

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN POST-SOCIALIST SLOVENIA

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### Abstract:

The present article discusses the image of child and childhood in post-socialist Slovenia in 1990's and beyond. Slovenia was part of former Yugoslavia (1918-1941 and 1945-1990), and from 2004 member of European Union.

This short but accurate analysis of Slovenian Children's Literature follows the theories stated in *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (2000), in which Maria Nikolajeva defined, systemized, and categorized literary texts by the characteristics through which the maturation process of becoming adult is accomplished. The movement is from an initial condition of primary harmony (Arcadia, Paradise, and Utopia) through different stages toward a successful carnivalesque phase, poetically named You are Dead. Press Escape and Play Again or a failed rite of passage as an important stage in life named collapse with poetic title Mission complete – Mission Failed. A historical classification of Nikolajeva's theory not concerned with or not taking into account history or historical development of children's literature, because she examining a phenomenon that changes over time.

Application of theory on Slovenian children's literature, have the similar results as in her study. At the same time, we could find the idealized, carnivalesque and collapse genre not just in children's novel but also in poetry and illustrations in children's literature too. We could also find the elements of those genres also in Slovenian folk tradition e.g. folk songs and tales, literary tales.

## Introduction

The word communism is a term of ancient origin, meant a society in which material goods was owned by the communists as citizens shared in the common wealth. Communist rule was confined to the Soviet Union until after WW II, at that time the Soviet Red Army liberated the countries of south-eastern Europe from Nazi Germany's control. The educational function of physical labour after WW II was stressed also in children's literature. The theory of concord portrays ideal characters in children's literature too. In the form of short stories and poems, many children writers also contributed to the 'hero's cult' of the countries. The popular genre was the novel in which the conflict was between the class collective and an individualistically minded pupil. Poesy was serving topical purposes as see from the political verses. In 1990s when the South-Eastern European countries moved to a market economy, they encountered economic problems. After years of Communist governments and collapse, many South-Eastern European countries were unable to compete in a free-market economy. Unemployment and inflation rose and the South-Eastern European countries did not have social security systems to deal with these problems.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1990s was made progress from passive dependence from socialist through social realist tradition. A class of professional authors for children arouse as distinct and degree of awareness of children and their identity. Degree of dependence from authoritarian controls especially of eastern communism ideology decreased but rise from western economy market philosophy. At the same time, the children's books started to become highly inventive but not recognized from western countries. Commercial reason started too dominated of series of book, teenage romance, and animal books. The books designed for young adults as socially relevant have appeared, treating subject new realistic tradition like urban crisis, discrimination the environment and women's liberation and unpleasant aspects of maturity. Books in 1990s concerned with traumatic experience – divorce, alcoholism, war, disease, death, sexy, violence, refugees, and drugs. At the same time, the south-eastern European authors invented new forms of genres and exploited a variety of traditional ones (folk and fairy tales). Children's literature in South-Eastern European countries are depends on translations and international meetings. They have quantity of primary (annual production of qualitative children's book) and secondary literature (scholarship, criticism, reviewing), institutional development as libraries, publishing houses, associations as IBBY. General imitation of western children's book took hold although they are handicapped by language problems. However, western society should

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<sup>1</sup> BLAŽIĆ, Milena. Children's literature in South-East Europe. *CLCWeb (Edmont.)*. Online ed., Mar. 2011, vol. 13, issue 1. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/10>.

positively response to children's literature in south-eastern European countries and tries to overcome West-East stereotype and aesthetic curtain.<sup>2</sup>

### **The image of child and childhood in Slovenian children's literature in 1990s and beyond - From children as diminutives adults to childish adults**

In *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (2000), Maria Nikolajeva defined, systemized, and categorized literary texts by the characteristics through which the maturation process of becoming adult is accomplished. The movement is from an initial condition of primary harmony (Arcadia, Paradise, and Utopia) through different stages toward a successful carnivalesque phase, poetically named You are Dead. Press Escape and Play Again or a failed rite of passage as an important stage in life named collapse with poetic title Mission complete – Mission Failed. A historical classification of Nikolajeva's theory not concerned with or not taking into account history or historical development of children's literature, because she examining a phenomenon that changes over time. Application of theory on Slovenian children's literature, have the similar results as in her study. At the same time, we could find the idealised, carnivalesque and collapse genre not just in children's novel but also in poetry and illustrations in children's literature too. We could also find the elements of those genres also in Slovenian folk tradition e.g. folk songs and tales, literary tales.

