

TANULMÁNYOK

DOI: 10.17165/TP.2019.3-4.1

ROBERT BACALJA¹ – KATARINA IVON² – DIANA NENADIĆ-BILAN³**Identity Distribution in the Croatian Children's Novel**

Identity formation and development has been a fundamental goal of the all-around educational work from children's very early age. The importance of a curriculum founded on a value system in which identity as a value occupies one of the most significant places has been recognized in the Croatian national curriculum at all levels, especially in early and pre-school education and in the primary school. In the development of identity, literature plays a particular role, encouraging the reader to identify with the characters, and then to assume their attitudes, values, behaviour - in short, to imitate the identities of literary heroes. The paper acknowledges the importance of the Croatian children's novel, which, by its rich identity distribution, becomes an encouragement and inspiration to young readers.

Introduction

Children develop their personality and identity in the context of educational institutions and families, which are, among other things, strongly characterized by the value system as the starting point and goals of educational efforts. In education, values represent the foundation and landmark of the teacher's activity. They permeate the overall content of the work, mirror themselves in the methods and procedures of the teacher, determine the atmosphere and culture of the educational institution, and create a framework for the child's identity formation. The strategic documents of the Republic of Croatia relating to the educational system insist on the need to define a national curriculum which will be based on values. The National Curriculum Framework (2016) highlights the core socio-cultural values which are promoted by the curriculum proposal and on which it rests: *"dignity of human being, freedom, equality, justice,*

¹Full Professor, University of Zadar, Department of Teachers and Preschool Teachers Education; rbacalja@unizd.hr

²Associate Professor, University of Zadar, Department of Teachers and Preschool Teachers Education; kivon@unizd.hr

³Assistant Professor, University of Zadar, Department of Teachers and Preschool Teachers Education; bnenadic@unizd.hr

patriotism, social equality, dialogue and tolerance, work, honesty, peace, conservation of nature and the environment and other democratic values” (National Curriculum Framework, 2016, p. 12). The following values are particularly emphasized in the national curriculum: knowledge, solidarity, identity and responsibility. Knowledge as a value trains us to understand better ourselves, others and everything created around us and enables critical thinking and successful functioning in life and work. Solidarity develops in children sensitivity to others, especially to the less well-off, the weaker and those deprived of their rights. Elaborating on the value of identity, the authors of the national curriculum say:

“Education contributes to the building of an individual's personality, cultural and national identity. Today, in the age of globalization, in which there is a potent mix of different cultures, worldviews and religions, one should become a citizen of the world while preserving his national identity, his culture, social, moral and spiritual heritage. In doing so, it is particularly essential to preserve and develop the Croatian language and to ensure that it is appropriately used. Upbringing and education should arouse, foster and develop personal identity and at the same time connect it with respect for diversity” (National Curriculum Framework, 2016, p. 12).

Responsibility requires the person's active involvement in and personal contribution to the common social and natural good, and honest relationship between his freedom and the freedom of others, as well as responsible action and behaviour. The foundation of the curriculum on values is pointed out at all levels of the educational system. The values proclaimed in the *National Curriculum Framework* have found their place in the National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education, as well as in the National Curriculum for Primary Education. The National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (2016) promotes the following values: knowledge, identity, humanism and tolerance, responsibility, autonomy and creativity. These values enable and stimulate the development of the whole personality of children, i.e. their cognitive, physical, speech, psychomotor and socio-emotional development. The formation of a child's identity continues strongly throughout primary education. The entire primary school curriculum is imbued with some core values, which will ultimately contribute to the development of awareness and self-image of every student. The proposal of the National Curriculum for Primary Education puts forward the following ideas. *“The fundamental values of primary education come from the orientation of Croatian educational policy, which aims at an integral development of students, the preservation of cultural, national, material and natural*

heritage and, if need be, to harmonize the local and national with the world and global development" (National Curriculum for Elementary Education, 2016, p. 5).

