

“Pieces of life”

Tajana's growing up in Sunčana Škrinjarić's trilogy Ulica predaka [The Street of Ancestors], Ispit zrelosti [Test of Maturity] and Bijele strijele [White Arrows]

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This paper analyses the growing up of Tajana, a fictional character in unhealthy family surroundings as depicted in Sunčana Škrinjarić's (1931 – 2004) trilogy: The Street of Ancestors (1980), Test of Maturity (2002), and White Arrows (2004). The main controversy of the trilogy is the presentation of a childhood without didacticism, moral lessons, or idealization; a childhood which is more unhappy than protected and joyful. By breaking settled rules and taboos, Škrinjarić created her own, recognizable style of narration. This study will particularly focus on Tajana's relationship with her mother and the girl's emotional development, which can be interpreted in light of childhood trauma. Tajana's mother is an educated, beautiful, and coquettish woman who does not love her daughter. She sees the girl only as a “redundant little brat”, a reminder of her broken first marriage, and an obstacle to happiness in life. Hitting Tajana, pulling her hair, and essentially ignoring all her needs, she can be labelled a bad mother who fails to fulfil the duties of her role: being present and protective, as well as providing for her daughter's well-being and upbringing. Tajana's experience of emotional neglect and emotional and even physical abuse from her mother in her childhood results in the girl's problems in building firm and healthy relationships in her adult life.

Key words: emotional neglect and abuse, literary trilogy, unloving mother, Sunčana Škrinjarić, unhappy childhood.

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Introduction¹

In literary texts, especially children's and young adult literature, as in real life, the character of the mother has an indispensable place. Literary mothers are represented in many ways, from the archetypal general representation as a mental concept, through limited stereotypical images that assume that all mothers share identical or similar characteristics, to alternative mother figures. This research attempts to offer an analysis of the mother-daughter relationship as a key moment in Tajana's character development in the trilogy consisting of *Ulica predaka* [*The Street of Ancestors*] (1980), *Ispit zrelosti* [*Test of Maturity*] (2002), and *Bijele strijele* [*White Arrows*] (2004), written by Sunčana Škrinjarić (1931-2004),² within a psychological methodological framework. In Croatian literary history, Škrinjarić is considered to be one of the classic writers of children's and young adult literature. It is, as she says, "a lovely label", although one very hard to escape once established, despite not all of her work being written for young readers.³ The first novel of the trilogy, *The Street of Ancestors*, was published in 1980 by the Mladost publishing house as part of "Jelen", a series intended for young people.⁴ Of the three novels, it has received the majority of critical attention, although critics disagree on its classification: some consider it a children's and/or young adult novel, others point out the duality of the reading public, some see it as a *Bildungsroman*, and others as a fictionalized autobiography.⁵ As Pavičić indicates, *The Street of Ancestors* will

¹ This work was fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under project number IP-2018-01-3732.

² All quotations from the trilogy are from the following editions: Sunčana ŠKRINJARIĆ, *Ulica predaka*, Zagreb, Mladost, 1980; Sunčana ŠKRINJARIĆ, *Ispit zrelosti. Nastavak romana Ulica predaka*, Zagreb, Naklada Pavičić, 2002; Sunčana ŠKRINJARIĆ, *Bijele strijele*, in: *Kuća od riječi*, Zagreb, Mozaik knjiga, 2004.

³ Škrinjarić in Vesna KESIĆ, *Mračna strana Sunčane Škrinjarić*, *Start*, (1982) 344, 11. Also: "Children's literature cannot be in a reserve. The things I write and are considered to be for children are actually for people of a refined sensibility, for the ones who love nature and for those who even in old age have kept the soul of a child", Škrinjarić in Sanja MUZAFERIJA, Sunčanina "Pandorina škrinja", *Arena* (1984) 1215, 22.

⁴ The "Jelen" series published works by authors who wrote for adults, but were also embraced by children's readership or, to be more precise, adolescents. These, for example, include August Šenoa's *Zlatarovo zlato* [*The Goldsmith's Gold*], Ivo Andrić's or Vjenceslav Novak's short prose, and adventure novels by Jules Verne.

