
Over the Verge of Modernism

An Essay on Slovene Children's Poetry

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The history of children's poetry in Slovenia can in many ways be paralleled with the development and characteristics of this addressee-defined literary genre in Europe: literary history (M. Kobe, 1992) has thus proved the origin of authorial children's poetry to be closely related to the adoption of the German poetry pattern of the Enlightenment period, for example texts from the *Midheim song-book* (*Midheimisches Liederbuch*, 1779). This applies to both of the pattern's two varieties; to the first one which transforms a child in poetry into an example of virtue, or rather, presents him/her to the reader as a warning, and to the second one that perceives childhood as a time of idyll, innocence and sweetness. In the older children's poetry from the beginning of the 19th century - and later (in the first and even second half of the 20th century) - the topics dealt with are either moral and religious education or the idyllic nature of childhood. A child impersonates diligence, respect for authorities, fear of God, kindheartedness. He or she likes going to school, is compassionate to animals, devoid of bad habits, never lazy, full of love for God, homeland and parents; sometimes the child just laughs, plays and innocently enjoys a carefree life, surrounded by loving parents or sweet, idyllic motifs from nature ... Therefore, a certain discrepancy can be observed between the creator of a children's poem and its addressee; on the one hand, a child is exalted to an example of virtue in poems, while on the other hand it serves as a projection of adult nostalgia for the carefree and happy time of childhood. The tradition of the Enlightenment in these texts is more or less clearly reflected in the wish to divert children from - in terms of content - often completely different folk poesy. Folk poesy - also, or above all, children's poesy - with its direct humour, playful language and creation of a "topsy-turvy world" as a unique

fantasy play, as well as with defying authorities (for example in texts that mock grown-ups) and with the use of taboo words, is completely discordant - and perhaps even contrary - to the educational and idealizational tendencies of the Enlightenment. It is therefore no coincidence that - as in the original German Enlightenment pattern - authors of older anthologies for young (and undemanding adult) readers sometimes unequivocally declared themselves against folk poesy, accusing it of being "*indecent, impudent and dirty.*"

The basic characteristics of the older Slovene children's poetry, i.e. the tendency to educate and the idealization of childhood, as well as typical style of expression (for example, the use of direct moral messages and diminutives which - stylewise - illustrate the sweetness of childhood) are surpassed by the poetry of Fran Levstik (1831-1887); his cycle *Children's Games in Songs* (1880) links children, poetry and play in the title already - but not as idyllic playfulness, for which reality is but a "toy", and not as "childish embellishment of the world", but as a children's game in the sense of a creative basis for the poet. This is the basis that offers the reader - through the language of poetry - the experience of unusual, illogical, multi-meaning, and therefore an aesthetic and artistic verbalization of reality. The essential feature of such playful experience is the creation of surprising textual reality, i.e. the use of unusual combinations of words and images; a seemingly everyday event is exciting and unusual, traditional relations between objects and phenomena are changed, and the language play leads the poetic imagination into the sphere of the unreal, fantastic, and above all paradoxical and illogical. Characteristics of the poetry based on such play are unusual neologisms and innovative rhythmization of sentences; all this, however, is not an "extra", but something defining and creating the poetic play. These are the very stylistic approaches that give readers the feeling of "spontaneity and coincidentalness" in the creation of textual reality; a poem has the effect of a playful "pun", free of the logic of the real world, even more, sometimes it even mocks such logic. Texts of this kind are therefore no longer tendentious poetic "illustrations" leading to a certain moral or directly expressed point; (poetic) play exists solely for its own sake, is bound only to its own rules and self-sufficient. Yet other patterns can also be traced in Levstik's

poetry – the patterns related to the tradition of older children’s poetry. Thus the stalking of birds – a theme typical of the period of the Enlightenment – still appears in his poetry, along with poems in which children’s play is not expressed as a way of experiencing the world, but is merely presented as a topic. Already in the initial stage of the development of artistic children’s poetry a feature can be observed that largely defines also the other, i.e. classical and contemporary poets, including some of those featured in the present anthology. We are dealing with the discrepancy between the patterns of poetic play and the tradition of educational (although humorous) or descriptive poetry; the term descriptive refers to all the poetry that still retains an explicit distance to childhood and its experience of the world, though this distance may no longer be that of idealizing nature. This discrepancy also characterizes the poetry of another prominent classic of Slovene children’s poetry, Oton Župančič (1878-1949). Apart from some distinct elements of folk tradition (i.e. folk customs, onomatopoeias, humorous world, and a pattern of folk buffooneries and limericks), educational tendencies and the distance between a grown-up and a child can still be perceived in his poetry; the child is still a curious, vivacious being, sweet in his/her innocence, inquisitiveness and admiration of sunny and blooming nature.

