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From Literature “about Children” to Literature “for Children” The Story of Children’s Literature in Slovakia after WWI¹

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The development of children’s literature in Slovakia was significantly influenced by the historical milestone of the end of the First World War (WWI). The new cultural conditions that occurred in Slovakia after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the foundation of Czechoslovakia created a suitable environment for the development of cultural institutions such as the Slovak Association, libraries, publishing houses and children’s magazines such as *Slniečko* [Little Sun]. After 1918, the literary production for children and young adults (YAs) began to take two distinct directions – one more traditional (didactic-moralising) and the other more artistic. The then artistic current in Slovak children’s literature promoted literary production for children and integrated it in the domain of art. The literary works of these authors can be further differentiated by identifying optimistic, realist and synthesising concepts of childhood. The post-war years in Slovakia can therefore be described as the beginning of the artistic integration of children’s literature into the system of national literature, which was accomplished in the 1960s.

Keywords: WWI, Czechoslovakia, Slovak Association, optimistic concept, realist concept, synthesising concept, traditional approach, artistic approach

One of the most important milestones in the history of the Slovak nation and undoubtedly in the development of the Slovak culture is 1918. It is related to the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the emergence of the new democratic state of Czechoslovakia, the common state of Czechs and Slovaks.² Until 1918, the

¹ The paper is the partial outcome of the research project *APVV-15-0071 Man with a Handicap in the Literature for Children and YAs* (2016–2020).

² The Republic was founded on 28 October 1918 as a consequence of WWI.

development of the national life of the Slovaks in the Monarchy was greatly suppressed and limited by brutal forms of national oppression.³ The newly acquired national freedom after WWI provided space for the development of national life in all its spheres (politics, culture and the economy) and also affected the sphere of national literature – its cultural and social functions. According to Stanislav Šmatlák (2007: 265), we are currently lacking sufficient historical imagination to understand in its full depth the radical transformation that took place in the Slovak nation after the foundation of the new state of Czechs and Slovaks. After 1918, the choice for the Slovak whether to become a tradesman, engineer, teacher or doctor would no longer be conditioned by the necessity to formally become a Hungarian. The inhabitants of Slovakia became increasingly prominent citizens of the new Republic. However, the radical transition from Monarchy to Democratic Republic was not easy or trouble free for the Slovak nation. The most serious controversy concerned the internal organisational structures of both nations within the new state. On the one hand, there was a unitary or centralised concept (essentially Czech), and, on the other, the federalist or autonomist concept (essentially Slovak). The problem was also the official idea of the “Czechoslovak nation” and the “Czechoslovak language” existing in two standard varieties – Czech and Slovak (as declared by the Constitution of 1920). This ideological construct stood in opposition to the dynamically proliferated awareness of the Slovak national (and linguistic) identity (Šmatlák 2007: 268).

After 1918, both society and cultural institutions experienced a dramatic development following the period in which their progress had been successfully obstructed by hostile Hungarian governments. In 1919, the Slovak Association (based in what was then Turčiansky Sv. Martin) resumed its activity; a new system of Slovak education was established – from elementary schools, burgher (lower secondary) schools to secondary schools, and, in the same year, the University of J.A. Comenius was founded in Bratislava. Literary life in Slovakia presented a platform for original literary production, and the range of cultural and literary magazines was expanding. However, publishing activities had to conform to the new principles of the market economy, and therefore the most successful publishing activities were those that were sponsored by a strong cultural institution (such as the Slovak Association, the Catholic Association of St. Adalbert, and the Transcius Lutheran Association).

According to Ondrej Sliacky (2013: 86), Stanislav Šmatlák (2007: 427) and Ján Kopál et al. (1987: 56), the post-1918 period became immensely significant for the history of Slovak literature because it was the beginning of the intentional integration of children’s literature into the macrostructure of national literature. This is evidenced by the fact that, immediately after the establishment of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks, the most important task was to provide a minimum number of valuable books of fiction for children and YAs. In this post-WWI situation, it was important to create an essential book stock to compensate for the acute shortage of books for children and

³ For example, the Apponyi education laws of 1907 aimed at intensifying the Magyarisation of elementary education in Hungary.

YAs. The absence of Slovak children's books after the establishment of the Republic also attracted attention in the Czech lands. This was where, just a year after the end of WWI, a list of twenty of the best books was selected to be translated into Slovak to serve as a basic stock for Slovak school libraries.⁴ The development of cultural life in Slovakia after WWI could not be achieved without significant help from the Czech side, since there were no professionally trained experts at that time in Slovakia. Sliacky (2013: 89) states that the individual help by Czech teachers who came to Slovakia to assist in building a school system after WWI proved to be of great benefit for Slovak children's literature. Some of these teachers also demonstrated their interest in literature for children and YAs in the capacity as writers. The presence of Czech teachers had more than just a quantitative effect on Slovak literature. Czech children's literature was more elaborate in character than its Slovak counterpart; therefore, a more progressive understanding of literary production for children by Czech teachers naturally stimulated interest in literature for children in Slovakia, too.

