

**CONTEMPORARY SLOVAK LITERATURE
FOR CHILDREN
IN THEORY AND EDUCATION**

EVA VITÉZOVÁ

2020
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Introduction

The tasks and aims of literary education may be defined differently. Finally though, it is about pupils learning to read (receive) poetry, prose, drama and literary criticism, so that the read text does not only slide on the surface of consciousness, but with it could grow aesthetic and ethical awareness addressing the strength of human personality.

Vincent Šabík

The idea of this introductory reflection, formulated by the leading Slovak literary scholar Vincent Šabík in his remarkable and timeless study *Literature and School* and published in *Literature for Contemporaries* (1988), is further developed in a broader educational context as well as in current school documents. Using art and literature, school education is primarily focused on the aesthetic element, on educating children to appreciate artistic culture. Literary education, as again Vincent Šabík maintained, “being aware of its sense and the sense of literature, knows that what is important is not only what is happening in the literary work, but also that what evokes, provokes, puts into movement – not only in the sense of the old catharsis, but also a new dynamization leading to the actualisation of pupils’ own needs, to their formulation as well as reshaping, to creativity, to new developmental possibilities”.

One of the long-term and permanent problems of teaching literature is that literary education overestimates the informative component of curriculum focused on memory acquisition. This unfavourable trend, typical especially for higher educational levels (though the lower ones often do not lag either) is objectively due to two reasons. The first one is the fact that literary production, paralleling an ever increasing measure of knowledge during the last half century, is more extensive than during the entire previous development. A consequence of this is a serious problem for teaching literature, that is, how to harmonise a requirement to include into educational content all the works important for the understanding of literary development, for the identification of its variability, and, at the same time, to prevent the content to become overexaggerated by such a multitude of facts that it would lead to the prevalence of memory-reproduction learning. The point is that knowing a certain amount of facts is also important for the development of a creative approach to literature, since without them, pupils cannot, and are not able to reflect on and take attitudes to literature, the author,

to concrete literary works. The second unfavourable moment of literary education results, analogically, from the previous one. Schools do not use the opportunity to develop individual learners' skills whose activity and personality are weakened. Stereotypical cultural education and the shortage of stimuli from the environment leads to the average, supporting uniformity of thinking and taste. The improvement of this trend lies in the systematic cultivation of pupils' reading culture, which is possible only through a constant reading contact with literature.

The monograph consists of several parts. The introductory chapter is a brief literary-historical (literary-reflexive) view of contemporary Slovak children's literature in the context of previous developments, followed by the chapters probing the partialities of contemporary literary development (a more detailed, interpretive view of the contemporary fairy tale, story prose for children, legend, leprello). The practical part's aim is an attempt at giving an insight into practical teaching, providing teachers with suggestions, guidelines as well as motivations and inspirations for dialogue between child and adult, between student and teacher.

I hope that the monograph will find its readers among teachers at various levels of school education, as well as among experts dealing with children's literature in a broader literary-didactic context, but also among students who are still preparing for the work of teachers. Last but not least, I believe that it will also appeal to enthusiasts who perceive the overlap between children's literature, adult literature or intra-territorial and inter-artistic contexts. I believe that the text will introduce readers to the values of Slovak literary and cultural milieu in general as well. Thanks in this connection are due to all those who participated in any way in the creation of the monograph - colleagues and collaborators for inspiration, students for the opportunity of creative dialogue in the discussion of individual works.

1

Contemporary Slovak literature for children and young readers

When thinking about literature for children and young readers, the most basic question is whether or not children's literature is specific by something that entitles us to take it out (albeit only as working concept) from the context of national literature. In seeking an answer to this question, we must be aware of two facts. The first is the fact that its addressee is a human "cub", that is, a person whose socialisation, intellectual, emotional, value, will, interest and experiential dispositions gradually develop in proportion to the achieved degree of ontogenesis (and reading and literary experience), and who needs also literary art proportional to its personal strengths, needs and interests. The second fact is that children's literature, as with literature for adults, is a verbal-semiotic art, and thus the same value-aesthetic criteria apply to both.

If we accept the ontogenetically conditioned psychosocial peculiarities of its addressee, we will come to the conclusion that children's literature is a subsystem of artistic literature, specific only in that it reflects the aspect of the age of the reader in some way. In addition to aesthetic function, non-aesthetic, pragmatic functions (didactic, entertaining, popularising, etc.) can also be employed in it more conspicuously than in adult literature where aesthetic function is expected to dominate. The only specific feature of literature for children and young readers is the phenomenon of intentionality, the children's (age) aspect, which conditions the whole structure of a literary work for children. In this sense, we can consider the children's aspect as the general developmental line of Slovak literature for children and young readers. It was the respect for the psychosocial peculiarities of childhood and the search for a way to incorporate them into an artistic text that led to the emergence of quality children's literature in Slovakia. Ignoring these peculiarities and a consequent reduction of literary work to utilitarian-didactic aspects would always cause the aesthetic qualities and ambitions of children's literature to curl behind its educational ambitions. In Slovak literature, this was happening throughout the 19th century, perhaps even up to the 1930s, when somewhere consciously (Podjavorinská, Martáková, Hronský), elsewhere spontaneously (Ondrejov, Rázus, Bodenek), aesthetic emancipation and equalisation of the relationship between creators and consumers based on contemporaneous and aesthetic concepts of literature for

adults took hold and displaced utilitarian didacticism of older children's books. Slovak children's literature has very quickly - in an unprecedented way in the world context - moved forward with its quality and (in comparison with the number of inhabitants) with the quantity of its works as well. Both literary and non-literary circumstances led to this, culminating in the advent of a "generation of children's aspect". I will gradually and chronologically clarify the most significant milestones in its development, paying greatest attention to the last twenty years.

Literature for children and young readers is a subsystem consisting of a set of texts for a specific type of recipient (preschool children up to 14-15 years and adolescents aged 15-18). It can be divided into:

- folk literature, or verbal folklore - (a narrower term than folklore, folk-lore = knowledge of the people), it is dominated by the verbal (textual) component, is mainly the oral verbal production of people, a relatively independent semiotic and communication system with its own genres expressive properties, frequent motivic material for the creation of other texts (folklore stylisation in various forms)
- non-intentional literature (a set of texts not intentionally created for children who have only gradually adopted these texts)
- intentional literature (a set of texts intentionally created for children).

For the preservation of folk literature, of great importance were its collectors operating mainly in the 19th century. In the Slovak context, they include, for example, Ján Kollár (1793 - 1852), who in co-authorship with P. J. Šafárik and Ján Benedikt published *Písneň svetské lidu slovenského v Uhřích a Národné zpievanky* [Secular Songs of the Slovak People in Hungary and the National Songs], Ján Francisci - Rimavský (1822 - 1905), who in 1845 published *Slovenskje povesti* (1845) [Slovak Legends], but did not continue publishing it and his material was edited by Pavol Dobšinský as *Slovenské prostonárodné povesti* (1880 - 1883) [Slovak National Legends], Samuel Reuss (1783 - 1852), whose principle was to not edit fairy tales and leave them in the form in which they were told by the narrator, Ľudovít Reuss (1822 - 1905), son of Samuel Reuss, who co-authored the 3rd volume of *Prostonárodný zábavník* [Simple National Entertainment Book], prepared the 4th volume himself (it had 519 pages and fairy tales were collected in it). Augustín Horislav Škultéty (1819 - 1892) and Dobroslav Čipka (both prominent collectors of folklore) published the first fiction book for children in standard Slovak in 1846 - *Zornička I*. The Czech writer Božena Němcová was also active in collecting folk literature, fairy tales and legends (1857 - 58), which prompted Škultéty and Dobšinský to speed up the publication of *Slovak Legends* (1858, they contained 64 fairy tales in 6 notebooks). The most important personality in collecting, editing and publishing folk literature was Pavol Dobšinský (1828 - 1885), in 1880 - 1883 publishing the

most important 8-volume work *Prostonárodné slovenské povesti* [Slovak National Legends] that contained not only magical, but also animal, legends, humorous, fairy tales. He included the material collected by Ján Francisci, Božena Němcová, but also fairy tales which were published only in magazines. Pavol Dobšinský was Slovakia's most important collector of folklore culture, and his *Slovak National Legends* is the largest collection of Slovak fairy tales to date. At this point, it is worth recalling that in the Slovak context, the term fairy tale and legend long coincided, the term legend meant fairy tale as well as what is now meant by legend. Terminologically, these genres began to differ gradually only at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the introduction, Dobšinský explains the motives that led him to compile and publish the work. According to him, older editions of Slovak folk tales were inaccessible to the reader - in terms of both material inaccessibility and comprehensibility. He does not trivialise the work of previous collectors but appreciates that previous editions fulfilled their role. After some reflection, he also included fairy tales from the *Rimavský* collection and, in an altered form, also some folk tales by Němcová - for example, *Soľ a zláto* [Salt Over Gold] and *O dvanástich mesiacikoch* [About Twelve Months]. However, most of the fairy tales in his *National Legends* were published for the first time. The content is varied and generically rich. Most of the fairy tales are fantastic, but there are also animal, legend, novelist, realistic and humorous fairy tales. A characteristic feature is the adoption of a unified authorial approach, thus many parts were stylistically modified. The second edition (1959) was supplemented by illustrations by the excellent Slovak painter and illustrator Martin Benka, the third edition was published in 1966 and the fourth in 1973. The most current version of Dobšinský's fairy tales was published in 2003 by Ľubomír Feldek under the title *Veľká kniha slovenských rozprávok* [The Great Book of Slovak Fairy Tales]. It is proof of the persistence of the values of folk literature even nowadays.

In the 19th century, even the greatest writers who entered the territory of literature for children and young readers succumbed to the didactic tendency of this literature. Interestingly, during that period, many works that were not originally intended for children became children's reading. In our context, this part of the work can be referred to as non-intentional literature for children and young readers. It is the part of the literature which, in its form and content, corresponded more to the interests of children than small verses and fairy tales that were directly intended for them. These works, together with folk literature, began to form the basis of children's literature and foreshadowed the liberation of literature for children and young readers from school and church didactics or didacticism.

They include the literature that was created before the codification of literary language (in 1843) already. Literature of previous epochs faced language

barriers, since in the pre-codification period, the biblical Czech or Bernolák's Slovak (the first attempt to codify the written language) were frequently used. However, where the topic and form are acceptable, despite the language barrier, this literature is placed into the domain children's reading. Examples are Ján Hollý (1785 - 1849) and his work *Svätopluk* or the travelogue by Jozef Ignác Bajza (1755 - 1863) *René mládenca príhody a skúsenosti* [The Adventures and Experiences of the Young Man René]. The tendency to use adult literature for children was fully embarked upon only by the representatives of Romanticism; Samo Chalupka, Janko Kráľ, Andrej Sládkovič, and Ján Botto. Children and young people were captivated by the simple style, emotional imagery, and epic elements of this poetry. Samo Chalupka's (1812 - 1883) poems reflected especially the people's desire for freedom. His cantos and songs are written in a lyrical-epic form and address the history of the Slovak nation (the poem *Mor ho!*). Many of his texts became popular, children like them and they are easy to memorise, for example, the poem *Turčín Poničan* can also be understood as a prototype of children's poetry. The historical novels of Ján Kalinčiak (1822 - 1871) had a similar success with young readers. They have a romantic plot, expressive images and are imbued with the spirit of patriotism and humanism. Some examples are *Knieža liptovské* [Prince of Liptov], *Orava*, *Bratova ruka* [Brother's Hand], and others. The romantic legend, written for the historical subject *Olejkár* by Jozef Miloslav Hurban (1817 - 1888), also gained great popularity among young readers.

Until the 1880's, intentional literature for children and young readers had a book form. An immediate connection with the life of the people and with the traditions of folk epics can only be found in the work of Martin Kukučín (1860 - 1928). Kukučín's short stories (similar to Chalupka's songs) managed to activate the aesthetic experience of children. Kukučín's short prose is still published in anthologies (selections) for children. Stories from childhood and youth have a special place among them. They are associated with the writer's memory of his childhood and student years. In these short stories, a number of village children, pupils, apprentices and students enter Slovak prose for the first time. They show a sense of sympathy for village people and their spiritual values. Kukučín is an inimitable master of literary portrait, which is fully manifested in the portrayal of his childhood characters. His short story *Mladé letá* (1899) [Young Years], telling the story of two students and one girl, can be considered a highlight in this respect. It belongs to the best works of Slovak literature. Its name also inspired a publishing house producing books for children and young readers, which since 1957, has been called *Mladé letá*. There are also many other Kukučín's titles that are suitable for children.

The realistic novelist and playwright Jozef Gregor Tajovský (1874 - 1940) dealt with the topic of the Slovak village. Only at a mature age does he return to his memories from childhood. Short stories from this memorial cycle are

included in the collection *Prvé hodinky* (1959) [First Watch], in which Tajovský presents his hero as if living on an island of joy and optimism – since this is how the writer perceived childhood. Jozef Gregor Tajovský is also considered to be the first representative of the so-called social approach to literature for children and young readers in Slovak literature, especially in the short stories *Apoliena* and *Nevinné ruky* [Innocent Hands]. Tajovský brought horrible pictures from the life of children suffering from hunger as well as a shortage of the basic necessities of life.

A number of other representatives have a dignified place in the reading list of Slovak children, or their realistic works. Among them we can find lyrical-epic poems by Pavel Országh Hviezdoslav, poems and short stories by Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, realistic short stories by Timrava, humorous and satirical short stories by Janko Jesenský, a memorial prose of Terézia Vansová. Elena Maróthy Šoltéssová contributed to this list with an interesting literary work *Moje deti* [My Children] (1923 - 1924) written in the form of a diary. A popular reading for young readers was the historical novel by Ladislav Nádaši-Jégé Adam Šangala (1923).

At the time when literature for children and young readers had entered the scene of Slovak literature as an independent genre, some works of literature for adults continued to enter children's reading as well, though no longer as opposites of children's pseudo-literature, but as its complementary works. Such additions became, for example, the novels (both from 1932) by Jožo Nižňanský *Dobrodružstvá Mórica Beňovského* [The Adventures of Móric Beňovský] and *Cholera*, and the adventure novel by Ján Hrušovský *Jánošík*. They also replaced the lack of adventure novels in literature for children and young readers, and became labelled as entertaining commercial literature. The exchange of artistic values between the two literatures (branches) of the national literature - adult and children's – occurred also because literature for children and young readers was no longer able only to receive the values, but also to repay its debts. Its best works have confirmed that the common platform of both literatures has become a reality and that many works intended for children's recipients have become the subject of reading interest of adult readers. Ondrej Sliacky addressed the issue of the history of Slovak children's literature in detail in the publication *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry pre deti a mládež do roku 1945* (Bratislava, *Mladé letá* 1990) [History of Slovak Literature for Children and Young Readers to 1945]. Among other things, he claims that an overview of the history of literature for children and young readers usually begins with information on the first publications written and published for children. In Slovakia, the year 1581 became such an important milestone, when *Katechizmus pre dietky a žiakov* [Catechism for Children and Pupils] was published in Bardejov, and then the year 1685, when the Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* was published in four languages. In the following period, during the 17th and 18th centuries, there were many such

publications in Slovakia, but most of them were religious and educational texts for children. It was not until the end of the 18th century, in connection with the school reforms of Maria Theresa, in the era of the Enlightenment and in connection with pedagogical philanthropic ideas, that the situation began to change. In addition to primers, catechisms and anthologies, various supplementary literature of an enlightening, illustrative and entertaining nature began to appear. It was designed for students, teachers, educators and parents. Its internal tendency was based on a catechic (question-answer) method, with questions requiring a binding form of answer. The second way of writing texts for children was based on the Socratic (dialogical) method which required deduction, a rationale for solving the problem.

The beginning of the 19th century saw gradual penetration of the devices of artistic literature to Slovak literature for children and young readers. The number of poetic declamations and short epic forms is increasing, the method of catechism and the Socratic method (methods of dialogue) are merged, e.g. discussion of a father or teacher with child. The Socratic method found a wide application in Slovakia also under the influence of translations of educational works (e.g. J. Ch. Campe *Mladý Robinson* [*Robinson der Jüngere*]). This type of literature gradually acquired a national-educational character. In Slovakia, such works were represented very richly, with Samuel Tešedík, Ladislav Bartholomaeus, Juraj Ribay, Pavel Michalko, Juraj Palkovič, Bohuslav Tablic and others devoting themselves to them in their work. Several works had the character of short thematic encyclopaedias. Under these conditions, the synthesis became *Čítanka aneb Kniha k čítání pro mládež ve školách slovanských v městech a v dědinách* (1825) [*Reading book or Book for the reading of young people in Slavic schools in towns and villages*] by Ján Kollár. He sought to lay the foundations of the then knowledge of man, the Earth, the Universe, history, technology and crafts. Thanks to its thematic breadth and diversity of literary forms, Kollár's Reader represents in itself an ideal realisation of efforts for educational and entertaining literature for children and young readers in the first phase of its development. The second phase in Slovakia is connected with the revolutionary-democratic movement around Ľudovít Štúr. The Štúrovci [Štúr Generation], personalities grouped around Štúr, enacted the Slovak literary language, collected oral folklore and also wrote their own works - poems, short stories and dramatic works. They considered caring for children to be an organic part of their program.

In the years 1846 - 1847, A. H. Škultéty and J. Čipek began publishing the children's magazine *Zornička* (*Entertainment for Children*). It is, in a sense, the first children's fiction. Most important in it were short stories drawing on pedagogical instructions. It illustrated some moral rule which was emphasised at the end of the story. In the thematic area, *Zornička* paid tribute to official ideology, did not go against the social order, emphasised the principles of

humility, and associated individual happiness with individual morality. Thus - apart from the fact that literature for children and young readers, thanks to Zornička, took a serious step from educational treatises to fictionality, to storytelling, it nonetheless served the tasks of scholastic education. The same can be said about two volumes of verses for children by A. H. Škultéty, though they contained several poems where live manifestations of children's life dominate over moral deduction. At the level of short prose in Zornička and Škultéty's poems was also the first Slovak small play for children *Siroty* (1846) [Orphans], written by J. Matúška.

The whole next half century was under the influence of the Štúr Generation. The changes affected, more or less, a number of published books and the efforts to publish children's magazines (*Včielka*, *Priateľ dietok*, *Noviny malé*, *Zornička*) [Little Bee, Friend of Children, Small Newspapers, Morning Star]. The Štúr Generation members actually started the process of aestheticising the intentional reading of children. The whole fiction for children was produced under the conditions of a sharpened national movement, in the spirit of joint moral and national education. While moral education was based on the Ten Commandments, national education was carried in the spirit of love of the mother tongue. An exception was Martin Braxatoris - Sládkovičov (son of the important poet Andrej Sládkovič), who at the beginning of the 20th century, focused with great understanding on the peculiar world of a small child. From his position as editor of *Small Newspapers*, he significantly influenced the quality of children's literature. The same understanding was also proclaimed by the writers of the so-called high literature, when in individual cases they entered the sphere of children's literature (*Vajanský*, *Čajak*), or when the children's environment appeared within artistic images (*Hviezdoslav*, *Kukučín*, *Vansová*, *Tajovský*).

The prehistory of Slovak literature for children and young readers was related to the national and social situation in Slovakia: education, Slovak culture, reading. The leading authors of national literature fought for national independence on many fronts of social life, and even literary criticism did not manage to sufficiently influence the didactic conception of literature for children and young readers.

Artistic translation has also played a major role in the process of aestheticizing children's fiction. Although there was not much of it, the children's literature brought it to a qualitatively higher level. A particularly important achievement in this context was the publication of the book *Andersen's Fairy Tales* in 1911. A few years before that, in 1888, a selection of Andersen's texts *Konvalinky* [Lilies of the Valley] was published, though the translation by Fraňo Macvejda was not of good quality. Thanks to Cyril Gallay, however, Andersen came to Slovakia with all his poetic and philosophical inventory. Gallay's translation of Andersen's tales was not only a quantitative extension of the book's offer, but mainly a new type of children's fiction. The meritorious

translation deed was also noticed by Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, one of the most important contemporary writers and literary critics.

Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 and care for the national language became an important part of writers' efforts - even the ones writing for children and young people. At first, older selections from pre-war works in magazines (translations) were published, later publishing houses were established, e. g.: O. Trávníček (Žilina), L. Mazáč (Prague, Madost' edition), Spolok sv. Vojtecha [Saint Adalbert Association], J. Horáček (Martin, Bratislava), A. Bežo (Trnava). In 1919, Matica slovenská continued its activities from 1863 - 1875. Within the literature for children, great attention was paid to conceptuality, original creativity and art. An important thing was, for example, the establishment of the Reading of Young Students edition. In 1936, a separate department of Matica slovenská for children's literature was established, headed by Štefan Krčméry. Matica slovenská was publishing since 1925 - 1927 the Včielka [Little Bee] magazine, but it gradually ceased to exist and was replaced by the Slniečko [Little Sun] magazine (nicer graphic design, emphasis on artistic expression, originality, creativity, thematic and genre diversity). In 1931, the Circle of Friends of Slovak Literature for Youth was established in Bratislava, it was an initiative of Czech teachers and became active in creating textbooks and pedagogical literature (František Volf, Josef Pospíšil, illustrator Jaroslav Vodrážka).