Fundamental values include knowledge, resourcefulness, identity, respect, responsibility, solidarity, health and integrity. The formation of a child's identity is inseparable from the creation of his self-image, self-understanding and self-esteem. The development of a child's identity is not a static process but a continuous and dynamic process facilitated by numerous interactions of the child with the social environment. While some aspects of identity are unique and individual, there is also the so-called group identity which denotes belonging to some group. Group identity allows some common layers of identity to be shared between members of the same group. As they mature and grow up, children enrich and develop their individual and group identity. Children develop a sense of their self in contact with the valuable works of Croatian literature. Literary works contain examples of numerous identities with which children identify, whose values they take on, and by which they model their behaviour. The following text will illustrate the distribution of identity in some examples of children's novels in Croatian literature. When it comes to the Croatian children's novel, we have a real wealth of identities because the characters in a novel, and children's books likewise, are the bearers of the plot and contribute to the dynamics of the events in the novel. It is the Croatian children's novel that abounds in the incredible dynamics of identity distribution, and therefore, the diversity and richness of identity images. The paper will aim to show in the examples of selected novels how this identity image has changed - from the beginning (Lovrak's novels), through Kušan and Matošec to Gavran. It can be pointed out that in the realistic part of Croatian children's literature, characterization of characters was always in line with social reality. Perhaps the figures of the founder of the Croatian children's novel Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić *Čudnovate zgrade šegrta Hlapića* (*The Strange Adventures of Hlapich the Apprentice*, 1913.) are, by some fairy tale polarization, excessively defined as black and white. Such are, e.g. Hlapić vs. Dark Man, Košarač (Basket Weaver) vs. Owner of the Circus, but constant polarization may also be found in Lovrak although his structure is not that of a fairy tale but is deeply rooted in realistic motivation. Although his structure is not fairy tale, Lovrak is firmly rooted in realistic motivation. He wrote his novels at the time when the so-called modernist objectivism had settled down in Croatian literature. This is how this phase was called by literary critic Ljubomir Maraković in his article *Modern objectivism / an Attempt to Characterize a New Period in the Development of Novel* (published in the *Hrvatsko kolo* in 1930). Therefore, it was when "good old realism" prevailed over the avant-garde and when Croatian literature turned to the problems of society with a socially engaged note. Miroslav Šicel singles out this interval of Croatian

interwar literature as *"a period of synthetic realism (1928-1941)"* and points out that it is filled with *"a strong penetration of social themes and a return to the stylistic features of realistic expression."* (Šicel, 2009, p. 5) Hranjec, however, in his discussion of Lovrak's character development, points out precisely this: *"Lovrak cannot be denied the skill in modelling children's characters (...) Nevertheless, they were created by a socially engaged writer who transferred aspirations from adult into children's literature. Besides, he was a teacher, and his children are bent down by the burden of their "roles"* (Hranjec, 1998, p. 41). So, in character modelling, that is, in the creation of individual identities, he shows specific class starting points or social stratification. Pero vs. Divljak or Ljuban vs. Pero:

"Such polarization or comparative characterization (character parallelism) in literary context (...) also serves to highlight the social polarization of characters (which, in fact, generates character polarization!). Thus, the positive character Ljuban is the son of poor parents; the villain Pero comes from a rich family. Class relationships are passed on to children: Pero is naughty and spoiled because he comes from a well-off family!" (Hranjec, 2006, p. 74)

Such polarization is actually schematic also in *Družba Pere Kvržice (Pero the Lump's Gang)*. Pero is the son of a poor peasant, and Divljak (The Savage), like Pero, in *Vlak u snijegu (A Train in the Snow)* is the son of a rich peasant. Everything related to wealth is negative. Divljak (The Savage), unlike the rest of the gang, carries with him a big lunch which he does not want to divide, but upon request he shares it: *"The Savage eats a large piece of cheese and egg pie. Pero keeps looking, is silent and waiting. Then he stands before him and tells him: "Be a man! ..."* (Lovrak, 1964, p. 12).

According to this projection of Lovrak's, poverty is modesty, non-extravagance, and this identity is, by Lovrak, one that the reader has to identify with. Behind this modesty, stands the wit, which is not wasted but used with purpose, reasonably and advantageously in the fight for the common good. It looks as if Lovrak suggests that this little man when he grows up, will lead the nation to a better life. He will do it with his virtues such as altruism, a born leader, most informed, caring for the group and each individual, togetherness, cooperation, etc. He gives examples from his childhood of how to behave in the future. Another identity or character parallelism is found in the Savage: wealth equals stinginess, savagery, neglect for the group, false leadership, blackmail, lying, obstruction, not understanding the true values, no struggle for the common good, but one's own promotion, lack of care for one's neighbour. As Hranjec points out:

“The most common model is a tightly organized collective with a leader, as well as a number of individuals - reliable deputies, opponents, villains, cowards. Lovrak transfers to them the class opposites of the grown-ups. In dividing the poor and the rich, the author is openly inclined towards the former, who are then both clever and character-wise superior. The interpolation of class relations led Lovrak, somewhere less, elsewhere more evidently, to the black-and-white line-up of the characters” (Hranjec, 1998, p. 45).

