



WE 021: Images

I don't even know where to start, because this is the longest we've ever got without being in touch. This is the longest break that we have ever had, and so, what can I say? Well, I've missed you. I've missed talking to you, I've missed recording new episodes, I've missed looking for inspiration, so maybe what I'll do right now is I'll just start by saying why I have remained silent for such a long time.

So, actually, the explanation is rather simple, because I was absent because of the holidays, and I do believe you also took a holiday for yourselves, right, so you went somewhere. By the way that would be an interesting thing to get some feedback from you and find out where you went on holiday, how you spent this time. If you managed to go abroad perhaps, and if you managed to use your linguistic skills and if you managed to speak some English.

So, this was one thing, right, this relaxation element, traveling, spending time with family and friends, indulging in some lovely food and lovely drinks, but on the other hand, this summer time was very hard working for myself, it was very hard working for the whole team here. We had a lot of work, a lot of ideas, spent a lot of time thinking about the classes, the meetings, and so, that is why there's been such a long break, but I promise with this recording that I'm not going to do it like that anymore, simply, as I said, because I missed you, I miss contacting you, I miss thinking about new ideas, and making up new stories, as I said, looking for inspiration.

And behind this very episode, behind this podcast, there is of course this inspiration, and this inspiration came directly from my classes. It has happened a couple of times, as you, as you know. And I'll tell you how it all happened, so I'll tell you about this inspiration and what happened, what led me to record this, finally, this episode.

So, I introduced in one of my classes which has happened quite recently, I introduced the expression nursery. And the reaction of the person I was talking to, the reaction of the person that I was teaching, working with, was 'Yuk. Oh, gee,



that's British English, this is so British'. Well, that's true, of course, the expression nursery is super British, that's a very, very British expression. What we actually meant in that discussion was nursery school. And of course, there is this huge difference between nursery schools in Britain and nursery schools in America, and of course, when I think about nursery schools, there are actually no nursery schools in America, because in America they are called simply kindergartens. So, guys I hope you will know now, I hope you will remember that the word nursery school defines the place for little children in Britain, and the same kind of place for little children in America is called a kindergarten.

The word nursery is very productive, because you can use it in various expressions, in various situations, so one of them is this nursery school, and I wonder if you know the difference between nursery, so just nursery, and nursery school. So nursery is this place, this institution for very very small children, and it actually depends on this institution, because some nurseries accept children who are 1 year old, but most of the time, this is what I know, and you know that I am a mother, a mother of a small kid, so that's why I know it, this is first-hand knowledge, firsthand experience, so as I said, some nurseries accept children who are one year old, but other nurseries would rather accept children who are a year and a half. So nursery - this is the place for very, very small children, and a nursery school is a place for children that are a bit older, so that would be who are two and a half years old or three years old. In nurseries or in nursery schools children can listen to nursery rhymes and a nursery rhyme is this kind of a poem, kind of an interesting story that you can read to your children. And you know that I'm a huge of reading to children. So nursery rhymes are a perfect thing to develop vocabulary, to expand vocabulary of a little kid.

Please do not confuse the expression nursery with a nurse. That happens very often, so, a nurse is this profession, we can have, like, female nurses, but we can also have male nurses, for instance. And this is something that I'm also asked about, right. Can we use it like that, or can we use it only for women, can we also use it for men, and that is true. We can also use it for men.



So, this is the introduction kind of thing, the word nursery was this inspiration, but as I said, it just came up, and led me to a very interesting story, it led me to a very interesting thing that I'm going to talk about. Why? Well, because as I finished the class, I went to my son's room and I found a book. You know that I read to him, I told you, I'm a fan of reading, I do it every single evening, it's a great thing, really. Some people ask me if read to him in English or in Polish, and my answer is, well, I read to him in Polish, this is the decision I have made, so we are going to start with Polish, and when he is big enough, when he speaks his own mother tongue well enough, definitely I will introduce English, and this is how we are going to do it, so I don't speak English to him, I speak Polish to him.