The authors who intentionally devoted themselves to literary work for children before WWI resumed their activity again. Literature for children and YAs faced a new question concerning its "literariness" and artistic cogency (in the sense of nonlinearity, non-straightforwardness and ambiguity of expression). At the same time, the opinion started to prevail that production for children and YAs cannot be limited to mere literature with "specific functions" (didactic, moral, educational, etc.) but must become a literature with a dominant aesthetic function (Šmatlák 2007: 427). It is only the aesthetic function that can charge literary production for the child reader with the characteristics of artistic utterance.

The beginning of the process of incorporating children's literature into the body of the national literary culture after WWI was, according to Kopál et al. (1987: 54) and Šmatlák (2007: 427), very difficult and complex from many different aspects: poetological, ideological, cultural, social, publishing, etc. The evidence of integration lay in the fact that, in the period after WWI, the field of literature for children and YAs began to shift from the exclusive domain of educators and school education to the domain of the principal national cultural institution – the Slovak Association.⁵ With children's literature in its focus, the Slovak Association created for the first time an institutional platform for the development of literature: it proposed the creation of a department responsible for publishing school literature. Even before the establishment of this department, the Slovak Association founded the *Čítanie študujúcej mládeže* [Reading for Young Students] series (1921). The Slovak Association's interest in school literature and fiction for children culminated in the founding of *Odbor pre detskú literatúru* [the Department of Children's Literature] in 1926. The Slovak Association, according to Sliacky (2013: 86), made a clear statement that the period in

⁴ This positive initiative provoked disapproval among the adherents of Czechoslovakism who opposed the Slovakisation of Czech texts.

⁵ For example, the book series *Dobré slovo* [Good Word]; the literary magazine for children *Slniečko* [Little Sun].

which Slovak children’s literature was dominated by non-talented teachers was over. Some authentic artistic personalities began to assert themselves under the auspices of the Slovak Association, especially in children’s literature. An important milestone for the development of children’s literature was undoubtedly the foundation of a new children’s magazine *Slniečko* [Little Sun] in 1927. The new magazine replaced the then published *Včelka* [Little Bee] magazine. While the title of the earlier magazine was synonymous with a didactic relationship with the child, its new name – *Slniečko* [Little Sun] – evoked a more humanistic approach to children’s literature. The magazine’s aim was to raise the social and aesthetic consciousness of the child and stimulate the further development of literary production. This is why the new *Slniečko* was typical in its richly illustrated pages and typical of the diverse variety of genres represented in both original and translated literary production for children. By founding a quality children’s magazine, the Slovak Association did not exhaust its interest in artistically valuable literature. In 1930, a *Dobré slovo* [Good Word] series was founded through its initiative, which, unlike other publishing series, was not conceived with a commercial goal in mind (Kopál et al. 1987: 54–55, Šmatlák 2007: 427, Sliacky 2013: 85–87). Thanks to this series, the Slovak reader of children’s books had an opportunity to discover the most valuable pieces for children and YAs produced in the given period.

Poetry for children after WWI

Any discussion about literature for children in verse in Slovakia after 1918 requires awareness that the uniform way of versifying for children, which previously existed, became internally more structured after WWI.⁶ The poetry took two directions: the traditional direction (i.e., the didactic-moralising type, or literature “about children”) and the artistic direction (i.e., literature “for children”). The latter direction in the field of versified literature for children in Slovakia was for the first time established by Ludmila Podjavorinská (1872–1951).

Podjavorinská, as remarked by Šmatlák (2007: 428), lifted versed literature for children to the domain of high art through epic poetry. The poetry thus adopted the expressive means of epic verse while lyricism remained aside.⁷ The production of Ludmila Podjavorinská had focused on the adult audience until 1918. After WWI, however, this author, who was more than fifty years old by this time, directed most of her creative energy into the area of children’s literature (she approached children with her pseudonym “Aunt Ludmila”).⁸ From conventional verses, in terms of both motif and form, the author gradually developed her idiosyncratic style, which became her contribution to the development of modern poetry for children. It is a versed epic story (or just an episode) with personified and anthropomorphised characters or

⁶ Such structural differentiation also applied in children’s prose.

⁷ The lyrical poem later became the domain of another notable writer – Mária Rázusová-Martáková.