In this gallery of opposing characters, especially in the *Pero the Lump's Gang*, a real wealth of characters emerges. *“Medo and Šilo are true friends and good workers, Milo Dijete (The Little Darling) physically the weakest - with a strong desire to contribute to a common goal (some features reminiscent of Ferenc Molnár Nemeček) (...)”* (Hranjec, 2006, p. 75). However, from this wealth stands out the identity of Pero, Divljak's opposite, but also when compared with others: *“Above all, the character of a leader, the boy with a 'lump', dominates, as Crnković called him. He is a boy about the age of eleven, superior to the rest in everything, an organizer, righteous, honest”* (Hranjec, 1998, p. 45).

Lovrak indicates Pero's superiority from the very beginning, such as when they jumped and fled after they picked the master Marko's cherries. They ran across the field and in an instant, they are in the meadow. Pero stopped them: *“Stop! No one is chasing us! Come here, let us get together to see if we are all alive? We are! Legs in place? What's broken? Ha! Ha! Only the noses are not in order! A little bloody! Little, that's nothing!”* (Lovrak, 1964, p. 14). The following is an episode in which Pero forms the gang, and here he stands out as a leader:

“Pero is proud. He stands upright at the window. His face is up. She speaks ecstatically. – Boys! Imagine this! Let's say: The mill is ours! The gang does not understand him and says nothing. Pero goes on. - It's clear. You're dumbfounded. And I haven't told you yet what I think. I won't be too hasty. I've been thinking hard there days. While I'm thinking it up, I'll suggest something to you” (Lovrak, 1964, p. 17).

As it has been pointed out in literary-historical reviews, his opposite is Divljak (The Savage), and Divljak's character traits are somewhat different, as his name says: *“Don't be angry with them. They revealed a secret to us about two little mirrors. – The Savage remains a real savage! He would also sell his birth father for some bright thing – Medo ridicules him”* (Lovrak, 1964, p. 77). On the other hand, Pero is calm, and at the moment when others would give in, he manages to keep the secret: *“Isn't everything over now? Šilo asked. – Let them come. They can grind. We can hand them over the mill! – No! No! It's not over yet. Please keep it a secret for a*

few more days. I figure out how to make it all happen, so while I think of it, we won't be sorry"(Lovrak, 1964, p. 89). We could also call it the preservation of autonomous space, as Berislav Majhut points out in his novel about children's gangs. He says, *"The main problem is not a movement in space but securing one part of space as autonomous. Securing hiding places, shelters, areas not governed by adult laws but by children"* (2005, p. 257).

Pero, in a way, continues this preservation of the oasis, as Majhut calls it, and that brave confrontation with the Savage when, like a true leader, he gets even with the negative hero: *"The Savage has stopped. Run back! He's turning into the cornfield! Someone is chasing after him. Who? Pero in person! Šilo hurried to help. He was not needed because behold, Pero pushed the Savage forward. He tied his hands with his belt from behind, at the back"* (Lovrak, 1964, p. 95). This is what we could call the character of a real or born leader:

"Pero is an outstanding leader, especially distinguished in the gang. And his nickname is in the service of characterization of the character, although at first, it seems casual, quite abstract. Pero is a boy with an idea - the right idea at the right time. His ideas are materialized in an auditory manner, in a lump because when a brilliant idea comes to him, he exclaims: Lump!" (Težak, 1993, p. 31).

It is clear that a collective identity prevails here, and it is the leader who is responsible for the collective. Although, as Dubravka Zima points out in later Lovrak's publications *Devetorica hrabrih (The Courageous Nine)*, we will find children whose *"achievement (...) is less ambitious"* (Zima, 2011, p. 95) In this novel also, Lovrak does not abandon his conception of collectivism. He is separating from a wider collective (teacher Matić's class) nine honours students, while the authority embodied again in the teacher's name, the unnamed Matić, stands out from the school collective by many positive characteristics which he also transfers to his students (Zima, 2011: 95). But this paradigm changes in the new the typology of children's novel - in a character novel and a family novel in the 1990s (Vrcić-Mataija, 2014, p. 220).

