

MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



Comparative Literature

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of literature for young people in Slovene from the point of view of multicultural and thematic elements, an analysis of the syllabus and an analysis of young people's literature in accordance with European concepts of equality or cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

Introduction

The Israeli scholar Zohar Shavit stated from the point of view of semiotics that children's literature is an area where interactions or convergence of effects between different cultural areas or systems take place (cf. Shavit 1986). Contemporary children's literature is based on a similar concept of the 19th century, when authors wrote primarily for the purpose of educating and teaching and later, in the 20th century, also to entertain young readers. The goals of modern literary education are also similar, but in reverse order, first learning, then fun. Publishers gradually, first after 1950, then after 1970, and especially after 1990, discovered that printing books for young readers was one of the most reliable consumer fields. However, children's literature cannot be considered only in a consumer-oriented context, although this mentality also co-shapes the directions of development in contemporary children's literature, e.g. Madonna's identity story *The English Roses* as a global marketing phenomenon unrelated to the quality of the picture book, neither with the text nor with the illustrations.

British scholar Peter Hunt also says that children's literature is an area that is heavily controlled and points to a hierarchical and ideological relationship, e.g. adults write, recommend, interpret children's books (cf. Hunt 1994). It is a one-way determination of what children should read; most authors also write literary texts according to these unwritten rules. The notion of the child as a reduced adult in the 19th century is closely connected with the emergence and development of children's literature (A. M. Slomšek: *Blaže and Nežica v nedeljski šoli* [*Blaže and Nežica in Sunday School*], 1842). In the second half of the 19th century, the child becomes individualized and obtains a name, e.g. Gregor (F. Levstik: *Otročje igre v pesencah* [*Children's Games in Songs*], 1880). In the first half of the 20th century, the child begins to acquire individual characteristics and the right to be a child, to play (O. Župančič: *Ciciban in še kaj* [*Ciciban and more*], 1900) and can already "carry a sunflower on his/her shoulders" (S. Kosovel).

In the second half of the 20th century, the child became the center of the family, moving from the village to the city, even obtaining *Pedenjcarstvo (Little Empire)* (N. Grafenauer: *Pedenjped*, 1966), and after 1990, adults began to introduce a nostalgic view of childhood (B. Štampe Žmavc: *Popravljalnica igrač [Repair Shop for Toys]*, 1990), because “growing up means to die.”

The Swedish scholar Maria Nikolajeva believes that adult literature within society accepts children’s literature as a side field, which reflects the process of marginalization in a monocultural society, also because mostly women write for children (cf. Nikolajeva 1996). Slovene children’s literature originated in the middle of the 19th century and does not yet have a sufficiently developed theory, also because it mainly talks about reading and books for children, but not about children’s literature as an aesthetic field. The connection of children’s literature with librarianship is historical, this is where the theory began. It took 30–50 years for children’s literature to enter universities as an independent subject and scientific discipline. Unlike adult literature, it is more flexible and responsive to changes in time and space. After 1990, it responded quickly to the spirit of the times and literary articulates contemporary social issues, including multiculturalism. It is Eurocentric and is expected to become a world children’s literature in its further development.

Motif-Thematic Aspects and Elements of Multiculturalism in Slovene Children’s Literature

Artistic texts in the *Nine-Year Curriculum* (1998) are the area where pupils acquire a positive attitude towards Slovene literature in the first three years. In the second three years, they read Slovene and foreign literature, broaden their horizons and become tolerant of other cultures. In the third triennium, the general objectives focus on the fact that language is the most important part of cultural heritage and thus a fundamental element of a person’s personal and national identity. In addition to Slovene, pupils also get to know foreign (again, a better name for the world) literature, broaden their horizons and cultivate a tolerant attitude towards other cultures. Based on the analysis of the *Curriculum for Slovene* from 1998, it has been established that among the 15 canonical texts for the ninth grade, only one is from world children’s literature (H.C. Andersen), while the other texts are from the field of Slovene literature (*Pegam and Lambergar*, Slovenian folk tales and short stories, Prešeren, Levstik, Cankar, Tavčar, Župančič, B. A. Novak, Suhodolčan, twice Pavček and Makarovič). A more detailed analysis shows that the works are proposed in the following ratio: two thirds of Slovene and one third of world literature. Of this, world (children’s) literature is presented with representative authors, which in itself ensures multiculturalism. Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is a theory, example and reality that emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures, especially when different nations and nationalities live together, with the formula of coexistence, tolerance, responsibility and respect for others being a necessary element. Children’s literature has been associated with socialization since its inception in the 19th century.