⁸ According to Šmatlák (2007), this fact could have an intimate personal cause – to compensate for the distress of her unattained motherhood.

animal figures. These represent human characters, as well as human life situations. Usually, they are funny and humorous stories that use situational comic scenes and lively dialogues that draw child readers into the middle of the action (Šmatlák 2007: 428). Child's play, which is the subject of her poems, is not treated by the author in its thematic dimension but is presented as a cognitive ground. In this way she respected the basic principle of the authenticity of the child's mental world. As noted by Kopál (1984: 62), she was the first in Slovak literature to apply the autodidactic function of child's play – children's imitation of the world of adults as a form of confrontation between the values of childhood and the world of adults. The play of children in her poems transmits a joyful and optimistic atmosphere, which is a distinguishing feature of her poems for children. She achieved amusement by eliminating negative social phenomena of human society from her anthropomorphic world and by constructing a plot based on humoristic principles. Podjavorinská considered the “principle of joy” as very important, but certainly not absolute. Pleasure, according to the author, was only a means of “refining” the child's soul. She introduced a cognitive aspect to her literary work through the animal world filled with basic human values such as love, friendship, emotional relationships and creative activity. Thus, according to Klátik (1955: 137), the poet unveiled life as a miracle and a joy at the same time. Her most famous collections include *Medový hrniec* [Honey Pot], *Škovránok* [Lark], *Zvonky* [Little Bells], *Zajko-Bojko* [Little Trepid Hare] and especially *Čin-Čin* [Chirp-Chirp].

It is the author's original versed fairy tale *Čin-Čin* [Chirp-Chirp] that is artistically suggestive and the most prestigious of her work. In this narrated fairy tale, Podjavorinská introduced a sparrow Čimo as a vivid and multi-layered character. Čimo learns the true value of life through a dramatic pathway, which makes his story more convincing.⁹ The complex path of learning is determined by the contradictory traits of Čimo's character: he is self-confident, pushy, and courageous on one side, but boastful, light-hearted and egoistic on the other. Čimo possesses all the characteristics of a child or a young person and learns to be a son, a son-in-law, a husband – he thus learns to be a human. The characters in the story, as well as their dramatic dialogue with the suggestive folk language and village atmosphere, are a source of the humour of her most famous work (cf. Sliacky 2013: 103).

The second significant personality that participated in the artistic transformation of poetry for children in post-war Slovakia was Mária Rázusová-Martáková. She entered children's literature with moralising verses. In her first three books *Pestré kvety* [Colourful Flowers], *Tri rozprávky z neba* [Three Tales of Heaven] and *Hrdinovia* [Heroes], as pointed out by Kopál (1984: 62), there is tension between her ability to see and experience the beauty of nature and the playfulness and joy of the world of

⁹ Čimo married the beautiful Čin-Čin whose parents refused him at first. After the wedding, they had no place to live – the parents from both sides no longer wanted to open their door to them (the couple had to take care of themselves). Čimo did not want to build a nest for them both, since he was irresponsible, selfish and lazy, and therefore they visited other nests (the swallow's, for example). Eventually, Čimo, facing existential problems alongside the faithful Čin-Čin, matures and builds his own house to which his wife brings little sparrows.

children on the one hand, and the author’s restraint in expressing this ability on the other. The writer overcame this contradiction between conventionality and artistry in her fourth collection *Hore grúňom – dolu grúňom* [Up the Hillside – Down the Hillside]. However, it was only her fifth collection, titled *Od jari do zimy* [From the Spring to the Winter], where she fully exploited her artistic qualities. In this collection, she abandoned the didactic position and adopted artistic technique for her poetry for children. As far as the development of poetry for children in Slovakia is concerned, Mária Rázusová-Martáková developed a lyrical style, which had been absent in the children’s literature of the period.¹⁰ The lyrical atmosphere of her poetry always came as a result of a poetic story that, despite the absence of a line of action, allowed for establishing contact between the poet and child readers. Martáková, in her artistic work, embraced the child’s imagination and the attractiveness of the fairy tale (Sliacky et al. 2005: 258–260, Sliacky 2013: 101–104).

Prose for children after WWI

Literary production in prose dedicated to children, just as was the case with verse, entered into the reality of the new state with the perception of its didactic and utilitarian essence remaining unchanged. A significant shift away from these tenets happened only in the early 1930s. Establishing an artistic type of children’s book could not automatically end the traditional, didactically oriented production for children, which still prevailed in terms of quantity. However, as far as aesthetic values are concerned, the traditional production, faced by artistically oriented works, necessarily became obsolete (Sliacky 2013: 109). Moreover, unlike in poetry, in which artistry was provided by a single author (Podjavorinská), a whole group of authors participated in laying the foundations for the artistic direction in prose (Jozef Cíger Hronský, Martin Hranko, Fraňo Kráľ, Ludo Ondrejov, Martin Rázus and Ján Bodenek) through the genres of literary fairy tale, legend and social prose (novels).