Identity images in the novel *Strah u Ulici lipa (Fear on Lime-Tree Street)* by Milivoj Matošec

The technique for building an identity in Matošec *Strah u Ulici lipa (Fear on Lime -Tree Street)* is slightly different. Here, identity is stratified; at the beginning of the novel, a false identity is given, and the true identity comes to light at the end. In a way, it is a search for identity, or the writer eventually discovers the real one. Unlike Lovrak and Kušan (Kušan, in his first novel *Uzbuna na Zelenom Vrh* (*The Mystery Of Green Hill*) from 1956, locates the shop on

the outskirts of the city, in the suburbs, and later traces his characters exclusively in the city area), Matošec creates an urban identity, in other words, he places his characters in an urban environment with all the attributes that it carries. These are city streets, cars, blocks of flats and parks, but there is also the influence of home reading, the Wild West legends, westerns, crime films and thrillers. Such is the product and identity of Mungos Nevada as well. There are also city gangs, such as the one from Mungos' street, which immediately ambushed Veslonožac as he was investigating where Mungos was going. He first sneaks into Lime-Tree Street in a western hero style, like in a series of films in which, e.g. Clint Eastwood starred. However, is a comparable "guy" character to a series of American films characters, a villain played by Humphrey Bogart, or unspeakably important roles of the character of a criminal but the unfortunate wretch, the Utopian James Cagney. However, the arrival of Mungos Nevada is special as he comes in the style of a western hero:

“A long-legged boy appeared at the end of the street. A big boy. Taller than Praporac and Velonožac. (...) So, the long-legged boy coming down the street either had done a lot of riding or was going to do it. Even a blind man would see that things were just like that. (...) The boy did not want to be surprised by anyone. Lowered down to the hips, his arms slightly swayed while he was walking, but they were ready. Ready for what? Ready for anything. For grabbing a pistol and with clenched fists awaiting an attack” (Matošec, 2005, p. 6).

Moreover, to put it colloquially, as such, "he got into the legend": *"His steps were long, soft and quiet. If someone judged a man by his walking, he should have concluded: resolute, cautious, dexterous.”* (Matošec, 2005, p. 6). Pointing out these western-features, Matošec also sticks on this boy's back a mask of criminal acts. He forces the naive Šapica (Little Paw) to buy a worthless lottery ticket that had been used and won nothing, in the style of Cagney and other characters from the movie screen: *"Whether it's worth or not is completely unimportant now. I paid four dinars for the lottery, and this is what matters.”* (Matošec, 2005, p. 20).

Šapica naively answers to his words, because of the wolf's skin into which the character of the long-legged boy slipped - Mungos Nevada does not give in: *"Find someone else - he says to Mungos briefly - I don't need that lottery. I know – Mungos nodded gravely – no one needs it. But if I decide who needs less, you know what conclusion I will come to. And don't forget, I'm the one who decides”* (Matošec, 2005, p. 20–21). The play between the naive Šapica and the mighty Mungos continues because Mungos intimidates and threatens Šapica: *"By a careless gesture, as if he is not doing it wilfully, he is touching that swollen pocket with his hand. Pistol.*

Šapica feels cold again" (Matošec, 2005, p. 21). Even now he does not realize his position, so he is trying to bargain with Mungos, who is brusque and who wants to sell the worthless lottery ticket: *"Listen, kid – he said softly, threatening – I have put up enough with your showing off. You may be brave, but you are certainly not brave enough to scare me. And because of that, don't try to order me anymore. (...) He pushed him away from himself, and Šapica staggered."* (Matošec, 2005, p. 21) Mungos without any reservations takes from Šapica almost all year's savings: *"Šapica takes four red banknotes, puts the box on the cupboard and gives the money to Mungos – You're a good person! His long-legged mocked him. – You can make good deals!"* (Matošec, 2005, p. 22). Besides, Mungos assures him that he will falsely testify that he gave him money for a pistol and not for a lottery ticket a fortune and will tell his mother about it (Matošec, 2005, p. 22). However, after this conversation at Šapic's flat, Mungos fully controls Šapica and, with threats, orders him to listen to him in the future and to assist him whenever he needs and when he asks for it. A character-novel, is already present here and, as it is pointed out in literature: *"The narrative pattern of the character novel presupposes the predominance of the inner reliving of the characters who independently go through the Romanesque plot, building their identity on a kind of the state of child's loneliness"* (Vrcić–Mataija, 2011, p. 149).