At the beginning of the 19th century, literature for children was religiously moralistic (A. M. Slomšek: *Drobtinice: učitelam ino učencam, starišam ino otrokam v podvučenje ino za kratek čas* [*Drobtinice: to teachers and students, parents and children to underline for a short time*], 1846–1901) and there were no elements of multiculturalism. During this period, Slomšek relied on the Christian upbringing and concept of Christoph von Schmid and his writings, which in the subtitles directly emphasize religious moralism (*Kmet Izidor s' svojimi otroki ino lydmy ali Pripodobi navyki dobrih staršov za svoje otroke ino podložne: knjižica za vsakega kmeta ino težaka* [*Farmer Izidor with his Children and People or Depiction of Customs of Good Parents for their Children and Underlings: A Booklet for every Farmer and Peasant*], 1824).

The image of genders – boys and girls in the history of Slovenian children's literature is also stereotypical. Even in the first half of the 20th century, girls were scarcely mentioned, mostly in connection with the pastoral function in Slovene folk songs (“I was small / I put the chickens out to pasture / the chicks chirped / and I grew up”). The characters of boys appeared in children's literature with their own names, which speaks of a changed conception of children. Gregor, the main literary figure in Levstik's poem *Otročje igre v pesencah* (*Child's Play in Songs*, 1880) is not yet playing. His function is pastoral, the child is an auxiliary labor force (“Gregor leads the black cow, our milking / to the pasture to graze”). In Levstik's fairy tale *Kdo je napravil Vidku srajčico* (*Who Made Videk's Shirt*), the child is presented as poor, with nature helping him in the form of personified animals. J. Stritar's book *Pod lipo: knjiga za mladino s podobami* (*Under the Linden Tree: A Book for Youth with Images*, 1895) represents progress as it contains illustrations, although education is still a major value (*Jagode: knjiga za odrastlo mladino* [*Strawberries: A Book for Adult Youth*], 1899; *Lešniki: knjiga za odrastlo mladino* [*Hazelnuts: A Book for Adult Youth*], 1906). The elements of originality are an indicator of a more equal conception of children in Levstik (Najdihojca) and Stritar (Cvilimožek).

The greatest shift from educational aspects to aesthetics was made by the poet Oton Župančič with a new conception of the child who has the right to play, to be playful, cause mischief, who has the right to be a child (*Pisanice: pesmi za mladino* [*Pisanice: Songs for Youth*], *Ciciban*). The name *ciciban* given to children has been preserved for more than a hundred years, which means that it is not only a new name, but also a substantive quality in the conception of a child. In Župančič's case, the elements of multiculturalism appear in the form of the imaginary land of Indija Koromandija (Never-Never Land), and the character of the terrible Turk as the archetype of a foreigner who poses a threat to children. The multicultural naming of animals – dogs – is also interesting in Slovene literature, with the two most common names being Sultan (F. Prešeren: *Hčere svet* [*Daughter's World*]) and Tarzan. The first name is derogatory and is a consequence of the Turkish invasions in Slovenia. In Prešeren's ballads and romances we find multicultural elements, e.g. in *Turjaška Rozamunda* (*Rozamunda of Turjak*) with Lejla, who accepts the ‘true’ religion. Even before Prešeren, there were many elements of multiculturalism in Slovene folk songs (*Alenčica, Gregčeva sestrica* [*Alenčica, Gregec's Sister*], *Lepa Vida* [*The Fair Vida*], a cycle of poems about *Kralj Matjaž* [*King Matjaž*], etc.