However, a fact, significant in the context of further reflections on the history and message diversity of the contemporary children’s poetry, is that both F. Levstik and O. Župančič and his contemporaries included play in their poetry – play as a (typically children’s) way of experiencing the world, i.e. as a poetic attitude perceivable in much of the contemporary children’s poetry, emphasized also in the basic texts dealing with it (autopoetical and essayistic). According to both the classics, play is no longer just “a topic, subject” of poetic text, but also a way of making poetry; however, it is also true that the prevalence and emancipation of such play in the works of contemporary authors developed only gradually, together with the growth of their poetic creativity as a whole, and regarding innovativeness as a criterion of the artistic value of children’s poetry. Thus the collection of poems *Pedenjped (Shortyshort)* (1966) by Niko Grafenauer (1940) still comes close to traditional poetry in topics and style of expression; neither

the traditional characteristics of childhood (smallness, inquisitiveness, dependency, raillery, fondness for sweets) nor the clearly perceivable authority of an adult who puts an end to child's play can be overlooked. The distance between a grown-up and a child is therefore still visible; an adult seems to be a benevolent observer of the child and its playing, especially when the latter assumes the role of the former. Due to the discrepancy between Pedenjped and a grown-up person, a unique topical element of this collection, i.e. "child's defeat" in play, becomes understandable; the child is not yet an equal collocutor to an adult, its play being broken off by an accident (Gardener) or by authority (daddy). On the other hand, a grown-up doesn't assume a child's view of the world either, although he/she (seemingly) comes close to it by nicknaming himself "*pedenjočka/shortydaddy*".

The collection *What Is at the End of the World* (1973) is already closer to an innovative poetic diction; it is no longer focused on the image of a child because here children's traits ("the roles game", talkativeness, dependency) are projected onto animal characters. These humorous motifs from the animal world (Camel), related to older literary texts (for example K. Čukovski and his poem *Camel*) act as a playful "illustration" of human characteristics; nonsensical poetics in the collection can be traced particularly in the playing with idioms and geographical names, respectively. Innovative poetics and the overcoming of the discrepancy between child and adult are two essential attributes of the poetry book *Skyscrapers, Sit Down* (1980) and its introductory poem *Mother*; this text is no longer written from the perspective of an adult benevolently watching a child; instead, the child himself is the narrator here, and at the end of the poem his childlike descriptions of mother are linked with a pun based on an idiom (mother being a better half of the father). Other poems of this collection can also be taken as a proof of Grafenauer's shift to poetry, based on language and fantasy play. They abound with unusual neologisms and transformed idioms, while the subject matter is taken from the world of objects, historical facts and abstract notions. In the logic of self-sufficient poetic play, which sets its own rules, all this is turned into a surprising, paradoxical textual reality, only seemingly related to the original theme. These are the very features linking the poet's innovative language to

the pattern of folk nonsensical poesy, because here contemporary objects or historical figures and events are also presented as some special topsy-turvy world.

The book of poems *Secrets* (1983) is where the poet reaches the verge of adult poetry, both in the message and in language complexity. Although there are some marked word-formation innovations and puns pointing out connections with previous poems, the book signifies a unique break-up with the poetics of language play and the rules of nonsense, because the basic notions it brings into focus (self, beauty, freedom, silence, etc.) relate it to the mental horizon of Grafenauer's adult poetry. In this sense it is indicative that the book begins with the poem *Secret* and ends with *Nothing*. This topical ranging of texts between "secret" and "nothing" means that creation and experience of poetry are set against the background of self-inquiry, distress, solitude, freedom, longing and the modern subject's awareness of finitude. Of course, all this is no longer just a "pleasure of pure poetic play", but rather a transition into contemplative children's poetry confronting young readers with basic issues of human existence, like dreaminess (*Love*), transitoriness of sensations (*Delight*) and life (*Life*), the experience of the infinity of everything that exists (*The Sky*) or pain and suffering in the world (*Scream*).

A similar trend of poetic expression can also be traced in the poetry of *Dane Zajc* (1929); his first children's poetry book *The White Cat* (1968) is still traditional (humorous presentations of animals and animal-related children's characteristics, e.g. neatness in the poem *The White Cat*) despite his typical lyrical depictions of small creatures and the use of play. However, two most important examples of the contemporary Slovene modernistic poetry are no doubt the poetry book *Abecedaria* (1975) and the anthology *That Flower is for You* (1981); in both the pattern of folk nonsense is present, although pure playfulness of poetry is already surpassed. Folk children's poesy also relates to *Dane Zajc's* contemporary limericks and puns without a "point"; poetic experience is first and foremost a surprise and surpassing of the known reality. An imaginary world is co-created by unusual poetic "characters" (*The Magician*, *thieves*, *yaks*, *numismatists*, *kangaroo*, *eagles*, *death*, *shamans*), by seemingly everyday motifs as bearers of the unbelievable, by a mysterious journey into the unknown (*Paper*

Airplanes), by a consistently built topsy-turvy world (the poem about the city of Erevan), as well as by fantastic yet lyrical images of live objects (The House). Essential for an understanding of the innovativeness of children's poetry by Dane Zajc is the poem *Doors*; at first glance written as a pure play of diminutives, adjectives and parallelisms, it can nevertheless be interpreted in a wider sense too, namely as a reader's journey towards a mysterious goal: to the most beautiful and biggest flower, hidden "*behind doors and little doors*", "*in little garden within a garden*", which - in the course of playing with different word combinations and a journey through the imaginary world of the poem - eventually acquires the role of a multi-meaning symbol. From a limerick to the margin of adult poetry - it is no coincidence that the anthology of Dane Zajc's children's poetry includes reflective poems about the contemporary world, and a personally expressive poem describing childhood.