The basic tendencies that prevailed in children's literature in this period were as follows:

- humanistic and patriotic tendency - Ľudmila Podjavorinská, Martin Rázus
- psychologising and social tendency - Ján Bodenek, Martin Hranko, Fraňo Kráľ
- nature tendency - Ľudo Ondrejov
- optimistic tendency - J. C. Hronský
- adventure-travel tendency - Ľudo Ondrejov
- historical tendency - J. C. Hronský, J. Horák (legends)

A separate chapter is the authorial fairy tale, which is established during the Romantic period (O. Wilde, the Brothers Grimm, H. Ch. Andersen, L. N. Tolstoy ...), but in Slovakia suitable conditions for it did not occur until the arrival of the first third of the twentieth century. Its founder is Ľudmila Riznerová - Podjavorinská. Her verse fairy tales Zajko-Bojko (1930), Čin-Čin (1943) have an entertaining function; they are playful, rhythmic, with the instruction explicitly expressed at the end. The author also presents serious situations humorously, but not ridiculously, the life of animals and their relationships being related to the interpersonal relationships (joy and happiness as the highest values). There is a repetition of motifs, rhythmic units, concreteness of imagery, work with language components, metaphors, anaphoras, folklorism, phraseology, colloquiality, metrically organised verse.

Mária Rázusová - Martáková is another important author for children - poet, novelist, playwright, translator. Her fairy-tale poetry does not have a purely epic character, the theme is the world of animals, nature, but the story does not play a major role, since it has a poetic load. She wrote the poetic fairy tale *Plamienočka* (1948), *Zverinček* (1950), *Zatúlané húsa* (1953). In her case, however, one can also notice a typical phenomenon for the period, the so-called "social imperative" caused by a change in political setting and the need for artists to write in accordance with official ideology. The proof is the lyrical-epic composition *Pieseň o Váhu* (1953), *Farebná záhradka* (1953) - a reaction to post-February events, with little convincing expression, the effort to involve social motives in the work remained superficial. Martáková also wrote several prose works. In general, one may say that her production clearly illustrates basic tendencies of children's literature in that period, i.e. the attempts of writers to escape ideology in efforts to preserve their artistic face.

This was caused by a complicated political situation that arose in Slovakia after 1948. Until that year, children's literature was still aesthetically and ideologically diverse. After the February coup d'état in 1948, it was to create works in accordance with the new social order, which were to promote the ideology of socialist literature for children and young readers. Children's literature faced the task of depicting the present and promote socialist needs and ideals. It focused on depicting the building of socialism, re-education of people in the spirit of the ruling ideology, depiction of children's work in youth organisations. The utilitarian function of literature came to the fore at the expense of art. The theme was treated superficially, with uncritical optimism, schematically constructed conflicts entered the texts, and characters lacked artistic depth and persuasiveness. Literature provided a simplified, constructed picture of reality. The reactions of the writers to the literary schematism were different, there being a wide range of coming to terms not only with the way of creation, but also with the overall philosophy of life and worldview. Adaptation, controversy with schematism, escape from schematism, these were all forms, ways and nuances of how to react to the situation in literature and society. On the other hand, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the authors of children's literature were in better situation than the authors of adult literature (children's literature was to some extent an asylum for writers and theorists); it was not that strictly ideologically controlled, so many talented authors went into it at some stage of their work or made a "flight" to its territory. An example is Hana Ponická, a signatory of Charter 77, who at one time wrote for children. Escapes from schematism took various forms, the most common being returning to one's own childhood and youth (when everything was joyful), to nature, folk literature, but historical themes were also frequent. It is an interesting fact how a historical topic can resonate in periods when a certain ideological encryption of the message is necessary.

Substantial changes in Slovak children's literature and the completion of the process of its position as an integral part of national literature took place in the 1960s, when a young generation of writers with a formulated artistic programme entered the literary scene. They introduced the so-called "child aspect", i.e. the child's point of view, vision, perception, evaluation and commentary on the world. This generation - also called the generation of the child aspect - also brought literature a modern means of expression in poetry and prose, living, full-blooded children's characters as well as child's sense of play and fantasy. A fundamental structural transformation first took place through the poetry books of Lubomír Feldek and Miroslav Válek. In addition to them, new poetics was developed by Klára Jarunková, Ján Navrátil, Jozef Pavlovič, Jaroslava Blažková, Mária Ďuričková, Eleonóra Gašparová, Milan Ferko, Vincent Šikula and many other excellent writers, thanks to whom, we can call this period the "golden age of Slovak children's literature" (Stanislavova 1998, 12).

The dynamic development and formation of modern Slovak literature for children and young readers at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s was significantly contributed to by two facts: improving the conditions of literary life of children's literature by completing its publishing, magazine, institutional and literary-critical base from the second half of the 1950s, and the arrival of the young generation of authors at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. Despite complicated conditions (that is, ideological, political - resulting from the fact that literary works in Slovakia and other socialist countries were controlled and censored), the fact that children's literature went in the new direction was especially due to the young generation of bold writers who entered literature at the turn of the 1950's and 1960's with, as mentioned above, a formulated artistic program stressing the so-called child aspect. They discovered the principle of poetic utterance from the aspect of a child, poeticised a child's inner life, and applied humour, play and fantasy in their verses. Theirs was a partnership, equal relationship between a child and an adult. They freed the verse and stanza and introduced nonsense and play with words into poetry.

Lubomír Feldek is a versatile personality who has devoted himself to writing literature for children and adults, translating (for example Shakespeare), and journalism. Miroslav Válek, together with Feldek, was the founder of modern Slovak poetry for children. Another personality who deserves to be near Feldek and Válek as co-creators of the idea of the child aspect, is Klára Jarunková. It is so not only because she is the most translated Slovak writer so far, but also because she was able to use the child aspect in literature intended for girls, as well as because her language was very lively and authentic - being the first writer to "smuggle" slang into children's literature. Her numerous works bring a vivid and humorous picture of the lives of contemporary children and young readers, poetics of folk tale transposed into a new, modern form though still retaining the principles of folk literature in all its attributes. She also wrote legends, especially

from the surroundings of Bratislava and devoted herself to the collection and adaptation of folk literature. Other authors who successfully entered the territory of Slovak children's literature in this period were Jaroslava Blažková, Vincent Šikula, Tomáš Janovic, Nataša Tanská, Dušan Dušek, Milan Rúfus, Daniel Hevier, Štefan Moravčík.

The events of November 1989, when the communist regime in Czechoslovakia fell, were not only a political coup, but also a kind of civilisational coup and a turning point. There came fundamental changes in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. Significant changes also affected the literature for children and young readers, especially through a change in ethical values. The original ethics of socialist humanism, the ideal of a communist man, collapsed and a different value system emerged, characterised by a return to the original conservative and Christian values as well as to the principles of political democracy, plurality of human rights and freedoms. In children's literature, significant organisational changes took place as a result of the ongoing democratisation of life and ideological and artistic pluralisation of previously monolithic culture.

In book production, the monopoly of the Mladá letá publishing house was fragmented in the expectation that a new space would be established for creative energy in the field of authorship and publishing, bringing several new publishers. However, in addition to the positivity of the liberalisation of the book market, this fact also caused a negative thing, which Zuzana Stanislavová, one of the most important Slovak experts on Slovak children's literature, characterised as follows: "A well established system of institutional care for book culture came apart. It brought the end to the censorship of books, which had, on one hand, a positive consequence in the ending of institutional ideological "overseeing" of literature, but, on the other hand, in paving the way for an uncontrolled supply of literary trash" (Sliacky – Stanislavová, 2003, p. 95 – 96). November 1898 also brought economic changes. After the fall of the totalitarian regime, the country saw the emergence of market mechanisms. Children's books became commodities. Dušan Roll (Slovak writer, illustrator, director and leading figure of Slovak cultural life, co-founder of several important institutions and events, such as the Bratislava Biennial of Illustrations) claims in this respect: "After 1989, Slovak literature for children and young readers, writers and publishers, experienced a shock they were not prepared for. Opportunities for publishing books were freed up, and many new publishers appeared, unfortunately, also those who, as "gold diggers", thought that they would be enriched by publishing children's books. The first thing they underestimated was the quality of the manuscript, editorial and linguistic editing, but also illustration, through which they tried to imitate precisely those children's books from the West whose quality made them junk" (Bibiana 1997, 38).

Concerns about the future of good books for children grew with a wave of commerce to which the unprepared readers had difficulty resisting. A certain

type of literature was unavailable in Slovakia - and therefore spontaneously in great demand. The natural accompanying phenomenon of these processes is the fact that just as life changes, so does the literature, so does the child reader. Children are surrounded by many attractions (television, internet, computer games ...), but the content and form of children's programs have also changed. Discussions about where Slovak children's literature goes, what it is endangered by and how it has to defend its originality took place on the pages of the quarterly *Bibiana* (the one in 1993 fully replaced the renowned Czecho-Slovak magazine on children's literature *Zlatý máj*) and on the pages of the magazine *Literika* (which has since then ceased to exist). An interesting feature is the number of re-editions that were published after 1989 (especially the works of Milan Rúfus, Mária Ďuríčková, Mária Rázusová-Martáková, Jozef Cíger Hronský, etc.) - they are proof that Slovak children's literature was and is of very high quality and timeless.

The term "contemporary literature", which forms the framework of the presented monograph, will be limited to the last twenty years (2000-2020), because the latest periodisations of literary development do not necessarily have to be defined by some historical, political or social milestones. Given the undeniable quality of current Slovak literary production for children and young readers, one can afford such thinking and classification. The most feasible and comprehensible way to help identify existing trends in modern children's literature is the conventional genre perspective - perhaps also because genre is in contemporary prose for children and young people (despite postmodern tendencies that have their place in children's literature as well) traditionally and irreplaceably an identifiable symptom.

Traditionally, from a genre point of view, even contemporary prose for children and young readers is dominated by fairy tale. It has been so since long ago and many times the fairy tale is even perceived as a synonym for children's literature. Many authors enter this genre with the ambition to create literature for children, sometimes mistakenly thinking that writing for children will require simpler criteria, that it is less demanding. This is not the case, because creating for children requires an experienced author, taking into account the child aspect, not underestimating the child, perceiving him/her as a co-creator, teammate or partner. Since it is not possible to present all high-quality authors of fairy tales in one monograph, I decided to follow the *pars pro toto* system for all major genres, and because the most important authors in this genre are, in my opinion, Ján Uličianský, I dedicate a chapter to him, bringing also an overlap to other types of art, especially dramatic work, and Marta Hlušiková, I discuss her work as a prototype of contemporary fairy tales for children. The fairy tale happy ending satisfies the human need for optimism and the belief that everything will turn out for good. In addition to meeting these most basic "fairy tale" attributes, the work of Ján Uličianský and Marta Hlušiková also meets strict artistic criteria. Their work is proof that quality work for children will find adult intermediaries and

children's recipients very quickly. In addition to these creators of a quality contemporary author's fairy tale, we can also mention Jana Pácalová, Štefan Moravčík, Ondrej Sliacký, Petr Glock, Zuzana Zemaníková, Jozef Pavlovič, as authors of various modifications of the folk tale.

The authorial tale is also a space of philosophy about man. In this context, it is necessary to mention the work of Petr Karpinský or Slávka Liptáková. It can also be a lyrical-symbolic imagination, which is the case of the work of the contemporary writer for children and young readers Ján Milčák. His tales use lyrical imagination to objectify the spiritual world of man and the charm hidden in the reality of the current world. Imaginativeness is achieved here by the ability to express oneself with a hint and a symbol, to use language sparingly, but at the same time to create rich connotations of meaning. The fairy tale as a cheerful parody of the world is present in the tales of Ľubomír Feldek or in the tales of Marián Vanek or Branislav Jobus. Gabriela Futová is an exceptional contemporary fairy tale writer (with an overlap into story, social prose). Based on the imagination of the reality of children's life through a fantastic element, Peter Gajdošík portrays the coexistence of people and animals. The authorial fairy tale with a didactic tendency, in which there is a dimension or effort to teach the child about selected aspects of the world, is an organic part of contemporary fairy tale work for children, especially in the works of Petr Stoličný or Jana Bodnárová, the author who has a great deal of credit in helping a child reader to master a foreign language. Thanks to the imaginativeness of her story, Jana Bodnárová proved that even an educational contribution can have its charm and artistic quality. This is the case in her prose *How Emma Ceased to Be Afraid* (2007, in Slovak-French and Czech-English language versions). Close to this type of fairy tales are also meditative fairy tales, or fairy tales with a Christian-didactic tendency. Gabriela Magalová has long been pointing out the long-term underestimation of this type of fairy tale (for example, in the monograph *Meditatívna rozprávka*, 2013) [*Meditative Fairy Tale*]: "Devaluing the fairy tale with Christian-didactic tendency as a genre is a historical oversight. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was the most widespread genre of epic authorial work intended for children in Slovakia, and so it was logically continued by several renowned creators" (Magalová 2013, 7). This type of fairy tale has been showing its qualities since the 1930s, and currently its most important representatives are D. Pastirčák, E. J. Groch, or J. Uličiansky.

The legend, in its authentic genre manifestation, has in recent years been published mainly by the Matica slovenská Publishing House as part of the project *Povešťová mapa Slovenska* [*A Map of Slovak Legends*]. Individual Slovak regions are very well discussed in this project. It published a large number of high-quality books of legends, such as Ondrej Sliacký's book *Turecká studnička (povesti z osmanských čias)* [*The Turkish Well (Legends from Ottoman Times)*], which came out in 2019 and won the award for The Most Beautiful and Best Children's

Book of Spring 2019 (selected by the literary and visual arts jury, consisting of the organisers - BIBIANA and the Slovak section of IBBY). In a review of this book, Ján Gallik commented as follows: "The book of legends from Ottoman times in the inventive portrayal of Ondrej Sliacký really declares that the legend is not a dry description of historical events, but a story about the circumstances of eternal human struggle with a volatile favour or disfavour of fate" (Gallik 2019, 66). Legends are close to the child reader, although they were not originally intentionally dedicated to children. Of the current authors of legends intended for children, the following are the most significant authors: Jozef Melicher, Zuzana Zemaníková, Anton Marec, Peter Urban, Jozef Tatár, Ján Podmanický, Štefan Moravčík or Zuzana Kuglerová (one of the following chapters will be devoted to her work).

I will also deal with the genre of social prose for children, or the story genre. In this monograph, the genre is represented by Marta Hlušíková and Gabriela Futová. Attention will be also paid to the genre of leporello. Although it is a format intended for the smallest readers, the fact that the basics of reading are already formed in the pre-reading phase of a child's development makes the genre worth discussing here as well. The basic creative principle of art for the smallest children is the imaginary principle of play. For preschool children, the play through which they get to know the world around and use their own creative possibilities is especially important. They can become in the play who they want to be and achieve what they want. It is important that children enjoy the play and its unrestrained imagination. Moreover, children should not be seen as passive recipients of the text, but rather allowed to actively adopt it. The easiest way for them to remember stories are texts that have a strong rhythm, simple composition and clear divisions. I will pay attention to such high-quality contemporary leporella in one of the following chapters.

The already indicated remarks show that current literature intended for children builds on the quality from previous periods, draws on fantasy, play and imagination. At the same time, it reflects current issues. The increase in quality in individual genres is gratifying. It is seen most strikingly in the genres of fairy tale and social prose, but the legend does not lag behind in terms of value either. A certain deficit is in quality poetry for children, but even here, the tide seems to turn.

2

Fairy tale genre - books and their theatrical adaptations

At present, the versatile author Ján Uličiansky works especially as a writer of fairy tales, playwright, radio dramatist and a professor at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. He is one of the most outstanding Slovak authors of modern authorial fairy tales in Slovakia. His debut in the field of children's literature was the book *Adelka Zvončeková* [Adele Bell], followed by the book *Nedeľa* [Sunday] (1987) and *Snehuliacke ostrovy* [The Snowmen's Isles] (1990), *Máme Emu* [We Have Emma] (1993), *Veverička Veronka* [Squirrel Veronka] (1996), *Drak Plamienok* [Dragon Plamienok] (2000), *Pán Prváčik* [Mr. First-Grader] (2002), *Podivuhodné príbehy siedmich morí* [The Wondrous Stories of Seven Seas] (2003), *Čarovný chlapec* [The Magic Boy] (2005), *Kocúr na kolieskových korčuliach* [A Tomcat on Roller-Skates] (2006), *Rozprávky z palety* [Fairy Tales From the Palette] (2007, co-authored by Peter Pálik) *Veveričky* [Squirrels] (2008), *Malá princezná* [A Little Princess] (2009), *Štyria škriatkovia a víla* [The Four Elves and the Fairy] (2009), *Analfabeta Negramotná* [Analphabeta Illiterate] (2011), *Tajomstvo čierneho Dvora* [Mystery of a Black Yard] (2012), *Leonardo, kocúr z ulice* [Leonardo, a Tomcat From the Street] (2013). In the typology of fairy tales, his tales can be included into realistic tales, that is, such tales in which the motifs are taken from contemporary life, adapted to the genre, understood humorously, satirically, or strengthening some social aspect. Uličiansky's fairy tales are regularly awarded prizes in the competition *The Most Beautiful and the Best Books* (of the spring, summer, autumn, winter) organised by the international house of arts for children Bibiana and the Slovak section of IBBY. The book *Snehuliacke ostrovy* [The Snowmen's Isles] earned him a place on the IBBY Honour List (1992). He was also awarded the *Trojruža Prize* [Triple Rose] for his production for children and youth in 1998. In 2004 he was nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award. The book *Pán Prváčik* [Mr. First-Grader] again earned a place on the IBBY Honour List. In addition to awards for fairy tales, he also received many awards in the field of puppet theatre, radio and theatre plays.

Ján Uličiansky has enriched literature for children and young readers not only by his many books, but especially by their value. He understands children as equal partners, portraying their worries as well as those of adults. According to

Beáta Panáková, “Ján Uličiansky knows that children face the same life problems as adults. And he knows well how important it is to offer a tender hand and lead them through the labyrinth of literature, as well as along the complicated life journeys” (Panáková 2012, 31). The central motif in the works of Ján Uličiansky is the reality, current social problems, sadness and pleasures of children and adults. The imperfections of current times and people are contrasted with the magic of everydayness and with the search for real values. Fairy tale characters are often stylised with models of human nature and qualities. The Uličiansky’s fairy tales core is thus reality, everydayness, complemented by fantasy, imaginativeness, playfulness and parody. The most characteristic feature of Uličiansky’s works, not only prosaic, but also dramatic ones, is his “resignation on action”. According to Zuzana Stanislavová, “his fairy tales are not characteristic for noisy activity, but rather for a latent concern over the disappearance of the signs that model a human and ethical measure of life” (Stanislavová 2005, 20). Another specificity appearing in most author’s tales is intertextuality. In Ján Uličiansky’s works one often finds also ecological aspect. The author brought his relationship to nature already to his work *Veverička Veronka* [Squirrel Veronka] (in its extended edition *Veveričky* [Squirrels]), into the book *Drak Plamienok* [Dragon Plamienok] and, finally, also to the book *Štyria škriatkovia a víla* [The Four Elves and the Fairy].

The fact that Uličiansky works as a prose writer, radio dramatist as well as director and author of plays for children, is reflected also in his works. He transformed many of his tales into the form of radio or theatre plays. He, himself, has acknowledged: “*Often (and gladly) I transfer one and the same topic, for example, from the form of radio bedtime story into books and from there, say, into the form of theatre musical*” (Uličiansky, 2012).

Interpretation of the authorial fairy tale *Štyria škriatkovia a víla* [*The Four Elves and the Fairy*]

The book *The Four Elves and the Fairy* was published in 2009 in the PERFECT publishing house. It was illustrated by Peter Uchnár. The publication is towering among the rest of Uličiansky’s works due to several reasons. According to Peter Naščák, “unlike in previous books, the author used here classical fairy tale/fantasy spacetime” (Naščák 2012a, 48). As Ľubica Kepštová also claims, the book’s genre is different than the existing Uličiansky’s works for children (Kepštová 2010, 50). Peter Naščák further claims that “... the (positive) influence of folk fairy tale cannot be denied here (for example, the similarity of Pikolo, Vento, Fredo and Solário, embodying four seasons of the year, with twelve months, as well as the overall plot)” (Naščák 2012, 47). Uličiansky often works with intertextuality and allusion. This time he got inspired not by the literary work, but by the musical work of Vivaldi (*Four Seasons*). In addition to the

influence of folk tale and the inspiration of Vivaldi's work, there is also a reference to the TV fairy tale Jack Frost.