The topic of the family has broad connotations in the 19th century, when families are mostly unicultural. The notion of the modern family started to appear only at the beginning of the 20th century. In 150 years, we move from the model of a large family to the model of single-parent families – peasant, village, suburban, urban and urban. Families are becoming smaller, moving from large, numerous, multigenerational to single-parent (P. Kovač: *Kaja in njena družina* [*Kaja and her family*]), and at the same time the monocultural space is expanding into a multicultural one (J. Vidmar: *Princeska z napako* [*The Princess with a Flaw*]), albeit in the direction of intolerance. In the history of Slovene children's literature, we find another constant – the absent father (F. Levstik: *Kdo je napravil Vidku srajčico* [*Who Made Videk's Shirt*]). At the end of the 19th century, the child's place at home is only next to the stove, and at the end of the 20th century he/she got his own room. The image of a child has been gradually evolving from a shepherd playing on the pasture to a child alone in a room and with too many toys over almost a hundred years. In Srečko Kosovel's poem *Sončnica na rami* (*Sunflower on the Shoulder*) we can find a new conception of the child, which continues Župančič's concept of childhood. After 1950 the child becomes the main literary figure, e.g. *Jelka in Moj dežnik je lahko balon* (*My Umbrella can be a Balloon*) by E. Peroci is burdened with the consequences of modern times – she can't play, which will be a constant, and not only in Slovenian children's literature. An important detail is that the main literary figure is a girl, who is a bridge between two notions of girls: the traditional – subordinate – girl and the modern – 'insubordinate' – girl.

Slovene children's literature is strongly focused on the monocultural past, which is reflected in the nostalgic conception of the child and childhood, the utopian setting of place and time in idyllic village, timelessness, homeliness, where the weather is always nice and children have no obligations, they just play; adults have no entry into the Arcadian conceived landscape. The latter does not reflect the image of the child and childhood in Slovene children's literature, but the constructed representation of adults who conceive of adulthood as 'expulsion from paradise', instead of acting responsibly and preparing children for the world outside the monocultural place and time, for the external, multicultural world (leaving home, trials and returning home) in terms of individuation and overcoming oneself (T. Partljič: *Hotel sem prijeli sonce* [*I Wanted to Hold the Sun*], S. Pregl: *Geniji v kratkih hlačah* [*Geniuses in Shorts*]). In contemporary children's literature, children learn more from the experiences of adults, who warn and educate them, but forget that this deprives them of their experiences and their own knowledge (J. Ribičič: *Miškolin* [*The Little Mouse*]). Adults show children a better, more beautiful and unicultural world, thus contributing to the fact that later confrontation with reality and multiculturalism is more difficult and more impatient than if children lived in the real world (B. Š. Žmavc: *Popravljalnica igrač* [*Toy Repair Shop*]). On the other hand, there is a pronounced trend of describing problem topic, especially after 1990, but this topic is presented linearly (Janja Vidmar), trivially (Ivan Sivec) and beyond literature (Vitan Mal: *Žigana*).

Multicultural elements appear as early as the end of the 19th century in the sense of the exotic unrealistic conception of India – Indija Koromandija – as a land of abundance. The story for

young people *Miškolin* (*The Little Mouse*) by J. Ribičič (1931) deals with a unicultural family of personified mice with their only son Miškolin. A foreign element enters the village idyll – auntie *Sivopetka* (*Grey Heel*), who brings her daughter Miša to the Mišon family. The concept of life of the literary person, Mišon, begins to change by accepting a ‘foreigner’ – he begins to slide away from the safe but at the same time too protective shelter of parents who, through their son, fulfill their unfulfilled desires and experience love as if it was “devastating to all.” Because the fantastic narrative is based on the concept of a folk tale, the ending is happy. J. Ribičič’s fantastic story *Nana, mala opica* (*Nana, the Little Monkey*, 1937) has elements of multiculturalism, but it is perceived as derogatory. Nana, the little monkey, and her relatives (aunt Anina, Anu, Kanfu) and the parrot Koko are placed as strangers in a certain place – a circus, and are considered exotic and intended just for the fun of the locals. They can only move in the space designated for newcomers, and this should be a place for entertainment for the locals.