Establishing the artistic concept in prose for children and YAs after WWI was neither simple nor straightforward. According to Sliacky (2013: 113–114), the new phase in literature for children and YAs did not present a unified artistic concept from the very beginning.¹¹ There were generally polarised opinions on the extent to which a child should be involved in learning about reality.

¹⁰ One of the factors that influenced the author’s intense perception of moments of joy was her severe condition (joint rheumatism), due to which – just like L. Podjavorinská – she could not attain motherhood and remained childless.

¹¹ What has to be emphasised, however, is that many of these works were not created intentionally for a child reader. They belong to the area of non-intentional literature and therefore possess elements pertaining to the literary approach of the particular author (social prose, autobiographical prose, lyrical prose and prose with elements of expressionism). The works were reclassified as reading for children on the basis of the immense interest of child readers and also, intentionally, because in the field of literature for children at that time the artistic level of the then literary production had met neither the needs of children nor the general reader’s standard.

One group of authors (those dedicated to the optimistic concept of prose, such as J.C. Hronský) promoted the view that a writer, writing for children, should always respect their tendency towards optimism, playfulness and imagination. In this view, children have the right to a magical and carefree childhood even though they are surrounded by an unflattering and profound social reality that handicaps them.¹²

Another group of authors (those devoted to the realist concept of prose, including Fraňo Kráľ, Martin Hranko, Ľudmila Podjavorinská) artistically materialised the idea that the mental world of children does not exist as an isolated entity but is always part of social reality. This stream of authors transformed reality into literary work utilising social problems and onerous social conflicts. The child is, in the interpretation of these authors, no longer the resource for various metaphors on childhood, but serves as the means for authors to critically render their attitude on reality.

The last group of authors (those gathered around the synthesising concept, including Martin Rázus, Ján Bodenek, Ľudo Ondrejov) tried to synthesise both poles in their work. The authors of this concept viewed the prose for children as a synthesis of both the child's mental specificity and social reality. They did not isolate the former from the latter and portrayed the child's mental world in connection with social reality and social conflicts.

The optimistic concept of childhood

Jozef Cíger Hronský's literary production for children was not just a supplement to his work for adult readers. It was a part of his lifelong artistic programme. Hronský conceived it as an optimistic way of life. It was the expression of his empathy for children but also the desire for harmony in human life (Sliacky et al. 2005: 126–128, Sliacky 2013: 115). This author's work for children manifests an inclination towards two genres: historical legend – *Kremnické povesti* [Tales from Kremnica], *Zakopaný meč* [Buried Sword], *Sokoliar Tomáš* [Falconer Thomas] and a folk fairy tale, in which he progressed from mere reproduction to the creation of more original literary versions – *Janko Hraško* [Tom Thumb], *Pod kozúbkom* [Under the Fireplace], *Tri rozprávky* [Three Fairy Tales], *Brondove rozprávky* [Brond's Fairy Tales] and *Zlatovlasá sestra* [The Golden-haired Sister]. Both legend and folk fairy tale became an inspiration for Hronský's original contribution to children's literature in the form of the literary fairy tale *Smelý Zajko* [The Courageous Hare], *Smelý Zajko v Afrike* [The Courageous Hare in Africa] and *Budkáčik a Dubkáčik* [Budkáčik and Dubkáčik] (cf. Šmatlák 2007: 429).¹³ It was the genre of literary fairy tale that made it possible for Hronský to imbue the burden of the social period with the illusion of fairy tale, humour and entertainment.

¹² The slogan of this approach was “the need to idealise reality in the best interest of the child”.

¹³ Paradoxically, the picture series about *Smelý Zajko* (published in the 3rd volume of *Slniečko* magazine) was a prequel to the literary fairy tale. It was illustrated by the Czech artist Jaroslav Vodrážka, and Hronský added his text to the illustrations only afterwards. However, as noted by Sliacky (2013: 119), it was mainly Hronský who brought about appreciation for *Smelý Zajko* by creating a unique anthropomorphic model of the main animal character.

The aesthetic function of such literature should, according to Hronský, multiply the child’s world of playfulness, well-being and happiness (Sliacky et al. 2005, Sliacky 2013). The novelty of Hronský’s best-known piece for children, *Smelý Zajko* [The Courageous Hare], was that he did not humanise the animal character completely, but left some of its typical animal attributes, by which he achieved a humorous effect (cf. Kopál 1970: 63, Klátik 1971: 134). One day, the Hare sets out on a journey to experience many incredible and entertaining adventures, gets as far as America, and finally returns home with a car full of cabbage and a beautiful bride.