The author – narrator disinterestedly tells a story of four seasonal dwarves, gentle fairy and a power-thirsty frog. As an omniscient narrator, he describes the thinking, behaviour and acting of all characters. The names of characters are created through the “nomenomen” (name is a sign). In literature, the nomenomen is used to express the qualities of characters. The origin of the protagonists' names is in Italian. The name of the spring dwarf Pikolo (piccolo) means small, summer dwarf Solário (solar) means sunny, the autumn dwarf Vento (vento) means wind, and the name of the winter dwarf Fredo (freddo) means cold. Also, the names of the fairy Viva (vive – life) and frog Futura (futura – future) have their origin in Italian. “Viva reminds of life; the name of the spring-like Pikolo evokes small spring mysteries – a beginning life, youths; the name of summer-like Solário is connected with the sun; the autumnal Vento associates windy weather; etymologically, the name of the winter elf Fredo draws on coldness; the frog Futura has its name derived from the foretelling of the future” (Vráblová 2010, 5).

The story is related at an old oak, which could be its narrator. There, for many years, the four elves were passing a musical-box to one another – a box of four seasons. Based on which of the brothers had the box, it played a spring, summer, autumn, or winter melody. The winter elf Fredo was enjoying his melody for an exceptionally long time but it was not only the spring elf Pikolo who could not wait to see his favourite season. Impatience also forced his good friend fairy Viva to come out of her shelter and find out why spring had not arrived yet. At the old oak she called for the frog Futura whom she considered her friend and wise prophetess. Instead of help, the frog decided to concoct a sneaky and deceitful plan, to use the fairy's good heartedness and confidentiality for her own enrichment.

“What are we going to do?” asked the fairy hoping that the old Futura will help her somehow. She immediately got an idea, but what kind of idea she did not tell the fairy (p. 10).

The frog is sending the barefooted and cold fairy to search for the winter elf assuming that he got so involved in listening to his own winter melody that he forgot that it is time to pass it to his brother. The fairy finally finds his house and learns that Fredo is not going to freely give up his play box. The discussion of the fairy Viva with the elf Fredo discloses the fairy's relationship with the summer elf.

“I long to see him very much as well. Don't you understand?! We are more than just friends,” she told him with tears in her eyes (p. 14).

The winter elf speaks out jealously but he agrees to give the play box to the fairy, if she dances for him as she dances for his brother Pikolo. Fredo was fascinated by the fairy and fell peacefully asleep in his rocking chair. The fairy

uses this and carries the four seasons box to the old oak. Meeting the fairy, Fredo showed himself as a cold, complacent, jealous and careless elf, which was no small consequence to the story. When the fairy came with the play box to the oak, the frog Futura took it from her (despite the fairy's good intention to bring the box to Pikolo).

"I'd rather give it straight to Pikolo."

"Just right! Why do you mind him? We have the box, don't we? Yes, we do!" (p. 16)

When the fairy Viva revealed Futura's intentions, it was already too late. The frog wanted to change the weather based on its whims, potentially according to the will of the one who will play it well. This was intended to cause chaos in nature, almost a natural catastrophe. The frog Futura represents current social views – to use all possible means to get rich. The frog, in fact, requires a fee to select the weather "at one's discretion". It especially longs for power, calling itself the minister of weather, professor Futura, director general.

"Croak! Croak! My dear? What do you want? Are you cold, little girl? Croak! Croak! Have you got (some) cents? It will not be free of charge! I am opening the spring drawer only for a fatty fee" (p. 30).

"Did you hear, you minister of four seasons!"

"And the meteorological institute as well! And if I want, I will also own the academy of seasonal sciences! No more a weather girl! Professor Futura, please!" one could still hear from above (p. 31).

Frog Futura turned fairy's objections against her when she told her that she, herself, stole the box from elf Fredo. Thus, after Fredo's complacency, also Viva's (though good-natured) slightly naïve and overconfident behaviour, it caused a situation that could result into a natural catastrophe. The fairy decides to go looking for help from her friend Pikolo. Although at first he gets shocked by the situation, he manages to understand the fairy's acting.

Well... those who never had in their heart any trace of hypocrisy and falseness, will not be able to guess what can hide in the souls of their expected friends (p. 20).

Together they searched for the help of Pikolo's brother Solário. They relied on his wisdom. The summer elf assessed the situation very well and as the only way out of it he saw was connecting the powers of all of the elves.

For it was clear to him that if natural laws are no longer held true, nothing else will be at all. Over its thousand years, their old oak remembers the times when in the middle of summer suddenly a cold storm came and the entire earth was covered by icy hailstones. However, there were also winters when not a single snowflake fell from the sky and then, when the earth was in spring, it was so dried up that it did not have strength to bring out a single live sprout. However, there has never been a situation that that belongs to the entire nature which would be in the hands of only one creature, even such stupid and bad creature as Futura. (p. 25)

We learn from the speaking of the autumn elf Vento that the old oak has for some time been at the end with its powers and they gradually will have to say goodbye to it.

"Oak"?! Quercusrobur, a thousand-year-old solitaire... I am afraid that it will leave us soon. When I played with its branches last autumn, there was a lot of cracking inside. It may be knocked over even by a weak gust of wind" (p. 27).

When the brothers visited the last brother, winter elf Fredo, he felt sorry for his deeds and was forgiven. Of more importance than the reproaches, was the brothers' solidarity, the joining of their forces against the evil. After they arrived at the old oak, the elves wanted to surprise the frog and thus to defeat it. Fairy Viva called for her. The Futura's blackmailing provoked the summer elf to such a degree that he left his shelter, followed by his brothers and thus causing the fight between the good (elves climbing up the oak) and the evil (the sneaky frog). When the frog wanted to get rid of the seasonal elves by calling a strong autumn wind, the branches on the old oak began cracking. The old oak's doom is going to be fulfilled. The oak fell down and crushed the frog as well.

"You will not get me, not even if I were to uproot it!" (p. 32)

"Croak! Croak! help! Quercusrobur has crushed me ... Croak!" (p. 34)

Together with the frog and elves, the play box was falling down as well and the bold Pikolo decided to save it. Except for the old oak and frog, all others survived the fight to save natural laws.

"Yes, the bad Futura has been punished," Vento said seriously. "However, I am sorry that our good old oak had to pay for that. Look how quietly it is lying... Let's take off our elf hats, brothers, and honour his memory!" (p. 34)

The story ends with a description of some happy moments of Pikolo and fairy Viva on a spring meadow. The balance in nature was preserved due to brotherly solidarity and clear love which was guiding us throughout the fairy tale. At the end of the tale, the author, using a short poem, outlines the subsequent destiny of the protagonists. The fairy will walk down the aisle, the elves will continue meeting one another and exchanging the playbox, but no longer at the old oak. For the oak will become a table, bed, bench for friends.

As it was indicated at the beginning, the fairy tale is a different genre than other Uličiansky's works. Despite that, there remained characteristic features of his works in it, and the proof of that is not only intertextuality with allusions to the musical work of Antonio Vivaldi and the creation of the names of protagonists through puns. The author depicts the current philosophy of society through the features and acts of frog Futura. Young readers find in Uličiansky's tales many cases in which they are motivated to overcome their own limits and enlarge their knowledge. In this case it is, for example, through the thousand-year-old oak for which the author gives also its Latin name quercusrobur. The author contrasted such human qualities as greediness, self-complacency and money-grubbing with the fairness, love and goodness. The ever-present love of fairy Viva to summer elf

Pikolo, together with the fellowship and unity of brothers – elves, will manage to finally defeat greediness and anger of bad frog Futura, and this may end the tale happily, with a typical wedding conclusion.

Theatrical play The Four Elves and the Fairy

The fairy tale *The Four Elves and the Fairy* was also adapted into a theatrical play. Its first performance in the Košice State Theatre was on 31 January 2010 and was connected with the launching of the book by the same name. The play was directed by its author Ján Uličiansky and edited by Martin Gadzík. It was a combination of music, words and dancing. The production was dominated by Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and the texts were authored by Ján Uličiansky again. The story was visually supported by costumes in the classicism style designed by Eva Farkašová – referring to the time in which Vivaldi was living. According to A. Mitrová, “they seemed very attractive, not typically elf-like, but rather elevated, royally fairy tale-like” (Mitrová 2010, 53).

The story was complemented by the dancing and ballet passages. In more relaxed scenes, without action and dynamism of the story, the main role is taken over by musical accompaniment and visuality. In the theatre play, the spring elf Pikolo used for his race with frog Futura an untraditional stage prop – a moped which represented an element of future in the story. As an experienced playwright, Uličiansky also used direct contact of actors with spectators several times, which is typical for children's theatre (a race of elves, fairy, frog and its servants in the auditorium). Ján Uličiansky left the plot and story in the same form as in the book. The story was highlighted by Vivaldi's music, enriched by Uličiansky's texts and in some passages, it was modernised. There were also added several minor characters (as, for example, Futura's companions), especially during dancing performances. The magic atmosphere was complemented by costumes and scenery. Uličiansky also added modern culture to a classical fairy tale story – especially through stage props (e.g. the moped that was mentioned). The topic and story of the fairy tale, however, remained the same, equally nice, magic, fantastic.

3

Narrative prose and authorial fairy tale

As far as the current production for children is concerned, the most typical genre in current Slovak literature is stories depicting the life of children as well as authorial fairy tales. Marta Hlušíková is a significant representative of both. Despite the fact that she writes books for children and youth, in her repertoire she also has several prose books and collections of poems for adults. She published, for example, the Dictionary of Latin Quotations (2000) and Latin-Slovak Dictionary (2003). It seems to be motivated also by the fact that Marta Hlušíková studied Slovak and Latin languages at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University. In addition to book production she is active in radio as well. She occasionally publishes in children's journals as well.

The chapter will be an interpretation of selected parts from the book *Neznášam, keď ma hladkajú po hlave* [I Hate When They Stroke My Head] which was first published in 2009. The book earned her the IBBY Award for the best children's book of the autumn of 2009. The second edition was published in 2015. The second book to discuss will be *Čo baby nedokážu* [What Girls Cannot Do], published in 2011, and, finally, the book *Strelené rozprávky* [Crazy Tales] from 2014.

I Hate When They Stroke My Head captures a short part from the life of a seventh-grader Petra, her friend Klára from Germany, and (marginally) the life of Petra's grandmother also. Thematically, the book's focus is on the relations between Petra and her classmates, problems with love, chicanery, but what is most significant in the book is the relationship between Petra and her modern grandmother. The author is trying to show young people that they can remain themselves, and do not have to respond to the peer pressure of their classmates. One of the book's themes is chicanery. Through the character of Klára, a German, she shows a positive example how to fight against chicanery or how to prevent it. Klára speaks up for a boy who is harassed, befriends him, even begins to teach him karate. The characters bring to the story a mature view of the relationships between people and the understanding of real values. The protagonist Petra is an observer of the whole story, trying to find real values to be directed by. Petra is thus the character who stands on the border between childhood and adulthood, and tries to enter the world of adults, but if she wants to do it, she must learn how to identify and critically evaluate the world and people in it.

Granny is Petra's confidant with whom she has a wonderful relationship, even though she is aware that granny is not without mistakes also. She is obsessed by weight loss and constant fight with her enemy, the neighbour Molnárka. This animosity ends up at the end of the book by mutual reconciliation in which it is possible to see the author's aim to show the nonsense of quarrels between former friends, the frequent inability of people to forgive one another, especially when the quarrel was caused by a small thing. The story also depicts Petra's first love, which, however, does not end harmonically, since she becomes aware that the values the boy insists on are not important for her, and begins to consider him superficial. Moreover, the book extends the cognitive development of children, explaining the reasons that lead to WWII. It also provides foreign concepts, e.g. borreliosis, as well as recipes, e.g. a recipe for plum balls or salad. It is also important to mention that, in the book, there are also extracts portraying pride for national history. The story flows spontaneously, with the author using current and authentic expressive devices typical for adolescent youth and captures up to date way of children's thinking, their language and events. The story thus is convincing and authentic.

First chapter – Granny's seven steps to the line

The story of a seventh-grader Petra, who also acts as its narrator, begins by a pleasant Saturday morning. That morning, which is a time of rest for Petra, is suddenly interrupted by her granny. *"Dustmen know what is supposed to be done on Saturday morning, parents know, Xara knows, only our granny does not"* (Hlušíková 2015, p. 7). Here one learns that the protagonist lives not only with her parents, but with the granny as well. The author does not reveal why the granny lives with the family of her niece. However, to claim that the coexistence with grandparents is natural for Slovak society, is no longer safe, since more and more people want to be independent. Throughout the world, there is a rising wave of animosity among people, even among family members. Young people want to live in their own home, leave their parents, which may be one of the reasons for negative relationships between children and parents. On one hand there are people who live with their family members, or with grandparents, due to various reasons – a shortage of money, care for an ill parent, or many other reasons. The most common conflicts are just because of such grouping of family members under one roof, since this may create conflicting situations not only between two, but even three generations. Petra is, however, a prototype of character who does not have anything in common with the examples mentioned. She respects her granny very much, is not assumptive nor careless, unlike many other young adolescents in Petra's age. On the contrary, she respects her granny and tries to be nice and devout to her, even though granny comes in a non-suitable moment with absurd worries and interrupts Petra's peaceful sleep. Petra's good relationship with her granny is her observation and empathy. *"I see*

that there is something wrong here" (Hlušíková 2015, p. 10). Despite the fact that the protagonist longs for a perfect Saturday rest in bed, she feels that granny, coming to her room with some new electronic scales, has a dilemma. Considering her age, Petra behaves very sensibly and is willing to listen to the worries granny is suffering from. The conversation between Petra and granny, as well as Petra's empathy and willingness to listen to her granny (despite her desire to sleep), is a typical example of their confidential relationship.

Another key character in this text for children and youth is Petra's granny. Like Petra, she is not a one-sided character preserving a stereotype of a granny baking cakes, frying tasty steaks with rice or salad for every grandchild. Petra's granny is caring and has something from that classical stereotype of granny, despite that she is exceptional in something. She suffers from overweight which was reminded to her, not in a nice way, by her enemy neighbour Molnárová. What is paradoxical is the fact that granny has an enemy, since under the concept of granny, and also in the view of young readers, granny is the symbol of love, peace and abundance. The author, however, provided Petra's granny with the perseverance and drive to fight against any obstacle. In this concrete situation it is the fact she is overweight. The entire part of this extract contains a dialogue between Petra and her granny, together with the interior monologue of Petra in the function of the narrator. The dialogue is humorous, with a great deal of ingeniousness, especially from Petra's side. What is interesting is the whole turn of events, how granny faces her situation of being overweight. Her acting does not only end with complaining to Petra for unsuitable comments, but by the change of her lifestyle. *"Ordinary coffee without sugar or cream, this is the step number one ... step number two is a nourishing breakfast ... Step number three is fruit midmorning snack. Watch for banana! Step number four: light lunch, not to spoil anything with potatoes! Only stewed vegetables! The fifth step is the afternoon and evening crunching of vegetables ... You see? This is my invention"* (Hlušíková 2015, p. 11 – 12). Petra's granny is thus a woman of action determined to change herself, who lives a modern way of life, does not fall into depression, but continues to fight, also with disfavours of age. The author depicts Petra's granny with a touch of humour, but also irony. The use of these forms is to attract young readers, entertain them and draw them to the plot. When we delve deeper to the interpretation of the behaviour of granny, we perceive the author's effort to capture the influence of sneering words on the acts of those to whom they are intended. I thus perceive in the extract a hidden criticism of verbal bullying.

Granny's weight loss, according to her own plan, journals, and a TV show, is bizarre, but not absolutely impossible. Petra's granny is very active, not only due to her nature, but because of her living together with Petra whom she considers to be not only her beloved niece, but also a confidante who keeps her connected to the present, to modern times. This introductory chapter is a perfect entrance to the story of the seventh-grader Petra. The conversation of Petra and her

granny and Petra's inner monologue are persuasive and natural, despite the fact that they contain elements of something unusual.

Interpretation of the chapter We have a new classmate

The chapter with the name *We have a new classmate* brings a new character that will later play an important role in Petra's life. It is the German called Klára who is, coincidentally, a niece of the enemy of Petra's granny. *"And now the message which takes your breath away: our German's grandmother is Mrs. Molnár alias the hag Molnárka who lives in our apartment building on the third floor! Well, our granny will have a harder time to forgive her than her neglectable hundred kilos"* (Hlušíková 2015, p. 22). Petra analyses how her granny will take the fact that her enemy has a niece from Germany. For us Slovaks, it is natural to be proud of something that is different, modern, in this case foreign, even to the niece. In Petra's ideas, the author expressed one of the mistaken values, not only of the Slovaks, but of this world as well. The mistaken value is the origin which is supposed to mean something. It is the Klára's German origin which represents something exceptional for the surrounding world. Petra renders this situation in a humorous way, does not dissect it further, but it is difficult not to notice this hint even for an inexperienced reader who may pause over it and consider whether the fact of a person's origin makes him/her better than others.

The idea of whether one origin is better than the other, shows a significant parallel in regard to the German origin of Klára. Klára's formal introduction in front of the classroom is done during the history lesson, when Petra's classmate, the lover of the WWII, wants to know whether students are taught about Hitler in Germany. Through this character, the author further develops the issue of origin as well as prejudice. Klára stands at the front of the class and tells the other students what they learn about Hitler, all the circumstances and causes leading to the fact that the German nation let themselves be controlled by Hitler. Her monologue is finished by the sentence *"I hope that nothing not happen so once more and we Germans finally not have listen things what you think of Jews?"* (Hlušíková 2015, p. 23). Despite the fact that the intention of the classmate's question was different than what Klára said, undoubtedly there exist people who have negative prejudice against Germans, related to the period of WWII, especially the young generation that learns about the tragedy of WWII only at school and cannot understand the behaviour of Germans during the war. They usually create prejudice of various types against them: it is them who started the war, murderers, etc. I, myself, remember the times when I did not know how to explain the behaviour of people during the war. The protagonist Petra is at the age when she analyses every act of her relatives, as well as of her surrounding, attempts to understand it and verify the truthfulness of such acting. The author is very authentic in her feeling into what Petra is experiencing, knows the psyche of a twelve-year-old girl. I suppose that through Klára's speaking she wants to tell

children how absurd it is to create prejudice based on the acts of a nation. Moreover, she provides detailed descriptions of the life of Hitler and the situation in Germany, so for many readers Klára's monologue is a certain enrichment of historical knowledge which is not available to all on the same level. The reading and summarising of such historical facts into a story for children and youth is a perfect way how to later prevent prejudice against other nations, not only the German one.

In this chapter, one can feel also an intention of the author's inclination towards Slovak patriotism. Petra's classmates are surprised that Klára speaks Slovak so well. She explains her good command of Slovak by her desire to learn the language in order to read books in Slovak. *"I wanted learn well, so I might read your books"* (Hlušíková 2015, p. 23). In this, Klára's avowal, emerges the author's love of the Slovak nation, its literary heritage, expressed by a twelve-year-old girl who is not of Slovak origin. In this statement, we can also find Hlušíková's hidden desire that young people find in themselves pleasures from the reading of literature, not only the popular literature promoted all over the world, but also our, Slovak literature. Klára's statement is also a certain shame for Slovak youth, since they are not interested in reading Slovak literature, while foreign pupils show a positive relation and desire to read Slovak authors.

The exceptionality and importance of this chapter lies in the expression of Slovak patriotism and a desire to suppress and limit prejudices about the origin and importance of other nations, as well as in developing the historical consciousness of pupils. Thus, this chapter has a positive influence on the overall changing of values of young people which is hidden beyond such a simple and common story included as a reading for children and youth. This book, however, treats the themes suitable also for older generation that would reach for the book maybe only out of curiosity.

Interpretation of the chapter Long live my new swimsuit!

This chapter is one of those which are supposed to entertain young people by depicting stories and problems that are part of life of all young adolescent girls. Also Petra is in this stage of her life. She is aware that she is not an adult yet, even though her views and values are gradually changing and are becoming more mature. This cannot be said, however, about her physical appearance, therefore she is very dissatisfied. *"... she will divert her look from your bosom ... she could straightaway say that from my breasts, but she could not say that since I do not have any!"* (Hlušíková 2015, p. 42). The author addresses the problem of every teenage girl – physical appearance. Petra does not complain about hair, face or her figure in general, but her problem is that she is not physically attractive enough with her breasts. She compares herself with her classmate Simona in whom she sees a physically adult woman. When one compares these two characters, Simona and Petra, one can see that each of them is equipped with

different qualities. Simona may physically already look like a woman, but, unlike Petra, she does not have such psychological qualities. Despite that, Petra comes with a plan how to solve her problem; on the day of swimming competition she stuffs her new swimsuit bought for her by the granny. Very humorously is depicted also the fact that Petra gets such childish idea due to her permanently active granny. She carries out her plan and we learn that she is satisfied how boys are staring at her, especially Peter whom she likes. What is humorous, however, is the fact that during swimming Petra loses part of her padding. The author did not finish this scene by a classical and disgraceful public revelation. She manages to hide her false padding. There is, however, a hidden lesson in the chapter, that is, how little one needs to debase oneself in an effort to suit the collective. Petra feels shame, therefore she does not tell the truth to her friend Klára either. *"I keep quiet like a fish. I cannot tell Klára that in the water she was bothered by my breast pads"* (Hlušíková 2015, p. 43). This was the situation through which the author intended to come closer and more authentically depict the life of a young growing up girl who despite her reasonable and mature nature makes does crazy things, as it is expected from every young girl.

