

Children's Literature in South-East Europe

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Abstract: In her article "Children's Literature in South East Europe" Milena Mileva Blažić begins with an introduction to Maria Nikolajeva's 2000 book *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* in which a theoretical framework of thematics is defined, systematized, and categorized. Nikolajeva's framework for children's literature suggests attention to characteristics through which the maturation process of becoming adult is accomplished. Following the introduction and application of Nikolajeva's concepts, Blažić first applies the frame to selected texts published in South-East Europe, followed by lists of children's book published in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia.

Milena Mileva Blažić

Children's Literature in South-East Europe

Innovation in form and content in children's literature in the region of South-East Europe starting in the 1990s is connected to the processes of democratization following the collapse of Soviet-style and communist government and society. In the following, I discuss Maria Nikolajeva's theoretical framework in her 2000 book *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. Nikolajeva defined, systemized, and categorized literary texts by characteristics through which the maturation process of becoming adult is accomplished. My discussion of the said theoretical framework is followed by lists of children's books published since the 1990s to current in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia.

In the region of South-East Europe the 1990s inaugurated progress from the passive dependence on socialist through social realist traditions. A new range of professional authors for children came into being who focus on perspectives of awareness of children and their identity. At the same time, while children's books started to show innovation, these publications did not and still do not raise the interest of scholarship in West Europe or in Anglophone North America. While, in addition to the now available possibilities of publishing non-communist/socialist fiction in the region, market and commerce determine the success and sale of children's literature similar to all fiction. In addition to the genre of children's books, books written and designed for young adults have also appear(ed) with as socially relevant topics including matters such as urbanities, discrimination, the environment, women's issues, and of course the trope of coming of age as related to traumas of divorce, alcoholism, war, disease, death, sex, violence, and drugs. While these topics remain staple in West Europe and in Anglophone countries, authors in South-East Europe succeed in new forms of genres and draw on a variety of traditional genres such as folk and fairy tales. Authors and publishers in the region depend on translations and international gatherings for the marketing of their products but they also able to rely on their domestic systems of the publication of children's books. At the same time, the occurrence of borrowing and imitation from the West is evident.

Here, I begin with an analysis of Maria Nikolajeva's 2000 book *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. In principle, the theoretical framework of the book is based on the concept that a great deal of children's literature functions as therapy for the adult author. Children's books can display three conceptions of time — utopia, carnivalesque, collapse — signs of the processes of coming of age. In the genre of science fiction for children and young adults, time is expressed as mythical or cyclical. Nikolajeva uses the term "Arcadian" to describe these works, which include classics as *Wind in the Willows*, *Little Women*, and *The Secret Garden*. Other features of the Arcadian include harmony, emphasis on home, innocence, collective protagonists, and an absence of sexuality, death, or repressive authority. In the utopia sub-genre, such idyllic works about a peaceful and beautiful world without problems often contain an omniscient, didactic, or authoritative narrator, and suggest that these works are adult longings for the lost paradise of childhood. In the texts Nikolajeva describes as carnivalesque, the idyllic order is overturned but restored after a series of exciting adventures, thus a break from mythical time to linear adult time with the protagonist returning to idyllic security of home. Nikolajeva uses Jungian concepts in that the conscious is approached but not integrated with the unconscious to achieve a wholeness of self. Nikolajeva's examples of carnivalesque include *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Elidor*, *The Snow Queen* as representations of the structure of home-away-home. These types of stories are plot-oriented with the use the model of operation of ideology and strategies as narrativization, rationalization and standardization. This genre mixes adults' and children's points of view and describes the author's generation with dominant themes and motifs as traditional families and issues such as the cold war, nuclear threat, the working class, social themes, unemployment, industrialization, pollution, and urbanities.

In the sub-genre termed collapse, there is no turning back to mythical time or a state of everlasting happiness. Characters live in a linear time, multiple perspectives are involved, and subplots are connected. There is a sense of chaos in comparison with the utopia and carnivalesque sub-genres, but also an option of change and move forward. *The Brothers Lion Heart*, and *The Little Mermaid* fit this model, but most examples here are in contemporary adolescent fiction, such as *Catcher in the Rye*

and *Johnny, My Friend*. From linearity follows an awareness of death and this sub-genre is not free of ideology but with focus on character development and without the adult's perspective. Thus, themes and motifs of this sub-genre are closely connected to the young protagonist(s) and life is neither idealized nor romanticized and include such topics as emotional literacy, the global village, computer gaming, tribal society, popular culture, nomadic friends, power dressing, the green movement, animal rights movement, etc. Family in these texts is predominantly of single parenthood and include the breakdown of traditional family life, and language is stress related.