⁵ For example, Dubravka Zima categorizes it as a children's novel about war (Dubravka ZIMA, *Kraći ljudi. Povijest dječjeg lika u hrvatskom dječjem romanu*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 2011, 130, 136-137) and Irena Lukšić describes it as "markedly grown-up regarding its subject, but children's with regard to its narrator" (Irena LUKŠIĆ, in: Andrijana KOS-LAJTMAN, *Autobiografski diskurs djetinjstva*, Zagreb, Naklada Ljevak, 2011, 228). According to Ivo Zalar, the novel is intended for older children (Ivo ZALAR, *Dječji roman u hrvatskoj književnosti*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 1983, 89), and Stjepan Hranjec considers Sunčana Škrinjarić to be a classic writer of Croatian children's literature, where one of the reasons for this status is the novel *The Street of Ancestors*, among her other (explicitly children's) work (Stjepan HRANJEC, *Dječji hrvatski klasici*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 2004, 237).

be best understood and accepted by a mature reader: "it looks and seems like it was written for children, but stabs right into the heart of an adult".⁶ Vesna Kesić points out that it can be considered a children's book due to it being a story about childhood or it can be seen as children's literature in the same way that Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* or Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are.⁷ Although the trilogy's autobiographical frame of reference has often been mentioned⁸ and has also been partially confirmed by the author herself, who described her childhood as "a series of cruel insights, surprises, conflicts"⁹ which she attempts to push away and forget,¹⁰ this will not be the focus of this paper.

All three parts of Škrinjarić's trilogy, especially the first, display a very different, atypical representation of childhood which, instead of warm, nostalgic tones evoking happy and protected childhood days, tell a frightful story about a well-off, middle-class family from Zagreb. It is difficult to assume the author would write in such a scarily honest way, stripped bare of the usual layers of patronizing adult attitudes and pedagogically directed conclusions which children's literature is often burdened with if she were consciously writing for children. There is an unusual disproportion between the representation of childhood in *The Street of Ancestors*, as well as the author's opinion ("Childhood is the most sensitive period, not the happiest period fabricated by grown-ups"¹¹) and stories published in the author's collection *Kaktus bajke* [*Cactus Tales*] where adults are always bearers of rigid, stereotypical ways of thinking, with childhood being the source of true, authentic, undisturbed joy and creativity. According to Škrinjarić's attitudes expressed in an interview,¹² it is above all clear that she as an author did not want to mould herself within existing genres. Škrinjarić appears to resist being labelled as a children's author because such a label is attached by publishers "who place an author in a certain field and then do not allow him or her to change genres", making it even harder for a "children's author to grow up".¹³ This is why Škrinjarić frequently toyed with motifs and subjects which were previously rare in the context of children's literature. Supporting this view, an example of children's sexuality

⁶ Josip PAVIČIĆ, *Predgovor. Kaktus i plamen*, in: Sunčana ŠKRINJARIĆ, *Ispit zrelosti*, Zagreb, Naklada Pavičić, 2002, 6-7.

⁷ Kesić, *Mračna strana...*, 11.

⁸ Ante MATIJAŠEVIĆ, *Izvorišta dvaju usporednih svjetova*, in: Sunčana ŠKRINJARIĆ, *Kuća od riječi*, Zagreb, Mozaik knjiga, 2004, 12; Kos-Lajtman, *Autobiografski...*, 227

⁹ Kesić, *Mračna strana...*, 11.

¹⁰ According to Sunčana Škrinjarić's daughter, Sanja Pilić, her grandmother (Škrinjarić's mother) took Sunčana to court because the stories in *The Street of Ancestors* described real people in detail and even used their real names in some cases.

¹¹ Škrinjarić in: Matijašević, *Izvorišta...*, 9.

¹² Kesić, *Mračna strana...*, 11.

¹³ Škrinjarić in: Kesić, *Mračna strana...*, 11.

can be detected in *The Street of Ancestors*¹⁴ and is even more explicitly outlined in the novel *Pisac i princeza (The Author and the Princess)*,¹⁵ which, unlike *The Street of Ancestors* and the debate concerning its intended audience, all critics interpret as forming part of children's literature. Since both works were awarded children's literature awards, Dubravka Zima rightfully asks: "should these works be read as canonical works of Croatian children's literature or as a subversion of the canon?"¹⁶