The book What Girls Cannot Do

Another book by Marta Hlušíková entitled *Čo baby nedokážu* [What girls cannot do] was published in 2011. It is divided into 23 chapters: *We do not have a normal family, How we wanted to pass around a headless dog with fiery eyes, How we were making a fridge soup, Our grandpa may be a wizard, Non-returnable glasses, A spot on the lábus, Magic picture, On the order valid all over the world, On the immortal light bulb, a whale and other animals, Long live the men!, I already know what girls cannot do, How a merry-go-round came to us, The best shop in the street, How we played for bicycles, Paťo's daddy is a clown and it should be like that, About a cabin in the mountains, A secret speech, To be a musketeer is not so bad, We are already four, The fifth musketeer will be a girl, We are preparing a surprise for Lilinka, Our first hospital visit, We still do not have a normal family, but we do not care.* The name of every chapter is characteristic and foreshadows the story. Marta Hlušíková's book which tells a funny story about two brothers, Maťko and Braňko, who have to come to terms with the coming of their sister, was awarded by the Slovak IBBY Prize as "The best children's book of autumn 2011".

In the book the author depicts a story of one family from the point of view of children. The story is told by Maťko – the older of the brothers. As early as in the introduction of the first chapter entitled *We do not have a normal family*, readers see what Maťko imagines under normal family and reason he has not to consider his family normal: *"in each normal family mother takes care of her children, chases them when they do not wash their hands and clean their teeth, makes a tasty breakfast for them. Fathers check children's grades, drink beer and go to football*

matches" (Hlušíková 2011, p. 11). Readers learn about Braňo and Maťko's family in a humorous way. Although the story is told by the first-grader Maťko, the book is suitable also for older pupils, because they can find pleasure in its situational humour and the unique world of younger children. In telling the story, the author was able to present it through the eyes of a small child and thus evoke a faithful atmosphere of the world of one family. What is not normal for Maťko, can put a smile on the face of adult readers. However, how may such humour be perceived by pupils just several years older than the story's narrator. Maťko sees his family as the family which *"must have been affected by a spiritual catastrophe. If a medal was awarded for otherness, we would have it in a bigger-than-life size hanging over the entrance, since: my mother every morning trains 5 Tibetans, shows us horrible pictures of germs which could move into our flat if we do not wash our hands ..."* (Hlušíková 2011, p. 11).

A peaceful atmosphere is disturbed when the boys notice that mother's belly is growing: *"...Braňo ad I found out an interesting thing: our mother's belly is growing! We saw it when she was training five Tibetans. We did not want to tell her anything so she did not get offended, but we know well: it is because she always invents various healthy foods"* (2011, p. 18) In their children's naivety they attribute mother's growing belly to healthy food that she attempts to eat, which is perceived as not normal by the boys, they do not understand it. The mother's eating habits are depicted in a humorous way: *"She is crunching various nuts, puts tofu on her bread (this is such a white cheese without any taste) ..."* (Hlušíková 2011, p. 18).

In the following chapters, the narrator Maťko introduces the reader to the stories and experience of his family as well as the events connected with the arrival of his sister. The merry stories of the boys, such as cooking soup from all the ingredients from the fridge, grandma's Sherlock Holmes investigative skills, grandpa's scary stories, the check-up of the eyes at ophthalmologist, drawing the letter A with a mouth and eyes on it, a guy's trip to a cottage, riding a merry-go-round and so on, are framed by the main story, which is the disruption of the "boys team" consisting of Maťko, Braňo, father and grandpa, by the message that Maťko and Braňo will have a little sister. The boys have "anti-girl" thinking, portrayed by the author in such situations as *"I would perhaps like to stay with my mother, but Braňo was laughing at me, saying that I was a ladies' man"* (2011, p. 21), that women are more clever and skilful is according to Maťo only an invention of the journals read by his mother, he calls them "ladies' journals" – women are in them, according to Maťko *"praised, pretending to be more important than they in fact are"* (Hlušíková 2011, p. 40). The arrival of the sister is therefore not perceived very positively. They feel endangered and calm themselves by saying that they outnumber women. Such "anti-ladies' ideas" of the boys are supported by the behaviour of the father and grandfather who also

perceive women and as a worse sex, because they are not more clever than men: *"This is what ladies cannot do!, smiled grandpa Ďusi and we were giggling with him"* (Hlušíková 2011, p. 46). Or the grandpa's behaviour with respect to football: *"We are going to play football with friends and you bake something good"* (Hlušíková 2011, p. 52). However, such approach of the boys is not felt negatively; in several moments the reader feels the boys' love to their mother and grandmother, but the membership in men's club with their father and grandfather does not allow them to be "ladies' men", because they believe that men are stronger and more clever than women. Despite that, Maťko admires grandma's detective mind.

In the characters of Maťko and Braňo we see children's mindset, that is, how they believe everything what they are told by adults, how they do not perceive ironic humour. Such thinking can be illustrated by, for example, a scene at the ophthalmologist who tells little Maťko that glasses make him look more clever. Maťko was not gladdened by this, but rather felt insecure: *"What if the optician is right? What if my glasses ignore me, because they find out that my head is not so clever as I pretend? And what if I here and there fail to learn some task and the glasses disappear?"* (Hlušíková 2011, p. 26).

Another example is when the painter tells Maťko that he has to paint eyes and mouth on the big A, so that it can smile at him and Maťko takes this information so seriously that he really paints eyes and mouth on each big A. One can also find school in the book, noticing how pupils call their classmates (spectacled cobra, Darina – Mandarina, Hrušiak, etc.) or teachers (Onion). The reader can also find in the book children's distorted phrases (Edinos –Edison).

The arrival of the baby into the family is not often mentioned in the chapters, in some of them the narrator only marginally mentions the mother's big belly. The author wants to explain to the reader why the brothers are not ready for the girl through narrated experiences. The girl does not fit to them especially because she is not so brave, clever, and a girl, in any case, cannot be a musketeer. The book *Čo baby nedokážu* has adventurous elements, especially in the chapter *Tajná reč* [Secret Speech], where Maťko and Braňo are witnessing fire and the arrival of a fire truck. Readers see a clear reference to the feeling of danger at the end of the chapter *Tajná reči*, after the mother of a boy who stayed in the house ran inside to save him. The boys are wondering whether their mother would run to a house on fire to help them, and they come to a clear conclusion. They think their mother has a substitution for them. In the chapter *Piatym mušketierom bude baba* [The Fifth Musketeer Will Be a Girl], the arrival of the sister is mentioned more often. Maťko and Braňo are not identified with the fact that another girl will come to the house: *"Are you thick? Don't you see that in the belly she is carrying our future sister? We can't take another girl in the house. Mother and grandma are enough!"* (Hlušíková 2011, p. 72). A situation occurs in which the mother is prematurely taken to the hospital and Maťko and Braňo are told that their sister

fighters for her life in the hospital. At this moment, there comes a change in the boys' thinking: "*Do you know how big she is? Less than two bags of salt. And we did not want her*" (Hlušíková 2011, p. 75). This situation helps the boys to understand that their little sister is a fighter and can become the fifth musketeer. The doubts that the little sister is a threat to them have never entirely disappeared, but they came to terms with the fact that she belongs to the family. The merry story of the brothers Matko and Braňo shows the reader, through funny events, a transition from fear of and resistance to a new member of the family to the acceptance of the sister as a musketeer, points to children's naivety, problems of children and influence of adults on children. The work *Čo baby nedokážu* is intended for the children of younger school age, but, in my opinion, it will find a larger spectrum of fans, especially due to its humour which is suitably used in the book by the author. She uses simple language, therefore the work reads quickly and easily.

Another book from the Marta Hlušíková's pen are *Strelené rozprávky* [Crazy Fairy Tales] from 2014. The concrete texts are called *Zázračný vysávač* [Magic Hoover] and *Ako som išla vyvenčiť metlu* [How I Went to Take Out the Broom]. The book *Magic Fairy Tales* is opened by the tale *Magic Hoover*. The authorial subject begins the text by a known fairy tale formulation which is attractively changed: "*Far, far away, on the far seventh floor of our house, concretely in my apartment, lives an old hoover*" (Hlušíková 2014, p. 6). Then comes the introduction of the setting – a flat on the seventh floor as well as the protagonist – an old hoover. Having read the entire book, one can summarise that the inanimate objects of the real world are portrayed as alive and as talking characters of the author's fictional world. This is the reason why she frequently uses personification.

In the following excerpt, we learn more about the protagonist, but the narrator, who is a woman, is also visible: "He's lived with me for so long that I haven't even noticed how old he is. His voice was roughened and his bronchi are gone (don't worry, they didn't really go, that's just the saying). He still has bronchi, but they are kind of caught (don't worry now, nobody touches them, that's just what they say)" (Hlušíková 2014, p. 6). As we can see in this passage, the narrator is direct and is one of characters. The author directly addresses the reader and explains metaphors that readers in childhood can understand them literally. Here we can also see a repetition in the structure – a metaphor and an explanation in parentheses. The author also addresses the reader with questions, such as: "Because you know what vacuum cleaners do in their free time?" (Hlušíková 2014, p. 6)

There are common comparisons in this text: "*... it would be enough to take the vacuum cleaner to the doctor to sing like a nightingale*" (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 6), "*Not when like slaves they devour dust from carpets.*" (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 7), "*I and the neighbour looked at each other and carefully, like two thieves, are sneaking to the door of the apartment the music sounds like a concert.*" (Hlušíková, 2014,

p. 8), *"I promise that I will vacuum as silently as a fly"* (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 9). Comparisons achieve a certain level of imagery and closer identification of phenomena. Most of these comparisons indicate sound, which completes the storyline of the fairy tale itself - the old vacuum cleaner has a problem with the voice.

The author uses rhetorical questions, which arouse curiosity and tension in the reader: *"What if the neighbour went crazy? What if I have to call an emergency?"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 8), *"Open? Do not open?"* (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 8)

One of the motifs in this collection of fairy tales is a dog. Specifically, in this fairy tale, the eyes of a neighbour, who comes to borrow a jazz CD, bear the adjective 'dog-like'. However, this view of the neighbour changes, which is humorously commented by the authorial subject: *"... and his eyes were no longer dog-like at all"* (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 7).

Another motif is music. As the vacuum cleaner sings in its hoarse voice, which reminds the neighbour of jazz, the conversation between the owner of the vacuum cleaner - the narrator and the neighbour, is interwoven with terms from this area. The name of the famous jazz singer - Armstrong - is also mentioned.

- "- Good morning! I have a request for you.
- Morning.
- Could you please lend me your jazz CD?
- Please?
- From Armstrong.
- Please?
- Excuse me. So the tape. Or a plate. Or a tape recorder ... "(Hlušíková 2014, p. 7)

Right in the introductory greeting - Morning - we can find an ellipse that signals that the speech is colloquial, bringing the author closer to the readers. In the text can also be found colloquial words like *job* or *tease* (someone). Next, the word *please* and the conjunction *or* are repeated in the conversation. The question - please? - is repeated because the owner of the vacuum cleaner does not understand what the neighbour is asking. Repetition thus highlights her misunderstanding and ignorance of the behaviour of her vacuum cleaner. The conjunction *or* is repeated with a noun after which the utterance is terminated. This repetition can be understood as a phenomenon of colloquial language, where the calculation of possibilities is not prepared in advance and is therefore situational. In terms of syntax, exclamation sentences are common, such as: *"If you could see his terrified gaze!"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 8), *"I'm not home after all!"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 8), *"... once it imitates the trumpet and then rasps again!"* (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 8), *"I don't want a classic!"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 7), *"And in order not to make you sad, I will sing with you!"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 9), *"Just don't,*

please!" (Hlušíková 2014, p. 9) This type of sentences emphasises the individual utterance of the character and thus the emotions that will interest children when properly recited or read.

In this collection's tales, Marta Hlušíková uses inanimate objects which acquire the characteristics of people. In addition to the objects, a woman as a narrator also appears in all the stories. Specifically, in this fairy tale, she is the owner of a vacuum cleaner, whose broken voice reminds her neighbour of jazz music. In this creative and humorous way, the author managed to make even such phenomenon as the sound of a vacuum cleaner special.

In the second fairy tale, entitled *How I Went to Take Out the Broom*, the author again uses an inanimate object from the household, namely a broom. The story begins simply and quite typically with the phrase: *"One afternoon I was sitting on the balcony, reading a book and drinking coffee"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 10). This use of a typical structure contrasts with the creative story of the fairy tale but draws the reader into the story immediately. Once again, there is a female character, a narrator, who describes her experience - the broom laughed at a small whisk. In the text we can find several diminutives. These softening words carry a positive connotation. Also interesting is the used occasionalism *metlopes* or a word denoting a chihuahua dog - *chihuah*. Creating new words complements the humorous nature of the story and is also an interesting element to attract children's attention. Something unusual is also the combination of words in the sentence: *"My broomstick has grown a dog! Suddenly, a beautiful Labrador with a whisk tail stands in the kitchen"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 11). The first part of the extract is a metaphor. The second sentence uses the similarity between the dog's tail and the whisk, as to indicate the movement of the dog's tail, the expression sweeps with the tail is used. There are also other metaphors in the text, for example: *"I see how the dog boy's eyes are enlarged"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 11), *"... a breeze has flown in"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 10).

As the previous fairy tale, this also uses mainly interrogative and exclamation sentences: *"Do you even know how to sweep such stairs, for example?"* 2014, p. 11), *"Why does your dog bark at its own tail?"* (Hlušíková 2014, s. 11), *"Why don't you say anything?"* (Hlušíková 2014, p. 12) We will also find here a question that is not put to a specific character. It arouses curiosity in the reader who then finds the answer in the text: *"Then get afraid: and what if no dog growls at it tomorrow?"* (Hlušíková, 2014 p. 12)

The use of exclamation sentences again makes the text dynamic and emphatic: *"Crumbs! I can sweep them, it's a piece of cake for me! But such stairs! Or the hallway! You can only dream about it!"* (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 10), *"It's just like that!"* (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 12), *"It's easy for someone to say when suddenly a dog grows him out of nothing!"* (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 12)

In the fairy tale, we also find signs of metafiction, as the main character comments on the story also like this: *"I would like to help my whisk, but I do not*

want to meddle into the fairy tale" (Hlušíková, 2014, p. 10). As if the author itself appears in the utterance, becoming a female character, narrator, and commenting on her actions. It is an interesting connection between the real world and the fictional, fairy tale world. Fairy tales often use this connection, which can captivate the reader, whether with humour or unusualness. A similar comment can be found further in the text: "*And because in the crazy fairy tale everything is allowed ...*" (Hlušíková 2014, p. 11). The extract uses the name of the entire collection, reminding the reader that the story he/she is reading is colloquially "*crazy*", that is, not normal, and in such a world anything is possible, and Marta Hlušíková preserved it in this fairy tale as well. The story of the whisk, which is ridiculed by a larger broom, and so a dog grows to it to become a tail and see the world outside, will fascinate the reader with its originality, not only through its language, but also through the depiction of an unconventional story. The character of the whisk also shows a positive human quality, namely humility, as the whisk, although it managed to do what the broom could not, did not boast about it and was not conceited. Therefore, we can say that through personification, giving life to inanimate objects, Marta Hlušíková also educates the reader and expands his/her fantasy world that has no borders.

I consider the work of Marta Hlušíková as a prototype of contemporary Slovak work for children and young readers. I think that it meets the requirements that contemporary times put on literary work as well as reflecting the requirements and expectations of the child. Her work is up-to-date, fresh, and, at the same, time does not lower its aesthetic criteria. Moreover, it is very popular with children, and this is the most important feature of her work. I would recommend reading the interpreted books in literature lessons as an extracurricular activity, because in addition to offering current topics and their artistic treatment, they could be helpful in children's personal development and growing up. They would probably also appeal to them with their humour.

4

Legends in current context

Historical *legends* represent one of a child's first contacts with the national past. For a young person, this genre becomes an interesting insight into the history of his/her own nation. The period of middle-school age for children is decisive for reading legends, and their inclination towards them is also respected by school literary education. The problems in the research into contemporary legends are currently branching around textual and interpretive contexts covering the whole complex of partial internal (textual) and external (contextual) questions concerning *legend* as a genre. They include, for example, the question of authenticity and the artistic nature of the legend in connection with the issue of literary transformation of originals, the problem of drama as a basic structural feature of the legend, the definition and delimitation of the generic scale, its interpretive positions and variations and a number of other accompanying problem areas, such as the presence and function of the real and the fantastic in the legend, the naïve character of the legend, the position of the narrator and recipient, informative or aesthetic value of the legend, the thematic aspect in the classification of legend, some editorial problems, etc. Since the 1990s (also in connection with socio-political changes) there has been a quantitative increase in the genre in Slovakia. The reason is often the effort to prove the distinctiveness of Slovaks, their independence and historical anchorage (in the spirit of "we have been here for a long time and have our own history"), but also the logical expansion of publishing possibilities. The most important authors in this genre are e.g. Jozef Melicher, Anton Marec, Jozef Trubíni, Jozef Hindický, Ján Podmanický, Jozef Tatár, Štefan Moravčík, Zuzana Zemaníková or Zuzana Kuglerová.

Zuzana Kuglerová is a contemporary Slovak writer who is characterised by an intense interest in the historical issues of Slovak realities. Since the 1990s, she has focused on the writing of historical prose. Her works include *Rytier a zbrojnoš* [The Knight and the Armor-bearer], *Kliatba kožušníckovej vdovy* [The Curse of the Furrier's Widow], *Dcéra riečnej panny* [The Daughter of the River Virgin], *Zlatá reťaz boha Sobeka* [The Golden Chain of the God Sobek], and *Legenda o Selenovi* [The Legend of Selenium]. She is mainly interested in non-traditional terrain, such as hillsides, hamlets, smaller towns and people's lives, in

which she often describes works through legends or other stories of folk origin. The literary treatment of Žilina and its surroundings through legends can be found in the work Turkova stupa [The Turk's Footprint], but especially in the collection of legends The Curse of the Furrier's Widow. The book contains thirty legends, including the one that gave the name to the entire collection. To write these legends, Zuzana Kuglerová studied in the archives, though most of the legends about Žilina and its surroundings have also been preserved orally. In the book, illustrations from the Slovak artist Bystrík Vančo are added to each story.

From the collection Curse of the Furrier's Widow comes the legend Lost Castle which will be discussed below. The name envelops the legend by a veil of secrecy and mystery which is achieved precisely by choosing a phrase that can arouse the reader's interest, as well as the question: How and where can the castle be lost? It is to this basic, primary question that the reader will find the answer when reading the text. It opens with an introductory sentence: *"Once upon a time there was a beautiful, magnificent manor house in Petrovská dolina, even richer than the castle in Bytča, more proud than Budatín Castle"* (Kuglerová, 2007, p. 71). This sentence can be interpreted as one that refers to someone else's statement, i.e. to the reproduction of the statement of a third person by the narrator himself, which is signalled by the expression *"It is said that once upon a time ..."* (Kuglerová, 2007, p. 71). The expression takes the reader to the past and indicates that the information to be related is reproduced. In this particular case, it is telling a story that is alive, especially in folk form, and thus preserved by oral tradition. However, if we look at the introduction of the text as such, we find that the narrator first depicts the environment and surroundings of the castle in detail, while despite the revelation of the landscape to the reader, the text evokes mystery. This can be documented by the following passage: *"Nobody knew about the chateau either, it was hidden, not only by dense forests and deep ponds, but also by fog, which hovered over the Petrovská dolina valley every morning"* (Kuglerová, 2007, p. 71). In the first paragraph, we also find a fantastic element, in the form of a cursed forest. In this way, the author acquaints the reader not only with the environment of the castle, but especially with the regional area, which is Petrovská dolina. And it is the introduction, the place with which the legend is associated with, that is its real basis. It can therefore be stated that this is a historical legend with a local, regional anchor in time and context.

The narrator presents a specific story, but even before the introduction of characters, the text specifies the area in which the story is set and the reader discovers the name of the village Petrovice, located near the town of Bytča. This increases the credibility of the whole story, referring to specific facts, events, names and other specific contexts, gives the legend a touch of "truthfulness" and historical validity. Finally, the narrator brings the character of lumberjack and his family. But first we learn about the head of the family, the narrator presents the lumberjack as both the father and husband. From this part of the text, it is

possible to deduce the main role of a man in society, especially in the past, in which the whole legend is embedded. That role was nothing more than the ability to take care of one's family and provide for it. Of course, emphasis is placed not only on the role of the man in the society of that time, but also on the role and position of the woman, as a mother and wife, taking care of the family and the household. And finally, their children, who are not depicted separately but only expressed in number, there were twelve of them. It is at this point that the reader encounters the symbolism of the number twelve as the number of fullness, completeness. The reader will certainly not miss the fact that no names of characters can be found, only two are named, the youngest and oldest son of the lumberjack. The eldest son was named Gašpar and the youngest Blažej. The fact that these two sons are called by name seems to bring them closer to each other, though the opposite is true. The very contrast of age, the youngest - the oldest, also foreshadows the contrast of behaviour, for in the work they were portrayed as opposites. However, it is not only the difference between Gašpar and Blažej that is emphasised here, but above all, the contrast between Blažej and his other brothers as well as his father. In this way, we can perceive Blažej as a prototype of a positive hero, while his pros are emphasised mainly through the negative qualities of his brothers and father.