In 1917, a collection of short realistic stories by F. Milčinski, *Ptički brez gnezda* (*Birds without a Nest*), was published, where the image of a child is not romanticized, where children’s rights are violated because it is not possible to take into account their interests, neither privately nor publicly, where there is no personified helping bird which would bring Videk his shirt in the form of an archetype of a sage or a good fairy, that would bring the orphans hope from the 19th century, where good was rewarded and evil punished. Children and adolescents in Milčinski are discriminated against on the basis of social origin, material condition, birth, disability, etc.

In realistic narrative prose, children’s rights are presented problematically and not romantically as in fantastic narrative prose. Nevertheless, Slovene children’s literature in the field of fantastic texts gained a new conception of the child and thus introduced elements of equality between boys and girls, first recognizing children’s rights in literature, and then also in reality. In the second half of the 19th century, a collective hero often appears, while at the end of the 20th century this is reduced to an individual character of a lonely child of the “alone at home” type. Supporting literary figures – adults (mother, father, teacher, uncle, aunt, grandfather, grandmother...) – often perform, but have no active role and remain on the sidelines (E. Peroci: *Moj dežnik je lahko balon* [*My Umbrella can be a Balloon*], 1955). Interestingly, animals, toys, plants, nature, and fictional creatures have better contact with a child than adults.

The monocultural setting in Slovene children’s literature is marked by social origin, the belonging to a social group, material group, and in the 19th century it is tied to the village, the village environment, grazing, house spaces – behind the stove. An example of a multicultural space is also the Carinthian folk tale of *Mojca Pokrajculja*, whose home is a pot and who, due to its hospitality, is almost left homeless, as the animals from outside settle in it. In the first half of the 20th century, the scene is unicultural – the path to school, school itself, pasture and the environment are tied to the time between the two wars and poverty (F. Bevk: *Pastirci* [*Shepherds*], *Pestrna* [*The Babysitter*], *Grivarjevi otroci* [*Grivar’s Children*], *Levi devžej* [*Left Pocket*], etc.).

Only later, in the second half of the 20th century or after 1950, especially after 1960, the unicultural space was partially transferred to a multicultural city, which speaks of the improvement of the material situation and at the same time the loss of contact with the idealized homeliness. Slovenian youth heroes have a distinct representative who goes to the multicultural world in a realistic narrative by F. Bevk, *Lukec in njegov škorec* (*Lukec and his Starling*); starling is a symbol of homestead, home and monoculture. The Slovene monocultural environment is also visited by aliens from outer space (V. Pečjak: *Drejček in trije Marsovčki* [*Drejček and the Three Martians*], 1961) – Martians who see Earthlings beating children, the time of the Cold War, etc. Foreigners live outside the area of monocultural homeliness or “small villages with small houses,” where outside “in the middle of the forest Muca Copatarica lives,” who is good, trustworthy because she fulfilled the condition for inclusion of foreigners in the home community – she exerted herself by work, by sewing, tidying up and subordination (E. Peroci: *Muca Copatarica* [*Sleeper Keeper Kitty*], 1957). After 1990, the setting was transferred from the external (village, school, pasture, meadow, forest) to the internal or subjective – to the child’s interior, where children’s rights were consequently violated because the child became a “lightning conductor for anger” (B. Gregorič: *Nebomske pesmi* [*The I Won’t Poems*]) into dreams, desires, fear, being alone at home, boredom... Children’s rights improved in the second half of the 20th century; children who have been physically punished in the past, hungry, barefoot, have become the target of psychological punishment after 1990, they have to overcome loneliness, boredom, fear, etc. The notion of outer space or multicultural imaginary lands is also important, as children have all the rights because imaginary lands are usually permissive and represent a multicultural gastronomic utopia where honey and milk are dripping (*Čenčarija, deveta dežela* [*Tittle-Tattle, the Ninth Land*], *Indija Koromandija* [*Never-Never Land*], *Kosovirija, Pedenjcarstvo* [*The Little Kingdom*], *Popravljalnica igrač* [*Toy Repair Shop*], *wonderland, universe*, etc.). The consequences of permissive upbringing are also visible in children’s texts: children are free to express their opinions, observe only the principle of pleasure (*Pedenjped se napoka* [*Pedenjped gets his Fill*]), have too few duties and only rights (B. A. Novak: *Pravice otrok* [*Children’s Rights*]), but are left without the principle of reality (S. Pregl: *Geniji v kratkih hlačah* [*Geniuses in shorts*]).