And as he has these books, quite a few of them right now, he has these books on his shelf, I found among them the book entitled *My First Nursery Book*, and as I'm reading the title to you, this title is exactly in English, because the whole book is in English. This book contains four popular stories for children, and these stories are as follows: *Who Killed Cock Robin?* *The Gingerbread Man*, *Three Little Pigs*, and *The Three Bears*. Anyone who knows the stories, well they would know instantly that they are these great stories, most children love them very much, they convey lovely messages, they teach them a lot, but actually the point of this book is not so much the stories, but the illustrations. This is the book, which was illustrated by Franciszka Themerson. I wonder if you have ever heard the name, and I would rather venture to say that you haven't, because this is the same situation, just like the one that happened to Antoine de Paris, I hope you remember the episode about Antoine de Paris, so he was this great hairdresser, very popular. Well, actually the word popular wouldn't just reveal what that was, actually, cause he was this fantastic, this visionary of hair-dressing, and he was extremely famous and extremely popular, extremely well-known abroad, but not so many people know about him, or not so many people have known about him in Poland.

And this is exactly the same situation with Franciszka Themerson and Stefan Themerson, they were a married couple, they were visionaries as well, great artists, Franciszka Themerson illustrated books for children, she mostly illustrated the books that were produced by her husband, but also, and here comes a little bit of a



tidbit, she also illustrated books by Jan Brzechwa, for instance. To tell you the truth, and to present these people in a couple of words, it would be actually very, very difficult, because they dealt with films, they dealt with illustrations, they published books, they had their own publishing house, they dealt with music, she was also an academic teacher. When I tell you that they dealt with films, of course we are not going to think about the films that we know now, because the films that they made, that they produced, they were very avant-garde, and the word that I have just introduced, that I have just used is the key word here, because what they did, they introduced this movement of avant-garde into art, they combined different types of art into one, so that's why it's actually very difficult to, to talk about them, to define them, to put them in one drawer, to pigeonhole and them and tell you what actually did or who they actually were. But what they did with this avant-garde movement is that they introduced this avant-garde movement into these pictures or illustrations for children.

I encourage you, I recommend having look at the book. So, the book is "My first nursery book". The illustrations are amazing. When you look at them, you know instantly that you are looking at a masterpiece, because they are for children, so they are fun, they are colourful, they attract their attention, and I can say this is what happens with our son, so when he sees the book, his eyes glow, and he's so much interested, he's so much into it, so that's why these pictures are absolutely amazing, but on the other hand, you know that it is a piece of art. Because it is avant-garde, because it is transcendent, because you cannot define the pictures that you're looking at with one single word.

They were or she was, because today I'd like to talk about Franciszka Themerson, but actually you cannot talk about her without her husband, because they were this, well, today we would call them, they were this power couple. They were married, as I said, and they worked together, they produced this visionary art, and they were not so much popular in Poland, or not so much popular until now, and the great thing that is happening of course, if you want to get to know them, what you would have to do, definitely, you would have to need to look at their work, or works, because there are so many of them, so there are these You-



Tube clips that you can watch on the Internet, there are various pictures, there are various publications, so actually without reading their literary output, without looking at the pictures, admiring the pictures, it is very difficult to, to imagine what they did, but I hope that with this recording and with a couple of expressions and words I can paint for you the kind of art that they produced. And the great thing is that they are becoming more and more popular, because the moment they are introduced to young generations, they are loved instantly. They are loved immediately. So the young generation, the young people in Poland and abroad, who find out about them for the first time, they just love them at the very first moment.

What is interesting, and what is also something that is to me worth remembering is that Franciszka Themerson published the first translation of *Ubu Roi*, and of course the translation is one thing, so she introduced the play to this broader audience, but also what she did and this is something that is easy to understand, as she was an illustrator, as she loved visual arts, she made it in a beautiful, beautiful visual way, because she produced it on yellow paper, so the whole thing was on yellow paper, the text was in black, and she embroidered it in a way with drawings, with her own drawings. And she enjoyed it so much, I mean that kind of work, that later on she produced a comic strip based on *Ubu Roi*, and she illustrated this comic book again with her own pictures, but the comic strip, the comic book as we can call it, it was published, or it was put for the greater audience to see on very long pieces of paper, they were one meter long. And on these one-meter long pieces of paper Franciszka Themerson drew the story, she illustrated the story with her own pictures.

What is interesting, as they were both born in Poland, but they emigrated, they emigrated before the war, the Second World War, they lived in France, and when the war broke out, they moved to London, when actually they were separated for some time, and Franciszka moved to London, but miraculously they got united after some time, so they both got united in London, and they kept working in London after, the war as well.