The whole lumberjack family can be considered as one line of characters appearing in the work. The second line of characters is the family of the lord of the forest and the castle. He is introduced not only as a king, but also as the head of the family and the father of his twelve daughters, who are not specified, but again we encounter the symbolism of the number twelve. However, one of the daughters excels, the youngest one, just like in the lumberjack family, where it was also the youngest member of the family. If we compare these two lines of characters, we will find that they are portrayed as opposites. The lumberjack family is simple, with regard to the conditions of the time, depicted realistically. The author contrasts it with the lord's family, which is a symbol of supernaturalness, the fantastic, and power and wealth. The sharp contrast between the families is also visible in the comparison of sons and daughters, though in the end, we find out that it is not a contrast in the true sense of the word, but an element of convergence and harmony which foreshadowed the similarity indicated by numerical symbolism. A certain similarity can also be seen in the depiction of the lord and the lumberjack, who, in addition to their hardness, are also similar in their main mission - the protection and security of their families. However, these contrasts are overcome at the end through the youngest members of the family and their love. At this point, it should also be remembered that the legend (in general, but also in this particular case) often has many features in common with the fairy tale.

The story of the legend is based on the constant alternation of tension and detention. The degree of tension begins to rise as the lumberjack travels into the

enchanted forest for wood and continues to do so further into the story. This is caused by the gradual loss of the sons, who, like the father, use human power to fight the supernatural forces, which is, however, negligible if compared with the curses. The tension is interrupted by a description of the miserable life of the lumberjack's wife and her youngest, and now only, son Blažej. The woman, having lost both her husband and her sons, had to take care of herself and her little son all by herself. The boy finally grew up and the level of tension begins to increase again when the youngest son begins to show curiosity about the cursed forest and, finally, he leaves the house. However, his departure was already different from the departure of his father and brothers. He differed mainly in the fact that the moment he leaves the house, he does not say goodbye to his mother, does not wave her goodbye, nor does he have even as much as an axe with him. The goal of the journey can be considered the biggest difference, because Blažej does not go to the forest to cut trees, but to save and free his loved ones. The only things he took from the house are dumplings with lard. This difference is directly expressed in the text as follows: *"You have a good heart, Blažej! - said the youngest of them at last. - not only did you not rush into us, but you also gave us your dumplings. Those who came here before you have never done that"* (Kuglerová, 2007, p. 74). Finally, thanks to this difference, Blažej reaches the lord of the forest himself. His staying in the forest and in the service of the lord is accompanied by a mystery, which at this point becomes an element of detention. Later, the motif of mystery and its revelation becomes a device of the culmination of tension when the lord is forced to lift the curse and thus save all whom he has hurt. At the same time, he must destroy himself and the castle. At this moment, the original question emerges, sketched out above in relation to the name of the legend: *"The whole castle collapsed with the lord of the forest. Nothing was left. Only ponds and a dense forest spread all around"* (Kuglerová, 2007, p. 77). At the end, one can observe a certain kind of moral lesson (also one of the signs of legend) that not everything a person wants is necessary to obtain by brute force. Above all, it is important to solve the problem in a sensible way. The conclusion is much more fantastic compared to the introduction, and several fairy tale motifs can be observed here, one of which is the curse of the lord's youngest daughter, who turned into a tree frog due to the lord's curse. There is also a certain change compared to the classic version of the fairy tale, where the prince kisses a frog and she turns into a princess. In this story the tree frog kisses a boy to turn herself back into a girl. But the most important thing is that, finally, after the tension escalates, easing of tension comes in the form of a happy ending and the victory of good over evil, which, however, reminds us again of the (already mentioned) fairy tale.

The analysed "lumberjack" legend can also be characterised as a historical fairy tale in which a number of fantastic elements appear. But these elements are only a completion of the real basis of the originally folk legend (Šenkár, 2008, p.

74). In the current period of syncretisation, one could hardly expect a "pure" genre. Nevertheless, fantastic elements in this context do not interfere, on the contrary, they add a magical character to the text of the legend. The real basis of the legend is the depiction of the environment, which is primarily of cognitive value reflected in learning about regional geographical attractions. *"The driving force of the story is its dramatic tension which increases the readability of the text"* (Vítězová, 2005, p. 62). It is the dramatic elements combined with fantastic elements that can be considered attractive for the needs of social and cultural communication. The overall evaluation of the legend can be characterised positively and despite the simple composition, the text is interesting, engaging and can captivate the young reader.

Legend offers many interpretive possibilities for the teaching of Slovak language and literature, whether it is the fulfilment of educational goals (to form a positive attitude of students to folk literature, to history as part of human community and the preservation of cultural heritage in our territory), educational (students learn about the concept of regional legend and can identify basic characteristics of legend, know several regional legends, can assess the degree of reality of legend, are able to work with the text, search and recognise basic literary data, can express the main idea contained in the text and is also able to adopt an attitude to the texts. The work with legends allows an interdisciplinary approach: Slovak language and literature, history, geography, art education, cross-section themes (multicultural education - preserving the heritage of folk literature, personal and social development - learning about the traditions of our ancestors). The decisive factor is a child reader, his/her interest in reading legends and "fitting" for their reception in the sense that the reading impact of legends on children is complex, that is, aesthetically impressive, beneficial in terms of cognition and educational enrichment with all the accompanying formative values that each legend brings with it. It is therefore important that Slovak legends get *"into the reading and reception circulation and that the traces and effects of this circulation are transmitted not categorically, but specifically sensitively and impressively into the consciousness of children and youth. The position of adults, especially teachers, educators and all those who, in some way, participate in the education of children and help them get oriented in the world of books and literature, is not negligible. It is an integrative position ..."* (Obert, 1999, p. 184).

5

Slovak leporello as a pre-reading genre

The first book in the hands of a child is usually a leporello, and as with everything seen for the first time, it leaves traces and resonates for a long time. The leporello is a proven type of publication for the youngest children, mostly made of stronger paper and used not only for reading, but also as a toy. In the first stage, it is a thing, an object, a toy, later an aesthetic inspiration, a kit, a jigsaw puzzle. From the literary point of view, both verses (most often used) and brief prose, artistic and educational text are suitable for the leporello. If we want to talk about leporello as the first (basic) pre-reading genre, we must first realise one peculiarity of this book - toys. Leporella do not have to contain text at all, they can be composed only of illustrations, although the writer is often the author of their thematic composition. Poetry is more common in leporella, prose is less frequent, one often finds fairy tales there (especially animal stories) or short stories from children's lives. In the beginning, texts were selected mainly from folk literature, later also well-known authors began to create texts. Publications about animals, means of transport and fairy tales are most favoured. Some book publications are also useful in developing a child's mathematical literacy, in learning about different human occupations, or in helping to learn various common activities, such as telling time on a watch. The selection of suitable topics for the leporello is varied and rich. When choosing a text, the creators of the leporello must realise that a coherent text is completely unsuitable, for it is artificially fragmented into parts and divided into individual pages. When compiling the leporello, Lýdia Kysel'ová recommends the following: *"In a literary sense of the word, leporello is a distinct genre, consisting of a mosaic of small separate texts or motifs of one theme, stimulating enough to be developed into rich artistic panorama through the imagination of a visual artist. It fulfils its function most effectively when the text is written under the picture like lyrics of a melody. Each page is actually a separate work of art here"* (Kysel'ová 1985, 115). The most suitable texts for leaflets are separate short poems - rhymes or short prose formations with a chain composition. The relationship of the text to the illustration with which it should correspond should not be underestimated either. The child must understand the connection between the text and the image. The complexity of the text should not be very high, because leporello is intended for children up to about 4 years of age. Older children will rather reach

for a book, although quality illustrations may attract them at a later age as well. The basic creative principle of art for the little ones is the imaginary principle of children's play. It is important that the child enjoys the play and imagination when meeting the artistic word. Children should also not be seen as passive recipients of the text but should be allowed to actively adopt it. The easiest way for children to remember is texts that have a strong rhythm, simple composition and clear division. According to Poliak, "*... in preschool age, of greatest success among children are such poetic formations which are a play of rhythm, sounds and ideas, i.e. rhymes, counting out rhymes, children's plays accompanied by spoken or sung words*" (Poliak 1983, 50).

The leporello is special in that the artistic component is usually more important to it than the textual component. In the first period of childhood, children encounter various pictures, which may not be part of the book, but may be part of another toy, clothes and the like. They also initially see the book as a toy. Later, children begin to realise that individual pictures have a telling value, showing objects that they encounter in everyday life. Illustrations also depict events, natural phenomena, human activity, and may even depict various emotions that characters experience. Children gradually realise that individual pictures often follow one another, conveying a story. In perceiving illustration, children develop active thought activity and process the reality they see, realising that the depicted theme is related to their real life and helps them to discover the diversity of the world around. At the same time, they develop their own imagination and, in a way, get acquainted with various artistic techniques of painting and drawing. The author of leporello is not only a writer, but also an artist who plays an equally important role in his/her self-realisation. Illustration and text should be interrelated, complementary and evolving. The artist should display the content of the text, but, at the same time, he/she can enrich it with other stimuli that are not implicitly expressed in the text, humorous elements are especially welcome if the nature of the text allows it. The illustrations should mimic reality, but this should not be an obstacle for the artist who can use an appropriate degree of aesthetic stylisation. It often takes the form of personification or anthropomorphising, which is very close to preschool children. Quality illustration not only concretises reality with regard to children's mentality and experience, but also brings elements of fun. Illustrations that are too abstract have little chance of success, providing few clues for specific children's thinking and imagination.

Literary and art critics, both in the past and in the present, often point out the insufficient quality of art in the book form. One of the most significant shortcomings is considered to be the inconsistency of the textual and artistic component, not only in the content but also in the atmosphere of the work. If the text is cheerful and humorous, the illustrations should also be displayed in such

colour tones as to evoke a feeling of a cheerful, pleasant atmosphere. The illustrations also blame the excessive simplicity of expression, the lack of detail or a too abstract way of representation, which the child does not have to understand. Zuzana Stanislavová sees other shortcomings, especially in contemporary literary production, in the generally declining aesthetic quality of leporella, which are often too commercially oriented, preferring entertainment without any deeper meaning. This applies to both text and illustrations. She claims that these contain large, colourfully aggressive areas or, conversely, sweetly sentimental ornamental details of the drawing, while the personification contained in them often acquires a comic-expressive character (Stanislavová 2007, 29). It follows that the production of leporello in our market is influenced by various fashion trends, which is often at the expense of its quality and therefore it would be necessary to pay more attention to what is offered to the smallest recipients of books, art and literature. A quality leporello stimulates children's interest in the world around them, and since children will very soon be able to "read" for themselves, the most basic preconditions for their future reading competencies are formed in it. Thanks to the large typeface and easy manipulation, it also finds its application for short-sighted or mentally handicapped readers who have insufficiently developed fine motor skills (Stanislavová 2007).

Stanislavová distinguishes several types according to the functions of leporella. One of them is a didactic-instructive leporello - it contains text, an instruction that helps to induce a communication situation, provides a suitable stimulus for dialogue with the child; using this type of leporello, the child learns, is able to identify elements of the thematic material and put them into context, to which rich illustrations also contribute, providing the child with further stimuli for conversation or storytelling. Another type is educational leporella with text - they contain information of a factual or aesthetic nature and mediate the primary knowledge of the subject or human world, they mostly take the form of a prose text, in the past they were rare, but now they appear very often in connection with the shifting of the lower age limit of readers of educational literature into preschool age. The last type is leporella containing aesthetic information. It is the most represented and contains mainly rhyme verses, is often repeated thematically, the most favourite are the ones in which animals appear.

The first leporello appeared in our country in the interwar period (1918 - 1939) in the work of Sidónia Sakalová, who wrote Slovak texts for pictures from German leaflets. During the Second World War, in the years 1943 - 1944, Michal Šteinhíbel wrote leporello about animals (Maťovčík et al. 2008). In the late 1940s, Darina Harmanová wrote leporello with the theme of animals' and children's stories. Literary criticism at the time blamed her work for children becoming overly sentimental and didactic (Stanislavová et al. 2010). The breakthrough in children's work meant a new approach by Ludmila

Podjavorinská and Mária Rázusová-Martáková. In her work, Ľudmila Podjavorinská abandoned the didactic concept and developed epic poetry, which Mária Rázusová-Martáková deepened with subjective lyrical expression. Marták's leporella are considered by literary critics to be of exceptionally high-quality, even exemplary examples of this work for the youngest readers (Kopál et al. 1987). Martáková also translated leporello from foreign production. This period saw the beginning of the creative activity of Krista Bendová and Zlata Dôňčová. In 1951, the Mladé letá publishing house began to pay special attention to book-making. At various literary meetings, the authors were invited to pay special attention to this component of children's literature. Ján Anđel continued the didactic concept, illustrating some of the leporella himself. Other authors included Jozef Telgársky, Rudolf Dobiáš, Štefan Cpin, Elena Čepčeková, Maša Haľamová and Mária Haštová. Dušan Roll enjoyed great success and his works were also translated into other languages. In 1950, Pavol Štefánik wrote his first leporello and ended his long-term rich work for the youngest in 2002 with a series of works about animals. In 1958, Eleonóra Gašparová wrote the first leporello with the prosaic text of Jurek's paintings.

In the 1960s, a new wave of work for children began, represented by Ľubomír Feldek, Miroslav Válek, Ján Stacho and Viliam Turčány. In his work, Feldek enters into a dialogue with a child; in Válek's work, the adult and children's aspects merge (Stanislavová et al. 2010). Some of Válek's leporella are specific in that the images were created first and only then did the author write text for them (Šmatlák, 1976). Daniel Hevier later followed up on the work of these two authors. The 1960s continued with the creation of František Lipka, Vladimír Reisel, Ján Šimonovič, Anton Miroslav Huska, Tomáš Janovic, Peter Kováčik, Miloš Krno, Ján Turan. Vladimír Ferko chose interesting topics - caving, cosmonautics, and the life youths.

In the 1970s, despite the overall literary decline, leporello were formed even by a new generation of authors, including Božena Trilecová, Jana Šimulčíková, Ján Navrátil, Vojtech Kondrót, Peter Glocko, Rudolf Čižmárik, and Rudo Brtáň. In the next decade, it was Kveta Dašková, Marta Baloghová, Milan Rúfus, Mária Števková, Ondrej Nagaj, Kamil Peteraj, Dagmar Wagnerová-Škamlová, Marianna Grznárová and Zdena Vojtková. At present, productive authors include Ľubica Kepštová, Václav Šuplata, Štefan Balák, Mária Baslíková, Štefan Moravčík, Ján Berky-Ľuborecký, who draws mainly from Romani folklore, and Jozef Repka who undertook the demanding creation of leporello with a historical motif from the period of the Great Moravian Empire.

The lending activities in current libraries show that parents like to provide their children with books that accompanied them as children, and today's children can find their way to them. The most popular are the works by Mária Rázusová-Martáková and Z. Alexandrovová, translated from the Russian original M. Rázusová-Martáková. Contemporary work provides a diverse choice. There

are leporella cut into various shapes, joined in a non-traditional way, for example in a spiral, in the form of a children's handbag which the child can carry more easily. The size varies, from small books to large format leporello - almost larger than their little readers. Many leporella also include puzzles, puppets, magnets, which children can place directly on the pages of the book, various whistling and sound effects. An exceptionally wide range of works is offered by educational literature which is popular even at an early age. It often includes magnets, transparencies, various 3D effects, children's binoculars, magnifying glasses, small hourglasses, children's maps and the like. The topics are again very diverse. Topics such as space, nature and the human body predominate in the scientific literature. Worth reading leporella are also those that help children learn to count or recognise letters, colours and geometric shapes. Many of these are really good publications, but there are also many that have obvious shortcomings or are called a leporello just because of the solid material from which they are made, but their purpose is more of a book - a toy than a real leporello.

Even in the current publishing practice, leporella capturing the richness of folk literature have an irreplaceable place. Folk literature inspires e.g. The book *Pec nám spadla* [A Stove Fell] from the MATYS publishing house, which contains folk rhymes. The imprint does not mention the author and not even the year of publication, but it is obvious that this is a new publication. The book contains rhymes dealing with various topics, mainly winter and Christmas motifs. The text is suitably complemented with illustrations by Adolf Dudek, who playfully and humorously depict folk themes in a more modern way. The adaptation of texts that take into account other cultural and social conditions in which today's children live and for which it is more difficult to understand the original text also contributes to this. The title page, however, containing an illustration that does not thematically fit into the context of the whole book, evokes a disturbing impression.

Nursery-rhymes are most often used in leporella, but we can also find other genres of folk literature. The leporello *Najkrajšie slovenské hádanky* [The Most Beautiful Slovak Riddles] was published in 2007 by Fragment. The text was edited by Juraj Hamar and the illustrations are the work of the Czech artist Ladislav Pechová. The book has a larger A4 format, it opens like a classic book. There are several riddles on each side. Each also has a picture related to the topic of the riddle. The texts are simple, the author kept them mostly in their original form, only modifying them so that they can be understood even by today's children. Illustrations by Ladislav Pechová suitably complement the texts. They are simple colour drawings, some realistic, others are understood with humour, also using personification. For this genre, however, it would be more appropriate if the riddles were arranged one at a time on each page, albeit smaller in format. This would make not only the riddle stand out better, but also the illustration that is related to it. If there are several separate texts and illustrations on one page, it

seems a bit chaotic. Nevertheless, this book is a high-quality example of a leporello. The value of the book is also contributed to by a complete imprint, which contains all the necessary information (which is not always a matter of course for leporella).

When choosing books from current production, Štefan Žáry's book *Ako zima koncertuje* [How Winter Plays Concerts] is interesting, especially for its impressive illustrations. This book was published by IKAR in 2003 and was illustrated by Vladimír Machaj. However, this is not a new edition, as it was originally published in 1980 by Mladé letá. The IKAR publishing house has chosen the same form of processing, the books are identical in terms of text and art, and the traditional rectangular form has also been used. A big plus of the new edition are richer and more pronounced colours than in the older edition. Illustrations look realistic, but we can also find personifications here. The excellently chosen painting technique with a number of ornamental and detailed motifs of nature gives the illustrations a special charm of a fairy-tale world, which directly draws the reader into the story. Short lectures from Štefan Žáry's workshop look playful and fresh. The book perfectly combines the motifs of the sounds of winter nature with the sounds of musical instruments. An ordinary walk of children turns into the discovery of mysterious and diverse sounds of birds, wind, creaking snow, bells of sheep, which in a child's imagination turns into a kind of musical concert. The author plays with words very inventively, uses multi-semantic names, or words with the same word base, and combines them into new, surprising connections. This leporello is an excellent symbiosis of fine and poetic art.

A popular animal theme is developed by the leporello *Na poli, na lúke, pri vode* [In the field, in the meadow, by the water]. It was published in 2003 by Tranoscus. The author of the verses is Ján Benčík and the illustrator Alena Drusková. The leporello has a rectangular shape, opening in a classic way. It is made of high-quality cardboard. Each page shows one or two species of animals that a child may encounter in the wild in our territory. Animals are depicted realistically with an emphasis on the natural environment in which they live. Here you will find representatives of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and insects. Each page is enriched with a four-verse stanza with an associated rhyme, which concisely describes typical features of a particular animal. The verses are enriched with elements of humour, comparisons, diminutives, but also colloquial expressions close to the children's way of expression. The author speaks to readers in the form of poems and invites them to his own thinking and observation of nature. He asks questions that he answers, but at the same time in a playful way invites children to explore nature themselves. The text meets the requirements of leporello making, because each page contains a separate passage, which is able to stand alone. Individual poems do not follow one another, but are connected by a common theme. A complete imprint, which

contains all the necessary information, also contributes to the value of the book. This leporello represents a high-quality symbiosis of fine and literary art.

The theme of animals is also treated by another leporello from the domestic work *Zvieratká v lese* [Animals in the Forest]. It was published in 2006 by Knižné centrum. The imprint does not contain information about the author of the text, the illustrator being Ján Vrabec. The leporello is rectangular in shape with classic side opening. Each page represents a separate unit, showing different situations from the animal world. Some are realistic and introduce readers to the real world of nature. They name individual species of animals and outline their way of behaving. Some parts, via anthropomorphising, attribute human characteristics to animals, but also human behaviour. The individual stories have an educational character. Some express direct instruction, others give it in a hidden form. The text meets all the required criteria. In quatrains with alternating rhymes, we find diminutives, personifications and colloquial expressions. It is a simple but high-quality work that focuses on conveying an educational message to readers. Simple text is suitably complemented by illustrations. They contain a lot of humorous and playful details, which suitably develop and enrich the text. The overall impression of this leporello is spoiled by too many flashy colours and inappropriate contrast, which is cliché-like and in some places even aggressive. Softer shades of colour and more sensitive contrast would contribute to the quality of the leporello, as well as full imprint.