Nikolajeva's theory is based on the concept that a great deal of children's literature functions as therapy for the adult author. Children's books can display three conceptions of time--utopia, carnival, or collapse--that are signs of the maturation process. In the utopian works, time is mythic or cyclic; Nikolajeva uses the term "Arcadian" to describe these works, which include classics as *Wind in the Willows*, *Little Women*, and *The Secret Garden*. Other features of these Arcadian works are harmony, emphasis on home, innocence, collective protagonists, and an absence of sexuality, death, or repressive authority. These idyllic works about peaceful and beautiful world without problems often contain an omniscient, didactic, or authoritative narrator, and suggest that these works are adult longings for the lost paradise of childhood. This genre is based on an adult's point of view about children and childhood. These genres use the model of operation of ideology and strategies these works use strategies as universalisation and eternalization, euphemisation, expurgation of the other (see Thompson, 1990:59-67).

In the works that Nikolajeva describes as carnival (from Bakhtin), the idyllic order is overturned but restored after a series of exciting adventures. These works present a break up from mythic time into linear adult time, but the protagonist returns to the idyllic security of home by the end. Nikolajeva use Jungian terms that conscious is approached but not integrated with the unconscious to achieve a wholeness of self. Among the works presented as examples of carnivalesque time are *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Elidor*,

<sup>2</sup> BLAŽIĆ, Milena. Children's literature in South-East Europe. *CLCWeb (Edmont.)*. Online ed., Mar. 2011, vol. 13, issue 1. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/10>.

and *The Snow Queen* in this traditional basic home-away-home structure. These types of stories are plot-orientated that use the model of operation of ideology and strategies as narrativisation, rationalisation and standardization (see Thompson). This genre mixes adults and child point of view to childhood. This book predominantly describes the authors generation more than generation of today's children with dominant themes and motifs as old traditional families, cold war, nuclear threat, working class, unisex, social themes, unemployment, industrialisation, pollution, cities.

In the "collapse" works, there is no turning back to mythic time or state of everlasting happiness. The characters live in a linear time, multiple perspectives are involved, and subplots are connected. There is a sense of chaos in comparison with the harmonious idyllic works, but also an option of change and move forward. *The brothers Lion heart*, *The Little Mermaid* fits this model, but most examples here are in contemporary adolescent fiction, such as *Catcher in the Rye* and *Johnny, My Friend*. From linearity follows an awareness of death. These works are distinguished from formulaic adult fiction in that some rite of passage is not completed. Transition to complete maturation as Stephens's presents, transition from infantile solipsism to maturing social awareness, still waits. These types of stories are character-orientated. This genre is not an ideology free model but it is confined to [?] the child and young adult perspective of themselves rather than an adult view. The theme and motifs of this genre are closely connected to the young person, and life is neither idealized nor romanticized. Therefore they include such topics as emotionally literacy, global village, computer gaming, tribal society, pop and club culture, nomadic friends, culture of massive parties, power dressing, green movement, animal rights movement, visual striking and visual culture. The family in these books is single or one-parent families, language is stress-related and include breakdown in old-fashioned family life.

Jung, Eliade, and Propp are theoretically influential upon the historical study of Nikolajeva. Around this theoretical background in study are the ritual role of food, anthropomorphized toys, and animals, social utopia in Soviet children's novels, female initiation, and characters existential fear of growing up (Peter Pan). Though Nikolajeva acknowledges that she considers only European and American works, her reach is quite extensive, as she includes canonical works of childhood familiar in the United States as well as Russian, Polish, and Swedish works.

The organizing principle of time allows Nikolajeva to work with a broad range of concerns. She often considers specific works with depth--highlighting how the concepts of time fits story (setting (time, space), character, motifs/theme/plot) and narrative discourse (narrator) scheme, while at times considering linguistic signs to make her point (adverb always as meaning for a long rime, for all future time too). Throughout she makes the case that the theoretical distinction between "realistic" and "non-realistic" or fantasy children's books is not useful.

Models of upbringing as reflected in the history of Slovenian children's literature from 1850-2000 indicate that three different value patterns can be identified, each characterised by its own set of expectations and the image of young people that it conveys. The most obvious distinctions between the patterns are the division into religious and non-religious value

orientations (see Hanzek). Based on analysis of literary texts we can distinguish between religious education of young people which could also be called education towards submissiveness and a wide range of non-religious education patterns which are much more supportive of a child's autonomy. Traditional religious model of upbringing with traditional values as religious faith, obedience, and good manners correlate with Nikolajeva's idyllic, utopia or arcadia genre. This idealised perspective of adult image of child and childhood making it seem more pleasant than it is. It is characteristic of states where religion, regardless of the set of beliefs practised and paying no attention of the market economic development of the state is considered an important element of culture. This set of values applies to a wide range of different religions. The mentioned states are usually traditionally religious in their value orientation which has a direct effect upon education and responsibility otherwise fundamental to a child's autonomy are the least desired qualities in this model.