Although Nikolajeva acknowledges that she considers only European and US-American texts, her reach is extensive as she includes canonical works of children's literature in the U.S., as well as Russian, Polish, and Swedish texts. The organizing principle of time and theme allows Nikolajeva to work with a broad range of concerns. Throughout she makes the case that the theoretical distinction between "realist" and "non-realist" or fantasy children's books and in my view this approach is less useful. Models of upbringing as reflected in the case of Slovenian children's literature from 1850-2000 indicate that three different patterns of value can be identified, each characterized by its own set of expectations and the image of young people that it conveys. The most obvious distinctions between the patterns are the division into religious and non-religious value orientations (see Hanžek, Matjaž. *Human Development Report*. Ljubljana: Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, 1998). Based on the analysis of literary texts we can distinguish between religious education of young people — which could also be called education towards submission — and a wide range of non-religious patterns of education which are more supportive of a child's autonomy. Traditional religious models of upbringing with such as faith, obedience, and good manners correlate with Nikolajeva's triad of sub-genres. However, an idealized perspective of the adult image of child and childhood results in making it seem more pleasant than it is. This is, indeed, characteristic of cultures where religion is considered an important element of culture, regardless of the set of beliefs practised and paying no attention of market and economic developments. This is the case in cultures of South-East Europe, traditionally religious in their value orientation and that has a direct effect upon education and civic responsibility otherwise fundamental to a child's autonomy.

The non-religious model or the survival model of upbringing based on qualities such as thrift, determination, independence, and hard work correlate with Nikolajeva's carnivalesque sub-genre. This pattern is typical of cultures with years of state tradition and of states in transition as in the case of Central and East European countries/cultures and only since the 1990s building Western-style democratic processes: between the two poles of social and market economy and their corollary of an at this time in-between social system, in Slovenian children's literature we can observe similar educational patterns. The non-religious model of coexistence involving qualities such as imagination, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for others correlate with Nikolajeva's collapse sub-genre. In the model the young person has to accept responsibility for his/her actions, show tolerance to others but without the romanticized notion of maturation. This model of coexistence in upbringing can be found in countries of North European cultures where postmodern values are held in high regard. This model suggests that qualities that encourage autonomy, as well as qualities which make it possible for the individual to co-operate with others.

Nikolajeva's theory to Slovenian children's literature in the 1990s to current and based on her utopia sub-genre in the case of Bina Štampe Žmavc's *Repairing of Toys* reveals a number of interesting points. The time and place setting of this picture book are typical of the utopia sub-genre, e.g., sunny days, a park pavilion, a fairy tale pavilion, an enchanted garden, a kingdom of toys, etc. There is a timelessness with an autonomous micro-society in simple, rural, and safe place in nature. The pavilion has fences as boundaries to the surrounding adult world both protecting and restricting intrusion from the outside world and adults. The collective of characters is typical in that children are simple, trustworthy, and ready to experience development towards perfection. Adults cannot enter the autonomous enchanted garden, because grownups are too serious and too complicated to enter into an isolated and safe setting as an enchanted garden. The narrator is omniscient and the tale has explicit morality built in. Carefree childhood is away from the troubles of adult life and the children are worried about toys only. The adults are not free of matters of survival and thus they are boring. The author of the picture book portrays a romantic image of childhood with the approach to conserve the children in an innocent, unchanging state and comfortably free of memories, emotion, affection, and responsibilities.

An example of Nikolajeva's carnivalesque sub-genre — Bogdan Novak's *The Fatal Picnic* — reveals already in its title the home-adventure-home structure. The setting is in real time and place. The weather is sunny and concrete, the locations are a small forest and meadows, thus an idyllic setting for a rural adventure. There is also a gastronomic *cornucopia* with modern items (chocolate, sandwiches), with modern middle class insignias (weekend cottages), and romanticized urban items (cars and bicycles). The protagonists are not idealized but individualized, neither are they heroes but faithful to the group order. Plot, theme, and motifs are (post)modern: a divorced father kidnaps his daughter and the group of courageous children rescue her and resolve the problem by kidnapping the divorced parents with possibility envisioned of future reconciliation, and when the mission is completed, the dysfunctional communal order is re-ordered. The moral of this carnivalesque sub-genre is that everything appears to the protagonists as a fantasy resulting in utopia albeit with the said carnivalesque characteristics. While they gain experience, there is no character development. This is a formula oriented story that is not character building. The purpose of the carnivalesque in the book is entertainment but also a rehearsal of a model for psychological transformation.