The anthropomorphic animal characters of Hronský’s stories are characterised by some typical features of the child – restlessness, playfulness, cheerfulness and naivety in thinking and acting (Kopál 1970: 60). Hronský’s anthropomorphism poignantly illustrates the child’s personality; moreover, it helped him to develop his own narrative art full of understanding for the natural curiosity and playfulness of an animal character. It is also filled with humour based on situational comedy and a hint of parody (especially when an animal character is in contact with the human world) (Šmatlák 2007: 429, Sliacky 2013: 119). *Smelý Zajko v Afrike* [The Courageous Hare in Africa] was a sequel of the successful first part,¹⁴ but it was not a direct sequel but rather a modified continuation, set in an ethnically different environment. According to Klátik (1971: 134), the animal character in exotic Africa becomes a fairy-tale symbol and a representative of the mental (and ethnic) environment to which the child reader belongs.

The optimism of Jozef Cíger Hronský is essentially of a psychological and mental nature. Applying it, the author tried to keep the child isolated from the conflicts of reality for as long as possible. Hronský, with his literary fairy tales, confirmed the validity of the genre that was also preferred by Ludmila Podjavorinská (in the form of epic verse). Hronský, however, also convincingly applied modern elements (aeroplanes, cars, etc.), which helped the reader to evoking more up-to-date concepts. He is considered to be the creator of the modern Slovak fairy tale with an animal character and social elements.

The realist concept of childhood

Fraňo Král’ was an author who significantly affected the outlook of children’s literature in the post-war period with his books *Jano* [Johnny] and *Čenkovej deti* [Čenková’s Children]. Král’ was politically on the left in both his writing and educational activities. In his literary works for children, he sought to mediate the social reality of the period by directly portraying the destinies of children in a conflicting social world (Sliacky 2013: 132–134, Šmatlák 2007: 430). Král’ made his first artistically convincing entry into children’s literature with his short story *Jano* [Johnny] that was full of autobiographical details (memories of his own childhood).¹⁵ The story captured a short period of life of a poor eight-year-old boy, Jano, a local community herdsman.

¹⁴ Czech artist Jaroslav Vodrážka was present here only as an illustrator of the text.

¹⁵ Six-year-old Fraňo Král’ looked after local turkeys, at the age of seven he assisted in grazing the cows, and as an eight-year-old he herded geese (to provide for daily meals).

The author sought to create a picture of the contemporary child who faced the hard reality of life (for example, punishment for the theft of cherries from the parish garden, running away from home for fear of punishment, the emigration of his father to work in America and his subsequent death there). The author's left-wing political views did not appear explicitly in the story – the main character acquired his social knowledge through his own experience after leaving home (not through the will of the author). The aesthetic quality of the text, according to Klátik (1975: 71), is based on the acceptance of the child's mental world as a part of social reality, hence the forms of knowledge have a significantly childlike form in the main character. Král' was also inspired by the elements of folk tale, in the tradition of which his character is brought back home. Unlike the fairy tale character, however, Jano, in the final act, firmly vows to become a rebellious outlaw, and therefore the ending of the story is rather the beginning of an anticipated life of struggle (Sliacky 2013: 133).

His second work of prose, *Čenkovej deti* [Čenková's Children], depicts the life story of the children of a poor mother. The children, after the death of their father and the fall into unbearable social conditions, were adopted for some time by foreign families: two children (Hanka and Mišo) go into service as apprentices, one child (Paľko) was sold by his mother to a wealthy family, and only the youngest girl (Evička) stayed with her mother. Finally, all children return to their careworn mother. However, the children were enriched by their life experience (loss of illusions, suffering and humiliation), which, as noted by Sliacky (2013: 133) and Šmatlák (2007: 430), improved their perception of their current life situation and made it more mature.¹⁶ Fraňo Král' was thus a post-war writer, whose works showed the system of contemporary society too tough for his literary characters to overcome, young outsiders handicapped by their social status as they are.

The realist concept can sporadically be found in the prose of Ľudmila Podjavorinská, who predominantly wrote poetry for children. Her prose, *Baránok Boží* [The Lamb of God], differs greatly from the merry and humorous view of reality she demonstrated in versified epic poetry. The story tells of the tragic fate of Ondrejko (Little Andrew, an Orphan) who becomes the innocent victim of the social system. Ondrejko grew up in an orphanage, in which he felt as if imprisoned due to the inhuman nature of this institution. The story is a testimony to Ondrej's rebellion against an orphanage caretaker, who represented adults' emotional lack of interest in children. The desire of the main character for a better world eventually culminated in the escape of Ondrejko, who ultimately dies.¹⁷ Ľudmila Podjavorinská, as pointed out by Šmatlák (2007:

¹⁶ The first edition of the book *Čenkovej deti* had a mixed reception – especially for the dark overtones of the story and the failure to respect the child's desire for optimism. The author was even accused of promoting class hatred and an anti-Christian attitude.