A very special combination of texts expressing different moods is typical of the lyrics of Miroslav Košuta (1936); his poems bring the intertwining of nonsense and lyricism, puns and short poetic aphorisms poetizing images from nature and fairy-tale world, as well as family life motifs. The poetry collection title *Laughing Bird* (1984) is in itself an indication that the book belongs to the category of transformations of nonsensical tradition; poetic play is a source of laughter and cheerfulness (also in the text *Laughing Bird*), as well as a witty depiction of humanized animals and their funny adventures (*Shortsighted Giraffe*), or a play of idioms and the creation of an illogical but attractive world (*Beside Yourself*). However, even in Košuta's poetry, deviations from modernistic play are apparent, his poetry motifs being markedly affected by images of the Karst, poems presenting creation as a journey into the unknown, as well as by lyrical impressions and poems dealing with human distress.

Two most prominent names of the modernistic playing with language (sound and meaning) in Slovene children's poetry are no doubt Boris A. Novak (1953) and Milan Dekleva (1946); both of them - each in his own way - have transcended modernistic play in their texts either through the return into the poetics of wonderment and presentation of the interconnectedness of everything that exists, or through intertextuality

of poetry and distinct emphasis on quotations. Language play (transformation of words) is the elementary characteristic of the first poetry book by B. A. Novak, titled *Let's Reword Words* (1981); it is reflected both in the title and in the preface, respectfully addressed by adult to children, “*the best smiths of new words*”. The contrast between grown-ups that are “*not fond of words*” and children that “*can rectify deteriorated words*” through play, is also mentioned in the foreword to Novak's second book of poems, titled *Fantasy Is at Home Everywhere* (1984). The poet identifies himself with children's playful transformation of “*old words*” and their love of words, and that's why “*every poet is a big child, and every child a small poet*”. But the book of poems is no longer just a play of words and of poetic form, which in its innovativeness comes very close to visual and concrete poetry (*Blabla*) ... Already or again it is the “defining of the world” as the thematizing of love and creating (A Poem, The Sweetest Post), as well as “open eye” for the beauty of the world (An Ad, definitions: Dawn is ..., A storm is ...) - and the poet is no longer just “a big playful child”, but also “*a gardener of silence*” (A Poet is ...). Novak's poetry is thus a formal, atmospherical and thematic upgrading of the playful words of the first collection: a poem becomes a language of secret and an expression of “*childhood of memory*” (The Metaphor Lorry), an ode to touch, look, signs and the language of creatures, wind, sea (The Languages of the World), and a ballad mirroring the distress of everyday life (A Modern Ballad).

The destruction of logic and the message of poetic text with nonsensical pattern - typical not only of children's folk poesy but also of children's language play - is also a characteristic of M. Dekleva's book of poems, titled *Poems for Hungry Dreamers* (1981). The concept of poetry as “poetic feast” is reflected both in the title of the book as well as in its tripartite structure (*Hors d'oeuvre, Main dish, Dessert*); poetry is therefore “a pleasure of the word”, a tasting of a colourful, playfully composed world, in which everyday things are glued together in such a way that topsy-turvy triviality is being changed into a paradoxical illusion which readers are free to upgrade with associations of their own. An ordinary word (e.g. sometimes) becomes a poetic character, colourful and evasive; notions too are embodied in a concrete form as motifs, images,

stories (Dreams Wear Hats with Jaunty Red Bobbles), and so are fantastic creatures like sneezers, coughers or swallows (Don't Bring Chess Sets to the Land of the Eaters). Words therefore “*don't speak any longer, they only flutter with wings on white paper*” - like in the modernistic poetry of Zajc and Novak, their paradoxical combinations are where the inconceivable and the mysterious are hidden; particularly interesting and significant in this context is the last line of the *Poems for Hungry Dreamers*: “*language devours the secret*”.

Nonsense and fantasy, but at the same time also articulation of “*timelessness*” and perception of duration of the images of everyday life; all this - along with explicit intertextual ties to Carroll's tales about Alice - is the framework of the message dimensions of the poetry book *Alice in the Computer* (2000). The selection of individual words from the English writer's texts, performed for the poet by the computer - “the trigger” of poetic play thus being a mere coincidence - is the basis of the nonsensical puzzle of words; understood as a “*plan of freedom*”, and as a record of liberating play, this puzzle, however, is far from being coincidental. The messages and style of the poems differ; for some of them it seems they are really just nonsensical “stories” (Rabbit Marmalade), abounding with unusual neologisms and stylistically marked words (e.g. vulgarisms). Different in still another way, and perhaps thematically even more complex, are texts establishing dialogue with literary tradition at the level of recognizable quotations, with the use of fixed poetic forms or parodic ties (e.g. the completely non-Idyllic picture of “love” in the poem *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, along with poems on fugacity and the evasiveness of truth and knowledge (Must, May, Can't) ... The book is a unique compound of themes for “*dispute*” and nonsense, of comic and fearful images, elevated and vulgar words, free verses and severe forms; it is a world, fragmented into a collage of ideas and truths, a world which not even a rich, merry and playful imagination can render stable. This, of course, is no longer just a linguistically-conceptual modernistic invention; such poetry is related to the post-modernistic dialogue of literature with literature, to the new play of looks and versions of the same, and to complex messages - on the verge of children's poetry.