From the point of view of multiculturalism, an interesting fact is the absence of the issue of the elderly. Images of the elderly have a stereotypical function of upbringing and do not participate in social and cultural life. In the text by M. Mate, *Babica v supergah* (*Grandma in Sneakers*), the elderly are portrayed without dignity, more from the point of view of ridicule than independence. Inclusion of the disabled or persons with special needs is still a rare topic (S. Makarovič: *Veveriček posebne sorte* [*Squirrel of a Special Kind*]), and sometimes a program (J. Vidmar on Down syndrome). The event time, expressed in Slovene children’s literature, is connected with key national holidays, but the latter do not play a significant role in forming a positive self-image. The setting and event time are shaped similarly to fairy tales – mostly indefinite, but thus general. This reason is understandable and acceptable for the 19th century, but not for the end of the 20th century and urbanity, the time of electronic media, mobile phones, the web, computers, etc.

European Union and cultural, religious and linguistic diversity

Respect for linguistic and cultural diversity is one of the EU's fundamental objectives and is also a right enshrined in Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: "The European Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity."¹ At the initiative of the European Parliament, which adopted a series of resolutions, the EU ensures respect for and promotes the development of languages and minority languages in Europe. Contemporary children's literature in Slovenia and the world reflects significant changes of the time, which is also reflected in literature, as the "mirror of society." Contemporary children's literature expresses the values of a multicultural society, especially the tolerance of difference. Multicultural children's literature is an opportunity to learn about the positive effects on personal growth and to raise general awareness through literature.

Multicultural education or tolerance education is an important area of the EU education system. Today's society is a multicultural society; schools have many students from other cultures, language areas, different socio-cultural or national backgrounds. The EU educates for tolerance and promotes understanding of different cultures in countries with appropriate didactic approaches, methods and practices in school. Multicultural projects promote tolerance and are directed against racism and xenophobia; they encourage students to develop a critical attitude towards their own cultural identity, and help them to discover and share humanitarianism that should extend to all cultures. At the same time, it is necessary to develop multicultural competencies or abilities to work in a multi-layered cultural environment that contain more than one cultural and linguistic identity.

I analyzed multicultural children's literature from the point of view of the following motif-topical elements, in accordance with the concept or principles enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01), in particular the third chapter which deals with equality.

1. In Slovene children's literature, the theme of equality before the law² is neither a common nor an explicit theme, but there are texts, from folklore onwards, that take into account these elements (all are equal before the law, e.g. *Peter Klepec, Pegam and Lambergar, Martin Krpan*). The texts open ethical dilemmas, e.g. *Ptički brez gnezda (Birds without a nest)* by F. Milčinski. The archetype of an orphan or children who are blamed without actual guilt is a constant in children's literature (A. Ingolič, *Deček z dvema imenoma [A Boy with Two Names]*; P. Zidar, *Kukavičji Mihec*, and J. Vidmar, *Barabe [Rascals]* in 2001). At the same time, we have an exceptionally comical view of equality before the law in the parody *Kozlovska sodba v Višnji gori*

¹ Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01). http://www.europarl.eu.int/charter/default_en.htm, and Listina o temeljnih pravicah Evropske unije (200/C 364/01); [http://www2.gov.si/svez/svezweb.NSF/0/43EBFC2376F40E56C1256C6F003A4215/\\$file/32000Y1218\(01\).doc](http://www2.gov.si/svez/svezweb.NSF/0/43EBFC2376F40E56C1256C6F003A4215/$file/32000Y1218(01).doc).