¹⁷ Podjavorinská, in her *Baránok Boží*, violated the conventional understanding at that time of the role of children's literature, which not only caused problems with its publishing (it was delayed for five years), but the book also appeared on the list of forbidden school books in the 1940s. The book even remained outside public interest in the socialist regime until 1990, mainly for its Christian symbolism and for the tragic fate of the main character.

428–429), Milan Jurčo 1997: 32–40) and Eva Pršová (2015: 48), with two contrasting positions in her work (the joyful in poetry and the grievous in prose), uncovered a conceptual dichotomy, which was also typical of Slovak children’s literature in the following decades.

Martin Hranko is another author in whose work the realist concept of childhood can be identified. Unlike the previous authors, Hranko was active in the domain of the literary fairy tale: *Ježkovci* [Hedgehog Family], *Rosnička* [The Tree Frog] or *Kukučka* [The Cuckoo]. In his most famous fairy tale, *Ježkovci* [Hedgehog Family], Hranko rendered convincingly the complexity of human and social relations to the child reader through animal characters. The story is based on the confrontation of two laws, human and animal, which are, according to Sliacky (2013: 121), two opposing value systems. The result of this encounter is, at first glance, the victory of human aggression (the human as predator) over the more “humane” world of animals. However, the tragic conclusion of the story was not Martin Hranko’s expression of resignation to life. It was rather a mobilising factor to take courage and fight against evil.¹⁸

According to Šmatlák (2007: 430), the animal world of Martin Hranko maintained its natural biological autonomy. In confrontation with the world of people, however, the world of animals gains new meanings with the serious message of freedom and the need for genuine interpersonal relations.

Synthesising the concept of childhood

Unlike the previous authors, Martin Rázus did not consider literature for children to be his prime area. Nevertheless, his books *Maroško* [Little Martin] and *Maroško študuje* [Little Martin Is Studying] became essential pieces of Slovak children’s literature and at the same time they rank among the top works of national literature overall. His prose *Maroško* originated as a reaction to Rázus’s disgust of the egoistic and calculating world of politics.¹⁹ Rázus looked back at his childhood in the form of autobiographical memories. The author recorded the story of Maroško Kozovie from early childhood to the period of gradual self-realisation. Maroško’s world is filled with children’s play, joy and well-being, but as he mentally grows the first disappointments and disillusionments occur (the strangling of the little bunnies leads Maroško to treat the cat cruelly). Gradually, Maroško also begins to perceive the social status of his family as a handicap (to get money, Maroško’s mother has to cut her beautiful hair; his family owns no horse, thus are “lesser” than the family of the Mraziks who possess horses).

The social inequity that surrounded the small boy, and which was perceived by him only subconsciously, made Maroško socially active (he becomes aware that people differ in status). According to Sliacky (2013: 130), Rázus, in the story of Maroško, managed to capture the development of the consciousness of a poor boy respecting

¹⁸ The bear did not respond to the shooting of a blind roe he passively cared for, but stood up against the dog and actively resisted the man who had a rifle in his hands.

¹⁹ Martin Rázus was the chairman of the Slovak National Party.

children's views and interpretation of reality, but at the same time connected it and subordinated it to social reality. In Rázus's recollection, his story became testimony to the reality at the turn of the 20th century. In terms of shaping children's artistic literature, the most important contribution by Martin Rázus is that he conceived his literary work on the grounds of play and social learning. The author, utilising the child aspect as manifested in children's play, takes the main character from anticipating the idea of social injustice to his own act of social defiance (his defiance took the form of raising his own awareness through self-education).

The most famous work by Ján Bodenek, who was likewise one of the writers of traditional artistic literature for children in the post-war period, also depicts a boy character. In the novella *Ivkova biela mať* [Ivko's White Mother], Bodenek, just like Fraňo Král', depicted the gloomy prospect of childhood in this period through the character of Ivko Hancík. The subject matter of this work, as noted by Sliacky (2013: 136), was the atmosphere of mutual aversion in the family of small Ivko, which arose due to the extreme workload of the parents.²⁰ Under circumstances of hard labour, the members of Ivko's family were unable to communicate with each other as their forces were exhausted in the struggle for everyday survival (Ivko's mother is a hard-working laundrywoman whose hands are "whitewashed" daily by aggressive caustic soda). They treated the youngest Ivko with indifference and even brutality, which triggered in the small boy a sense of injustice. His emotional world had not yet adapted to the emotional aridness of adults, and he therefore sought to find an alternative compensatory source of love. He found it in his teacher with whom he learnt what love, kindness, understanding, and affable words were. However, he experienced all that indirectly, through the relationship of the teacher and her own son, whom he desired to become too. Ivko experienced proximity to his mother only after the teacher's departure and the death of his father (in which he was indirectly and unintentionally involved). The feeling of affinity and belonging to his mother started to grow in Ivko during his illness. He then viewed his mother from a new perspective and reassessed his relationship with her.

