

## **Outsiders in current Slovak literature for children and youth**

Ján Gallik - Renáta Hlavatá - Mariana Hrašková

Ján Gallik is a literary scientist and university teacher, who currently works as an associate professor and director of the Institute of Languages and Cultures of Central Europe, Faculty of Central European Studies, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. He is mainly engaged in research and interpretation of literary works by authors of Slovak, Czech and Hungarian Catholic literature as well as Slovak literature for children and youth. He is the author of the scientific monographs *Ján Haranta v literárnokritickom kontexte* (2011), *Spiritualita v slovenskej literatúre pre deti a mládež* (2014) and the university textbooks *Slovenská katolícka moderna v stredoeurópskom priestore* (2015), *Kapitoly zo súčasnej stredoeurópskej literatúry* (2015, e-book). He is also the editor of several conference proceedings and co-author of the publications *Pavol Strauss, prorok novej evanjelizácie* (2018) and *Religious Literature Through the Lense of Comparative Imagology* (2020).

Renáta Hlavatá is an assistant professor at the Department of Slovak Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. She lectures on the disciplines of Slovak language stylistics, text creation and analysis, dynamics of contemporary Slovak language, language culture, and the theory of language communication. In her scientific-research activity she focuses on the characteristics of the language of artistic texts, while monitoring the influence of the thought systems of the time on the possible access to the text and the work. At the same time, she focuses on research and analysis of language as a system of means of expression through various types of texts and examines linguistic-speech expressions in mass media communication. She is the author of the scientific monograph *Fenómén historizmu v myslení o literatúre* (2011), the university textbook *Tvorba a analýza textu* (2015) and the co-author of the university textbook *Jazyk ako text* (university textbook on practical stylistics) (2019). She participates in lecture stays at foreign universities (Czech Republic, Poland) and organizes lectures within the Slovak Linguistic Society at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava.

Mariana Hrašková is a literary scientist and university teacher who currently works as an assistant professor at the Department of Slovak Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. In her professional research, she focuses mainly on the field of literature for children and youth, professional didactics - the methodology of literary education and contemporary Catholic literature in the context of Slovak drama. She is actively involved in artistic presentation. She is the author of the scientific monograph *Biblické témy v slovenskej dráme* (2013), author and co-author of university textbooks focused on the didactics of literary education *Práca s textom v literárnej komunikácii* (2015), *Literárne praktikum I.* (2020), *Literárne praktikum II.* (2021), *Umelecká literatúra v predprimárnom*

vzdelávaní (2021), editor of several conference proceedings and author of scientific studies focused on the interpretation and reception of artistic texts for adolescent readers.

**Abstract:**

*Within the solution of the project APVV-17-0071 Support of Reading Literacy in the Mother Tongue and Foreign Language, it is also important to reflect on outsidership as a certain ambivalent phenomenon, which appears after 1989 in contemporary Slovak literature for children and youth in various analogies. One of the aims of the study is to define the initial concept of outsider from various professional perspectives. We will also focus on the methodological basis of research of outsiders (social status, otherness, disadvantage, bullying, rebellion), not only in contemporary artistic texts but also in working exercises with regard to the learning language style.*

Within the frame of the project APVV-17-0071 *Support for Reading Literacy in the Mother Tongue and Foreign Language*, an important aspect is represented also by *outsidership* as a peculiar literary model and as a certain ambivalent phenomenon in the social-psychological context (which – after 1989 – is present in contemporary Slovak literature for children and youth in various analogies). In the introduction of her monograph *Podoby outsiderstva v literatúre pre deti a mládež* [Images of Outsidership in Literature for Children and Youth] (2012), Zuzana Bariaková reported that during the 1990's – unlike the previous period – “aesthetic models and literary paradigms are changing radically, with a new movement towards postmodernism, when the images and functions of art are modified in general” (Bariaková, 2012, p. 9). According to her, the above mentioned fact also influenced the occurrence of new types of outsiderships in Slovak literature for children and youth after 1989, which deserve a thorough reflection in the field of literary sciences. We selected this topic also because of the awareness that outsidership (in its diversified, variable, and hugely ambivalent form) constitutes quite an important pattern for studying differences or diversities in literature for adolescents, with regard to its readership and reading literacy in practical terms. This strange or different phenomenon did not occur only because of visits to exotic countries or large well known international multicultural cities. In fact, differences, heterogeneity of life, and social-cultural diversity in its various forms are part of our everyday life. Contact with artistic literature focusing on outsidership (together with aesthetic experiences) does facilitate the process of integration of adolescents in the heterogeneity of society life. It allows them to perceive diversity in their surroundings, exemplary life situations described by literature or light and dark life positions – by putting new challenges before the child (Hrašková, 2019, p. 26). The outsidership phenomenon in literature for children and youth can be analysed from different points of view. For each single interpretation, it is possible to select various methodologies. For the sake of interpretation analysis, it is necessary to separate the developmental value from the