² All are equal before the law.

(*Goat's Judgment in Višnja gora*) by J. Jurčič (1884) and *Butalci (Boneheads)* by F. Milčinski (1949).

2. Slovenian children's literature has exceptional examples of social non-discrimination³ that promote empathy, the concept of coexistence and peace (Bevk: *Pastirci, Grivarjevi otroci, Pestrna, Lukec in njegov škorec*). In the time of social realism, Voranc (*Solzice, Levi devžej*) also stands out. In his short realistic prose *Prvo pismo (The First Letter)*, Voranc shows a clear example of linguistic discrimination and the belonging to a national minority, e.g. Slovenian name Celovec for the city of Klagenfurt. An example of social discrimination on the basis of social origin and material condition and then overcoming can be found in Voranc's literary sketch *Potolčeni kramoh (The Beaten Loser)*.

3. In Slovene literature, from the folk tradition onwards, we find considerable elements of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity⁴ in cases when a literary person goes abroad and longs for his homeland (*Lepa Vida*), or when a person from abroad comes to Slovenian territory (F. Prešeren, *Turjaška Rozamunda*) and accepts the 'true' religion. There are also motif-thematic elements of disguised girls, e.g. *Alenčica, Gregčeva sestrica*, who bravely tackle the task and rescues her brother Gregec from a Turkish prison. It is interesting that the fact that Alenčica is a woman is not important at all – she is confidently aware of her gender and courage. In 1958, Tone Pavček published the poem *Juri Muri v Afriki (Juri Muri in Africa)*. At that time, the general awareness of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity was not as high as in 2001, when he published *Juri Muri drugič v Afriki (Juri Muri in Africa for the Second Time)*, a straightforward poem in which elements of discrimination based on race, color and social status appear on the textual level, and everything is also supported by illustration.



Figure 2. *Juri Muri in Africa* (1958) and *Juri Muri in Africa for the Second Time* (2001)

³ Any discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin or social origin, genetic characteristics, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, belonging to a national minority, material status, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation and the nationality is prohibited.

⁴ Respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

T. Pavček, M. Jemec Božič: Juri Muri in Africa (1958)

Čuri Muri, kidder Juri,
The one who fell from a pear
Yesterday at five o'clock
He traveled to Africa.
He can't stay at home
Everyone scolds and pesters him
Everyone wants to wash him
But he is afraid of water.
So, he thought: better to go To the south side of the earth
There black people live unwashed Without water, towels

T. Pavček, M. Jemec Božič: Juri Muri in Africa for the Second Time (2001)

Jurirides a camel to look like a gentleman, a black barefoot boy walks
on foot on the sharp sand,
but from the high sky the same sun burns both.
As soon as he noticed this,
Juri said to himself wisely: "Enough! To me, faces
with different colors just won't make a difference! So, my honest boy,
just sit up next to me!" The camel knelt on its knees, the hound Bongo
jumped on it
and Juri hugs him
and squeezes his black palm as they rush like two brothers in the
distant Ben Ata Sheikanat.

Traditional literature, written mainly by men in the 19th and also in the 20th century, portrayed women as unequal.⁵ This is due to the situation in a society in which women focused on home, family, children, and men turned to profession, society and entertainment. An interesting paradox, also mentioned by M. Hladnik,⁶ is that women lag behind in creation but have an advantage in reading, although literature shows them in a subordinate function, regardless of whether they are cover, main or supporting characters. The character of a woman in Slovenian prose is marginal and derogatory. The character of a girl is even more marginalized in the well-known motif of disguised heroic girls, where it is obvious that girls are allowed to be brave only if they are disguised in boyish clothes (*Alenčica, Gregčeva sestrica*). Unequal portrayal of female literary characters in stereotypical roles reduces the willingness to transcend patterns in the minds of young readers. By portraying the role of gender – the private sphere in girls and the public sphere in men – in a traditional way, children's literature helps to maintain the superiority of men. Sexism takes many forms: overt ('women's areas', jokes at the expense of women), subtle (patronizing attitude towards women – "you can't do that") and disguised. The unequal position of girls' literary figures shifts from formal and overt forms to informal and covert ones. The picture book *Maček Muri* by K. Kovič and J. Reichman also contributes to the consolidation of gender inequality;