Mungos's hiding and running away from home changes, and he breaks down: *"Another, different Mungos – revealing that his real name is Darko - is himself misunderstood and unloved. The core sentence, in this sense, is precisely the boy's honest statement: - Nobody likes me. No one!"* (Hranjec, 1998, p. 65) Even though the author's idea that parents leave their son loaded with two make-up exams and go to the seaside (!) is unconvincing, the lesson told through Veliki Tom is clear and logical. It's up to a person whether they will make a friendship and win the affection of other people (Hranjec, 1998, p. 64–65). Šapica is indecisive because of the fear of Mungos Nevada, so Mum returned, he does not have the heart or courage to tell her what had happened to him in the conflict with the long-legged. He constructed the whole scenario in his head, but he did not say a word: *" – A boy came to our street. Big, evil. He forced me to bring him here. (..) – He had a revolver. He threatened me. He took four dinars from me. He didn't take it. He forced me to buy an expired lottery ticket. And so he got his money."* (Matošec, 2005, p. 52). Latica (Petal), Šapica's sister, is troubled with this truth, and also with the problem left to her brother by Mungos. She goes to Veliki Tom (Big Tom) (this is also a citation name), her uncle to lament about the problem the boys, and especially her brother, have had since the long-legged boy arrived at Lime Street. But the boys organize themselves and follow Mungos and want to find out who Mungos Nevada is. Velonožac does not succeed in

finding it out, because the boys standing in front of the house he went in did not know anyone by that name, but they did not particularly like it:

“What does this Mungos look like? Or maybe you're talking about mungos which catch mice and snakes? – No. I'm talking about Mungos Nevada. - Mungos Nevada? – one said awe-struck. – Awesome nickname! Come on, describe him! - Sneakers, jeans, a white T-shirt. Tall. Short-cut hair” (Matošec, 2005, p. 66).

The discovery of the real Mungos of Nevada comes only after his disturbing dream in Alcibiades' basement: *“He is running down the street. A large bundle is swaying on his back. A mighty heavy bundle. It's full of stones. Mungos is being chased. A boy chases him on a two-wheeler, a smiling girl and a boy with a black revolver in his hand.”* (Matošec, 2005, p. 69). What he hides in the real world, his goodness and weakness and a desire for the warmth of home and parental love happen in a dream! *“Everything in that dream is awfully clear, almost transparent. The bundle and the revolver, and the boy on the two-wheeler. One thing is not clear though. Who was calling my mom? Him? Nonsense. Mungos isn't a baby! No, no one called my mom”* (Matošec, 2005, p. 70).

Maybe to figure out Mungos Nevada's true identity, Big Tom's word matters: *“He kept trying to find friends. Only, he didn't choose the right way. Come on, hurry up now! It's time for him to wake up, if he's not already woken up”* (Matošec, 2005, p. 134). Despite all the brusqueness and showing off his strength to the boys of Lime Street, Mungos is timid, and he shows it when Tugoljub I. comes to his hiding place in Alchibiade's basement. At first, Mungos thinks he is a ghost, but this phenomenon occurs to him with voice and laughter, and he concludes that he is not a ghost because ghosts do not speak.

His defense is filmlike and he grabs a revolver: *“Mungos bends down and feels it. The revolver is still there. And that's what matters! He tightens the grip of the weapon. (...) As the tiny flame grew, Mungos bounced to the side and pulled the revolver in a rapid movement. (...) – I'm going to shoot! He threatened insecurely (...)”* (Matošec, 2005, p. 94). But this rapid movement of Mungos or his threat did not confuse Tugoljub, but made him life laugh:

“- Ha, ha, ha! The man laughed. - You gonna shoot? And how are you going to shoot? This revolver wouldn't go off if you begged it on your knees! Even if there were bullets in it, this revolver wouldn't shoot. And there are no bullets in it, I know well that there are none, because I've checked it from all sides” (Matošec, 2005, p. 94).

Now, the intruder is finally revealed. Tugoljub I. is actually an elderly man from a nursing home who escaped from the home: *"Well, it's nice in the nursing home, but the old people are very boring. Alas, stunt boring! I keep looking at them, and when I can no longer look at them, I run away."* (Matošec, 2005, p. 96). And Mungos immediately liked Tugoljub I. because he was no longer alone in the basement, and he sincerely wanted his friendship. In this relationship, Dubravka Zima finds a "narrative axis" which:

"on the one hand, includes a possible interpretation of childhood as a privileged period in human life, given the stereotype of children's intuitive perceptions of the world and community, which allows for a stronger connection with the old age that is also in a privileged position considering the gained experience that enables the elderly to form a judgement in a relaxed and relativistic manner" (Zima, 2011, p. 160).