aesthetic value of the texts. Aesthetic expression quality (Plesník et al., 2011, p. 484) can be determined on the basis of the work itself – as quality of the sign artefact, i.e. quality of its effects on the percipient, modality of its pragmatic operation, stylistic function or values. The developmental value also depends on other factors than mere internal text factors (e.g. interdisciplinary dimension, aesthetic aims, openness, etc.).

The *outsider* is generally perceived as a person who is excluded from a certain main group (or sometimes as a person who plays only a peripheral role, without any hopes of success). This notion immediately generates a negative sensation in the mind of the recipient – something that is not included in the habitual “normal” category. There can be several reasons behind this fact and they result from a certain degree of diversity and distinction: physical handicap, social disadvantages (social exclusion, family dysfunctions), adoption, intellectual disorders, sexuality, racial, national or ethnic origin, etc. The outsider is perceived as a person who is outside the normal standards or is distinct under a certain aspect. The outsider’s different status in various fields of personal life may be a source of misunderstanding with the surroundings. It affects social qualities, reciprocal human relationships or sometimes even the lifestyle and behaviour of a character who has conflicts with the surroundings. The outsider is often in a subordinated position – and this is no exception in the child sphere. With regard to literature for children and youth, Jaroslav Toman classifies this phenomenon as a social-psychological phenomenon “manifesting as psychic deprivation and problematic socialisation of a child who feels at the margin of a given society, very often represented by family, school, children’s home or community peers” (Toman, 2007, p. 225 – 226). Similar statements can be found in Milena Šubrtová who connects the whole phenomenon to “social aspect of personality, its acceptance in the external surroundings, and its interior self-assessment” (Šubrtová, 2004, p. 123). In their adolescence, outsiders face many exceptional stressful situations that cause frustration. It is not easy for them to come to terms with them. We can firmly state that such a multidimensional issue has become one of the phenomena observed in contemporary literature for children and youth. The books focusing on the topic of outsidership (in its various motifs) are generally aimed at warning children and young people about traps related to adolescence, about the severity of similar situations, and about possible consequences and risks. Among other things, literature focusing on the topic of outsidership often brings a possible alternative approach to face the given problem and to find a solution to it. We have mentioned outsidership also as an ambivalent phenomenon. This depends notably on the fact that “outside the specific context, it is not possible to assign a clearer judgement (positive or negative). Its manifestations vary within a range of two limits: on the one hand, there is an involuntary exclusion of the

single individual from social context, as a consequence of inherent handicapping factors or other similar factors of different origin; and on the other hand, there is a conscious and voluntary deflection from the mainstream ways of acting” (Jančovič In Bariaková – Kubealaková, 2008). Through the category of basic semiotic object of epic prose (i.e. literary character – outsider), we have a chance to perceive its position in the social context or its *sujet* function in the artistic text. Indeed, due to its social status, the character of the outsider can be “a potential bearer of epic and *sujet* action – its functional value resides mainly in the role of a representative of a clearly specified semantic field; and, at the same time, in *sujet* terms, it may also act as a somebody who breaks the limits, as well as a constituent of semantic alternative for the *sujet* task of the character(s) from the opposite field” (Jančovič In Bariaková – Kubealaková, 2008, p. 11). With regard to literature for children and youth, in the prose material of the selected *sujet* genres (tales, short stories, and historical prose in films), we notice the social behaviour or the sense of alienation of literary protagonists in specific life situations and circumstances.