As for the most contemporary authors, three are included in the present anthology, each with his or her own recognizable

poetic style, that has never been (completely or mostly) affected by modernistic play. Bina Štampe-Žmavc (1951) used the word “*everyday life*” as the center of her first poetry book *Čaroznanke* (1990); it is not “the playing with language and world” that is essential for creation, but rather the search for and discovering of poetry in everyday life - in diverse images, different moods, characteristics and adventures of a contemporary child, in his attitude towards school, adults, animals, himself, as well as towards dream, fantasy and lyrical world. Lyrical experience and eyes open for the beauty and mysteriousness of creation are two specific features characterizing the poetry book with an indicative title *Heavenly Carriages* (1994). This poetry is no longer focused on children’s world and play; on the contrary, man has resigned his place in the poem to the mysteriousness of the universe, so it is no coincidence that - apart from “*solar carriages*” - the poetic dictionary contains several multi-meaning concepts like invisibility, mysteriousness, countlessness, vastness. And “*deep vision*”.

However, man’s tie with nature in the lyrics of B. Štampe-Žmavc is not “just” an open eye and wonderment at the beauty of creatures and moments; humans are connected with the universe by strange parallels weaving the incomprehensible interrelatedness of the world into a whole. The latter is particularly apparent in the symbolism of the sun; everything on the Earth originates from this star - grass, water lilies, butterflies, whales, people and “*parades of shadows*”. Everything there is and was is linked up into one, into “*an infinite contact*”, into a whole; part of this whole is “*you and me*”, as past and present are part of the “*heavenly-terrestrial contact*”. Living and passing away - the thematizing of transitoriness and duration, “*of steps of time*” is a novelty against the background of the modernistic tradition of older collections, comparable to the transcendence of modernism in the poetry of N. Grafenauer and B. A. Novak. An image from nature is therefore a carrier of the symbolic message of poetry as vision: the rainbow is a link between the bright and the dark side of the world, between laughter and tears (The Rainbow). The world “*between sleep and wakefulness*” is exciting, concealing “*the labyrinth of spirit*” (Awakenings); however, the way to this labyrinth is paved neither with play nor with factual depiction of childhood but with “*prints of fairies’ feet*” and “*unfathomable reflections*”. The truth is there-

fore revealed on the verge of dreams, through premonitions and intuition, and this is not unrelated to the symbolist poetic tradition in (children's) poetry. All things that exist live in temporality: trees are waking (How Trees Awake), arousing the observer, the world starts shining in "*unimaginable length and width*", until the vision fades out "*in steppes of time*" (How Big Is the World), and thoughts "*fly away into weightlessness*" (Why Is the Sky). The author's third poetry book *Klepetosnedke* (1996) is marked by her return to the observation of world and child; poetic creativity stems from "small everyday life stories" - from the "*afternoon tea*", from closeness, friendship and watching snowflakes, cats and flowers.

Close to this, in many ways original sensitivity to the world of children, is also Peter Svetina's (1970) book of poems *Mimosvet (By-world)* (2001). Here, the world is no longer an unfathomable vastness of notions and images, dispersed in time, the Earth being "*small*", childlike and playful (*Bump*); everything on our planet is interesting, and some things are also funny - be it a floppy disk, comb, flower bed with white butterflies (*Kitchen Garden*), house number, cell phone or rainbow, climbing from leaves to sky (*Rainbow*). Also interesting and cheerful are meetings between people - especially if the difference in height between her and him is too big (*Floor*), if soup is a big trouble that needs to be overcome, so that "*the king and the queen*" will be pleased (*Soup-sailor*), or if a brother is someone whose behaviour is not completely understood by the child (*Scientist*). Is this poetry characterized by the poetics of "message minimum"? Perhaps: the poems don't deal with big themes anymore, preferring instead small flashes from the simple, though by no means naive or idealized children's world.

Humour and originality of poetic expression, perceivable either in unusual children's characteristics and moods, or in the use of taboo words, are two components of the unique poetic world of Andrej Rozman Roza (1955). His first children's poetry book *Rhymes for Pre-gentlemen* (1993) is - at least as far as the title is concerned - related to the tradition of nonsense, although it is already surpassing it with the inclusion of surprising and provocative "non-poetic" images which undermine the reader's conception of beauty as the essential feature of children's poetry. Pronounced is the use of non-literary words and forms, and so are humourous depictions of appalling im-

ages of fear (*Fear*) and monsters, of “loathsomeness” and stench, making fun of cleanliness, picturing voracity as a basically likable trait, as well as praise of laziness (*Song of the Lazies*). All these features are as such in dialogic relation with older patterns of educational children’s poetry (as emphasized in the concluding “topsy-turvy moral”, e.g. “respect idlers”), and - of course - also with the presumption that poetry is an aesthetic play (“*dirty words*”, snot and spit in the last poems of the collection).