⁵ Equality between men and women in all areas, including employment, work and pay, and special benefits for the benefit of the sex which is represented in smaller numbers.

⁶ Miran Hladnik: Woman in Slovene narrative prose. <http://www.ijs.si/lit/zenske.html-12>

Maca and Mica, whose husband, cat Jumbo, is on a business visit to Tigrania, can “talk smoothly about feline friends, feline fashion, and feline children and sit in a neatly tidied room.” After the football match, Mav and Muri go for a “big milk.”

4. Much has been written about children’s rights in Slovene children’s literature, especially from a positive point of view. The period of the so-called social realism knows of extraordinary cases where the wider society has tried to respect the rights, protection, care and welfare of children.⁷ The literary texts by F. Bevk are examples of social empathy, cohesiveness and helping children in poor financial condition. With regard to the situation between the two world wars, the wider society tried to take into account the private and public interests of children. The topic of parental separation became visible after 1990, especially in the book by P. Kovač, *Kaja in njena družina* (*Kaja and her family*). The emotions of the main literary person are affected by the separation of the parents, the child is in distress, an archaic fantasy in the form of a stone and a bunny is awakened in the girl. As this is a model of a modern fairy tale there is no happy ending. After many emotional complications, the text ends with the title character having regular and direct contact with both parents. Topics that still arise are the violation of children’s rights (S. Vegri, *Kdaj in zakaj* [When and Why]), the child in “pedenjcarstvo” (N. Grafenauer, *Sladkosned* [Sweet Tooth]), the child is aware of his/her rights (B. A. Novak, *Pravice otrok* [Children’s Rights]), and the child feels consequences of modern times and stresses (B. Gregorič, *Strelovod za jezo* [Lightning Conductor for Anger]).

There are many literary texts in which the child is, e.g., the subject of sexual abuse (M. Moškrič, *Ledene magnolije* [Ice magnolias]), which are a means of expressing ideology (J. Snoj, *Škorček norček* [Foolish Little Starling]) or are completely beyond literature (V. Mal, *Žigana*).

Saša Vegri: Kdaj in zakaj (When and Why)

When and why

are adults beating children?

Adults beat children when their hands are carried away from their minds and hearts.

Such a headless heartless palm, doesn’t even know on a rainy day what to do.

What is it doing? As soon as it sees a lively bonce

it smacks it. And why is it doing this? Because everyone thinks that it is good to beat small people.

Niko Grafenauer: Sladkosned (Sweet Tooth)

In the little kingdom the Highness of the pedenjped rules wisely. Lemonade is poured there and ice cream is offered.

Cake, pudding, chocolate, All flies into the bottomless abyss. In the little kingdom it is customary for the emperor to eat sweet all day long.

⁷ Children's rights relate to the welfare of children in all areas.

He stuffs himself; he is never left with an empty mouth. Then he
bends and moans,
He goes to bed to take a leave.

Boris A. Novak: Pravice otrok (Children's Rights)

I have the right to:
To be full
Crazy about French fries,
Eat ice cream,
Because I'm a sweet tooth,
To be happy,
If I'm fat,
To listen to music, That I want (otherwise I'm crying!)...
And I have another right, Which I don't like too much, because it's
more of a duty,
that oppresses the youth, such is the thing:
the right to education, which rhymes with music and means
that I have to go to school
even though I would rather drink Coca-Cola!
I am tormented by the question,
How to reconcile
Two fundamental children's rights:
On the one hand
The right to education,
On the other hand
The right to play And to sleep in the morning.