Children's literature is a literary system fully controlled by adults: adults are the authors of works intended for children, they publish and buy them, and quite often read them to their children. Therefore, children's literature has always (understandably) suffered from adults' perception of appropriateness, which is dependent on the cultural context, ranging from the cultural understanding that books are undesirable forms of entertainment if they do not bring educational or pedagogic benefit, to the need to avoid inconvenient topics for children's literature. When *The Street of Ancestors* was published, the subversive dimension of the novel was certainly present, but the question is if it is perceived in such a way today due to social changes and almost programmatic talk of taboos in contemporary children's literature. In fact, if the novel is analysed in the context of Anglo-Saxon children's and young adult fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, in terms of theme and poetical approach, Škrinjarić follows contemporary efforts within the genre of "problem novel" which question social taboos, with the stereotypical representation of family relationships being just one of them.¹⁷

The three novels, *The Street of Ancestors*, *Test of Maturity*, and *White Arrows*, describe the childhood, adolescence, and young adult experiences of a girl named Tajana, the author's alter ego, capturing the period from the 1930s to the 1960s and the change of three different state systems: the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Independent State of Croatia, and socialist Yugoslavia. The events are mostly set in Zagreb with some episodes taking place in Split or Slavonia. The novels are immersed in the social context of the period, but reality is interpreted from the girl's viewpoint. Representations of childhood without moralizing and/or idealization are rare in 20th century Croatian children's literature, despite such representation being more in line with reality. Children depend on their surroundings, adults decide in their name and often under the

¹⁴ An inappropriate kiss by Tajana's real father, which will be discussed later in the analysis, and the episode of a boat ride with an elderly Latin teacher when Tajana seems almost to enjoy his lustful gaze.

¹⁵ Dubravka ZIMA, Kanon i/ili subverzija: kako čitati Sunčanu Škrinjarić, in: Ante BEŽEN, Dunja PAVLIČEVIĆ FRANIĆ (eds.), *Prvi specijalizirani znanstveni skup: Rano učenje hrvatskoga jezika (RUHJ-1)*, Zagreb, ECNSI – Učiteljski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2008, 219.

¹⁶ Zima, *Kanon i/ili subverzija...*, 220.

¹⁷ Julia ECCLESHARE, Realism, Romances, Contemporary Problem Novels, in: Peter HUNT, *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature*, second edition, London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004, 548-549.

influence of their own needs, traumas and attitudes, often with a destructive effect on the child.¹⁸ *The Street of Ancestors* is a novel full of emotional trauma, starting from its title, imbued with an air of mystery and an eerie sense of being haunted, emphasized by Josip Josipov's illustration on the cover of the first edition, representing Tajana's house, "a cold house with green doors" and a child's head looking at it reluctantly from a distance. It is narrated from a child's psychological viewpoint, relying on a "naïve" child and later an adolescent, but through an adult omniscient narrator. All three novels consist of a series of subtitled sequences constituting a homogeneous whole which can also be read as separate stories. Chapters can be used as a structure for analysing Tajana's character, her relationship to the world around her, as well as her inner self. The following analysis will attempt to interpret Tajana's (emotional) development from childhood to early adulthood from the perspective of intra-familial relations, with reference to the consequences of these on her adulthood.

From childhood to maturity: the creation of Tajana's character in Škrinjarić's trilogy

According to Zima, Tajana is turned into an emotional invalid by her own family.¹⁹ The girl was raised in a well-off, bourgeois, yet toxic and dysfunctional family – there was only the image of a nice, happy, perfect family in a patriarchal social system. The representation of Tajana's mother is mostly negative: she is an educated, beautiful, coquettish woman who is cold and hard-hearted towards her daughter. A very important signal in the text is that she is left nameless throughout the trilogy. Not even her function, *mother*, is written with a capital letter, as might be expected, but simply "mother" or later "mother dear",²⁰ indicating several things. Firstly, it partly stands as an ironic symbol of Tajana's detachment and distancing from a woman who fails to provide even the minimum level of maternal affection, and, secondly, it may be interpreted as a purposeful act of denying her the right to call herself mother despite biologically being one. She sees the girl only as a "redundant little brat", a reminder of her broken first marriage and an obstacle to her happiness in life.²¹ Nevertheless, several epithets constantly appear throughout the trilogy accompanying the word "mother", such as beautiful, gorgeous, and wise.²² The

¹⁸ Gordana BULJAN-FLANDER, Dubravka KOCIJAN-HERCIGONJA, *Zlostavljanje i zanemarivanje djece*, Zagreb, Marko M., 2003, 8, 17-18.

¹⁹ Zima, *Kraći ljudi...*, 137-138.

²⁰ Majčica! See: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Mother%20Dearest> (04.12.2020).

