania. Finally, Cristina Pecherle, the illustration author of the book '*Little Lucky*' by Laura Sărăcin is one of the Romanian illustrators who is working with the publishers putting her talent to illustrate the texts for children.

The illustrator artists of the books for children in Romania are graduates of the Art School who have worked and collaborated on the book market, with the magazines and the books for children, but for the adult public also. The personal style was influenced by the particular artistic extract, the taste and the aesthetic options of each illustrator. However, we could draw some features: at the Romanian illustrators the propensity to illustrate specific stories, with characters wearing gorgeous allegorical costumes and also the tendency of inspiration from art and also from the popular costume and characters (Walter Riess, Valentin Tănase, Anamaria Smigelschi, Rusz Livia, Raluca Ilie etc..) can be easily observed. At the Hungarian artists the influence by the folk art of the wood sculpture coming from the mountain areas and also by the Hungarian graphic art from Romania can be seen. A unique style of illustration, more personal and modern, take Mihail Marian and Nicolae Vasilescu in the case of Gellu Naum's volume, '*The Book of Apollodorus*', or Cristina Pecherle and the illustrator in the case of the book '*Die Bunte Omi*' (*The Fairy Granny*). There is also obvious the preference for the technique of painting in acrylic, the watercolor on canvas and paper, or the graphic and drawing.

I have selected the illustrated books for children in Romania, given the proposed selection criteria, but also the quality of the art works, illustrators personality and especially the suitability of the images with the text, the reason that mostly weighed in my choice. Certainly, consulting my fellow librarians in the country, the bookshops, the members of the professional association of the public libraries and the national branch of IBBY in Romania was more than necessary. Based on their suggestions, I revised my personal list from the beginning including their recommendations I considered relevant.

### **Picture Books in Romania today**

In Romania, the children's literature, the books of fiction, the educational books, the school bibliography and the illustrated books for children are in the area of interest of the Corinth Junior, Aramis, Gama, Girasol, Flamingo GD, Vellant Publishing Houses and sometimes Humanitas, with some publications. Most of the times the publishing is influenced by the commercial interests, the reprints of the classical authors and the translations of the international bestsellers being among the first publishers' options. It is really difficult to encourage and promote the children books contemporary authors in Romania. So, there isn't a constant interest in promoting this genre of literature. This is why the translations are mostly preferred and only rare local successful editions appeared, the volumes of the Romanian authors hardly attracting the publishers attention and requiring a great effort from their part. For this reason, the number of the publishing houses that invest in this area is even smaller.



Thus, publishers such as Corinth Junior, Flamingo GD, Vellant and Gramar are nearing monopoly situation. Even among them some differences can be observed - GD Flamingo prefers to print classic works, along with modern illustrations and accompanied by CDs, assuring this in this way a better selling. Gramar Publishing House prints a large number of copies of the same works, but at a lower price, sometimes diminishing the quality of the cover and the graphic editing, the result being less impressive than of the previous publisher's. Vellant launched luxury editions of the same classic authors, but illustrated by eminent artists as a special order of the publishing house, which makes these books luxury objects for adults, but not for children. Only Corinth Junior continues its effort to offer illustrated editions presented in high-quality conditions, signed by contemporary Romanian authors, although at an enough high price.

A problem of the most editors is that they often do not mention the illustrators. Not indicating the illustrator artist is serious and affects both the editorial control and the accuracy of the library descriptions, the lack of professionalism affecting the books market in Romania. That's why I could not select one of the most famous Romanian authors, Tudor Arghezi, because of unprofessional editing his works for children. Regarding this aspect, the illustrators often reported the serious problem of breaking, by the publishers, of the copyright law for the book illustrations (6). It is true that there are some favorable conditions for the book illustration: an Illustrators' Club was established, a series of events have been organized, there is a real concern for the art of book illustration at the level of the National University of Arts (special studies are run by Stela Lie), and also the activity of IBBY Romania, which, by its director Claudiu Istrate, made the effort at the Ministry of Culture to foster awareness on this unfairly ignored field. The solution for this situation is to continue the efforts in promoting the local literature for children, mainly the recent production, joining the public libraries and their professional association to the IBBY's Romania efforts and the establishment of a special award from the librarians for the children books, in order to stimulate the authors and to rise the interest for this field. The Picture Books Project is a chance for Romania, children's literature and the illustrated books in this country. More than anyone, the librarians are aware of the need for quality illustrated books for children, that ensure the children's first contact with the written word together with the image in an inextricable combination necessary for the children education. Therefore, through their suitability to the children needs the picture books always remain current, and they will be always read and cherished (7).

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