Stefan Themerson was born in Płock, and he has, I mean actually, they have, because this is, this is the street that bears the name of Themerson, so like both of them, and so they have their own street in Płock and there was this great performance, there was this great celebration, when, when they, I mean the authorities of the city, when they decided to praise them this way, right, to honour them this way, when they actually gave one of the streets their, their name, so there is the Themerson street in Płock. And what I would like you to, what I would like to draw your attention to is this way they observed the world, and this is something, and that's why I got so much interested in their works, and I do believe that you will be equally interested in their works. So what is very contemporary, I would say, for them, and for their artistic output, although both of them died in 1988, it is the way they observed the world, so they had these unique observation skills, and they had this wonderful feeling of surprise and awe. Awe, I don't know if you know the word awe, because it sounds a bit funny, but if I introduced another word that comes from the word awe I'm sure you will know what I'm talking about, because this other word that I would like to introduce is awesome, so if I say awesome, yeah, everybody knows it, right, everybody knows that, that's a great thing, but awe is this noun and awe is this feeling, this feeling of interest, this feeling of respect, so they had this feeling of surprise, and respect for the world. Something that we have lost I would say. So, that's why their works are so fresh, they are so full of life, they are so unique, there are so hard to define, because they have these unique feelings, they manifest these unique feelings, and if you live with this ability to be surprised, to be surprised all the time, it is a great thing, really, because your life will never get boring, and they had these very strong artistic skills, they kept on working, they were very productive, they were very full of life, and you can see it, really, you can see it with your own eyes.

I recommended some sources, right, so I told you that you can turn to this Internet sources, and have a look at what they did on the internet, but, and this is an invitation on my part, I would like you, like all of you, the listeners of this podcast, I would like to invite you to Gdańsk, because there is an exhibition in Gdańsk, in Łaźnia, where you can look at Franciszka Themerson's work, and the word łaźnia



can be translated as bathhouse, please remember the word, now you know how to call it, it's the bathhouse. But the place I'm talking about is referred to in Polish so that's why we have to leave it in Polish.

This exhibition is still open, so if you have time, please go, please have a look, and again, the feedback that I can get from you is just an amazing thing, so if you have any ideas, if you have any thoughts, if you have any feelings after watching their artistic output, I would like to listen to that, I would like to find out about it, you can write to me, you can tell me how you felt. If you had the same kind of impressions, so if you have, if you had the same kind of feelings, this feeling of freshness, this feeling of uniqueness, this feeling of being surprised all the, all the time. But what really struck me, really, in Franciszka's work and why I decided to introduce this person to you, why I decided to talk to you about her is that this great artistry, this great art that is usually reserved for adults, it was introduced into the world of children, and this is something that I truly love, so even if you are still very little, you can be introduced to fantastic art, you can be introduced to this visionary way of thinking, and in my way of thinking, the way I see it, it is absolutely wonderful, because children from the very beginning, they are in touch with this greatest artistic output, and that kind of experience that they get, builds the way of understanding the world, and builds their sensitivity for the years to come. And the book is a true masterpiece, even if you are an adult, you want to read it, you want to go through these pictures, but as I said, the main idea was to attract this attention of children, and I think, well I can't say I think, well, I'm sure this is what happened, Franciszka did exactly that.

So guys, I'm full of energy, full of passion, because we are meeting again, as I said, I promise, I will not leave you like that, empty handed, I will keep on reaching you as often as I can, but I hope that this energy, this bubbly energy that I have right now and this wonderful artistic experience that I'm talking about right now, it is something that will guide you, so please, remember if you have any time, if you are from Gdańsk, you can go and visit the place, you can see the exhibition with your own eyes, just go there and see it. If you are not from Gdańsk, then perhaps you can travel there, or you can just have a look at these sources that are



available on the Internet. Franciszka Themerson, *My First Nursery Book*, you know the word nursery, you know where the inspiration comes from, so I hope you, you have enjoyed this particular episode, but so much even more, I do hope you will enjoy having look at the works of these two wonderful people that is Stefan and Franciszka Themerson. So guys, all the best to you, I'm happy to be with you again, and I will reach you in no time, thank you so much. Bye, bye.