²¹ The mother blames everyone, and mostly Tajana, for her misfortunes and bad fate, calling the marriage to her father a foolish mistake, Škrinjarić, *Ulica...*, 53.

²² Škrinjarić, *Bijele...*, 344.

archetypal mother mentioned initially can have two polarized roles, one being a kind, protective parent, and the other a harmful, abusive mother, often found in fairy tales.²³ In *The Street of Ancestors*, Tajana's mother clearly belongs to the second group. After becoming a mother, every woman faces two contradictory modes of realizing her "role": being a mother or being a woman. Although some women more or less successfully manage to find a balance, most, whether they want to or not, find themselves on either side of the scale, being more woman than mother (in the case of Tajana's mother) or more mother than woman.²⁴ According to the mother type categorization by Eliacheff and Heinich, Tajana's mother could be categorized as a combination of a narcissistic and inconstant mother, incapable of providing those who are dependent on her with reactions predictable enough to serve as guidance, foothold, and support. Thus, the relationship between Tajana and her mother can be studied not only from literary, but also psychological and sociological viewpoints.

In Tajana's early childhood depicted in *The Street of Ancestors*, her mother did not just essentially ignore all her needs, but also physically punished her, and thus she can be labelled an abusive mother who fails to fulfil the duties of her role: being present and protective, providing for her daughter's well-being and upbringing. Physical abuse is more frequently detected because it leaves a mark,²⁵ whereas emotional abuse is much harder to notice or even define. Sometimes the term emotional abuse is used interchangeably with the wider term psychological abuse because it covers both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of abuse.²⁶ Emotional abuse has an active and passive component, both equally devastating; a child being called stupid or being ignored by adults in his or her need for closeness and support eventually has the same impact.²⁷ Young Tajana cannot define what is wrong in her relationship with her mother;

²³ For more about mother characters in literature, especially those described negatively, see: Alis MARIĆ, "Najgore" majke u književnosti – iritantne, psihotične, tragične, na rubu pameti, površne... (27.05.2019), <https://citajknjigu.com/najgore-majke-u-književnosti-iritantne-psihotične-tragicne-na-rubu-pameti-povrsne/> (01.12.2020) and Petra MIOČIĆ, *Stvarne i knjiške majke* (04.06.2020), <https://www.matica.hr/vijenac/685/stvarne-i-knjiške-majke-30471/> (01.12.2020).

²⁴ Caroline ELIACHEFF, Nathalie HEINICH, *Majke – kćeri. Odnos utroje*, Zagreb, Prometej, 2004.

²⁵ Tajana's mother showed an eruption of hatred towards her child during their stay in Samobor. Tajana was catching frogs and at one moment brought the cold animal and put it on her mother's naked leg – she screamed in horror and fury, grabbed Tajana's pigtails and started to slam her head on the table: "the kid screamed, blood ran from her nose, Mom pulled her hair even more, hit her all over her body, it was a true eruption of hatred, Mom's eyes were glassy and cold. Tajana yelled, 'Mommy, I am sorry', but all was in vain". When people asked about Tajana's bruises and scratches on her face and legs, she would explain by saying she fell. She assumed that other children fell in the same way because they too were a nuisance to their parents, and that is why Tajana decided she would never have children (Škrinjarić, *Ulica...*, 55-56).

²⁶ Buljan-Flander, Kocijan-Hercigonja, *Zlostavljanje...*, 3.

²⁷ Vesna BILIĆ, Gordana BULJAN-FLANDER, Hana HRPKA, *Nasilje nad djecom i među djecom*, Zagreb, Naklada Slap, 2012, 119.

the only thing she feels is the lack of warmth and support, as well as constant insecurity. After becoming more independent, Tajana begins to recognize healthier patterns of behaviour; wandering the streets alone, she finds company with beggars and children her mother considered to be “Gypsies”, and Tajana could not help but notice their *joie de vivre*. Although barefooted and poor, the mothers often kissed or lovingly touched their children – Tajana on the other hand was kissed only on formal occasions, such as at Christmas and Easter, with no spontaneous cuddling or expression of emotions, no safe feeling of arriving home where you are loved and awaited.²⁸ She returned to a very cold home environment, devoid of warmth and affection.