The example for Nikolajeva's collapse sub-genre is found in Desa Muck's *Deadly Serious about Drugs*, a young adult tale dealing with urban problems such as drugs, sex, violence, and social problems in postmodern times, set in the mode of linear time. The female protagonist's ability to judge her own situation is limited and thus the individual protagonist and the story itself are without a happy-end. The main female protagonist is lost and departs from the innocence of childhood and enters into adulthood. While the disintegration of the protagonist's character suggests the result of mission completed, in the end it is failure. The narrator is doubled in that the narration is by a "real author" while narration is by an individual first-person protagonist implying stronger identification; however, this narration is too frightening for young readers.

In my further analysis of Slovenian children's literature 1990s to current by application of Nikolajeva's framework and I examined the Slovenian curriculum for language arts and literature from 1-9 grades (6-15 years of age). What I found is that in grades 1-6 reading lists are — obviously — with books of the utopia sub-genre and the 6-8 grades reading lists suggest a departure from the utopia sub-genre towards the carnivalesque sub-genre. What is interesting is the 8-9 grades readings lists where books are predominantly of books with the romanticized image of the child and childhood. This indicates planned pedagogy although the same reading lists include also texts containing problems of divorce, illness, poverty, refugees, love, sex, pregnancy, drugs, and conflicts but mostly from a romanticized point of view. In conclusion, it appears that the problematics of today's young people are not sufficiently taken into account in children's and young adults' books in Slovenia. Next, I list selected books published in South-East Europe with indication as to the typology provided in Nikolajeva's theoretical framework.

In Albania the period of innovation, similar to other cultures in the region, commenced in the 1990s with fantasy literature in such works as Sokol Jakova's creative fairy tale and humorous novels such as *The Adventure of Brave Mirosh*. Mira Meksi *Planetthi i ngrirë* (The Little Icy Planet) is in the genre of science fiction where human and animal inhabitants fight to free their planet from ice. Jorgji Kodra writes collections of fairy tales and short stories such as *The Boy who Ignored the Time* and *Vocabulary within One Week*. There are series of books by Thanas Pilafa, for example, *Great Dreams* and *How I Became a Robinson*. Everyday problems are touched upon in realist fiction about problems in the modern family, school, and issues of emigration by Viktor Canosinaj's *They were Looking for Happiness* and from a child's perspective in Ramadan Pasmaci's *Childhood Paths*. Bedri Dedja reissued his novel *Revolution in a Flat in Tirana* now without ideological elements and *A Dangerous Trip* in which the author portrays the turbulent aspects of the coming of age of three run-away children. Gaqo Bushaka returned to the fiction of a personified protagonist in a fairy tale novel *The Film of Cufo, the General and Cufoja dhe Bubu Cacurrel* (Cufo and Bubi the Curly). Dalan Shaplo's fairy tales cross the boundaries between prose and verse in *The Girl Who Knew the Language of Birds*, Ferit Lamaj continued the fable tradition with his *202 Fables*, Stavari Pon's *The Adventures of Queros and Eramil* renewed interest in the concept of the folk hero, Besiana Avdyli's *Mos më zgjoni* (Do not Wake Me) is a volume of poetry with aspects of life with the point of view of a child. Viktor Canosinaj's *Meriyll* follows the trend in Europe toward problem-orientated realist novels about contemporary society in which a teenager has to take care of a whole family, thus an exploration of crises in Albania and another prob-

lem-oriented realist novel is Chmitter Xhuvani's *Street Children*. Children's literature in Albania alternates between the traditional genres of the folkloric tradition via socialist realism to contemporary trends in search and exploration of poetic forms, problem-oriented realism mostly expressed in prose including science fiction.