The publication and distribution of Daniel Pastirčák’s book *Starec a Dieťa* [The Old Man and the Child] (2017) is narrowly connected with the topic of outsidership. It was published by the civic association *Proti prúdu* [Against the Stream] which also regularly edits the magazine *Nota bene*. This civic association has worked with homeless people for twenty years, with the purpose of helping their integration in society or providing positive influences on the position of public opinion towards homeless people. The book *Starec a Dieťa* [The Old Man and the Child] was sold directly by the sellers of the magazine *Nota bene* in the streets. The back covers reports that the reader “received the tales from homeless people. Now, the readers can speak with themselves through the tale. Perhaps, during this conversation they will hear the voice of a man who is at the beginning and at the end of the story” (Pastirčák, 2017, back cover). Indeed, there is a hidden life story in each single street magazine seller – often perceived by public opinion as a social outsider. Many times, the consequences of such life stories are tragic existence, suffering, resignation, and passiveness.

During the elaboration of the project APVV-17-0071 *Support for Reading Literacy in the Mother Tongue and Foreign Language*, we focused our attention on the above mentioned book by Daniel Pastirčák. Specifically, we did it in a study called *Od čítania k čítaniu s porozumením* [From Reading to Reading with Comprehension] – published in the proceedings of the international conference *Jazyk a umenie pre deti a mládež v hodnotových a didaktických pohľadoch* [Language and Art for Children and Youth in Value-Related and Didactic Perspectives] (Prešov 2019). The main goal was verification of the reader’s skills in terms of reading with comprehension. The project was carried out through qualitative research based on

7<sup>th</sup>-class children from the Primary and Maternal School of Ondrej Caban in Komjatice and from the Church Primary School of Žofia Bosniaková in Šurany (with a focus on work with spiritual-religious artistically created texts). Daniel Pastirčák is a well-known and experienced writer and artist, acting as a Church of the Brethren preacher in Bratislava. In many of his books for children and youth (with philosophical-symbolic messages, interiorly interconnected with religious truths, artistically and aesthetically modelled as prosaic texts with humanising-Christianising ambitions), it is possible to detect specific semiotic background of notions, semantic links, and notably modifications of spiritual-Christian motifs – which are applied in the literary works especially on the axis of characters or the portrayed world, within the author's structures and their functional usage. The stories are often constructed also on the basis of fantastic principles, fabulousness, and inter-text connections with world literature. Such a spectrum of spiritual and symbolic signs suggests the author's efforts of bringing the secret of Christian faith and revelation closer to today's recipients – even in post-modern society – by using child protagonists (Gallik, 2014, pp. 8 – 9).

Analogically, this happens also in the small book *Starec a Diet'a* [The Old Man and the Child], made up of three fairy tales. The first tale is called *Nič* [Nothing]. Its main character is a young boy named Lojzo Kukučka, also known as Nič. His classmates gave him that nickname because he didn't own anything. By the way, the social status of the outsider is not determined only by the nickname. The very beginning of the story describes the place in which Lojzo lives. Even this place is located at the margins of community. Indeed, Lojzo Kukučka lived in the suburbs of a little town, in an old house close to the civic amenity site. He lived with his grandparents “who did not own anything, apart from a poor pension allowance” (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 7). Even Pastirčák's novel is clear proof of the fact that, nowadays, criteria for exclusion of people from a group (or their ignorance) have a growing tendency. We can agree with Radoslav Rusňák when he states that – notably in the childish world, where “directness of attacks is sometimes much more cruel than amongst adults – there are several heterogeneous criteria for excluding friends, peers, and classmates. Besides racial-ethnic, opinion-based, and confessional differentiations, children may face other criteria relating to material status (e.g. clothes, physical appearance, hygiene), to social status (e.g. parents' employment, holiday destinations) or to image-forming (mobile phone with Bluetooth and camera, MP3 player, notebook, etc.)” (Rusňák In Bariaková – Kubealaková, 2008, p.166). Even Pastirčák's Lojzo Kukučka (also known as Nič) became more or less invisible to his friends because of his social status. “If somebody noticed him by chance, they would forget about him in just a short while. When children played hide-and-seek, nobody would find Lojzo. The game was over. Friends