Ján Bodenek, according to criticism of the period, was able to approach the mentality and emotions of his literary characters. Thanks to this ability, Ivko becomes aware that his parents could not treat him with love and affection due to their constant and crushing fatigue and destructive misery. After WWI, the book *Ivkova biela mať* enriched the kind of literature for children that introduces the child to a social reality full of conflicts, yet at the same time remains an artistically convincing celebration of maternal love (Sliacky 2013: 137).

Eudo Ondrejov was another writer who significantly contributed to the development of children's art literature in the then Czechoslovakia after WWI, and is rightly considered to be one of its founding fathers. Ondrejov was concerned with

²⁰ Jurčo (1977) states that the relationships of the characters in this book were affected by the biology of life. The motif of the biology of life is represented in Bodenek's work as so-called alienating work.

the relationship between man and nature. He was able to enrich this relationship with a subjective lyrical experience while not hiding his resistance to the destructive interference of humans in natural ecosystems. In today’s language, as commented by Šmatlák (2007: 431), it could be called the application of an ecological attitude in a literary work. The author made full use of this approach in his books with fairy-tale elements *Rozprávky z hôr* [Fairy Tales from the Hills], *O zlatej jaskyni* [About the Golden Cave] and *Tátoš a človek* [Steed and Man], and, in his triptych of fictional travel books *Africký zápisník* [African Notebook], *Horami Sumatry* [Through the Hills of Sumatra] and *Príhody v divočine* [Adventures in the Wilderness]. The most important of Ondrejov’s pieces in post-war production is undoubtedly *Zbojnícka mladosť* [A Rebel’s Youth].²¹ He convincingly expressed his artistic and life conception in the subject of the natural world and freedom of being (Sliacky 2013: 122). *Zbojnícka mladosť* is a story about Jerguš Lapin, a boy who was born in a secluded dwelling in the mountains. After some time, he began to make various trips to the world of people, enjoying the surroundings of the village. But he also witnessed many distorted interpersonal relationships (the suffering of two orphans – Mat’o Kliešť and Červenák). Eventually, Jerguš arrived in the city. The experience with the city is quite negative for Jerguš. It is represented by the factory environment, where the boy is hired as an apprentice. But the strange and unnatural environment ultimately destroys his boyish joy of discovery. His master in the factory beat Jerguš with a rubber hose just because he played hide-and-seek with his friends during a break (beating him, the master dislocated Jerguš’s shoulder). Jerguš, for this injustice and out of defiance, fled the city, went back to the mountain chalet and decided to become a rebel.²²

The literary critic Ján Števíček (1983: 200) labelled *Zbojnícka mladosť* a book that acts as a criterion of aesthetic value in children’s literature. According to Števíček (1983), the book is incredibly beautiful and at the same time a true poem of childhood.

Martin Rázus in *Maroško*, Ľudo Ondrejov in *Zbojnícka mladosť* and Ján Bodenek in *Ivkova biela mať* fully respected children’s identity and did not fear to confront it with the reality of the period. They were not afraid of any destructive impact that these episodes might have on the child reader. Their main characters with their children’s ideals faced conflicting social reality. In such day-to-day confrontation, they were gradually transferred from the world of games to the complexities of the world of adults. *Maroško* by Rázus and *Jerguš* by Ondrejov did not make up for their social handicap by climbing into the upper social class, by which they would only confirm the inequity in the system of power transformation. Nevertheless, the confrontation of the ideal world with reality did not have such a traumatic impact on the child character as in the book *The Lamb of God* by Ľudmila Podjavorinská. Both *Maroško* and *Jerguš*

²¹ The theme of childhood in *Zbojnícka mladosť* was originally intended for adult readers, but it was soon listed among essential reading for Slovak children and YAs and became an iconic book, in the same way as happened with the book *Maroško* by Martin Rázus.

²² *Zbojnícka mladosť* is the second part of the trilogy: *Slnko vystúpilo nad hory* [The Sun Ascended above the Hills], *Zbojnícka mladosť*, and *Jerguš Lapin* [Jerguš Lapin].

were negatively affected by social reality, but this process did not culminate in tragedy. It finally ends in raising awareness of both persons' own value and the values of the environment that the characters come from. A result of the encounter of the innocent mental world of the child with social reality is thus the process of raising the child's self-awareness associated with becoming aware of the moral uniqueness of the environment in which the characters were born.