Non-religious model - survival model of upbringing based on qualities such as thrift, determination, independence and hard work correlate with Nikolajeva's carnivalesque genre. This pattern is typical of states with years of state tradition and of states in transition (Eastern-European states), only now building their sovereignty (independence). Being between the two extremes, being between two utopias – social and market economy -- the states of Slovenian and Slovenian children's literature apply the same educational patterns. The ability to work hard is a quality appreciated more in the society, which are otherwise, due to the lower level of their economic development. Non-religious model of coexistence involving qualities such as imagination, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for others correlate with Nikolajeva's collapse genre. In the model the young person had to accept the responsibility for them, they had to be tolerant to self and others without romanticised notion of maturation. This coexistence model of upbringing can be found in countries of northern European states where post-modern values are held in high regard. The pattern states as desired some qualities that encourage autonomy as well as qualities, which make it possible an individual to co-operate with others (adults). Quality patterns which difference populations foster during the process of upbringing reflect either a traditional-religious orientation of upbringing or national-legal orientation, while the turn to post-modernism marks a trend toward the quality of human life and democratization and therefore gives priority to participatory values and tolerance in collapse genre and not gives priority to scarcity values as in idyllic genre.

Application of Nikolajeva's theory in case of Slovenian children's literature in 1990s and beyond firstly based on of idyllic genre, *Repairing of toys* by Bina Štampe Žmavc. The setting – time and place in this picture book are typical for idyllic genre, e.g. sunny day, sunshine, park pavilion, fairy tale pavilion, enchanted garden, toy kingdom that we could not find it on map. Writers evoke timelessness with autonomous micro-society in simple, rural, safe, summer place in nature. Pavilion has fences as boundaries to the surrounding adult world that both protecting and restricting from outside world and adults. Collective characters is typical, children are simple, trustworthy, perfectible being. The adults cannot enter the autonomous enchanted garden, because grown up (mothers, aunts, grandmothers, uncles, fathers, grandfathers ...) they are too serious too complicated not enough simple to enter into isolated setting as enchanted garden. The grown up are master troublemakers. Plot, motifs, and themes are

interwoven and divided into primary time (real world) and secondary time (enchanted pavilion, Arcadian time). The narrator is omniscient didactic and the literary tale has explicit moral similar to Little prince "If you work with love you always would have good magic by your side." The carefree childhood is away from temptation of real life and support regressing from responsibilities. Collective protagonist does not have internal life. The children are worried about just about toys because their grownups have not time to repair it. This middle class family setting support regressing from responsibilities and are reluctance to grow up. The children are free of the necessity for survival. The adults are not free of the necessity for survival and they are boring. The regression into childhood and infancy is too obvious. Because they do not repair the toys of the children, the adults are punished with ugly dreams, and because they are grow up they have lost some of children's natural abilities. The author portrayed romantic image of child and childhood as adults paradise lost. Her attitude is to conserve the children in an innocent, unchanging stare, comfortable free from memories, emotion, affection, and responsibilities. In a genre the children lives in ghetto, they have qualities such as faith, obedience, and good manners. This correlate with the image of dependence, submissive, dutiful children as nostalgic childish adult projection how the children must behave and not to cause any trouble with the main aim of socializing children in faithful citizens.

Example for carnivalesque text in the book *The Fatal Picnic* by Slovenian writer Bogdan Novak we could find in title, the two emphasized the word fatal that means something adventurous and picnic that we have the home-adventure-home structure. The setting is in real time and place. The weather is again sunny and concrete that it was beautiful Saturday in early summer. The places are little wood, meadows, clearing – idyllic setting between urban to rural adventure. Time and space in urban setting are linear but time and space in quest are mythical. They have gastronomic utopia (cornucopia) with modern items – chocolate, sandwich; with modern middle class insignias: rural house (weekend, bungalows) and romanticized urban items. Autos and bicycles. The characters are collective; the group of children with faithful dog Hani. The characters are not idealised but they individualised, they are not superheroes, they are faithful to the group order. Plot, theme, and motifs are modern: divorced father kidnap his daughter, and the group of courageous children rescued her and resolved the problem with kidnapping and divorce parents with possible together future living. Picnic in unknown in typical plot, with iterative events. The innocent children are transformed into movies heroes. The characters are without internal life but the mission is completed and the order is re-ordered. The sub-moral of this carnivalesque genre is that everything seems to the collective characters as in the movie. They gained experience but not character development. This is typical story of formula orientated story not character-orientated. At the end of the novel the original order of urban life is re-establish but after romanticized role of the omnipotent child. Readers, mostly male readers, could reach identification in omniscient third-person narration. This naive, stereotyped character experience topsy-turvy adventurous again troublemaker adult. Purpose of carnival or this type of series of book is entertainment but also a rehearsal of a future model and psychological transformation. The collective heroes become heroes after a series of trials (against adults).