would forget about him and go home” (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 7). The protagonist does perceive his outsider’s position within the group of friends or classmates, but he doesn’t lose the ability of distinct (emotional) perception of the world. He comes to terms with his peripheral position without big obstacles: “Nič was quite happy that nobody noticed him. The more people didn’t notice him, the more he could notice people. He looked at the world with his eyes open in wonder from dawn to dusk. Well, they called him Nič. Once he fell in a puddle – but he didn’t bother about it. They laughed at him, ‘cos he was so clumsy; and he laughed with them. He was glad he cheered up his friends. (...) When they played tag, he’d never catch anybody. When they had running race, he would always finish last. Lojzo didn’t like to simply run somewhere all for naught. He would start running and then slow down after a very short while. There was always something that would stop him. For example, a woodpecker drumming its beak or a colourful butterfly or the song of an unknown bird. He never got bored. He was a very happy boy, although he didn’t know about it” (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 7). Daniel Pastirčák anticipates the main idea of the story: in our life it is not important “to have” but “to be”. He refers to values like – e.g. – our ability of perceiving the beauty of things around us, spreading good words and deeds, rejoicing in life, even if human existence is situated in very simple and humble material conditions. By means of a mysterious stranger (a person we can perceive as an enticer or evil-doer), the protagonist discovers the meaning of “material sufficiency”, of “being somebody at the eyes of the exterior world”, but – at the same time – “losing himself interiorly”. The mysterious stranger wears a silk smoking jacket and a top hat. He has a walking stick with a precious ivory handle. Lojzo Kukučka receives from him three symbolic gifts: (i) a pair of golden gloves in which everybody would put whatever Lojzo longed for; (ii) a magic mask with pink cheeks creating irresistible charm; and (iii) a pair of fast-running shoes with lucid toe-caps that allowed him to outpace everyone. Other tales present three symbolic gifts that are supposed to help the protagonist reach morally right and desired goals. But in Pastirčák’s tale, such gifts may be considered as a Danish gift. They just bring momentary advantages, but eventually they cause negative and harmful consequences. The author ends the first story with the *deus ex machina* system. Only God (presented as an old man) explains to Lojzo Kukučka that the three gifts from the unknown stranger had transformed him in a remotely controlled toy. Consequently, a process of metanoia is started in the mind of Lojzo Kukučka: “He saw himself in the mirror: a ridiculous masked racer, a clown fully covered by useless odds and sods. He repeatedly viewed himself in the mirror, until his face went red from embarrassment. It was his first time he watched his interior and it was not a pretty sight. He put his glasses off and he saw light everywhere. He entered a luminous world as though he was being born again. He left his

shoes, mask, and gloves somewhere behind him; and he never wore them again” (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 14).

The second tale concerns a wheat grain. It is written in a sort of allusive style, based on Hronský’s “a man-in-a-million” (portraying Jozef Mak, a tiny man as small as a poppy seed, in the immense quantity of people crawling on the planet – but destined to be always responsible for his task). With the help of the narrator, the reader communicates with a wheat grain named Filip Zorn, who lives in Wheat City, on the first floor of the municipal granary. By means of an anthropomorphised character, Pastirčák tries to explain the little grain’s existential desire of reflecting on his personal destiny, about his personal mission, and about his efforts of being different than the other hundreds of thousands of fellow-grains who live in an indifferent way – “they don’t bother; none of them has any ambitions. Nobody is ever complaining about anything. Nobody wants to draw attention to themselves” (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 18). The wheat grain Filip Zorn perceives himself as an outsider who simply feels uncomfortable in that place. He misses something. He is weirdly sad, but he doesn’t know what causes his gloominess. He would like to escape his wheat grain’s destiny – ending up in dissected black soil somewhere in a field. He doesn’t accept the argumentation according to which every wheat grain knows about his destiny but is not supposed to ruminate over it. “They call me Filip – the Speculator – but I had my plan very well organised in advance. Those monsters with their huge merciless hands won’t catch me so easily. I was very careful and – in a moment of their inattention – I fell to the ground unnoticed. They brought all the other grains away. I remained alone, lying on the stone pavement, close to the door” (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 21). As time went on, he realised that his decision was not the right one. Yes, he escaped his planned wheat grain destiny, but now he feels lonely and useless. “Life went on, days passed, and I was lying there. Nobody noticed me. I had nothing to expect. Nobody needed me” (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 21). Here, the author presents an interesting literary portrayal of solitude – not just physical but also psychological (interior solitude or loneliness). As reported in the publication *Samota a osamelosť (vo vybraných textoch slovenskej umeleckej literatúry)* [Solitude and Loneliness (in Selected Texts of Slovak Artistic Literature)] by Zuzana Bariaková – Henrich Jakubík – Martina Kubealaková: notably “metamorphoses of psychic, spiritual, and moral solitude are a real problem in the era of post-modern thinking” (Bariaková – Jakubík – Kubealaková, 2013, p. 141). Eventually, Pastirčák’s story about the wheat grain transmits messages like ‘don’t be afraid of your marked path’, ‘don’t be afraid of your determined goal’. In his “solitude at the threshold of the granary” the narrator-protagonist decides to fulfil his empty and isolated life (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 21). “What was supposed to happen, it happened. The D-day was there