From the fairy tale genre, the *Psík Ňufík* [Doggy Ňufík] leporello from the MATYS publishing house is interesting. This leporello is taken from Polish production, but the text of the book comes from the Slovak author Sibyla Mislovičová. It was published in Poland in 2003 and in Slovakia in 2005. The author of the illustrations is Grazyna Motylewska. However, the original author is not mentioned in the imprint. The leporello has a traditional book shape with a fine wavy cut. The book also includes an audio device that emits the sound of a barking dog when pressed. There is one quatrain on each page, but the poem is not suitable for this type of children's publication, because its individual fragments cannot stand alone. The story is relatively simple, suitable for children of younger preschool age. The level of verses is very average, the frequent verse overlap is especially unpleasant. Even the illustrations do not exceed average quality, but a big plus is the large number of details with which the artist has developed an otherwise not very lively text. The pictures are suitable for younger children, there is also anthropomorphising of animals. Overall, the leporello is rather of average quality and it is not saved even by the sound device, which has also only a purely entertaining function.

A successful leporello is *Bobřík v škôlke* [Beaver Puppy in the Kindergarten] by the Czech author Ladislav Pechová, who not only wrote it but also illustrated it. It was published in 2011 by FRAGMENT and translated into Slovak by Iveta

Výrašteková Dalmádyová in 2011. It is a small-format leporello with an accordion-type page layout. The author humorously depicts the first day of a small beaver in the nursery. She put into this fairy-tale character the fears of a preschool child who must leave the safety of home and discover previously unknown environment of a kindergarten. Here, however, she finds a nice teacher and many friends to play with. The theme of the leporello is very close to children, because it captures their own experience of joy, but also fears associated with entering kindergarten. The author chose short, only two-verse stanzas on each side of the leporello. Nevertheless, in a few words she was able to perfectly express the story and experience of the characters. The verses can also stand in isolation and are excellently complemented by illustrations. The author is also an illustrator, the pictures perfectly complement and develop the text and, at the same time, offer a lot of details and motifs. She avoided cliché sentimentalism, and with a simple drawing method she realistically depicted the environment of home and kindergarten. She used personalisation when instead of children, animals – specifically beavers - appear in the leporello. This work is an excellent example of the symbiosis of fine and literary art, to which the excellent quality of the material from which the book is made also contributes, as well as a very well-crafted imprint.

Another fairy tale book is the book *Maco Laco* from the PB - press Bratislava publishing house with texts by the Slovak writer Štefan Balák. It is also an adopted leporello, probably from Italian production. The imprint does not provide any details, only the year of publication 1994. We do not know the name of the author of illustrations. It is a retelling of the classic fairy tale *Zlatovláska a tri medvede* [Goldilocks and the Three Bears], which the author has moved to the present day. The text is not very suitable for a leporello, as each page does not form a separate unit. The text often does not match the illustrations. There are one to three quatrains on each page, some pages do not contain any text, which seems quite chaotic. The poem is a relatively good work of art, but it does not bring anything exceptional or imaginative. The author also used too many diminutives, so the poem looks unpleasantly sweet. The illustrations represent a very good work of art, with the animal figures, but also the sun, personified. They can be blamed for too much colour, which looks too sentimentally sweet.

A very nice publication is the leporello *Veselí zajkovia* [Merry Bunnies] from the JUNIOR publishing house. It is a leporello taken over from foreign production, the texts were written by Ľubica Kepštová, the author of the illustrations is Pierre Couronne. The imprint does not state the country of origin or the year of issue. Illustrations are a very high-quality example of fine art. They are conceived very realistically, depicting everyday life of bunnies. However, some animals are personified. Their facial expressions and gestures are human (laughing frog, bunny with a bouquet of flowers in the paws). The pictures contain a lot of details, thus avoiding gossip sentimentalism. They provide many opportunities

for developing communication with children. Other animals that occur in a meadow or by a pond are also shown here. Pictures perfectly complement verses by Ľubica Kepštová. It is not a translation of the original text, but the author's own work. In the short four-verse stanzas, she captured not only the story, but also the emotional experience of the Hare Bite. The text is very suitable for a book type leporello. Each side is a separate unit, but they are chained to each other. The text is closely related to illustrations, there are a lot of diminutives as well as humorous elements. Verses are connected by a combined rhyme and stories also have an educational character, when in the behaviour of the bunny one can also notice a hidden instruction on appropriate behaviour. The rabbit that washes itself to be fresh, after a hard fall caused by its inattention, and other motives that children can perceive from their own lives and take their own attitude toward them. Overall, it is high quality leporello with excellent literary and artistic work. The only drawback is the incomplete imprint.

The leporello *Zatúlané šteniatko* [Stray Puppy] from Matys was published in 2000. The author of the texts is Pavol Štefánik, the author of the illustrations is Radvány Zsuzsa. This piece is made of high-quality cardboard, has a classic rectangular shape and an accordion-like way of opening the sides. There are two to three quarters on each side. Individual parts follow each other and cannot stand alone, which makes the text unsuitable for this type of publication. The author was able to enrich a simple plot with a description of the puppy's emotional experience. It meets the ridicule, fear, inattention of others in the world, so it prefers to return home. Pavel Štefánik's texts represent quality poetic work, but there are no elements of humour or word puns. The representation of artistic means of expression is also quite modest. Some sentences seem cumbersome and are more suitable for a work intended for older children. The whole story seems rather sad. The gloomy design of illustrations also contributes to this. Images quite faithfully capture the content of the text part, but in some cases, the artist painted other emotions of the characters than those contained in the text. Although this leporello is a relatively decent work of art and literature, a classical book form would be more appropriate.

From children's educational literature, a leporello called *Detský lexikón* [Children's Lexicon] will serve as a *pars pro toto*. It was published by Mladé letá in 1996 and taken over from the English original, though the imprint does not mention either the original author or the author of illustrations, only stating the original year of publication as 1987. The Slovak editor is Mária Smoláriková. The leporello is made of hard cardboard and has a classic book shape. Each double page contains a picture from a different environment, from home (In the bathroom, In the kitchen, In the garden) and from outside the home (In the hospital, On the road, At the Railway, In the port). The leporello does not contain text, but individual subjects are assigned their names. Illustrations from the home environment show the children close and familiar environment, but also

events they know from their own lives (baking a cake, cleaning, games in the garden). Illustrations provide a lot of detail and are a good aid in learning to name the objects surrounding children, while also providing many stimuli for communication between them and adults. Illustrations from outside the home are much more challenging. Although they realistically depict different environments that are attractive to children, they are much poorer in plot and do not give children enough stimuli to talk. In addition, there are pictures with such technical terms that even adults would have a problem explaining to children what these objects are for. There are two types of illustrations in the book. Those from the home environment would be suitable for the youngest children aged 2-3 years. However, other illustrations are much more demanding and would be more suitable for older preschool children. The compilers of the leporello would do better if they developed more topics from the home environment. The leporello would thus become a suitable tool for stimulating communication or naming the basic subjects that children encounter. Suitable topics would be, for example, a children's room or a playground.

The offer of current leporella is very wide. Individual publishers approach leporello production in different ways, which is reflected in the different quality of works for the little ones. One can find leporella from the period before 1989, which are reissued in the original version or with completely new illustrations by contemporary artists, or the works completely or partially taken over from foreign, especially English, Italian, Polish and Czech works for children. However, there is a relatively small number of leporella which would come from a home production and were created in collaboration with Slovak writers and illustrators. It is significant that many publishers deal with leporello production by taking over foreign illustrations, which are then texted by Slovak authors. Educational literature is given much more space than in the past and is often enriched with various visual or auditory additions.

The quality of the literary component of contemporary leporella is very diverse. We may find high quality prosaic or poetic examples of texts, but not all of them are suitable for this type of book. Some texts have a low artistic quality, are marked by excessive sentimentality, excessive use of diminutives and verse overlap. The plot is often poor and the author's creative play with words or the effort to actively involve children is absent. On the other hand, we find excellent work of Ľubica Kepštová, Ján Benčík, the Czech author Ladislav Pechová and many others who increase the literary quality of the leporello production with their work. Similarly, in the artistic component of the leporello, there are beautiful works of art by Slovak artists such as Vladimír Machaj, Jana Kiselová-Siteková or Alena Drusková. In contrast, there are low-quality illustrations, mostly taken over from foreign works. In them, we encounter too much "sweetness" of expression, or, conversely, aggressive colour variations. Many illustrators, in an effort to get as close as possible to the world of children, come

to the opposite extreme - too much childishness. This is reflected in sweet tones, a disproportionate amount of detail or an excessive use of personification. This means that children often receive an oversaturated art product in which they find it difficult to orient themselves and, in addition, does not provide them with space for their own imagination. There is also a big difference in the quality of material and printing of leporello production. This shows a much higher quality of domestic printers compared to cheaper, but much lower quality production of foreign, especially Asian printing companies. A major shortcoming of almost all current leporella is the incomplete imprint, which often does not even contain basic book data.

At present, we have a wide range of book publications for little children. However, their quality varies and many of them fail to perform the functions expected of this first children's book. For future book-making, the big challenge is to abandon low-quality and cliché products, which should be replaced by quality literary work, based on the cooperation of talented writers and artists. It is also a challenge for literary theory and criticism to refocus its view on literary work for the youngest. The leporello is of great importance for the further reading development of children, and therefore due attention should be paid to restoring the artistic quality of its treatment.

6

Reading comprehension in generic projections

The problem of making children interested in reading is very serious, and it has been under discussion in different forums by teachers, scholars as well as parents. It is positive that general statements that “children do not read,” “children are not fond of reading,” “children do not understand the read text,” “reading is not interesting for children” are being increasingly substituted by constructive efforts to mediate books for young readers in a form most acceptable and close to them. To stimulate children’s reading, and to teach them to read with comprehension, was taken up in Slovakia by the project Let’s Read with Comprehension. Magdaléna Fazekašová, a publisher from the Trio Publishing house, came up with a project and began publishing children’s books accompanied by reading guides. The project helps develop reading skills, experience and perceptiveness. It is aimed at publishing quality children’s works by home authors and mediating reading as an experience, pleasure and discovering values. The selection of titles shows that the project is intended for the youngest to adolescent readers. It has a symbolic name based on the name of the first book in the edition series (Analfabeta Negramotná [Alphabetically Illiterate]). The book is accompanied by a complementing reference book whose ambition is to offer the reader help to penetrate more deeply to the text and illustrations. The special reference book helps the reader to find his/her way in the genre and theme, to perceive the text with comprehension and creatively, to discover a sense of the values in it. The reference books are prepared by an outstanding professional in the given field, Timotea Vráblová. They are intended not only for children, as readers, but also to teachers, parents, librarians, and educators.

The following books have so far been published in the project Let’s Listen with Comprehension:

In 2017: Ivan Lesay: A-KO-ŽE [BY-WAY-OF]

In 2015: Marta Šurinová: **Záhada čarovného vajíčka** [The Mystery of the Magic Egg]

In 2014: Ľuboslav Paľo: **Veľká nuda** /Tim a Pim/ [Big Boredom / Tim and Pim]

Daniel Hevier: **Svet zachránia rozprávky** [The World Will Be Saved By

Fairy Tales]

Ján Milčák: **Starec, ktorý lietal** [The Old Man Who Flew]

In 2013: Ján Uličiansky: **Leonardo, kocúr z ulice** [**Leonardo**, a Tomcat From the Street]

Gabriela Dittelová: **Roztopašná knižka** [A Mischievous Book]

Klára Jarunková: **O psovi, ktorý mal chlapca** [About a Dog Who Had a Boy]

Martin Vopěnka: **Spiace tajomstvo** [**Sleeping Mystery**]

Igor Válek according to Pavol Dobšínský: **Nebojsa! a iné**

HORORozprávky [**Fearless! And other HORROR tales**]

In 2012: Ján Uličiansky: **Tajomstvo Čierneho Dvora** [Mystery of a Black Yard]

Jozef Lenhart: **Čierne zlato. Povesti z Hornonitria** [Black Gold. Legends from the Upper Nitra Region]

Martin Vopěnka: **Spiaca spravodlivosť** [Sleeping Justice]

Ján Milčák: **Rozprávka o oslíkovi** [A Tale About a Donkey]

In 2011: Martin Vopěnka: **Spiace mesto** [A Sleeping City]

Daniel Hevier: **Vianočná posta** [Christmas Mail]

Gabriela Dittelová: **Knižka pod vankúš** [A Book Under the Pillow]

Ján Uličiansky: **Analfabeta Negramotná** [Alphabetically Illiterate]

The Ján Uličiansky's book *Analfabeta Negramotná* (TRIO Publishing, 2011) was also published in the project's first series, and together with it also the reference book by Timotea Vráblová offering the activities for reading comprehension. Ján Uličiansky is a writer who makes sure that his books speak about contemporary children with their contemporary problems in their contemporary language. *Analfabeta Negramotná* does not offer a simple story, but rather an interesting search with everything that relates to it. Zuzana Stanislavová, the author of annual evaluations of current Slovak children's literature, claims that using various ways of intertextual linking, present also in the *Analfabeta Negramotná*, is a very rewarding trend for the fairy tales genre, and it is bringing fruit (Stanislavová, 2012, s. 1). The best books for children are based on not underestimating the readers, on reflecting on their problems and perceiving their needs. It is a story of a passionate non-reader, Betka, who mistakenly enters the world of books and, through literary characters, solves her problems. Alžbeta Bábiková [Elizabeth Dolly] earned the abusive nickname *Analfabeta Negramotná* due to her dismissive attitude towards books; however, her rebelliousness has deeper reasons. She grows up in a broken family, living with her mother and grandmother. The mother is not willing to speak about the father, who left them after Betty was born. The bored young rebel with a punk haircut and limited vocabulary fills in his empty space by defiance. Protesting that she does not know her father, not being able to give him even a Christmas

present, she runs from home at Christmas (and, at the same time, on the day of her eleventh birthday) and by chance finds herself in a library. This is the major incident in the plot – for Analphabeta Illiterate stays closed in the library with the protagonists of the books (seven prose works) about whom she does not know anything since she is not familiar with them as a reader. The literary characters include Janko Hraško [Black Eyed Pea], Pinocchio, Pippi Longstocking, Anne of Green Gables, Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators, Harry Potter and Čarovný chlapec [The Magic Boy]. Every text is a different generic invariant – it is, for example, a folktale, authorial tale in various typological modifications, novel for girls, detective story, fantasy. Betty gradually discovers the sense of reading for her life and begins to regret the gaps in her reading experience. The rough mask hides an uncertain, vulnerable and sensitive girl. There also emerges the motivation of her running away. The narrator composes the plot in such a way that he reminds us of an individual story and “fits it” to an actual life story of the protagonist. The confrontation of characters, plots, comical situations resulting from Betty’s lack of knowledge of book stories gradually creates a story leading to a happy end. “The narrator acts as a director who permanently communicates with a virtual reader, which on one side dynamises and estranges textual passages based on the reflexivity or description, on the other side, it ironises the fact of non-readership. The selected narrative procedure allows relativising that could come out as too definite or sentimental, for example, the final happy end, when it appears that the police officer who takes action in the library is the protagonist’s long-searched for father (the motif being similar as in the older work Peter Klůčik). The inventive updating of familiar plots (to a certain extent a comical element) was used by J. Uličiansky as a basis of statement on worrying social phenomena, such as incompleteness of families, generational misunderstandings, feeling of unsatisfactory emotional support in growing up, as well as an alarming decrease in the reading culture of children. He created a book which in non-textual space, “between the lines”, invites readers to preserve their own culture, to learn how to search for values where they are seemingly invisible or not genuine” (Stanislavová, 2012, p. 1). There is, in fact, a double happy end – which is the finding of Betty’s father as well as Betty’s relationship to books. The Christmas dinner, prepared for Betty by literary characters, symbolises the understanding and acceptance of the values resulting from the reading. The narrator draws in readers into the story and asks for their permission at the beginning of each chapter. He sophisticatedly “draws them” to the community of readers. The book thus becomes a motivational factor in the acquiring of new readers. The fact is that Uličiansky has really managed to get many fans for this book. It was awarded a prize for the Most Beautiful and Best Book of Winter 2011, won the sixth year of the reader survey for libraries entitled Golden Fish – a Children’s Book of 2012, and became material for theatre performances.

In *Analphabeta the Illiterate*, Ján Uličiansky uses the pluri-reader, pluri-reception approach in its composition. The editorial note says as follows: In writing the book, the author drew on the following works for children:

Black Eyed Pea

Pinocchio

Pippi Longstocking

Anna Shirley

Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators

Harry Potter

Fuk

Hobbits

Reflections on the language of illustrations also offers interesting parallels. Their author is Vladimír Král, an artist who is not only an illustrator, but also a stage designer, graphic designer, director of animated films, and author of scenography and spatial design for theatrical plays. His illustrations in *Analphabeta Illiterate* complement the text with, for example, smileys, mathematical formulas, calculations, letters, punctuation marks, plays – which, in a sense, only confirms the universality of illustration and its general comprehensibility. One can then think about illustration as about a multi-language. It is, in fact, a written communication by means of images (or symbols). Visual communication is a process of passing the information between the author and the receiver. Illustration is a highly organised system of information, a medium through which the receiver is provided with the coded information, message. It differs from common visual communication in the fact that its reception contains a literary reality. In order for the information, coded in the literary work, to be received by the receiver, the communication participants must know the code, that is, the visual language. Valér Mikula claims that there are three positions of the reader (1987) which can also be applied to the reception of illustration:

1. the reader understands the illustration (reveals and accepts the code and the illustrator),
2. the reader does not understand the illustration, (does not reveal the author's code), or uses incorrect code to decipher it,
3. the reader "does not get" the illustration, (reveals the illustrator's code, but does not accept it and does not agree with the way of its coding) (Mikula, 1987, p. 53).

As far as visual art and the perception of visual work are concerned, recently there have been discussions about the so-called visual literacy, emphasising the subjectivity of the receiver. This is also connected with the fact that the receiver primarily perceives not the signs which he/she is to decode, but the aesthetic experience. The work is primarily experienced, only later decoded. The receiver's

subjectivity also carries a risk of the distortion or even loss of information. It is closely connected with communicational competence which influences the reception of illustration. In the theory of literary communication, as well as in the process of human communication, the following qualities play a significant role: being aware of the aims of produced (sent) information, ability to anticipate reactions of the receiver, ability to do its interpretation, ability to concentrate during the reception of other's utterance (Obert, 1998). The same holds true also for the field of visual competence in the case of the reception of illustration. And worth mentioning is also the fact that visual arts (like music, dancing...) do not need translation, since they use universal communicational codes.

The book *Analphabeta Illiterate* was very quickly translated into Czech (published in 2013 in the Práh publishing house, translated into Czech by Jana Čeňková). As far as the reception of foreign language literature is concerned, it is interesting to note how translating (or not translating) books may influence the understanding of other texts. As Milena Šubrtová in her review of *Analphabeta Illiterate* (translated into Czech by Jana Čeňková) claims: "The translator had to come to terms with the fact that some literary works mentioned in the text are not yet familiar to Czech children, since they have not been published in Czech translation. This is pointed out in the editorial note in which curious readers may find references to Slovak editions, for example, of adventurous novels of an American author Robert Arthur about *The Three Investigators* published in the 1960s, or a little *Fuk* from Ján Uličiansky's *Magic Boy*. Fortunately, Betty's story is conceived as a journey exploring literature undertaken by a girl without reading experience, so that not even Czech readers should feel deficient in their meeting with the as yet unknown literary characters" (Šubrtová, 2014).

The book *Analphabeta Illiterate* offers several other possibilities of interpretation. One can reflect on the language as a message, and there are many of them, either direct or indirect. With the theme of plurilinguism, for example, is associated the use of foreign words, which means that Ján Uličiansky does not underestimate children readers but expects them to be clever and independent. Most words, however, are explained in the book, but sometimes not directly. Many things are said indirectly, also through phraseologisms and comparisons. Uličiansky plays with words at various levels (homonyms, tautology, calembour). The name of the protagonist and her locking up in the library as well as her civil name (Alžbeta Bábiková – Elizabeth Dolly) and nickname (*Analphabeta Negramotná* – *Analphabeta Illiterate*), serve also as opposites here. One only rarely meets with a nicer name as Betty [Betka] in stories. It associates the most beautiful tales, stories (e.g. *Perinbaba* – *The Feather Fairy*). There is also a contradiction between the past and present (other possibilities – internet at present – confrontation of current settings with the literary settings, similarity of some contemporary personalities - Lady GAGA - with fairy tale ones). Names in the fairy tale are related rather with the nature of characters, they define them,

emphasise their qualities. As far as the name of Analphabeta is concerned, we may speak about alpha as about some beginning and beta as a second step that should have a continuation. The continuation is Betty's development by means of books and their heroes. Other motifs – for example, Betty's feelings (defiance, egoism, loneliness, need of silence, running away from people...), her behaviour to characters and selection of friends, moral lessons, gradual spiritual maturing through literary characters, her own fantasy and interconnection of several stories into one – her story, typical features of literary characters and their speech characterising the whole work, the fact that as if Uličiansky were not speaking with the language of the authors of the works present in the story, psychology of the protagonist, an outline of children's literature related to Betty's experiencing the need to read; all these are the indications of the multi-layered nature of the Uličiansky's book. I wanted to point out, however, that the inventive refreshments of familiar plots and intertextual techniques were not used *prima facie* by Uličiansky, but they associate the universality of Analphabeta's story. It could take place anywhere, Analphabeta dressed in a punk style is "readable" universally, her problems are "universal" and "learning" that the world of books and reading provide space for fantasy and, at the same time, answers to many questions is not simplistic, but evident. The book is written from the point of view of Analphabeta, in a live and current language.