The same humorous frightfulness and intertextual attitude can also be traced in a small collection *Maggoty Poems* (1998); here the topics of the poetry are everyday, trivial events like morning preparation of cocoa (*Milk*). It seems that these very trivial, non-poetic and banal themes create a unique field of poetic freedom, which is no longer verbalized as a humorous play based on its own rules, but as a rebellious, teasing play, promoting - through “words of indecency” - revolt against adaptation to any patterns, rules and good taste (*Last Year’s Disgust Prizewinner*). Based on this attitude, the lullaby as a genre turns into its frightful contrast (*Scaraby*), the final line of which has the effect of mocking the attentive, compassionate and supportive attitude of an adult towards a child. Caricaturing of fixed roles is also a significant characteristic of the book *The Small Roman Circus* (2001), e.g. in the nonsensical transfer of master’s role from man to dog (*The Dog and His Master*). The “subversive poetic play”, aimed against aesthetic rules and decent behaviour, is of course related to another pattern of folk children’s poetry - the tradition of ridicules or mocking songs; like Rozman’s contemporary poems, these too are aimed against the authority of the adult world - as they include taboo words - and make fun of older and proper names. The topsy-turvy world of this poetry is no longer the world of fun and self-sufficient play; it is conceived in such a way that it acts like a “slap” in the face of decency and worn-out roles that an adult embarking upon the path of reviving childlike playfulness in himself, attributes either to a child or to himself.

Surely there cannot be any doubt that quality children’s poetry is indeed marked by folk textual patterns. In contemporary poetry, relaxed or destructive play - liberating in both cases as the joy of inventing and surpassing of the factual and

verifiable, but also as a unique rebellion against rules – is of course upgraded, both in terms of expression as in the message. A unique digression from folk playfulness, mockery and modernistic language innovativeness is therefore particularly obvious in the poems, in which sensitivity for children's view of the world is substantiated in wonderment at moments and the joy of life (also as a kaleidoscope of brighter and darker stories of everyday life), in the verbalization of the unity of creation, and in focusing on the basic existential issues – i.e. above all in children's lyrics and reflective poetry on the verge of adult poetry.

Translated by Marjeta Gostinčar-Cerar

Contemporary Slovene Children's Fiction

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The study of contemporary children's and young adult fiction reveals significant development of certain literary genres (modern fairy-tale, fantasy story, long tale and young adult novel), contemporaneity of topics and motifs, exhaustive outlines of literary characters, and, with most authors, an exquisite feeling for language. The present anthology brings a selection of authors and works, written over the last three decades. It includes fourteen prose writers. The works of these authors (and passages from their books, respectively) were selected according to the criteria of quality, attractiveness of literary genre, and topicality of themes and motifs. The passages taken from the authors' works are the ones adequately presenting characteristics of the respective literary work as a whole. The purpose of the anthology is to highlight - with typical passages - the part of children's literature aiming at readers aged between ten and fifteen.

Among the selected prose works two literary genres with fantastic elements are particularly outstanding: modern fairy-tale and fantastic story. Although originating from folk literature, the fairy-tale is gradually drifting away from its original genre, especially as far as themes and motifs are concerned. Even the choice of literary characters depends on young readers' ability to identify with them. The fairy-tale combines layers of fantastic and real textual worlds into a uniform whole, with literary heroes whose characters and traits are individualized, although even the modern fairy-tale is not completely devoid of stereotypes (e.g. sex and age related ones - mother cooking lunch, father reading newspapers, grandmother - a pensioner - knitting socks, etc.). Like everywhere else, in Slovenia too, the modern fairy-tale originates from the national mythic archetype, expressing at its deepest level authors' appreciation of the most significant issues concerning human-

ity. Playfulness, humour and even the lightness of fairy-tale plots are conveyed to young readers without redundant pedagogization of literary texts, and without judgements on the appropriateness of literary characters' behaviour.