After the Civil War (1992-1995) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, owing to political and/or religious demarcations, three separate languages and literatures arose: Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. The language of the previous Yugoslavia, Serbo-Croatian, emerged as Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian depending on the speaker or writer's ethnic and political affiliation. In the period after 1995, three trends can be observed: 1) the quest for identity, 2) the entrenchment of tradition, and 3) the publication of national anthologies. This means that children's literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina is in a process of transition, with the corollary of intense focus on national interests. This trend led to the publishing of national authors based on national and not aesthetic criteria. And even canonized and classical authors are facing re-evaluation. Rooted in above trend 1), the characteristics of children's literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina are based on the search for identity, with the result of polarization ethnic groups. One prominent genre that came about — owing to war and destruction — was the genre of the journal and diary, suggesting the need for imaginary states and locations of piece through memory. Zlata Filipović's *Zlata's Diary* was one example published in this genre. Alija Dubočanin's *Pas pismoša* (The Post Dog) is a realist picture book (photographs) about war in Sarajevo as experienced by a young girl, Dina, and her dog, Jenny, who carried letters during the civil war. Ferida Duraković's *Amilina abeceda* (Amilia's Alphabet) is a book of thirty stories, each one connected to a letter from the Bosnian alphabet accompanied by illustration. Duraković's earlier novels include *Jos jedna bajka o ruži* (Another Fairy Tale about a Rose), *Mikijeva abeceda* (Mickey's Alphabet), and *Najnovije vijesti iz Sarajeva* (The latest News from Sarajevo). Željko Ivanković's novel was written as a dictionary *Tko je upalio mrak? Sarajevski pojmovnik* (Who Switched on Darkness? Sarajevo's Dictionary, 2000), and Advan Hozić's stories from the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina *Na kraju placa* (In the End of the Marketplace).

The trend in children's literature in Bulgaria is oriented towards present-day problems: Lilia Ratcheva, Tsvetan Peshev, Chavdar Shinov, and Anastas Stoyanov base their work on folklore or the parody of folklore, while others use the fairy tale to examine present-day reality. Vladimir Zelengorov's *Strange Jobs: Short Stories* is a collection of tales ranging from adventure stories set in Tibet to humorous tales about everyday life. There are also allegorical stories about animals and everyday life such as Kina Kadreva's *Prikazka za palavoto skakalche* (The Story of the Little Grasshopper who Could not Hop) and Yordan Radichkov's *Malki Zhabeshki Istorii* (Small Frog Stories). Nonsense tales represent an innovative trend as by Kina Kadreva, Mile Markovski, Roumen Shomov, and Petya Aleksandrova. Ivan Tsanev wrote an interactive book, *Vesela misterija* (Funny Mystery), in which children became co-authors and co-illustrators. Liana Daskalova *Djadovata gradina* (My Grandfather's Garden) is about friendship between generations. Fantasy and ghosts constitute another new trend as in Krasimir Mircev's *Vampiri-Gunduraci-Zmej* (Vampires-Centaurs-Dragons) which presents a great diversity of creatures in a typical tale about good and evil. Overall, Bulgarian children's literature is rich in terms of thematic diversity and original authorial styles. It has expanded traditional ideas and developed new trends in fantasy, nonsense, parody, and an ironic worldview.

Croatian children's literature changed considerably since the mid-1990s following the war (1992-1995). The political changes in Croatia influenced the motives and themes in children's literature regarding national patriotic and religious themes, while post-war changes also impacted the texts. The complex changes and post-war syndrome resulted in a loss of aesthetic and human values in favour of populist and nationalist goals, similar to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Božidar Prosenjak's novel *Divji konj* (Wild Horse) and the action story by Joža Horvat, *Dupin Dirk i lijena kobila* (Dolphin Dirk and the Lazy Mare) are allegories of modern times and his *Frka v Ščitarjevu's* detective story (Chaos in Ščitarjevo) is about archaeological items, perhaps in order to strengthen the national eminence of Croatia. He also wrote fantasy literature, *Waitapu* influenced by legends from Indonesia. Post-war childhood was portrayed in Želimir Ciglar's *Dekameron za golobrade pustolove* (Decameron for a Young Adventurer) about a father's role with refugees and employed postmodern elements (diary, address book, poems, etc.). Anton Gardaš's novels *Koliba u planini* (House in the Mountain) and *Miron u škripcu* (Miron in Trouble) also deserve mention. Themes concerning modern children, unhappy fami-

lies, and the urban child are represented by Sanja Pilić in *O mami sve najbolje* (About Mother Every Good), *E, baš mi je žal* (Oh, I am Really Sorry), and *Vidiš, da se moram zabavljati* (See I Should Have Fun), Darko Macan's *Knjige lažu* (Books are Liars), and Maja Brajko Livaković's *Kad pobjedi ljubav* (When Love Wins).

