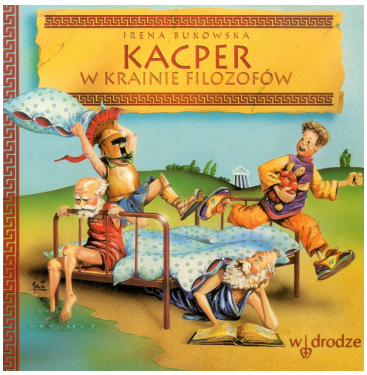
Summary: Anna Ślezińska, Analysis: Marta Pszczolińska, "Entry on: Kacper in the Land of Philosophers [Kacper w krainie filozofów] by Irena Bukowska", peer-reviewed by Katarzyna Marciniak and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1256. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Irena Bukowska

Kacper in the Land of Philosophers [Kacper w krainie filozofów]

Poland (1997)

TAGS: Aristotle Democritus Diogenes Epicurus Greek Philosophy Heraclitus (of Ephesus) Plato Socrates Thales of Miletus Zeno of Elea Zeus



Cover design and illustrations by Jan Zienkiewicz. Courtesy of the publisher.

General information	
Title of the work	Kacper in the Land of Philosophers [Kacper w krainie filozofów]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland, Czech Republic
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	1997
First Edition Details	Irena Bukowska, *Kacper w krainie filozofów,* ill. Jan Zienkiewicz. Poznań: W drodze, 1997, 125 pp.
ISBN	8370330878
Genre	Novels, Time-travel fiction
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Summary: Anna Ślezińska, University of Warsaw, annie_s@o2.pl Analysis: Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl
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Creators

Photograph courtesy of the Author.

Irena Bukowska , b. 1942
(Author)

A philosopher, Doctor of Arts, in retirement since 2006 (she is still a lecturer of philosophy at private colleges). She worked at the Medical University of Gdańsk (1977–2006) and the Gdańsk Academy of Fine Arts (1999–2006). She lectured on history of philosophy, ethics, pedagogy, and theory of culture. As a pedagogue, Irena Bukowska developed an educational method for teaching philosophy at secondary school. Member of Polskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne [Polish Philosophical Society], she is engaged in organising Polish Philosophy Olympics and in preparing high school students for that competition. She is very successful in that field – she received a prize from the Committee for Polish Philosophy Olympics and a medal from the Commission of National Education. She also received an award from Poznański Przegląd Nowości Wydawniczych “Książka Wiosny ‘97” [Poznań Review of New Publications “Book of the Spring ‘97”] for the novel *Kacper w krainie filozofów* [Kacper in the Land of Philosophers], 1997.

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Additional information

Translation	Czech: *Šimon v říši filosofů*, trans. A. M. Schwarzová, Trinitas; Řím: Křesťanská Akademie, 1999.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Irena Bukowska, *Kacper na tropie zła*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls", 2016.

Summary

Based on: Katarzyna Marciniak, Elżbieta Olechowska, Joanna Kłos, Michał Kucharski (eds.), *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity: A Catalogue*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2013, 444 pp., section by Anna Ślezińska, pp. 37–38.

Kacper, a school boy who lives in Gdańsk, broke his leg and is supposed to stay at home. He asks his sister to give him some books about dinosaurs but surprisingly, she gives him a book about ancient philosophy. Kacper thinking that the book is about dinosaurs starts to read it and suddenly realizes that the world around him becomes strangely different. Kacper finds himself unexpectedly on a sunny clearing in Ancient Greece. He meets Thales of Miletus who explains his theory about the first principle: water. Astonished by that thesis Kacper walks through the surroundings and meets another philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus who comes in and out of a river. He explains to the boy that no one can ever step in the same river twice, i.e. the world is in constant change. Then Kacper arrives in town. On the bench sits a wise-looking man named Zeno of Elea. He presents to Kacper his arguments against motion. The next philosopher the boy meets is Democritus. He presents to Kacper his thesis that everything is composed of atoms. Afterwards Kacper goes with Socrates to a symposium taking place in Agathon's house in Athens. The boy gets into a dispute with philosophers over harm brought by causing or suffering pain. After the feast Kacper gets into Plato's Cave, where Aristotle explains the sense of the allegory of the cave. Later Kacper talks to Diogenes of Sinope who lives in a barrel on a beach. Diogenes tells him what real happiness is. After the meeting with the philosopher, Kacper goes to the shore and comes on board of