The fairy-tales of Svetlana Makarovič (1939) – mostly contemporary animal fairy-tales (e.g. picture books *Bakery Mish-mash*, 1974, *Skipmouse*, 1976, *Squirrel of a Special Kind*, 1994, collections *Animal Stories*, 1973, and *Cat's Yarn*, 1992) and fairy-tales with a primarily mythological main literary hero (e.g. *Kuzma the Gremlin Wins a Prize*, 1974, *Zofka the Witch*, 1989) – point out, in their essence, the intolerance towards diversity. Perhaps it can be claimed that S. Makarovič's fairy-tales touch the good side of man at their deeper levels. Due to the complexity of their meaning they are also interesting for teenagers and grown-ups even after these have surpassed the fairy-tale phase of their reading histories. Long before the fairy-tale about the witch Zofka, in which kossies Glili and Glal appear as side characters, the author wrote the fantastic story *Kosovirja na leteci žlici/Cosies on a Flying Spoon*, 1974, followed later on by its sequel *Kam pa kam, kosovirja?/Where to, Cosies?*

The same holds true for the fairy-tales written by Polonca Kovač (1937). Her collection of contemporary animal fairy stories *Small Beasts from the Eternal Street* (1975) deals with the relativity and originality of the individual's comprehension of events, expressing in fairy-tale form philosophical doubt about one single truth and reality (The Beaver's Tale). Her animal characters' self-perception differs from the attitude of their surroundings, and some of them even have strongly negative or disturbing habits (e.g. extreme talkativeness, complacency, unkindness); in the denouement these are resolved to the satisfaction of all animals of the Ljubljana Zoo. In contemporary Slovene children's literature Polonca Kovač is also famous for her other children's books, especially longer tales (*Never Too Many Andrews*, 1977, *Ursulas are Absolutely Flawless*, 1980, *Špelce*, 1983) and fantasy tales (*Jack and Uncle Fridge*, 1976).

Among all the original fairy stories, published in recent years in Slovenia, the one containing most folklore elements is the collection *Mislice/Thinky-Tales* (2000) by Feri Lainšček (1959). Although his fairy stories seem like proper *folk* stories at first glance, they differ from the latter greatly in fact, the author having borrowed some fairy motifs only to freely transform them. Lainšček's fairy-tales relate the stories of grown-

up humans with personal names and individually portrayed characters, while plots and denouements are often affected by their moods and feelings. Chief literary figures and carriers of plots are often women (who as a rule have no active part in folk and classical literary fairy-tales). Literary space in all the fairy-tales is either concretely (e.g. Blatograd /Mudtown, Bele vode /White Waters), or at least indirectly denominated (along the Mura, along the Raba). Lainšček succeeded in depicting in these fairy stories the magic character of the Prekmurje lowlands between the Mura and the Raba, the hard life of the Prekmurje people and their choosing between good and bad options in life.

Bina Štampe-Žmavc also deserves to be mentioned among the selected authors. Her fairy stories reach into the sphere of time and the fugacity of human life (fairy-tale collection *The Quenched Dragon*, 2003), and she also advocates acceptance of diversity (*Goblin with Big Ears*, 2002) and deals with problems of the contemporary world (*Softpaw the Cat*, 1998). The author who invented a sweet character of a little walrus in his fairy stories is Peter Svetina (*The Little Walrus That Wouldn't Cut his Nails*, 1999, *Little Walrus Gets Spectacles*, 2003). (The anthology includes both authors, Bina Štampe-Žmavc and Peter Svetina, with passages from their children's poetry books). Also highly popular are the fairy stories of Kajetan Kovič, two having become classics of children's reading already - *Tomcat Tom*, 1975, and *Zmaj Direndaj* (1981). Both are animal fairy stories describing the world of cats and dragons that in fact symbolize humans.

The essence of the FANTASY TALE - another frequent irrational genre of Slovene children's literature - is a conspicuous transition from real into fantasy world and vice versa. This genre often depicts literary characters that find themselves in unusual (strange) surroundings where rules are different than in our everyday life. The first literary work in Slovenia representing this genre is *A Journey into a Thousand Cities* (1957), written by Vitomil Zupan (1914-1987). The boy named Tek (Run), the main literary character aged six, becomes aware of the significance of friendship, trust, maternal love and the sun, which becomes a symbol of freedom. Homesickness is the prevailing emotional state and the reason for Run's longing to return home (back into the real world).

Maja Novak (1960) created a special type of this genre with her book of three short fantasy tales titled *Small Creatures from Big Cities* (1999). The stories are distinguished by persuasive characterization of heroes, witty style, distinctly poetic language, and especially by the paradox which helps characters overcome their dissatisfaction with their looks and enter the world with self-confidence (The Miraculous Growing Up of Little Cosimo).

The anthology presents many realistic texts, these being the part of children's literature having greatest appeal for young readers (over twelve years). Realistic (veracious) prose texts are widely represented in the anthology as they stand for the part of children's literature that best suits the reading stage of young readers aged over twelve. These literary works are mostly ranked among young adult novels, although - genre-wise - they are quite varied. Of course we cannot talk about complete homogeneity of individual genres, as longer prose texts for children are often compounds of genres, thus offering a range of attractive topics for the greatest number of young readers. NARRATIVES (novels, tales) as medium-long prose texts have a long tradition in Slovene literature for teenagers.