Interesting texts for children and young adults were written by Zvezdana Odobašić, an 18-years old student who wrote the fantasy *Čudesna krljušt* (Marvelous Fishskin) and Svjetlana Grković Janović wrote books with intertextual reminiscences of Croatian classics from children's literature. Unhappy childhood is a theme in Sunčana Škrinjarić's *Čarobni prosjak* (Magic Beggar). Božica Jelušić's *Po mjeri cvijeta* (According to Flower) and Matko Marušić's *Snijeg u Splitu* (Snow in Split) are with poetic descriptions of the beauty of nature. Nada Zidar Bogadi wrote short fables about personified animals in *Sretan cvrčak* (Happy Grasshopper) and *Kiša je moja prijateljica* (Rain is my Friend). In *Uspavanka za poljubac* (Lullaby for a Kiss) Vesna Parun writes modern texts about love and Zoran Pongrašić writes about a young adult living with his artist mother in the humorous novel *Mama je kriva za sve* (Mother is Guilty of Everything) and Grigor Vitez revived interest in poetry in Croatian children's literature. Overall, Croatian children's literature is clearly in a transitional period and there is an innovative new generation of authors whose works deserve wider recognition.

Children's literature in Macedonia include Gorjan Petrevski's *Proletni doždovi* (Spring Rains) with fourteen tales based on well-known folk tales, retold by the author from a modern perspective of novelistic elements untypical of folk tales. Olivera Nikolova, one of the most popular authors for children, explores with humour the introduction of a boy into the world of girls and male-female relationships through the company of his older brother in *Devojkite na Marko* (Marko's Girlfriends), a modern story about human relationships. In Macedonia children's literature moved from a politically and socially activist period of romantic patriotism of deep feeling and collectivity to poetry based on traditional folklore and utilizing nature (scenery, flowers, wind, spring, animals) in a romantic mixture of fairy tales and folk songs to modernization.

Children's literature in Romania in the 1990s started with Monica Savulescu-Voudouris' *Un alt glob, va rog!* (A Different Globe, Please!), a book about emigration. This autobiographical story tells about a ten-year-old girl and her mother who live in the refugee shelter in Holland from a child's point of view. In *Ospatul lupilor* (The Wolves' Banquet) Diana Irimescu writes about superstition among the Romanian people. Eugenia Doina Gemală's *Legenede din pinuturi dobrogene* (Legends from Dobrudja) contains folk tales and legends from different parts of Dobrudja, a region of Romania, in a well-chosen mixture of literary folk tales and retellings. An alternative textbook for elementary schools by Irina Nicolau, Carmen Huluta, Matei Cerkez, and Ana Pascu, *Lectii cu povesti despre facere lumii* (Lessons with Stories about How the World was Made) combines myths and legends into didactic material. The emphasis here is on poetic, humorous, and imaginative content presented as free from religious influence. Ana Blandiana's *Cartea albaa lui Arpagic* (Arpagic's White Book) is an example of problem-oriented new realism of children's books: written as a postmodern metaphor of photographs, documents, anonymous letters, etc., in secret police files, the book traces the life of a tomcat. National and multicultural concerns in the 1990s have become an important aspect of the Romanian new realism in children's literature, which also brought young adult literature into a transition period until current.

Children's literature in Serbia and Montenegro (and the Kosovo as an autonomous province) faced similar trends to the rest of the region. First arrived the commercialization of children's book and then the arrival of the problem novel about traumatic childhoods (war, refugees, orphans, disease, death, violence, sex, drugs, etc.). The revival of the folk tradition was started by Branko V. Radičević and Grozdana Olujilć *Princ oblaka*. Despite the overwhelmingly traumatic experiences of the past years, children's and young adult literature continues to be written and includes a cosmopolitan view in Mirjana Stefanović's *Sekino seoce* (Seka's Little Village) and in Gordana Maletic-Vrhovac's *Spasonosna odluka* (A Saving Decision). Growing from childhood into adulthood in present-day Serbia is the problem-orientated topic in the novel of Vesna Aleksić's *Marija Modiglian*. Time will tell if children's literature in Montenegro must be written about separately because of political changes. In Montenegro of note is Voja Marjanović's *Portreti crnogorskih pisaca za decu i mlade* (Portraits of Montenegrin Children's Authors). In the 1990s Nikola Vulcanović's *Sunčana zemlja* (Sunny Country), *Sunčev pjevač* (Sun's Singer), and *Osmjeh za Mariju* (Smile for Maria) mark a new beginning. In Kosovo the political

and ideological situation resulted in a decline of children's literature and thus there is a transition period with focus on heritage.

Note: although of a specific theme, the following bibliography is relevant to my article (the bibliography includes seminal work in children's literature in general): Drews, Marie. "A Bibliography of Work on Racial Narratives for Children." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 10.2 (2008): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss2/12>>.

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