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a ship where he meets Epicurus. When the weather turns into a storm, Epicurus shares with Kacper his convictions that there is no need to be frightened of death. He says also that the soul is mortal and gods do not pay attention to what people do. Due to the storm, Kacper is so badly scared that he faints. When he wakes up, he meets Blaise Pascal. The French philosopher explains the difference between mind and heart as well as the fact that man is weak. Eventually, Kacper wakes up in his own bed. He realizes that his dream adventure was prompted by reading about philosophy.

Analysis

The book is a short course of philosophy aimed at children. As the main character meets various philosophers and talks with them, it does not resemble an academic lecture but a clever device to introduce children to historical figures and their views in the form of an interesting adventure, following at the same time the ancient tradition of dialogue.

Greek philosophers met by Kacper all live simultaneously in a Mediterranean fairy-tale land where the sun shines, trees give shadow and sustenance, and a creek provides fresh water. At first, it is not recognized by Kacper as ancient Greece. The boy tells about his adventure in a childish manner which is an asset – every time he wonders what he does not understand, and explains to himself what he has learnt, it serves as an explanation to child readers provided in a vocabulary suitable to their age. The main character does not use “proper” terminology but describes what he sees in his own words, comparing it to familiar things. For example, at first, he does not use Greek words like “chiton” or “himation” but describes ancient garments as "a long shirt and something like a length of fabric, slung over one shoulder and clasped at the hip" (p. 25). Once he learns the proper Greek term, he uses it further in the text, in order to record the new word.

The author introduces some motifs known directly from ancient sources and adapts Kacper’s story accordingly. A good example here can be Agathon’s symposium, described in a way known from Plato’s *Symposium*. Kacper first sees Socrates in the street, talking with Aristodemos (here not named). He goes to Agathon and takes Aristodemos with him. There is a moment when Kacper joins a feast to show the reader its course and related customs. He describes a dining

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room in which men in chitons lie bare-footed on sofas, and a servant takes their shoes, wine is poured out as an offering to Dionysus, after the meal, there is entertainment – dancers and jugglers, and the men engage in a debate. An incident when a slave accidentally spills wine on a guest's himation provides a pretext to present Socrates' views, and show the use of the Socratic method of elenchus, presented by Plato in Socratic dialogues. Kacper discovers his own knowledge, directed by Socrates in the role of "a midwife".

Greek antiquity is highlighted by illustrations depicting many ancient elements and the omnipresent motif of a meander placed at the bottom of each page. In a useful display, philosophers' names and their most important thoughts are printed in bold in an uppercase font. Most of the fonts slightly resemble Greek letters, while those used to highlight Pascal are stylized baroque italics. Interestingly, the illustration of Democritus uses a pointillist manner reflecting his theory about atoms.

In the end, the author lists some characteristics of each of the philosophers met by Kacper, then a short vocabulary of difficult terms, and – which is unusual in a children's book – a bibliography containing ancient sources (Diogenes Laertius, Plato) and some scholarly literature. Even if certain aspects of Greek antiquity are inaccurate (for example, Diogenes does not live in a pithos but a wooden barrel) the main goal – presenting ancient philosophy in an accessible and interesting way – is achieved.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aristotle Democritus Diogenes Epicurus Greek Philosophy Heraclitus (of Ephesus) Plato Socrates Thales of Miletus Zeno of Elea Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Animals Child, children Death Historical figures Knowledge Morality Philosophy Soul Travel Water

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Further Reading

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Plato, *Platonis Opera*, John Burnet, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903.

Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 trans. Harold N. Fowler, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1925.

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