So, to his words that they were two lonely wolves, Tugoljub reacted in his own style, but this also invokes that original identity starting point – reading and movie: *"Ha, ha, ha! Two lone wolves! One him, and the other me! Where did you read that, boy? What kind of crazy book did you find that crazy statement in?"* (Matošec, 2005, p. 99). But Mungos, in the basement, takes care of Tugoljub, so when the old man woke up feeling ill, Mungos gives him some water, takes care of him, shows attention and love, and calls him Grandpa Tugoljub and eventually goes to see Big Tom, the doctor. He did not want to leave Tugoljub for a moment, but he ran back to the basement, and this is when Mungos changes: *"He tried to convince himself that he could really leave Tugoljub I. but was already hurrying down the stairs. It is as if out of one Mungos there were two. One, who decided to run away and the other who returned to fulfill his promise. The latter won"* (Matošec, 2005, p. 109). Obviously, an awareness of similarity with others prevailed in Mungos; one identity prevails, and that is humanity. Evidently, this Copernican turn in Mungos was driven by interaction with others. Namely, Mungos was constantly running away from people (running away from home and running away from his street) due to a lack of interaction with others, or simply because of failing to adapt to a new environment. The way Mungos tried to affirm himself among the weaker ones (Šapica, Veslonožac, Latica) also reflected in his speech with Tugoljub about two wolves. He did not stand for long wearing a wolf's skin but taught about humanity by Veliki Tom, he, as we have said, embarked on the night of great changes, or in the contact with humanity, an identity changes and a new one is created, i.e. it returns to its original state. Matošec grades, and Mungos is gradually changing: *"This thought accompanied him to the door of the doctor's house. He heard the cheerful voice of Veliki Tom from the house and felt some strange warmth. Didn't he just start liking another*

man? Who knows?" (Matošec, 2005, p. 118). And then moral traits are awakening in Mungos himself and his actions; at first it is honesty, so he confesses to Veliki Tom what actually happened. In fact, he first lied that his parents left him alone in the house, and then admits, *"I should explain it to you in more detail. I've got one makeup exam. No, I have two exams. A son of a daddy's friend too. Dad agreed with his friend that I and this little son of his study together."* (Matošec, 2005, p. 119). In his confession, he gradually reveals the reason why he moved away from his street; because the gang there didn't like him (and he only lived there for six or seven months, as the novel points out): *"Once, having just moved in, they stopped me in front of the house. – Do you have a name? – one of them asked me. – He must have one – laughed the other. And I was angry that they made fun of me, so I just walked past them"* (Matošec, 2005, p. 121).

After that, Veliki Tom encourages him to take the makeup exams (since they were only three weeks away), but even then Mungos has not yet revealed all the secrets that bother him. There is one left and he decides to reveal it, i.e. he spent his parents' money for food and he eventually reveals his true identity, He turns from Mungos into boy Darko:

"Give me that envelope, Mungos! Or you don't want me to call you that? – Why not – Tugoljub I. raised his voice. – I've only just memorised his nickname and you'd like him to give it up! My name is Darko – Mungos said. I don't want either of you to give me money. It's my own fault that I took the money" (Matošec, 2005, p. 127).

Here along with honesty, there is another moral trait: responsibility. This also comes from Western and crime films: a built identity so that he could prove himself to others because he simply did not know how to approach them. Now Darko gets the qualities which build one new identity, the identity of being responsible, honest and careful towards others, especially towards the elderly (this also includes Tugoljub). Matošec's message is clear, as Hranjec points out: *"(...) in terms of the consequences of too much reading and swallowing 'a pile of colourful volumes' (...), and actually one has to be natural, try to understand and love fellow people."* (Hranjec, 1998, p. 65). He also points out that Mungos, in fact, Darko, served Matošec: *"In this sense, this character is the bearer of the author's assumption, because the author, through him, at the children's reception level, depicts the mixing of the literary and life reality, emphasising, on the closing pages, the need for genuine friendship and understanding"* (Hranjec, 1998, p. 65).