According to Sliacky (2013: 115), the synthesising model of childhood, unlike the previous two models, portrayed the children's world and the reality of adults as mutually interrelated. The model requires children's literature to accept the psychological traits of the child audience so as to provide them with the prospect of an optimistic conclusion, even in the most difficult social or life situations.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the three unique and original approaches to artistic literature for children after WWI (optimistic, realist and synthesising concepts) were determined by the worldviews held by the individual authors and by their perception of social reality. However, the internal contradiction between the three concepts was not so significant that it could be interpreted as antagonistic. From a holistic point of view, the literature for children and YAs after WWI came through a transition from the prevailing traditional production (with moralising and didactic goals: "literature about children") to artistic literature (literature "for children"), which lifted Slovak children's literature into the domain of high art. This transition was achieved by the creative personalities who demonstrated, according to Sliacky (2013), their understanding of a joyful vision of childhood (Jozef Cíger Hronský), social sympathy (Ľudmila Podjavorinská, Fraňo Kráľ and Ján Bodenek), resistance to the violence and dehumanisation of the human (Martin Hranko, Ľudo Ondrejov), and drew their stories from the dissection of their own childhood in poverty (Martin Rázus).

Thanks to the historical milestone – the establishment of Czechoslovakia after WWI – the process of artistic integration of children's literature into the system of Slovak national literature could begin, and was accomplished in the 1960s.

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Od književnosti „o djeci“ do književnosti „za djecu“: Priča o dječjoj književnosti u Slovačkoj nakon Prvoga svjetskoga rata

Kao povijesna prekretnica kraj Prvoga svjetskoga rata bitno je utjecao na razvoj dječje književnosti u Slovačkoj. Novi kulturni uvjeti nastali u Slovačkoj raspadom Austro-Ugarske Monarhije i osnivanjem Čehoslovačke stvorili su pogodno okolinu za razvoj kulturnih institucija poput Slovačke udruge, zatim knjižnica, nakladnika i dječjih časopisa kao što je *Sniečko* [Sunašce]. Nakon 1918., književna produkcija za djecu i mladež krenula je dvama smjerovima: prvi, tradicionalniji (didaktičko-moralistički) i drugi, više umjetnički smjer. Tadašnja je umjetnička struja slovačke dječje književnosti promovirala književnu produkciju i integrirala ju u domenu umjetnosti. Književna djela tih autora razlikuju se po optimističnim, realističnim ili sintetizirajućim konceptima djetinjstva. Stoga se poslijeratne godine u Slovačkoj mogu opisati kao početak umjetničke integracije dječje književnosti u sustav nacionalne književnosti, koja je dovršena 1960-ih godina.

Ključne riječi: Prvi svjetski rat, Čehoslovačka, Slovačka udruga, optimistična koncepcija, realistična koncepcija, sintetizirajuća koncepcija, tradicionalan pristup, umjetnički pristup

Von der Literatur „über Kinder“ zur Literatur „für Kinder“: Die Geschichte über die Kinderliteratur in der Slowakei nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg

Das Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs bildet für die Entwicklung der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur in der Slowakei einen Meilenstein, der diese Entwicklung wesentlich beeinflusst hat. Die mit Zerfall der Österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie und der Gründung der Tschechoslowakei entstandenen kulturellen Gegebenheiten schufen in der Slowakei günstige Voraussetzungen für die Entwicklung kultureller Institutionen wie der *Slowakischen Gesellschaft*, Bibliotheken, Verlagshäuser und Kinderzeitschriften wie *Sniečko* [Die kleine Sonne]. Nach 1918 schlug die literarische Produktion für Kinder und Jugendliche zwei Richtungen ein, eine erste, stärker traditionell orientierte (didaktisch-moralistische) und eine zweite,

eher künstlerische. Die damalige künstlerische Strömung der slowakischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur hat die literarische Produktion gefördert und sie in die Domäne der Kunst integriert. Die literarischen Werke jener Autoren unterscheiden sich nach ihren optimistischen, realistischen oder synthetisierenden Kindheitskonzepten. Deshalb könnte man die Nachkriegszeit in der Slowakei als Beginn künstlerischer Integration der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur in das System der nationalen Literatur bezeichnen, einen Prozess der in den 1960er Jahren abgeschlossen wurde.

Schlüsselwörter: Erster Weltkrieg, Tschechoslowakei, Slowakische Gesellschaft, optimistisches Konzept, realistisches Konzept, synthetisierendes Konzept, traditioneller Ansatz, künstlerischer Ansatz