Actions that imply emotional abuse can include verbal abuse and constant criticism, although subtle tactics such as intimidation, manipulation, and a refusal ever to be pleased also constitute emotional abuse.²⁹ For example, after Tajana had completed her secondary schooling, her mother only coldly commented that it was not much of a success in comparison to her own accomplishments.³⁰ Such comparisons with her mother often resulted in Tajana’s feelings of inferiority. When she enrolled in the Teacher Training College, her mother again devalued her.³¹ Tajana’s perfectionist mother was obviously impossible to please – accomplishments were never appropriately evaluated and validated, but were followed instead by the mother imposing a sense of insufficient success which has a significant negative long-term effect on the building of self-confidence. From the very start, the girl built her identity in the context of Otherness. She was not as beautiful, refined, or smart as her mother. She does not resemble her mother, her stepfather is not her father, and her real father, to whom she is often compared, is an incompetent idler, Communist and lunatic. It is implanted into the girl’s consciousness that she bears the burden of her real father’s defective character. Feelings of rejection, whether the result of real rejection or inappropriate communication, is also a type of emotional abuse.³² According to Bilić, Buljan-Flander and Hrpka, the most drastic examples of rejection are conveyed in sentences such as: “I wish you had never been born” or “I wish you were dead”.³³ Tajana had been hearing such utterances from early

²⁸ Škrinjarić, *Ullica...*, 36.

²⁹ Emotional abuse. <https://web.archive.org/web/20141120190029/http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/self-help-brochures/relationship-problems/emotional-abuse/> (01.12.2020).

³⁰ “Tajana finished with a B, and nobody in the house particularly cared about that. Mother dear noted that she was a better student, why, she was free from taking the school-leaving exam, and therefore getting a B was hardly a success (...)” Škrinjarić, *Ispit...*, 123.

³¹ “I thought you would become someone special – added mother dear, lowering her eyelids over her famous aquamarine eyes – you were a child prodigy, at least that is what godfather Certin used to say, I still keep his porcelain figurines, that man had finesse and taste. But there you go, wishful thinking, you have always maltreated me and your crazy father has been pursuing me, I hope that at least with my son things will be better, he will make up for it”, Škrinjarić, *Bijele...*, 318.

³² Bilić, Buljan-Flander, Hrpka, *Nasilje nad djecom...*, 124.

³³ *Ibid.*, 125.

childhood. By giving birth to her, her mother's chances of finding a suitable husband were ruined, and at the end of *White Arrows* she wishes that Tajana had died instead of her younger brother.

At the end of the first novel, Škrinjarić discreetly introduces the issue of another form of abuse – sexual abuse.³⁴ When Tajana's real father kisses her, not as a father would kiss his child, but as a man would kiss a woman, seeing in her only her mother, his sorely missed spouse who abandoned him, Tajana reacts with rage. To an emotionally starved child, a teddy bear becomes comfort and refuge, an object with which to "exchange" tenderness and share deepest secrets. In a moment of rage, however, the girl punishes the plush toy as a personified father who betrayed the father image that she had been building throughout her childhood. After realizing that her mother represents a superior adversary, this act of tearing up the teddy bear might be interpreted as a possible Electra complex, ending in fury. Symbolically, this act can be viewed as a transition from childhood into adolescence, breaking away from childish illusions about life, people, and primarily from her real father who turned out to be one of the biggest disappointments – adults lie, miracles do not exist.³⁵

The passive component of emotional abuse is difficult to differentiate from emotional neglect, with the two sometimes being considered synonymous.³⁶ Psychologists emphasize that exposing a child to domestic violence, such as frequent verbal or physical abuse between parents, leads to social distancing or isolation, developing a tendency for substance abuse, depression, eating disorders and suicide attempts.³⁷ After a failed first marriage, Tajana's mother's second marriage was coloured by a very tense, unhealthy atmosphere and repetitive toxic patterns of behaviour, but this marriage did not lack sexual chemistry.³⁸ Apart from being treated as redundant, Tajana witnessed constant fighting between her mother and her "second"/"new" Dad. According to some studies, parents who neglect their children have an even greater negative impact than abusive ones because their relationship towards their children is colder, more indifferent and disinterested, without showing any emotion, not even anger. Thus, neglect can lead to more serious harm than abuse.³⁹ By ob-

³⁴ "Sexual abuse is defined as any type of sexual contact between a child and an adult or a teenager five or more years older than the child victim. An adult can be a parent, relative, grandfather, grandmother, teacher, trainer, nanny..." (J. BRIERE et al., *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1996, in: Buljan-Flander, Kocijan Hercigonja, *Zlostavljanje...*, 77).