The plurilingual aspect gets manifested, to a different degree, in other Slovak children's works, for example, in the case of Ján Uličiansky, in addition to Analphabeta Illiterate, it is also in the books *Podivuhodné príbehy siedmich morí* [The Wondrous Stories of Seven Seas], *Malá princezná* [A Little Princess], *Kocúr na kolieskových korčuliach* [A Tomcat on Roller-Skates], *Čarovný chlapec* [The Magic Boy], in Daniel Pastirčák's works *Damianova rieka* [The Diamond River], *Čintet*, Erik Jakub Groch's *Dievčatko so zápalkami* [A Girl with Safety Matches], *Píšťalkár* [A Whistle Man], *Abé, Aha a spol.* [Aha and Co.], Lubomír Feldek's book *Dvere do rozprávok* [A Door to Fairy Tales], Zuzana Kuglerová's *Rozprávky z blogu* [Fairy Tales from a Blog], Peter Karpinský's *Sedem dní v pivnici* [Seven Days in a Cellar], Muška and Igor Molitor's book *Dievčatko v krajine drakov* [The Girl in a Country of Dragons]. The depiction of plurilingualism is successful in the theatre as well – for example, Ján Uličiansky transformed his own book *Veverička* [A Squirrel] into a musical. In 2007, this children's musical premiered in the Andrej Bagar's Theatre in Nitra. The performance depicts squirrels and people staying in a spa town getting into a series of common situations: spectators see how both these groups get into contact and engage in recreation together. The international spa staff serves the author to play out plurilingualism, naturally, to such an extent to which children are able to follow it: he lets guests speak in their native languages, and thus essentially offers an anti-global linguistically varied world. The orchestra's director even speaks Russian, which is a bold step if one takes into account the fact that Russian is taught only scarcely at schools, as well

as realistic if one looks at current popularity of Russian musicians throughout Europe.

Literature and literary education in relations

Although the issue of reading in and out of school is relatively well researched and there is a large number of publications in which reading is analysed from a theoretical and empirical point of view, practical experience in primary schools is proof that there are still many unfulfilled possibilities in this area. Teaching literature in class and pedagogical work outside of it are necessary parts of education. Its goal for the 1st and 2nd level of primary school is to motivate students to read, think and act, to lead them so that they are interested in working at school and have feelings of joy, excitement and satisfaction. This creates a positive relationship with the book, developing pupils' creativity and activity. The creation of an atmosphere in which every student, every thought, where optimism and freedom at work prevail, contributes to this. Such an atmosphere ensures the emotional participation of students in the classroom and eliminates fear, anxiety and unnecessary tension. Excessive demand for discipline from the teacher dampens students' activity and hampers their ability and willingness to develop in reading and think creatively. Memory acquisition of knowledge, strict and directive fulfilment of the curriculum ultimately leads to a reduction in interest in reading. The current concept of upbringing and education is critical of the overestimation of knowledge in a traditional school. The teaching of literary education and the orientation of extracurricular reading must be oriented towards the development of interest in reading.

The semantic relationship literature in school - literature in life is a reciprocal one. Literary education and reading - according to Vincent Šabík - "only becomes a pleasure when it gets into play the student's creativity, productivity, when the text and teaching gives a chance to these abilities, when teaching them with the help of the text opens him up. The aim of reading is not only to get acquainted with the content, theme and substance of the work ... but the awakening of certain abilities, initiation of consciousness, and last but not least, the ability to reflect reality, oneself, to formulate problems, to articulate questions, the ability to produce truth" (Šabík 1988, pp. 155 - 156).

Literature in the didactic guise provokes permanent discussions about whether the school benefits or harms literature (or reading literature). The teaching of literature in schools and the didactics of literature must address many issues, the discrepancies between theory and practice, the asymmetry

between the prevailing knowledge and less contained level of experience and aesthetics. We believe that although current textbooks on reading and literary education to some extent respect the interests and aesthetic tastes of students, the question of finding appropriate school literary texts remains open. Improperly chosen school lectures cause boring communication and recipients who identify themselves externally with the text (learn, master the school curriculum), but not internally. This would not fulfil the goal of the subject literary education, which in addition to having students master certain amount of literary knowledge and literary historical contexts (especially high school teaching of literature), it should also expect them to acquire internal belief that reading is a very pleasant mental activity, not only providing new knowledge, but serving for relaxation and inner enrichment through experiences and impressions.

The reading context is historically variable. As time and literature change, so does the reader. Thirty years ago, reading was at the forefront of children's leisure activities, but a representative survey conducted in 2008 by the Literary Information Centre in collaboration with the Cultural Observatory of the National Education Centre signalled that nowadays reading is the fifth to seventh leisure activity. Almost 87% of children find reading fun, but 25% only read if it is a school-based task. Childhood itself is a dynamic period of development, so child readers develop at a faster pace and sometimes often in unpredictable directions. In the development of Pupils' Literary Culture (Obert 2003, pp. 223 - 227), Viliam Obert spoke about three reading crises in the reading development of children and young people in the sense that reading crises are mainly related to psychomental development and the related state of consciousness and being of children and young people. Some essential characteristics and symptoms correspond to the reader's interests and orientations, especially with regard to certain turning points, crisis stages, which significantly influence the reading, and thus direction of cultural development, of young people. I will briefly outline the context and circumstances of these states of tension, which can be labelled, more clearly, the readers' crises.

1st reading crisis: 6th - 9th year of a child's life, corresponds to the so-called phase of creating reader realisations. Children - beginning school attendance - are interested in the technical side of reading, they miss the meaning of what they read, reading is hard work for them, and although in the pre-reading period, when they were read to by adult text intermediaries, reading was a very pleasant activity, at this time, literature becomes a command for them. In addition to mastering the technique of reading and reading comprehension, children should begin to apply reading as a tool of learning and gradually use it as a pleasant and useful mental activity.

2nd reading crisis: the 13th - 15th year of a child's life is also called the phase of reading explosion. During this period, young persons are confronted with a

complicated period of adolescence. The reading crisis at this stage has its major cause in the over-intellectualisation of reading and, in particular, teaching of literature. In literary education, the emphasis is on educating adult readers, and a young person at this age may not be ready for that yet. The formation of the feeling of adulthood is also related in the increased criticism of adolescents, which is reflected in the critical selection of books for reading (in the best case), or in a programmatic non-reading. In this context, it should be recalled that pupils who do not read at a younger school age find it very difficult to acquire reading habits in the later years of schooling. Therefore, the importance of primary education needs to be re-emphasised.

3rd reading crisis: 19th – 21st/22nd year of life. This phase is a phase of reading stabilisation, on one hand, it's a time of discovery of hitherto unnoticed "school" authors and on the other hand a strict focus on certain authors, book mutations; or so-called reading snobbery - reading (or just collecting) books that are currently highlighted.

The first two crises are related to school literary education and are most significant in the context of reading crises. They are also related to the education of future teachers of literature. In addition to having a literary education, a literature teacher is primarily a human being. The basis of communication is precisely his/her human dimension which includes opinion and value orientation (Šimonová 200, p. 12). The main role of a primary school teacher is mainly to teach students to read, write and count so that they are literate, but also to ensure that they are happy at school looking forward to the teaching process. From this point of view, the literature teacher must feel love for his/her profession, create a positive atmosphere in the classroom, motivate students to read books not only in class but also in their free time, and be able to look for new methods, ways, forms of working in reading lessons. He/she should lead children to read in such a way that they see reading not only as a means of learning and related duties, but that it becomes a pleasant aesthetic experience. The current situation shows that most teachers are still not able to take advantage of curriculum innovations, many are afraid of the current new state education program and have problems in this area. Apathy, or even aversion to reading, cannot be cured by any well-thought-out reform. Educational goals in reading and literary classes can be achieved through art, not outside it. The most important task is the correct and appropriate choice of text. As part of the characteristics of reading crises mentioned above, it is presented as a "recipe" for a solution to give the right child the right book at the right time. These principles could really be a solution especially during the first crisis, when a freshman teacher should have the ability to diagnose current reading competence of his mentees and at the same time be oriented in the offer of books to read, not only those he/she knows from childhood and from the time of university studies, but also the current offer of book publishers. There is perhaps no need to stress the

importance of working with parents. The contemporary child reader must also be seen in the context of the present. The symptom of superficiality brought about by the media era has spread to younger school age readers. Its characteristic features are the need for speed, desire for action, as well as superficiality of experience. One of the diseases of today's civilisation - the flood and shallowness of information - is a sign of children's and parents' approach to books. In addition, child readers do not yet have an adequate distance from the text, they cannot formulate evaluation criteria, therefore can only express to the teacher what they are currently experiencing. The emotional experience of the text - and it does not always have to be its verbalisation - can have a great influence on the authenticity of the children's perception of the reception. Daniel Pennac, a French essayist, puts the readers' "right to silence" on the list of ten rights. In addition to the right to remain silent, the inalienable rights of readers include the following: the right not to read, the right to skip pages, the right not to finish reading a book, the right to read it again, the right to read anything, the right to bovarism, the right to read anywhere, the right to glean and the right to read aloud (Pennac 1992, p. 124).

A problem in the field of interpretation of an artistic text may also be that students are formed into one-sided, reader-oriented types - sci-fi fans, detective stories fans, or readers of comics, and the like. It follows from the principle of age but also from the reader's indifference. Although the texts used in literary classes have several functions, informative, instrumental (developing) as well as formative function, the aesthetic one should be in the foreground. A major problem in today's schools - and PISA research proves this - is mastering the reading technique. Reading comprehension is perhaps the major problem. Mastering the reading technique is a means for students to penetrate to the story, to be able to find pleasure in the text, to get oriented in it, and to read with understanding, whether quietly or aloud. For many students, this is due to their hyperactivity. This unfavourable trend is especially prevalent among older students. Because if the student cannot read fluently, he/she cannot understand the plot and content, cannot penetrate into the intricacies of the plot and subsequently he/she feels disappointed with the book, which can grow into resignation with regard to school and education. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the initial reading methodology. The process of acquiring quality reading does not take place smoothly and without difficulty for all pupils, not only speaking about children with reading disorders - dyslexia, and writing disorders - dysgraphics, or even those who are included in special school facilities. This is another chapter and a topic for independent study of the issue. Some problems manifest themselves in the first phase of reading, during the recognition of graphemes. It often happens that the child confuses sounds (b - d, m - n, etc.), order of sounds in the syllable, and thus changes the meaning of the word (em - me, la - al, etc.). The cause is considered to be insufficient visual-

auditory association of the second phase of reading, mirror vision. Finally, it happens that the reader fails in the last stage, when he/she does not understand the meaning of a word, then the whole sentence structure or paragraph, questions his/her reading performance and returns to the beginning of the word or sentence. This makes the reading appear repeated, slow and unmanageable by the reader.

By practicing and deepening students' reading skills using the analytical-synthetic method, motivating the development of students' reading interests, reading experience, it is possible to achieve the set goal and identify or detect and diagnose the difficulties of students - readers in acquiring this primary skill. Diagnosis of reading at the 1st stage of primary school shows that many students have serious problems with mastering the technique of reading and with reading comprehension, which is significantly related to children's listening comprehension. If students read with understanding and fluently, if they have mastered the technique of reading, they can penetrate into the complexity of the story, orient themselves in it, find pleasure in the text and work with it independently, mastering the technique of reading. Such students get a "desire to read" because they understand the text that is close to them. The ability to read fluently, consciously is a process that should be completed in the 3rd grade. All available world research on reading consistently shows a tendency for the interest in reading to be declining, especially among young people. However, active reading is a cultural activity determining all other activities; active readers, for example, are more flexible in cultural and social life, they are much more successful in their profession. In 2008, the National Program for the Development of Education that was created in the Slovak Republic introduced a new system of curricular documents into education, namely national and school curricula. The national educational program includes school educational programs, which primary schools create themselves on the basis of possible implementation according to the points set by the Framework Educational Program. The Framework Educational Program for Basic Education (as mentioned) is an open document with innovation, defining the content of education, cross-sectional themes and procedures, various methods and forms with individual needs and interests of students of a given school.

The educational content of the subject Slovak Language and Literature has three components: communication and composition, literary education and language component. The subject matter of individual components overlaps, even within interdisciplinary relationships. Complementary subject matter is drama education. The aim of literary education at the 2nd level of elementary school is to teach students to distinguish literary types, their characteristics, formulate their own opinions, acquire reading skills and habits, lead students to interpret literary works in order to use different methods, forms, procedures. Literary education aims to shape the competencies of students and leads them to

experiencing a work of art with pleasure, strengthening a positive, better relationship to literature, deepening, or building in them emotional and aesthetic feeling. School libraries play an important role, especially in selective and spontaneous extracurricular reading. The PIRLS 2006 research (Ladányiová 2007) shows that in Slovakia, 99% of students attend schools that have school libraries. The other side of the coin is the fact that in many schools they give preference to specific classrooms for given subjects or computer technology. In many schools, libraries even perform only a formal function. Objectively, however, it can be said that many teachers (not only librarians) have students visit libraries regularly, even in difficult conditions. Libraries of a general nature - local, city, district or others - also have the opportunity (and often use it) to organise various activities and events for children. In addition to classic lessons in the library or discussions with writers in Slovakia, they include, for example, such specific events as:

- Week of Loud Reading - announced by the Orava Association every year in April,
- Night with Andersen - this is a project of adventurous fairy tale nights in the library, it was created in 2000 in the library in Uhorské Hradišťa (Czech Republic) and since then has gained great popularity in Slovak libraries,
- Lost Fairy Tales - students in the footsteps of Pavel Dobšinský are looking for lost fairy tales in the region,
- Dobšinského Rozprávokovo [Dobšinský Fairy Tale Land] - an art fairy tale competition organised across libraries since 2012,
- Book swap - the secondary school Student Union of Slovakia, on the occasion of Book Month (March), have organised this project every year since 2012, through which it allows students and pupils to exchange books according to the formula "take one book and bring another for exchange",
- Reading with Osmijanko [a fairy tale character] - a nationwide reading competition,
- The Whole Family Reading - a large family literary festival, since 2012 it has been organised by the Library for Children and Youth in Košice,
- Crowning the King of Children Readers, etc.

Other institutions (besides libraries) also feel the need to help make reading a more popular activity - sometimes they use what is perhaps understandable in today's commercial world for their advertising. As an example, one can mention an event from 2008 entitled The Most Numerous Children's Reading Marathon, in which simultaneous reading of children from Ľubomír Feldek's book The Blue-Green Book of Fairy Tales took place in 28 Tesco stores throughout Slovakia in one day. The event was attended by 2912 children who read 2939 pages of Feldek's book and subsequently this attempt was entered in the Slovak Book of

Records. However, it is questionable whether such actions are not just sudden marketing moves and whether the children really read with comprehension.

As part of the didactic transformation of an artistic text, I will present several methodological proposals for didactic literary communication using various texts with a focus on the readers of lower secondary education. I offer an interpretive-analytical three-phase model, a EUR framework, a reading workshop, and a combination of several models using the methodology of creative drama. I believe that in practice, the teacher seldom focuses on strict adherence to the framework parts of a particular model, but rather focuses on students' competencies and consistency between content and target categories. It is common to combine methods from multiple systems and styles.

The most attractive genre in the categories of young and middle readers is a folk and authorial (artificial) fairy tale. In addition to textbook material, the teacher has at his/her disposal a rich offer of texts of several types of fairy tales from Slovak and translated literature. The fairy tale space still attracts by unusual storytelling, dynamism of the story, varied situations and interpersonal relationships, albeit in a simplified form. Sometimes even adults like to reach for works with a simple philosophy of reward and punishment. Fairy tales are for children "an important means of subconscious organisation of feelings and imagination, including confirmation of aspects of humanity, in a way appropriate to their level of moral evaluation" (Čačka 1999, p. 68). They are a means of communication with the world, offering models and relations and helping create attitudes to people, things and a fantastic world. Čačka also draws attention to the educational effect of the fairy tale, its imaginative function and possibilities of its use in the teaching process, as it participates in the development of cognitive functions. Typical or schematically drawn characters help to acquire attitudes, create roles and identify with the characters, and the reader verifies who he/she is and who he/she would like to be, which is the phase of self-knowledge. In the emotional area, the fairy tale can contribute to the imaginative-emotional release of tension by reliving emotions, especially those that are difficult for the child (sadness, fear, hope, insecurity), while relieving tension, feelings of guilt, even catharsis. The fairy tale has an educational effect mainly through the actions of the heroes who appeal to children with something, being awarded in the end. This has not only moral significance, but also reassurance for the child that there is always a chance of success when on one's path one strives and follows the rules of life towards nature and towards other people. The poetic side of the fairy tale influences the development of creativity (Čačka 1999, pp. 68 - 74). The type of hero, especially the animal, plays an important role for child readers. As J. Toman (2007, p. 76) has it, in an allegorical, symbolic and metaphorical depiction, this hero represents the bearer of positive or negative human qualities or depicts actions and relationships in everyday life situations, making the story with an animal hero a picture of real life and the world. In school perception,

experience and interpretation of a fairy tale, it is important how intensely the emotional and moral context is experienced by the teacher, who is mostly a "narrator". The teacher should be the one who conveys the text to the audience. The spoken word, its character, musicality and melody can be the key to awakening children's imagination. In terms of requirements for cognitive, communication, intra and interpersonal competencies in literary education, the tasks arising from the text were designed for perception, reading, interpretation, and aesthetic-educational activities which are mainly in the field of creative drama. In addition to the methods of creative drama, various types of reproduction can be used (faithful, free, selective and reproduction with the completion of the story or conclusion according to one's own imagination), and because in fairy tales, characters are dominant, the analysis sets aside space for conversation about characters and their consequences. Questions are created in the context of a six-level model, that is, from explicitly expressed information to learning about lexicon, naming linguistic means through identifying the main idea to evaluation of the behaviour of characters. In the process of perception and reading, it is important to focus on imagination and verbalisation of images, listening to the text, strong loud reading, reading in a whisper (as a means of concentrating on the text), quiet reading and speaking about what has been read. These are seemingly obvious activities, but their meaningfulness is manifested, for example, in the evaluation or ability to predict the stories according to the pictures and create illustrations or comics according to the story. When working with text (story, plot), students should have enough space to reproduce the whole story and parts of it. By reproducing the story we also mean dramatisation (verbal and non-verbal), pantomime, or a strong recitation of a part of the poem or an excerpt from a prose text. These activities support skills in the creation of an outline, the types of which should also be varied. Compiling an outline in various ways helps to orient oneself in the story of fairy tales, dividing it into sequences and reuniting into a coherent whole, respecting and maintaining the temporal and causal sequence. Reading experience and meaningful work with the text also create preconditions for the ability to be able to tell a story, not only by telling, but also by playing in improvisation while observing the circumstances of the story, or in changed circumstances, or by illustration. It is useful to draw attention to reception supports in the text of the fairy tale, such as the mysterious nature of the story, fantasy and suspense, boldness, courage, and great deeds or moral message of the fairy tale. The reception barrier in (especially traditional, folk) fairy tales can be their lexicon, especially the colloquial, outdated words and archaisms.

Pupils' communication competence in reading texts of fairy tales with comprehension, develops by using their lexicon, through formulation of sentences, reproduction of the text, communication with classmates, preparation of dialogue and dramatisation of the text. The motivational part (preparation for

perception) should be realised in the form of brainstorming, for example, students can write their ideas on a poster and comment on them. The interpretive part may be carried out in the form of questions leading to the identification of the experience of what has been read, work in pairs is also welcome; for example, students may be given the task of choosing the most exciting part of the text in pairs and justifying their choice. Aesthetic-educational activities following interpretation consist in the dialogisation of the selected part in pairs, later in a role play or in the dramatisation of a part of the text in pairs. Reproductive activity is interesting in the context of the text's lexicon.