Barbara Gregorič: Strelvod za jezo (Lightning Conductor for Anger)

My mom has problems. Because at the place where she works
There's a dragon.
My father has problems. I don't know what kind,
And I don't know why.
My sister
also has problems due to unrequited love.
But why
Are they all mad at me?
And they make me cry?
I am a CHILD. And not a LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR!
Find another way out!

5. The rights of the elderly are less frequently represented in Slovenian children's literature. Images of grandparents are romanticized, granddads trim hedges, grandmothers have an apron and bake 'potica' (cake). The modern view of a dignified and independent life, participation in the social and cultural life of the elderly⁸ has not yet entered the children's literature.

⁸ The rights of the elderly – recognizing and respecting the right of the elderly to a dignified and independent life and to participate in social and cultural life

6. The inclusion of people with disabilities⁹ (people with special needs) is also a rare topic in children's literature. In the modern fairy tale *Veveriček posebne sorte*, the author Svetlana Makarovič tackled a difficult topic and presented as the main literary figure the squirrel Čopko as an independent person involved in social and professional life in the forest. Čopko is the son of the squirrel Puhanka and the absent father, a regular in Slovenian children's literature. The squirrel participates in the life of the community, as is usual with the version of the Desetnica motif, where nature deprives the child of one thing and therefore endows him/her with another – the squirrel is an extraordinary storyteller. In the fairy tale, society symbolically transcends prejudices against a person with special needs when the squirrel also transcends them himself. People with special needs are also shown in certain other literary texts, with larger or smaller open questions about integration into society (P. Svetina, *Mroček dobi očala* [*Little Walrus gets Glasses*]). Special attention should be paid to the book for the blind and visually impaired *Snežna roža* (*Snow Flower*, 2005) by Aksinja Kermauner, written in Slovene (also in English) and in Braille. The picture book is also intended for those who see, on order to sensitize them to such issues and connect tolerance and respect for others.

Conclusion

In Slovene children's literature in the 19th century, most of the motif-thematic elements were dedicated to the assertion of children's rights as small adults (e.g., in Levstik, Stritar). Only with Župančič did the child get the status of a child, a creature that needs to be protected. Childhood became a period of life worthy of special attention (S. Kosovel, *Sončnica na rami* [*Sunflower on the Shoulder*]), parents became protective (J. Ribičič, *Miškolin*), strangers were viewed with mixed feelings as exotic persons, but in a limited and special space (J. Ribičič, *Nana, mala opica* [*Nana, the Little Monkey*]). Between the two wars, Bevk tried with extreme sensitivity to show non-discrimination of children on the basis of social origin and material condition (*Pastirci* [*Shepherds*], *Pestrna* [*Babysitter*], *Levi devžej* [*Left Pocket*]) and departure from a single-cultural home to a multicultural world (*Lukec in njegov škorec* [*Lukec and his Starling*]).

A clear example of linguistic discrimination and belonging to a national minority is Voranc's literary sketch *Prvo pismo* (*The First Letter*). After World War II, the child's outer world expands, shifting from a rural to an urban environment, and the inner world shrinks: the child gets a lot of public rights, but his private rights diminish. He/she has regular and direct contact with both parents, but is separated not because of multiculturalism, but because of two singleparent families. On the one hand, he/she gets his country (*Pedenjcarstvo* or 'Little Kingdom') and his room, but he/she is alone in it. Psychological rights become even more important, adults become irresponsible towards children (S. Vegri, *Kdaj in zakaj* [*When and Why*]; B. Gregorič, *Strelovod za jezo* [*Lightning Conductor for Anger*]), the transition from a unicultural village to a multicultural city has become a reality presented in an artistical (S. Makarovič), a linear (J. Vidmar), trivial (I. Sivec) and an advanced (A. Kermauner) manner by writers for children.

⁹ Recognition and respect for the rights of persons with disabilities to measures to ensure their independence, social and professional integration and participation in community life.

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