³⁵ Škrinjarić, *Ulica...*, 134.

³⁶ Bilić, Buljan-Flander, Hrpka, *Nasilje nad djecom...*, 119.

³⁷ Buljan-Flander, Kocijan-Hercigonja, *Zlostavljanje...*, 8, 17.

³⁸ "What kind of love did Mom and Tajana's new Dad make? They never kissed, they always yelled at each other. Actually, Mom yelled and Dad ominously kept quiet, but in bed mysterious things happened [...]" (Škrinjarić, *Ulica...*, 29).

³⁹ Buljan-Flander, Kocijan-Hercigonja, *Zlostavljanje...*, 65, 70, 72. Research shows that emotional abuse leaves more long-term harm than physical abuse (Bilić, Buljan-Flander, Hrpka, *Nasilje nad djecom...*, 121).

servicing the behavioural patterns and reactions of their closest family members, a child creates his or her own notion of the world which can be either friendly or hostile. Through mutual relations and influences, a child's personality is created, and the child evolves into the person he or she becomes in later life.⁴⁰

The realm of books and physical distancing were two resources Tajana used as a way out of her family surroundings.⁴¹ Although living in Zagreb, she succeeded in enrolling in a boarding school, a place that would build her character and where there would be fewer reminders of the pain she had gone through. Apart from her mother taking no part in Tajana's life choices, she also abstained from the small things in life that bring joy and emotional connection; for example, when she needed to find a dress for the Press Ball, Tajana did not seek her mother's help, either in terms of money or advice, despite her mother being known as a woman of refined taste. After Tajana came of age, her mother's reactions can mostly be described as those of indifference and resignation.⁴² According to Bowlby's attachment theory,⁴³ Tajana's relationship with her mother might be described as insecure attachment, which appears when the primary attachment figure either reacts inadequately or fails to react at all to a child's need for emotional warmth, closeness and security during the child's earliest age, resulting in a feeling of being unloved, worthless and insecure. Most likely, the child will apply a learned pattern of behaviour to relationships with other people, perceiving them with mistrust, and the world in general as a place of insecurity. Indeed, in the first part of the trilogy, Tajana perceives the world she lives in as hostile. Her home is a battleground full of tension as well as of imaginary fears, with the only sanctuary being a teddy bear. School was also a foreign and unsafe domain where the girl failed to find her place or establish any closer contacts. Tajana only feels emotional attachment to her Auntie and later towards her younger brother. Although her aunt lacked the authority and integrity of an adult since she was, as a person with developmental disabilities, degraded and abused by her sister, Tajana's mother, her benign warmth gave Tajana a much-needed emotional connection – an empathic relationship towards someone who was in an even worse position

⁴⁰ Buljan-Flander, Kocijan-Hercigonja, *Zlostavljanje...*, 3, 4-5.

⁴¹ "Tajana was tearing up patches and catching pieces of life; she arranged and glued her own picture; some things seemed terribly big and important, and, as she grew, they decreased. Everything was much clearer in books, even in the most complicated ones, which is why it was best to lie in bed and read books, and life breezed and clattered around her" (Škrinjarić, *Ulica...*, 61, 28).

⁴² Škrinjarić, *Bijele...*, 276.

⁴³ Attachment theory was defined in the 1950s by John Bowlby, based on the main assumption that a child is born with a biologically programmed system of behaviour which enables the child to establish emotional bonds with others: "Depending on the responses of adults to the child's attached behaviours, the child develops a certain type of attachment, which forms his or her viewpoints, self-perceptions as well as perceptions of others and the world" (Bilić, Buljan-Flander, Hrpka, *Nasilje nad djecom...*, 39, 42-43).

than herself and who knows the truth behind the walls of the family home, a fellow sufferer. After her brother was born, the then fourteen-year-old Tajana became even more unimportant, a nuisance nobody paid attention to.⁴⁴ However, the birth of her brother lowered the amount of fighting between Tajana's parents,⁴⁵ her "family now seemed completely normal",⁴⁶ but, at the same time, it highlighted Tajana's otherness. While Tajana does not perceive herself as beautiful, quite the reverse, sometimes even unappealing, her little brother was exactly what Tajana wanted to be – sweet and charming, like her mother. Everyone loved him, making Tajana envious. Her envy manifested itself in teasing him and she would sometimes, when angry, pinch him so "he would suddenly cry out in pain. Tajana would punch herself on the head. Why was she so evil? But there was no help [...]".⁴⁷ Tajana would also try to control her jealousy by teasing her mother, obviously looking for attention, even negative attention. When other people would comment on Tajana not bearing any resemblance to her brother, she would "maliciously utter: 'Well, of course not, we have different fathers'. These words would hit like a rock, mother would look at her pleadingly and sweetly. This kid is a real pest. They all agreed on that".⁴⁸ Her little brother's sweet appearance opened old wounds, but after she moved out of her family house, Tajana established a very strong connection with him.