A typical representative of the mixed genres type among contemporary authors is Dim Zupan (1946) with his five-volume series dealing with two friends, whose opinion about adults is all but good; disappointed with friends and teachers they respect only a wise old man named Friend. The structure of all five parts is distinctly tripartite, as indicated by the titles of the respective volumes: *Three Days in the life of Poopsy and Woopsy* (1991), *Three Nights of Poopsy and Woopsy* (1993), *Three Secrets of Poopsy and Woopsy* (1994), *Three Stars of Poopsy and Woopsy* (1995), *Three Findings of Poopsy and Woopsy* (1998). Their adventures are everyday life situations that keep turning into comical scenes. Dim Zupan's speciality are also humorous sketches (*Revenge of a Terrible Soup*, 1997, *Maja Knows*, 2002) and children's novels (*The Country of Cut-off Heads*, 2001).

Slavko Pregl (1945) is one of those Slovene prose writers whose popularity amongst young readers has been growing ever since his first published work (The Expedition of The Green Dragon, 1976). His choice of topics - everyday problems in boys' and girls' relationships, happy childhood, wild adventures and comical situations - is no doubt the most at-

tractive feature of his children's literature. Most of his works can be classified as realistic adventurous comical tales or humorous sketches. Pregl's books – each of them a rounded whole – are focused on the everyday life of a group of children; these get a little older in every part, and their wishes, needs and problems vary accordingly. *Geniuses in Shorts*, (1978) grow up into *Geniuses in Trousers* (1985), but their vagrancies, playing and buffooneries continue in the writer's short prose works like *Handbook for Vagrancy* (1977), *Fighting Records of a City Lad* (1982), and *A Hooded Star* (2003). The young adult novel *Silver from the Blue Cave* (2003) is a modern Robinson-style adventure tale, dealing with a treasure search. The basic premises of Pregl's poetics are witty style, comical situations and occasionally a touch of irony.

Another very popular Slovene children's literature author is Primož Suhodolčan (1959) whose sports trilogy *Basketball it is* (1994), *Bicycle it is* (1997) and *Lanky Strikes Back* (2000) presents the literary character of a slightly clumsy high school boy who turns into a real basketball ace. Although highly successful in sports, he suffers from school and love problems which can be quite troublesome for a teenager. Young readers were greatly amused by Suhodolčan's trilogy, but his short prose and fairy stories are even funnier (*Animal News I. and II.*, 1998, 2001; *Put a Fish on Your Head and Off to Bed*, 2003; *You Voracious Dustbin*, 2003).

Bogdan Novak (1944) is the author of the collection *True Friends*, which brings ten adventure books with detective inserts (*Secret from the Sea*, 1992; *The Castle Ghost*, 1992; *Beware of the Dog!*, 1993; *White Trap*, 1990; *The Wicked Castle-lady*, 1993; *The Fateful Picnic*, 1993; *The Forest Recluse*, 1993; *Super Gig*, 1993; *Brigands' Den*, 1993; *Bučko the Cat Champion*, 1993). The selected novel describes a group of scouts trying to save themselves from a deadly danger. The synthetic structure of Novak's novels and his verist solving of troublesome situations, caused by children's excessive curiosity, stir young readers' adventurous interests. Dynamic detective research in the books is variegated by elements from Slovene folk tales (e.g. the Black lake under Triglav, treasure hidden in the castle of Beltinci in Prekmurje, the treasure owned by a wicked castle-lady in Carinthia). Bogdan Novak writes adventurous stories and fantasy tales, but his opus also includes a very interesting love novel for young adults *Nina's Two Poets* (1995).

Popular adventure stories and tales dealing with sports, history, scouthood and detective search, were also written by other authors of Slovene children's literature like Ivan Sivec (*Forgotten Treasure*, 1987; *Wheels on Fire*, 1997; *The Last Mega Party*, 2001) and Vitan Mal (*Happiness on a Leash*, 1977; *Summer at the Seaside*, 1986; *Castle Orphans*, 1998). Some of these stories were even turned into the biggest movie hits in Slovenia.

From the viewpoint of children's literature, the TEENAGE NOVEL could be treated as a specific literary genre aiming at readers in the period of abstract intelligence, i.e. after the age of twelve. Teenage literature, namely, focuses on different topics than children's literature (e.g. puberty, adolescence, social rules, love) and introduces different literary characters. The teenage novel is no longer about easy childhood, playing, friendship and happy ending.

Although the humorous motivation of some novels is quite pronounced, their backgrounds hide slightly bitter experiences and findings of the mostly teenage characters. The situations in which they find themselves confronted with queer rules, habits and standards of adults, can turn into wild grotesques. Typical examples of this trend are two novels by Svetlana Makarovič - *Aunt Magda* (1978) and *Holidays with Aunt Magda* (2001). They are related by a first-person narrator, a teenage girl observing from the standpoint of her experiences her closest and more distant surroundings, especially grown-ups and their often incomprehensible and illogical deeds. Despite all her love for the good aunt and teasing games with crazy neighbours, she is beginning to suspect that adults are just big boasters, and is relating it with lots of cheerful situations and verbal irony.