The second upbringing pattern named the survival model correlate with romanticised or carnivalesque genre. That model of survival in adult world offer escapist model that during carnival support individualism, determination the quality that makes child continue trying to fulfil the mission even when this is difficult with hard work. In this model and genre child protagonist, need autonomy although in limited time.

The example for collapse genre in novel *Deadly serious about drugs* by Desa Muck is dealing with urban problems as drugs, sex, violence, and socially illness in post-modern times. The setting in this novel is linear time adulthood in urban setting. The female protagonist's ability to judge her own situation is limited. Individual protagonist has gained something but lost something else self deceiving child. Happy ending is absent and is disharmony. The main female protagonist in contemporary humanity lost felt and definite depart from innocence of childhood and enter into adulthood. After breaking away, meeting shadows (drugs, sex, violence), the female character construct bridge into linearity beyond the point of no return into innocence and naiveness. Disintegration of character in mission complete but mission is failed. The narrator is double the main story is real author and the second voice is from individual first person character that implying stronger identification that is too frightening for young readers. Identity crisis and instruction on the way to adulthood. From this point of view that the most children's literature in Slovenia preferred the idyllic genre to the children's literature that is definitely the ideological problem. Why we would like to persuade the children that they live in the better world that they are? Why we would like to conserve and protect children from the real world?

From this perspective, I examined the Slovenian curriculum for language art (and literature) from 1st till 9th grade or from 6th until 15th years. The first triad from 6th till 8th year overcomes the children's literature that idealised the image of child and childhood as utopian, Arcadian, paradise everlasting time. In the second triad of primary school or from the 9th-11th years the most children's, book romanticized the image of child and childhood. They prevailed to carnivalesque perspective with romanticized point of view to problems (divorce, illness, poverty, refugees). In the third triad from 12th-15th year, the most books are about problem-orientated topics (love, sex, pregnancy, drugs, and conflicts) but the most from romanticized point of view. Adults just on verbal level encourage young person to learn at home and at school as imagination, responsibility, tolerance and respect for other. On the non-verbal (factual) level, adults supported mostly the religious model with values as religious faith, obedience, and good manners because the childish adults need conformist citizens (see Hanzek).

Nikolajeva detailed examination is a historical; she has showed the general trends of the development of Children's Literature - that is "*From Idyll to Collapse*". The scholar uses time pattern as the base for text typology, which is new. Three major categories of texts -- prelapsarian, carnivalesque, and postlapsarian (or "utopia -- carnival -- collapse") represent the maturation process of becoming adult. At the end of the study, Nikolajeva tries to answer the question What is Children's Literature. She announce the details: "With my approach, the difference between children's and adult fiction does not concern subject, style ("readability")

and the like, but the stage of initiation described in the text" (P. 264). Important things are that time patterns and this new text typology, in general, help to "open" many classical children's books as if for the first time, and to notice new features of the world of the books. Some interpretations given by Nikolajeva are astonishing, surprising and at the same time convincing. (The analysis of "*The Little Prince*" by Saint-Exupery, and "*Pippi Longstocking*" by Astrid Lindgren). The historic typology by Nikolajeva is application. The scholar proves that not only children's literature itself is especially interesting and important field, but children's literature criticism, research, or so-called "secondary literature" can be very attractive as well. Examines the depiction of time and identifies a continuum of texts ranging from those depicting non-linear time to those that express linearity. Argues that the literature is a displacement of myth, and that it depicts not only "reality", but also a symbolic coming-of-age process.

## Conclusion

Today's young people are an anomaly: our environment conserve them into idyllic childhood or push toward a precocious maturity. Adults see that their task is to socialise children that is to make them faith and behave in ways that are generally acceptable to adults – in ways that will fit the children to take their proper place in society, as adults perceive it. This is one of the reason why the adolescent phase are delayed and the young person do not want to be boring or responsible adults, because we support adult image of child and childhood not real child and childhood. Adults are more powerful than children that reflect also in children's literature written by adults. The relationship between writer and reader is a relation of domination. Thus, though may be idyllic children or boring adult and they had to over jump being they. Idyllic or diminutive child we hypocrisies as cult of child and they had to leap into adulthood and behave as childish adults. As a result, some children's books (e.g., Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and, at one time, *Munro Leaf's Story of Ferdinand*, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Rowling's *Harry Potter*) are also read widely by adults. Implied reader relationship is also attempt to control children reader, e.g. tell the gaps, horizons of expectation and broader the horizons. Implied reader relationship is also attempt to control and socialization children reader constructed by real (nostalgic) authors can be significant because this position have guided him or her and do not support the post-modernism values trend toward the imagination, responsibility, tolerance and respect for other toward the quality of human life and support real democratization not the myth about democratizations.



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