Surprisingly for a person who had grown up in an unhealthy family atmosphere, when Tajana reached adolescence, there was no anxious uncertainty when she became involved in different social events (labour actions, parties at Mazarini's, drawing-room gatherings at the apartment of the painter Mirjam, the Press Ball), gaining the status of an intellectual and of an outgoing person. At the house party of the sculptor and painter Bruno Mazarini, Tajana met people who were the creators of the spiritual atmosphere of the city – it was important to be liked by them, but, as Škrinjarić wrote, Tajana had grown up in solitude, with the weird and unadjusted, so she lacked the social skills to make herself more likeable to flatterers.

Tajana felt more comfortable in male company; school immediately became a more cheerful place when she was in a mixed class and, at her first job, she was the only female member of the editorial staff, which was an enjoyable experience for her. Her childhood erotic fantasies (for example, for her father's driver) manifested themselves in Tajana's longing for an eternal, authentic and deep love: "[...] she wanted to experience great love, passionate and romantic,

⁴⁴ Škrinjarić, *Ispit...*, 13-18.

⁴⁵ After giving birth to her second child, in *Test of Maturity*, a certain change in Tajana's mother is noticeable. Having accepted that she will not find a better husband, she takes on the role of a traditional mother and Tajana observes that she even begins to knit, but continues to be unjustly harsh and constantly condemns her daughter.

⁴⁶ Škrinjarić, *Ispit...*, 23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

filled with thrills, risks and falls, she wished to fully surrender to someone and feel the tenderness she had missed during childhood”.⁴⁹ In her romantic relationships, she would often fall into daydreams and romanticising as in the case of Vladimir, a physically attractive and melancholic young man. Tajana’s quest was for stability, complete and unreservedly emotional commitment, emotions she had longed for throughout her childhood, although some childhood traumas undoubtedly resulted in serious consequences for her.⁵⁰ Tajana accepts her sexuality and plays with it; male attention suits her and flatters her, even when it is inappropriate. Her pleasure is similar to what gives pleasure to her mother, men’s attention and lust, which provide women with a certain power. She loses her virginity in a half drunken state with Mazarini, an old lover and ladies’ man. Thinking about what she had done, Tajana rationalizes that she had to go through such an experience: “after she had ripped the teddy bear into pieces and finished with childhood, after real Dad’s weird behaviour, she had grown strong, considering herself to be an adult”.⁵¹

Once a rather plain, clumsy and ungainly girl, she now became aware of her beauty, which was not classical and striking, but refined and exceptional in a bourgeois manner: “Tajana was aware of her looks; beautiful women were more lavish and striking, but she exuded a tenderness and a kind of inborn exquisiteness. “The kid is intriguing, the experienced connoisseur Mazarini would say””.⁵² Tajana’s attention would often be drawn to men with melancholic, almost sad facial expressions, like Vladimir or Gaben, with whom she established deeper emotional connections. Tajana abandoned him, however, hoping she “would meet some new, extraordinary man who would rivet her attention and compensate for all her disappointments”.⁵³ Her next relationship with Grof offered something entirely different: an eternal optimist, handy and multitalented, he brought a whisp of joy and a sense of family to her life (Tajana and Grof, together with Tajana’s younger brother and Grof’s daughter Svjetlana, created a small community). This sense of good fortune ends tragically with Tajana’s brother’s death in a car accident, creating a huge gulf. Thus, Tajana once again undergoes great attachment pain. Grof was supposed to “compensate for all her disappointments”. However, this obviously cannot come from an external source, since no person can erase someone else’s layers of sadness – Tajana had to find that power within herself and heal her childhood wounds.

⁴⁹ Škrinjarić, *Bijele...*, 277.

⁵⁰ “Mom once beat her with a horse-whip, leaving her with feelings of humiliation and hatred; later, when she became a bit older, she wanted men to beat her, and she was also searching for the velvet, motionless tenderness of a bear. Such things are impossible to find in one person, which is why there should always be several” (Škrinjarić, *Ullica...*, 24).