As already mentioned, adventure prose represents a major part of Slovene children's literature (sports, scouthood, detective and marine stories or travelogues). A special trend within the sea and seaside stories are Robinson-style adventure novels, the most famous among them being the masterfully written novel *The Naked Sea* (1988) by Mate Dolenc (1945). Three levels of events are intertwined in this novel: a social description of three families that have been spending holidays together for many years, first love which wakes feelings and passions so far unknown in the main character Martel, and cruel struggle for survival on the open sea. Dolenc consis-

tently focuses his writing on topics that are strongly related to the sea; in the ecological fantasy tale *Poisonous Brigita* (1989) he thus points out the dangers of pollution, brought about by the Italian ship Brigita Montanari, and in the short prose collection *Flying Ship* (2002) he intertwines myths, stories and real events concerning sea and mariners. For Mate Dolenc, the sea is the means for conveying eternal truths and doubts about mankind's superiority over nature.

Another important type of young adult novel is the socio-psychological novel which tackles delicate themes like addiction (to drugs and alcohol), eating disorders, delinquency, sexual abuse ... Desa Muck (1955) launched new topics in Slovene children's literature with her series of novels *Seriously* (*Seriously about Sex* (1993), *Seriously about Behaviour* (1995), *Seriously Stoned* (1996), *Seriously about Fame* (1998), *Seriously about School* (2000)). The series is special in having a double purpose - on the one hand, the author deals openly and with expert knowledge with themes adolescent children are particularly interested in, yet never learn enough about, these being kind of taboo topics, and on the other hand she treats serious problems and often purely educational contents with lots of humour. Her stories are vivacious dialogues between didactic and art language. Humorous infringement of taboo themes has made Desa Muck one of the most widely read and popular contemporary Slovene writers. In the series *Deadly Serious* she managed to capture - from a comical perspective - all the difficulty of adolescence, e.g. running away from home (*Under the Open Sky*, 1993) and reasons for lying (*Lying Suzi*, 1997). In the story series aimed at younger children, titled *Annie*, the author tackles the topics that concern children in the early schooling period (death, friendship, present giving). Another highly popular book of Desa Muck is her fantasy novel *Kremplin* (1996).

While the books of Desa Muck are mostly limited to family themes, Janja Vidmar (1962) discusses wider social issues in most of her works. Her novel *Bad Lad* (2001) points out the issue of violence in the family, which has only recently been given adequate attention from the part of the state, despite the very pressing problem of helping victims of violence. The main character of the novel has to rely solely on his own strength. What happens to the child that is forced to confront

the violence of a gang, is the theme of Janja Vidmar's book *Smashing Girls* (2003), while anorexia and bulimia - the two typical diseases of the modern times - are dealt with in the novel *Miss Chubby* (1999). All the novels convey fear of loneliness and danger of losing one's identity. The author also actualizes the problem of refugees in her novel *Faulty Princess* (1998); here the main literary character, teenage girl Fatima, impersonates the inability of refugees to adapt to the customs of the state in which they found shelter from atrocities of the war, as well as rejection (or at least ignoring) of refugees in the new/ foreign surroundings. Presently, the author is writing a series of tales titled *Matic*, dealing with delicate themes like punishment and disease, and intended for children in the early school period. Her novel *The Bloody Legend* (2003) is a successful example of another - unusual for children's literature - highly popular genre of horror novel.

Marjana Moškrič (1958) also focuses on the topic of social problems in her two novels. Presented exclusively at the level of intimate experience of the main character, the two books are even more touching. *Čadavec* (1998) is an epistolary novel narrated by a teenage girl Marjetica. Letters are addressed to her mother who had left her daughter and her husband. The letters reveal the girl's distress, first love and the news about her mother's death (Aids). The second novel, *Magnolias of Ice* (2002) is a deeply moving story of the abused girl Lucija, who was raped by her stepfather. The story is based on monologue, indicating even with the title the symbolism of violently broken-off childhood, and the girl's shutting off from the world as she loses trust in people after having been raped.

Lenart Zajc describes urban settings and the life of modern urban teenagers in his novels (*5 to 12*, 1998). These grow up into more or less responsible individuals (*Good-for-nothing*, 2001). *5 to 12* belongs to the genre of the young adult jeans novel, or novel "in jeans". It describes a boy who cannot make shift in the modern world, neither recognizing nor accepting the role the society is trying to impose on him. He is bored with school and in constant conflict with grown-ups, his chief life goals revolving around fun, experimenting with drugs and alcohol, having sex and irresponsibility as a lifestyle. This genre is also familiar to Dim Zupan, Matjaž Pikalo and Goran Gluvić.

The anthology of the newer Slovene literature presents two generations of authors; the first began publishing their works in the seventies, the second at the end of the 1990s. All the presented authors are still productive in the field of contemporary children's prose (the only exception being Vitomil Zupan, the late beginner of the fantasy tale in Slovenia), developing different motifs, composition elements and styles, as well as launching topics that might be interesting for contemporary teenagers. The young adult novel is certainly the genre providing for the most in-depth treatment of topics, while tales offer diversity, fantasy narratives attractiveness, and fairy-tales magic, all of them opening up ethical issues. All the discussed authors represent the quality peak of Slovene children's prose.

Translated by Marjeta Gostinčar-Cerar