Identity images in the novel *Sretni dani (Happy Days)* by Miro Gavran

In contrast to previous publications, the contemporary children's novel is moving from adventure to social-psychological topics (Vrcić-Mataija, 2011, p. 147). It also deals with problem situations, and it is emphasised that

“Children emancipation, treating children's social status with respect through a clearly expressed child identity, which is best evidenced in the novels through the narrative focalization of the character, are the basic sociological criteria that cause the transition from the traditional to the modern, and consequently postmodern type of children's novel” (Vrcić-Mataija, 2011, p. 147).

Now, we have not set any ambitious goals in line with the postmodern tradition, but the ordinary life realities and characters of children who solve problem situations from their everyday life. In classifying the novel Miro Gavran's *Sretni dani (Happy Days)* into a *"family novel with the image of a contemporary patriarchal family"* (Vrcić–Mataija, 2018, p. 215). Pero and Jurica, are atypical heroes of children's novels, because they do not aspire to a great achievement, a goal that is usually set by children's gangs. Instead, they aim to change the position of their families (Jurica's mother walked out on his father and is now living in Argentina with her new husband and Jurica hears from her very rarely. She *"just sends a Christmas card"*. And for his birthday, not even that - in a sad voice, Jurica commented on the behaviour of his mother, who in the distant world forgot about her son (Gavran, 2000, p. 16). On the other hand, Pero's father has died. The whole idea is how to bring the two families together? Pero's mother cooks well, and Jurica's father is not a great cook: *"Indeed, Jurica was a little angry that his dad was constantly making Italian dishes and he was already fed up with that kind of food. His dad tried to defend himself by saying that he had not cooked spaghetti for three days and it was not his fault he was not a perfect cook."* (Gavran, 2000, p. 16). The novel begins with a get-acquainted meeting of Pero and Jurica, two fifth-class students. And then the author simply follows in a diary three levels of events: events in the family, Pero with his mother and Jurica with his father and he also follows Jurica and Pero at play and generally all that makes childhood, as well as their school life. Their family life is incomplete because, as we said, each misses a parent. According to some data, 174,518 mothers with children and 33,345 fathers with children live in Croatia (2018 data). Thus, it can be said that Gavran analyses in the 1990s, when the novel was written, a contemporary social issue that is still relevant today. Both families are highly educated people. Pero's mother Marija is a lawyer, and Jurica's father Božidar is a mechanical engineer. Marija is a young woman and mother of only thirty-three. In an important

conversation, Jurica and Pero conclude that friends should not keep secrets, and then confess to each other what troubles them. Pero is tormented by a lack of male companionship, Jurica goes with his father to watch games, is interested in sports, and Pero can never get an upper hand of his mum and complains *"She didn't even let me go in for karate because she as a woman thinks it's a stupid sport"* (Gavran, 2000, p. 24). Pero complains to Jurica that he needs a dad:

"– She has no idea I want a father and a brother. Let's say one brother like you who loves sports and life. Do you understand? – So tell your mum. – Huh, fat chance. She constantly talks against men, how stupid, insensitive, and half-educated they are, and that it's a good thing that she hasn't married a second time" (Gavran, 2000, p. 25).

Jurica comes to the idea that Pero's father might be Uncle Ivo, the plumber from his building, because he is sure that Ivo is a good man and loves children. They engineered a plan for Pero to break the tap and then call a plumber. But to their great disappointment *"Master Ivo walked into our flat swaying, struggling to maintain his balance. With him, a strong smell of bad brandy hung in the hall. (...) All afternoon he messed up with the faucet, smoking one cigarette after another, and drinking his mom's homemade plum brandy which she kept for rare guests all the time"* (Gavran, 2000, p. 30.) Eventually, there is a complete collapse of Pero's idea:

And it was not until nine o'clock in the evening that Master Ivo finished repairing the tap. On leaving he charged them so much that his mum nearly fainted away. - It's a rip off! said Mum. - Well, my lady, all of you would like to have your repairs done free of charge. Well, you can't have it any more. It's capitalism now and workers must be the first to be respected (Gavran, 2000, p. 30–31).

The second attempt again agreed upon by the two boys was with an advertisement *"looking for a husband"*. And this insistence on a father can be related to what we can point out about changing identities, that is, this kind of novel moves away from the previous themes of children's realistic novels: *"from a markedly adventurous it turns into a social and psychological novel and the topics of modern novels are various forms of existential problems, children's fears, traumas, disease and the death of loved ones or various problems within the family"* (Vrcić-Mataija 2011, p. 147).