Texts of legends can be interpreted in didactic communication, for example, through the motives of the EUR methodology. Working with a narrative text, in which, through the phases of evocation, awareness of meaning, i.e. learning and reflection itself, is in some cases an activating process. It is also a model of teaching strategies that can be adapted and varied in specific classes and with different types of texts (including non-artistic). Like in the preparatory literary phase, it is important for the teacher to answer the following questions before reading a book: Why should students read this text? What experiences should students have and what can lead them in the text? What knowledge, from the point of view of literary theory, will it bring them? Other questions address human relations issues: what can students learn about human relationships? Which phenomena in the text do we want to draw their attention to? What kind of understanding should students gain after finishing working on a text? What activities should students handle with the text? What should students want to share after reading?

Phase 1 - evocation

Prediction from words or pictures.

I will introduce four words related to the text of the legend. For better clarity, the expressions can also be drawn on a poster. Within five minutes, everyone should have enough vivid imagination of how these words fit into the story to be read, what events remind them of them, and what thoughts relate to the story. Pupils have a time limit for the activity so that they do not write too much and divert their attention from the curriculum. After a few minutes, students in pairs share their stories, thoughts, ideas, but no longer than 4 minutes. Finally, we can hear 2-3 versions of student predictions. Although it will not be possible to listen to everyone after this activity, as is not possible with other activities, as many pupils as possible should be given the opportunity to take an active part in the conversations. After reading a story that contains the four terms mentioned, students can observe and compare how the story resembles what they came up with.

Phase 2 - learning / awareness of meaning through guided reading using a table of predictions

During guided reading, students stop several times and check their comprehension through the table of predictions. The reading is stopped several times in the text so that students can create and then confirm their predictions. Anticipation is as important in reading as conversation, critical thinking develops, and the space for thinking about the text expands. Making a spreadsheet is not difficult, and the ability to write to a spreadsheet will improve when reused. Its use is becoming an important activity of guided reading comprehension. There are many dialect and regional words in legends, teachers can work with them before reading the text, but in this procedure it is more appropriate if students underline the words they do not understand or have not yet encountered. In this context, the text of the legend is also suitable for language education.

An important part of the process after reading a story, is to address the readers' free interpretations, which focus on the feelings immediately after reading and the thoughts that come to mind and want to share them with others. Some are surprised in the end, others were expecting it, and for some, something remains unsaid. If reactions to the readings are different, it is natural and good for the next part, which is the discussion. The interview is based on questions prepared by the teacher in advance. The questions concern the story, the genre of legend, fictional narration, but they also encourage wider associations of students. Everyone should write down or say the answer to themselves first, and then share it with others. The teacher should respond to the student's answers (he/she can also write down some) and encourage the exchange of views between them and also ask them to support their answers with a text. When the conversation ends, he/she reads aloud his/her notes about what the students said and did not answer yet. Similarly, the conversation continues with other prepared questions: Do you think this story could have really happened and why or why not? Can you find evidence in the text? So, what genre does the text belong to? How is the text of a legend different from the recording of a real story? Who is the author of the text? What do we then call narration in such a text? If the teacher conducts an interview about the knowledge of the genre and the elements that determine this text as a legend, he/she can formulate questions according to Bloom's taxonomy (Turek 2008, pp. 50 - 52) from the simplest level:

Did you find information in the text about the places where the story took place? Where is the story located? Can you find these places on the map? Find time data in the text. Do you know what the folk names in the text mean? What do you consider fictional and narrated?

Phase 3 – reflection

Returning to predictions from expressions.

At the end of the interview, the teacher asks the students to return to their original partners from the pair, remembering the stories they imagined in the beginning on the basis of four expressions. How did your stories resemble the story presented? Could your story be real? The pairs have three minutes for the interview and then several of them can share their conclusions with the whole group.

Summarising knowledge through “cinquain”, a five-verse poem that requires combining knowledge into concise terms that describes or reflects on a topic. For example, to a legend story:

Legend
old true
remembers warns says
there is life in everything
knowledge.

One of current methods of developing reader communication is a reading workshop. The basic skill with which the school enriches children, is the technique of reading with maximum requirements for its quality, art of reading and communicating effectively with the text. The school develops these skills at all its levels and branches. The reading goal cannot be narrowed down only to reach the basic level of reading, to master the technique of fluent, correct and conscious reading, but it is necessary to penetrate deeper into the read text. This reading competence can also be improved in other subjects, not only in literary education, but it is also a broader culture-creating phenomenon. When reading educational and artistic texts, it is necessary to read with comprehension, in which students integrate ideas stated in the text into their own context and their knowledge, which they already have about the topic or content. If we ask students to just recall and reproduce the information they have read, then we will never know if there has been any understanding at a higher level. Students must be active in reading themselves, they should learn to connect what they read with what they already know or can do. Readers must consider the author's message in terms of their own thoughts and actions. The role of the teacher is to help students develop the ability to become engaged, thinking, and receptive readers. They should be taught to read for pleasure, out of a desire for experience, out of curiosity, to build a relationship and respond to the text, also to move away from simple reproduction to more complex interpretation of the text. One of the methods that significantly helps in the development of reading competence and helps the reader to find a meaningful relationship to the text is the reading workshop. It contains a number of elements that reflect research on reading and thinking. Its aim is to get students from a low level of reading skills

to a level where reading becomes a difficult tool for stimulating thinking and then engaging in thinking at a higher level. The reading workshop is fully used in reading and literature classes, but also as a training for independent individual reading of art, popular-scientific, scientific and magazine literature. We can apply reading workshop to improve reading habits and comprehension in general education subjects, where the text is the central means of transmitting subject's content. The three basic elements that reading requires are time, selection itself, and response to what is read.

The procedure of the reading workshop is as follows:

Every student should have something to read, including the teacher. Before reading, we will explain to the students what they will do after reading the text, that is, writing responses to what they have read. They will share their responses to what they have read with others and will discuss them in small 3-4 member groups. It is important to know that the response to what has been read is a personal reflection, not reproduction; it is intended to indicate what the reading gave the reader, he/she should interpret, not describe what he/she has read. The response should be understood as the beginning of a dialogue with the reader, not a lecture; it should include an evaluation opinion, e.g. "I liked the book because ...," "this article made it clear to me ...," "I don't think I agree with the author because ...". Everyone has a piece of paper in front of them on which to write the responses, and then they get 20 minutes to read. When the reading is over, they have 5-8 minutes to write their impressions. Students are then grouped into triplets or quadruples to listen to each other. They must also have enough time for that. Since this is the first discussion after reading, classmates do not know what others in the group have read. Therefore, everyone briefly explains what he/she read, states the title and author, and adds a few words about the topic, plot, or character. Written responses are then read out.

The reading workshop consists of four activities. They are mini lectures, reading, interview, and responses. Mini lectures are short, focused on specific information, content that we want to pass on to students. They last a maximum of 15 minutes. In this way we can provide a lot of learning content. These can be lectures on the reading workshop, its structure, responses to what has been read, elements of writing, different genres, elements of composition, the use of adjectives or whether the book is written in the 1st or 3rd person, plot, character development, etc. During the first half-year or over the whole year, the number of mini-lectures decreases. At the beginning of the year, this may be a lecture on responses to what has been read, because students will not yet know what to write about or how to write about what they have read, and they should learn to experience reading in other ways. They don't have to write about what happened, what the author said, they don't have to pay attention to the facts. They should write about how reading impressed them, what they noticed in the story or characters, what they liked about the book and why, how the content

relates to the title or to their own idea of the topic. At the beginning, they will need examples of responses to what has been read and model examples. Other mini-lectures can cover topics such as selecting books by interest, type of authors, facts about a particular author, using the library or the Internet to read.

Reading in school is the best way to promote active reading by students. If reading is just a side activity, something that is done outside of school, then students will value this activity less, expect less from it, get less and achieve poorer results. Reading workshops should provide pre-planned opportunities for long silent reading. Students will know when they will be reading, they will be prepared to read all the time dedicated to it. At the beginning, the reading time is about 15 minutes, when students get used to reading independently, the time gradually increases to 30 minutes or more. Independent reading activates the subject, it also provides greater opportunities not only for understanding, but also for identifying the reader with emotional states of the heroes. Students are more focused while reading, but while listening, due to the accidental loss of continuity in following the story, some details may escape them and they are no longer able to return, which actually reduces the resulting effect of understanding. An important role in an independent reading of the text is the application of individual tempo and thus the possibility of applying self-regulation of attention (Obert, 1998, p. 89). A conversation about reading is a dialogue between a teacher and one student. Before conducting interviews with students, we first explain to them how such an interview is conducted and demonstrate it with a student. The interview always includes a discussion about the book and the student's response to it. It may involve reading an excerpt from a book aloud when a student begins to read a new book so that the teacher can determine the level of difficulty of the text, or when the teacher wants to check how smoothly the student is reading. During the interview, the teacher develops the student's interest in literary elements and assesses the degree of understanding of the text. Comprehension is checked by reading questions, which students answer:

Why did you choose this book?

Tell me about your book. Which part do you like most and why? Read me the part that is the most exciting.

Ask about the parts that are not clear to you.

How did you feel when it happened? What did you think then?

Where can you find more about this topic?

What did you learn from this book?

What are your problems with reading?

What would you like to ask me? How can I help you?

What is the plot of the book? How is it developing?

Do you know any other books by this author?

Were there words you didn't understand? How did you deal with them?

Conversations about the read texts take place during the silent reading stage and usually last 3-5 minutes. During the workshop, the teacher meets 3-5 students or even more, depending on the number of students and the environment of the class. During the interview, the teacher can move between chairs around the class and sit with students or a student comes to the teacher's desk. During the interview, both the teacher and the student should sit, preferably next to each other, which helps to create an informal relationship. Instructions for organising reader interviews:

1. All students need to have something to read that might interest them and what they will be able to read. They can choose according to their interests or according to recommendations, whichever books they can get in the school library, the books that represent the school curriculum.
2. There must be silence in the classroom during reading workshops, no disturbance, no talking. Only reading is allowed.
3. Everyone in the class must read.

The atmosphere of the reading conversations should be relaxed, but purposeful. When other students read, we must speak quietly. Pupils should be told that they can ask questions when the interview with one student has ended and another student is coming to the interview. When conducting an interview, we give sufficient space to students, adapt the interview to their and our own needs and interests. At the same time, we make notes on the student's card about the reading interview. Responding to what is read is the part of the reading process that has the greatest impact on whether students become receptive readers. Students need to have time to respond in order to appreciate and understand their literary experience. There are many ways in which students can respond to what they have read. Responding to reading means providing opportunities for wider dialogue. Such a dialogue can be oral or written, it can be a student-teacher dialogue, a student-student dialogue or a group dialogue. Responses can also take the form of reproducing a story, dramatising, grouping stories according to similar characters (when deriving a theme, genre characteristics), creating new stories based on the read, displaying a story on a board, painting a scene from a story, favourite part, beginning, middle or the end of the story, writing about the story, making a leprell; it can also be listening to music that is tied to a book, making a bulletin board about a favourite book, etc.

An interesting topic is how to record reading results. Reader's diaries are already a traditional form. However, it is possible to vary and transform them in various ways. One of the forms is diaries of dialogues. These reading diaries (notebooks) are for students to write down their responses to what they have read. When they write something in a diary, they pass it on to the teacher, who reads it and writes a short comment. This is a continuation of the dialogue on

what has been read. The aim of these diaries is to support the student's thinking about what has been read. Writing these diaries can also be done in pairs with classmates. One of the problems that bothers students and teachers when starting a reading diary of dialogues is deciding what to write about in the dialogue diary. These questions represent some ideas and thoughts that teachers can use to initiate dialogues with students: What did I like / dislike about the book? How did I feel about that? How did the book start? How did it end? Was the end satisfying? Did it remind me of something in my life? What important words did the writer use? Am I interested in the language? When am I most interested in it? Can I say three words that best characterise the author's style? What was the conflict like here? What did the author do to keep my interest? What made sense to me? What new ideas or opinions did I get after reading this book? How did the characters change during the story? Why? What impact did these changes have on other characters? What would I do differently if I were one of the characters? Why didn't the character change in the story? Were the characters trustworthy? Why yes / why not? Did details help to accurately describe the environment? How did the author approach the environment? What role did the environment play in the story? Why did the author use so much description of the environment? Which character did I like most? What questions will I get answered when I read another section of the text the next day? "We see the importance of such written statements in the fact that the teacher, after getting acquainted with them, has the opportunity to more closely link school work with literary text with individual confessions of students than it would be possible when the teacher in the lesson has to be satisfied with only a few oral statements, selected and targeted more or less randomly or unilaterally" (Obert 1998, 96).

Literary letters can be another form of recording and identifying the reading experience. Students conduct dialogues through literary letters that are short and personal. These are immediate, but not superficial, responses to the readings that the student wants to share with a classmate and expects an answer. Pupils often send letters to friends who are reading the same book or a book with the same topic, or a book by the same author. Often, however, students write a letter just because they want to introduce the book to classmates. There are often spelling mistakes in the letters. As these letters form a process of thinking when writing and are not intended for the public, these errors are not considered significant, but merely reflecting the evolving process of writing.

Talking about a book is another method of responding to what has been read and it is a short utterance of a student or teacher. It is a group activity involving the whole class and its aim is to introduce a new book or author, or to say why a book might be of interest to readers. Talking about a book is often organised at the end of the reading workshop, should not take more than 10 minutes and should allow a brief introduction of the book (title, author, short story, explanation of important parts, introduction of a favourite part, explanation of

why he/she chose the book, and justification of why he/she "likes" the book, the character, the idea) and the response of the class members to what he/she spoke about (they ask the reason for the choice, ask for details about the book, comment on the thoughts). However, the conclusion of the book should not be revealed, at least some will be motivated to read it. This activity helps to create a community of readers that appreciates and uses the reading process. It helps students to understand that the process of reading does not end with reading the text, but only when students have thought about their reading and expressed their views on what has been read in some form. Registration of what has been read is an important component of reading workshops, as students keep records of what they have read. Self-monitoring and self-assessment are the steps a student must take to become an independent reader. It can be said that in the reading workshop, we assume that every child can be a reader and can read well. In order for students to become good readers, they must be given opportunities to read. Being a good reader means being a thinking reader who understands and uses the reading process. Reading becomes the basis of students' individual, intellectual, aesthetic and emotional experiences. We create an environment for conscious reading (reading comprehension) by providing a number of books from which students themselves choose, respond to what they have read and are inspired by our love of literature. We allow students to feel the relationship to what they are reading so that they can choose their own books and take responsibility for writing their own records. The reading workshop is organised and structured so that the teacher actively monitors the development of the students.

The indicated possibilities of working with a literary text are a free inspiration, possibility or alternative, how to work with a literary text in literature lessons or in out-of-school literary education. However, the role of the teacher as a moderator of activities and always a person who is behind the events, but is mainly a coordinator, a unifying element and a factor that anticipates and directs individual activities, is always decisive. General statements as to why children do not read, whether the blame is on computers or watching television, makes no sense. Ultimately - the question should not be why children do not read, but why the adult population does not read. It is not possible to "attract" 100% of children to reading, the acquisition of even one more active reader must be considered by the teacher as his great personal success.

Finally, I offer a summary of the benefits associated with children's reading (ten reasons why a children's reader should reach for a book):

1. General outlook: Children who read regularly and often, or those to whom an adult intermediary offers this opportunity, have a broader general perspective and broaden their horizons. If a child spends a lot of time in front of a television screen (without the active participation of an adult who can

explain the things offered through the screen), the director, screenwriter and others will do the whole imagination for him. The child becomes a passive consumer. If a child spends time in front of a television screen, he or she urgently needs an adult guide, an intermediary, to explain what is happening on the screen.

2. Reading trains the brain. It presents the reader with tasks that occupy all corners of the brain. It is scientifically proven that during reading, new bonds are formed in the brain and neurons do not die as fast as in the case of people who prefer passive entertainment.
3. Reading improves concentration. The child is faced with the need to focus his/her attention on reading, not to be distracted by it, and all this trains his/her memory and draws concentration. Time spent with a book is a meaningful time.
4. Books (of course, the good ones) tell more about the world than a parent or teacher can say. They provide children with a lacking experience. Fairy tales are full of good and evil, on imaginary characters children finds out that not everyone who is good at first sight is really okay. They can easily learn about the places, people, and facts that surround him every day. Books also give children confidence in telling their own experiences, such as what they did at school or experienced on a trip. They find out that the story has a beginning, a culmination and an end, and so become skilled narrators.
5. Children's books have an absolutely irreplaceable part in the process of expanding vocabulary. This reason may seem trivial and long overcome, but in today's time of preferring speed, the brevity of expression, this "traditional" reason for reading books is becoming more important. Books adequately and naturally expand children's vocabulary, because even words that a child does not normally encounter are organically incorporated into his or her active vocabulary. A child's brain has an amazing ability to learn, (of course, best when the child doesn't even know about it), and new words remain memorized somewhere waiting for their moment.
6. The stories in books develop and intensify children's imagination and creativity, they can also apply the readings in their own games and in their own worldview. Naturally, the role of adult mediator and counsellor, who is able to understand children and offer them books suitable for their mental abilities, is important here. The fantasy and imagination created by books are incomparably better than those mediated by other media.
7. Reading increases empathy. If children experience suffering and joy with the protagonist, it is easier to empathise with the feelings he/she really experiences. It is good if children identify with individual characters in the story. Maybe they will get to know their friends in them, whether good or those who do them or other children badly. Thanks to books, they can more

easily recognise the events or feelings of the day and empathise more naturally with the feelings of others.

8. The traditional result of regular reading is a better benefit for children. This is an undeniable fact which teachers regularly and gladly point out. Those who read have a better overview of history, can write better compositions. Reading children have the form of written words anchored in their memory, so they respond much more flexibly during lessons.
9. Books can be a faithful friend of young persons and children. They are a great form of entertainment that can also be practiced anywhere. In a school backpack or backpack for a trip, a small book will fit comfortably. By reading, the child will shorten his/her way to school, waiting for the class or for the parents to be picked up from extracurricular activities.
10. Reading books evokes peace and harmony. The child (and the adult recipient) relaxes by reading. They will learn how to calm down and, unlike other activities, the child's mind is not bombarded with other sensations while reading. And this is a balm for the soul, which should be given to the child as often as possible, preferably regularly.

Conclusion

In the formation of students' reading culture and the process of their literary education, the most important role is played by a quality literary text. It is a bridge between teacher and student, adult mediator and child, an interactive medium ensuring the quality of literary-aesthetic formation of the child's personality in the intentions of his/her age dispositions, interests, and also gradual and sensitive shape of his individual growth, social maturation, personality perspective. Valuable literary text in combination with quality pedagogical guidance crystallises students' reading and literary tastes, enables orientation in the world of literature, and induces a tendency to make reading literature in the broadest sense of the word a permanent cultural need for students. The orientation of teachers, adult mediators of literature (towards its children's audience) in the values of contemporary literature is a basic prerequisite for opening the door to the model of not only aesthetic but also philosophical, ethical, religious and other relationships, not only externally educational but also internally, spiritual ties, penetration into the interior of man, into the presence and history of mankind, but also into perspectives.

In the work *Contemporary Slovak Literature to Children in Theory and School*, I used the illustrative examples and specific (analytical) methodological material based on the current model of contemporary Slovak children's literature. On the examples of the latest texts of Slovak literature for children - leprella, fairy tales, story prose from children's lives and legends - I tried to point out the current developmental and value tendencies, as well as how to deal with them in pedagogical activities. In literary education, it is important to monitor such communication situations (like establishing contact, engaging in dialogue), emphasising the ethical side of social behaviour, broader contexts. Slovak children's literature has defended its position thanks to "strong" literary personalities (Válek, Feldek, Rúfus, Moravčík, Jarunková, Ďuríčková, Šikula, Hevier), who have been awarded prestigious international prizes. However, the current generation of Slovak writers for children does not lag behind them. We believe that the monograph that has been presented is the proof of that.

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**Title: CONTEMPORARY SLOVAK LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN
IN THEORY AND EDUCATION**

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The monograph is exhibited in a chronology, mapping the author's professional interest in individual literary genres, which she has been working on for a long time. However, the connecting link of the individual considerations is, above all, the mentioned didactic superstructure. This is done in the belief that the teaching of literature in primary schools is still under the control of traditionalism, which "overestimates the informative component of the curriculum focused on memory acquisition." The leitmotif of E. Vitézová's text thus becomes the idea of presenting the reader's education with experiential teaching, which blurs the uniformity of thinking and the mindless canonisation of texts by the teacher. As a bonus, it presents a set of ideas, possibilities and inspirations for working with a book in the area of school teaching and preschool education.

Gabriela Magalová

E. Vitézová's monograph *Contemporary Slovak Literature for Children in Theory and Education* presents a current view of contemporary Slovak children's literature, synchronising the artistic value of a particular literary text, the age aspect of the child reader, as well as its mental and therefore reception disposition. The author achieves her original comprehensive and value-based approach to the issue through didactic analyses, applying theoretical knowledge about children's work to the educational context, as well as searching for and finding connections between the author, his/her literary work, the reader and school methodological application. This makes her monographic treatment of the topic unique. The topicality of the monograph is indicated not only by the analysis of works by contemporary authors, but also by the attitude to psychological issues accompanying the phenomenon of reading and the formation of the discursive reader both in the informal - family environment and in the educational process.

Zuzana Kováčová

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