⁵¹ Škrinjarić, *Ispit...*, 79.

⁵² Škrinjarić, *Bijele...*, 281.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 367.

Conclusion

Sunčana Škrinjarić's trilogy, especially its first part, *The Street of Ancestors*, brought novelty into the corpus of Croatian literature. This is not in the literary subject but in the approach to the delicate topic of growing up in a family which was far removed from the place of security and love it should be. It seems that in Tajana's rather chaotic life circumstances there are two unchangeable points of reference: a recurring sense of redundancy in her immediate family and her unnamed mother's beauty. In her protagonist Tajana – regardless of whether or not she was her alter ego – Sunčana Škrinjarić created one of the psychologically most remarkable characters in contemporary Croatian literature. As a child, Tajana suffered physical and emotional abuse, primarily, as this analysis shows, from her mother. In the context of Croatian children's literature, the theme of abuse is no longer taboo, but narration regarding abuse coming from the mother is extremely rare. This paper argues that the majority of problems later in her life came from the missing emotional connections with her mother and from communication containing elements of active and passive emotional abuse. As a consequence of these early experiences, Tajana attempts to find a way out of the toxic surroundings of her adolescence by physically and emotionally distancing herself from her mother. She consciously expels her mother from her life and builds her character in a wider social environment, developing into an outgoing girl with a great number of social contacts. These contacts, however, show that something is wrong: they are shallow, and she appears to attempt to fill emotional emptiness with social activities. These extreme outgoing phases interchange with depressive phases and indicate great mood changes. Tajana fails to form friendships, especially female friendships. In her adolescence and early maturity, she shows some level of promiscuous behaviour and difficulties in forming deeper emotional bonds. This leads to the conclusion that the unhealthy mother-child relationship in Tajana's childhood resulted in emotional disturbances in adulthood. Ultimately, it must be emphasized that by breaking settled rules and taboos, Sunčana Škrinjarić created her own, recognizable style. She did not belong to any "school", generation or artistic movement, and therefore it is no wonder that the oddity and provocative quality of this work has provoked long-term critical discussion. From a broader perspective, *The Street of Ancestors* in Croatian children's literature can be interpreted as a forerunner of the "problem novel" in Croatia through which global trends in children's and young adult literature can be traced.

Ana Batinić* – Sanja Lovrić Kralj**

»Krhotine života«

Tajanino odrastanje u trilogiji Sunčane Škrinjarić Ulica predaka, Ispit zrelosti i Bijele strijele

Sažetak

Članak problematizira odrastanje književnog lika Tajane u nezdravu obiteljskom okruženju prikazanom u trilogiji Sunčane Škrinjarić (1931. – 2004.): *Ulica predaka* (1980.), *Ispit zrelosti* (2002.) i *Bijele strijele* (2004.). Temeljni prijemor trilogije krije se u prikazu djetinjstva bez didaktičizma, moraliziranja i idealizacije: djetinjstva koje je više nesretno nego zaštićeno i radosno. Narušavajući uvriježena pravila i kršeći tabue, Sunčana Škrinjarić stvorila je vlastiti, prepoznatljiv narativni stil. Analiza će biti posebno usmjerena na Tajanin odnos s majkom i predodžbu djevojčičina emocionalnog razvoja koji je moguće interpretirati u svjetlu trauma iz djetinjstva. Tajanina je majka obrazovana, lijepa, koketna žena koja ne voli svoju kćer. U njezinim je očima djevojčica tek »suvršeno derišće«, podsjetnik na propali prvi brak i prepreka u ostvarivanju životne sreće. Od fizičkog kažnjavanja do zanemarivanja gotovo svih Tajaninih potreba, njezina majka zasigurno pripada u kategoriju loših majki koja nije ispunjavala svoje osnovne majčinske dužnosti: da bude prisutna, pruži zaštitu i brine se za Tajaninu dobrobit i odgoj. Tajanino iskustvo emocionalnog zanemarivanja te emocionalnog, pa čak i fizičkog zlostavljanja u djetinjstvu odrazilo se na probleme u izgrađivanju emocionalno čvrstih i zdravih odnosa u odraslijoj dobi.

Ključne riječi: emocionalno zanemarivanje i zlostavljanje, književna trilogija, narcisoidna majka, nesretno djetinjstvo, Sunčana Škrinjarić.

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