Jurica and Pero agree on the contents of the ad, but work independently and on their own initiative because they do not ask mum for permission: *"– What if your mum doesn't allow it? - I won't even ask her. I'll put an advertisement, and only when it comes out, will I tell her: "the point is that I want a father, I want a brother, please invite those who answer the ad to talk to*

you so that we could choose the best one" (Gavran, 2000, p. 34). Not only did they decide how they would pay for the ad (by collecting old paper), but also choose an ad that is most suitable for their purpose already published in the *Večernji list*: *A young widow, through no fault of hers, with long dark hair, big eyes, of a gentle disposition, comfortably off, no commitments, seeks a man, sports lover for the sake of marriage* (Gavran, 2000, p. 35). Certainly Pero did not tell his mother about the ad until Saturday. Mother was very angry, and Pero told her that he had just done it because she'd been very nervous lately. And this is where all the difficulties of modern life are revealed. She is nervous because there are problems at work.

The men interested in the ad started arriving on Sunday, and Zvonko says that the advertisement is not credible because it does not mention that she has a son. *"You probably did not mention him for strategic reasons"* (Gavran, 2000, p. 40). When Pero's mother says she is thirty-three, the candidate answers: *"You're a chicken. I'm over fifty"*. (Gavran, 2000, p. 43). When she asks him what his occupation is, he vaguely says he is in a car sale. *"Nothing special. Mainly second-hand cars. Do you get the point? I'm not interested where the cars come from as I just act as a middleman; my job is to sell them well and not to ask too many questions."* (Gavran, 2000, p. 44). But this middleman is bothered by Marija's having a son so he ran away as fast as his legs could carry him. The conclusion of another suitor sounds even funnier as he touches the 'comfortably off' claim: *"Do you think that a woman who has a 58-square-metre flat on Rendić Street, and nothing else, has the right to say that she is comfortably off?"* (Gavran, 2000, p. 41). And his greeting on leaving was also peculiar: *"Anyway, today I've got interviews with two more debauchees and one widow."* (Gavran, 2000, p. 41). In the whole kaleidoscope of suitors and potential candidates, various social types that are taken from our daily lives can be found.

What stands out in literary theory as a starting point in the shaping of a contemporary character novel equally relates to the formation of the identity of children and the above-mentioned pattern of family novel.

"In the types of a modern and post-modern structured character novel, which, in a chosen time section, are significantly more numerous than the previous ones, the image of contemporary urban childhood and the character of a child and teenager who builds his identity on the dominant influence of contemporary forms of popular culture or is extremely excluded from it" (Vrcić-Mataija, 2011, p. 150).

Reading the novel, in the section dealing with school and the environment, this is especially emphasised in a number of motives: Jurica's father Božidar is a computer expert, so he teaches

them computer games (and Pero cannot use the computer). This was very popular during this period (the 90s of the 20th century), which Gavran refers to in the novel:

"And then uncle Božidar set up a computer game called The Prince of Persia, which is a really great game, that prince escaping from a Turkish prison. He showed me what I had to do, and after a few minutes I could play without help" (Gavran, 2000, p. 17). Not only is Uncle Božidar reproductive but is also creative, so he offers them a new game that, according to Pero, is better and more beautiful than *The Prince of Persia*. The same reflection of that urban identity are also school parties when their form master allows them to start a disco, providing their parents watch over. We can say that different identity features prevail in this contemporary novel, in other words *"we interpret the manner in which a juvenile identity is built and shaped in the context of love, family, but also existential determinants, less often the trend ones"* (Vrcić–Mataija, 2011, p. 150). Eventually, it all ends up after *"several appointments and a few 'spontaneous encounters' in one boy getting a father, and the other a mother"* (Hranjec, 2006, p. 247).

Instead of conclusion

In these few examples, we see how identity distribution or the identity paradigm in the Croatian children's novel is changing, from the leader of a children's gang Pero in the novel from a rural community, through the character of Mungos Nevada in the novel from urban space in which reading and film dominate as an identity starting point and identity search with all the lessons / messages of Matošec, to the identity in the contemporary Croatian novel, which is formed on the basis of urban childhood, contemporary culture, family relationships, but also life-existential determinants. In the analysed works, the literary-pedagogical function of these novels is complex. Readers get to know individual characters as living persons with their specific characteristics and actions. Their virtues or shortcomings lead them to reflect on their own personal and group identities. Recipients can consciously, but also unconsciously, search in the characters for the similarities of their traits and behaviour. The read contents are internalised, "adopted", and continue to be upgraded on the internal mental plan of the reader.

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