again. The two-footed creatures entered the granary and put the seeds in the bags. I didn't hesitate. I cleverly glued myself to one of those men's shoe. (...) The two-footed guy jumped out of his vehicle. The shoe plunged into ground. (...) I rolled off to the closest furrow. I slowly descended into darkness. This is what the end looks like" (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 23). As a paradox, for the wheat grain the end is a new beginning and unexpected joy. Similarly to Lojzo Kukučka entering the luminous world at the end of the first story, Filip Zorn (as a wheat spike) sees the infinite blue sky and "all around the sun was enlightening flickering and lively green bodies" (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 24).

The third (and last) tale has the same name as the book. Here, the authors depict a literary image of the creation of the world and human beings. In the context of outsidership, we believe that a substantial aspect of the story resides in Pastirčák's spiritual-religious perception of each single human being as an original tone in the great music of the world. Indeed, every one of us is an important "stitch in the cosmic gobelin" (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 39) – and our mission is to spread the good that is embedded inside us. Nevertheless, in the mind of each single person the world suddenly begins to appear "in different ways than for other people; everyone has their own personal mode" and the world has "as many forms as the number of people inhabiting it" (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 37). Consequently, "the evil is disclosed in places where the good was already present" (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 40). In his story, the author reveals the egotistical human desire of becoming God, claiming the right to decide what truth is and what it's not, classifying and establishing criteria, and distributing people in groups and categories. The author uses allegory (although in an easy way, so that also the young readers can understand) in order to portray the tragedy of human history, totalitarian empires, and ideologies, where the truths were "one against the other and people were fighting never ending wars" (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 51). The conclusion describes the entrance of the Child into human history, so that truth and good "can return in His love to their original essence. Silence dominates in places where the Child came in. Those who were in that silence had a chance to see the pervading light" (Pastirčák, 2017, p. 54).

In the educational process (and also in the phase of reading with comprehension) – in the attempt to strengthen positive feelings and to develop the emotional intelligence of pupils – it is possible to use Pastirčák's tales (through the prism of key literary characters) in order to provide a suitable example for manifesting empathy, tolerance, and tactfulness towards all people, with no differences at all. If the teacher (within didactic communication) rightly defines work with structure and function of text, then they shall manage to reveal to the pupils the main symbolic meanings of the literary creation. Consequently, the outsider's position shall be



understood by the pupils in an emblematic way. In other words, the pupils shall understand that every one of us might be in that position one day. Moreover, in the course of the emotional education, the teachers have a chance to direct the pupils and teach them how to show solidarity with people who are facing various life problems and obstacles.

The rich variation of authentic characters of child outsiders (in a background made of heterogeneous causes) may be found also in contemporary texts composed for a competition organised by the publishing house Perfekt – awarding the best original short story. Since 2005, the tale collections (in the best selected texts) address current topics about adolescence. In many stories, it is possible to find the dominating motif of outsidership, presented in an aesthetically impressive way that appeals to the reader. In school literary educational activities, these tales can be used as literary-artistic subvention, in order to prevent socio-pathological phenomena regarding children and youth.

Jozef Kollár's prose *Šálka a tanierik (môj denník na úteku)* [Mug and Plate (My Diary on the Run)], published in the collection *Trapoška* [Awkward Girl] (2008), is a diary of an anonymous Roma boy living in a foster family. Over the course of several years, the foster parents make their effort in order to provide their adoptive child with everything he needs. The symbolic title of the tale shows the fragile grouping connotations of the single members of the family in the story. The father is a mug; the mother is the handle of the mug; and the protagonist is the little plate. The foster parents take care of the young boy in an exemplary way. They grant him a harmonic environment (e.g. they buy a mountain bike for him; they go together to a pizzeria; etc.). At the beginning of the summer, an unpleasant conflict occurs in the family. Since then, the pages of the boy's diary inform us about the impressions of a nineteen-year-old boy who faces sensations of alienation and outsidership in a difficult process of identity searching. The jealousy-related incident between his parents enhances a crisis and becomes a source of enormous tension. The boy feels ostracised. He is overwhelmed by a sense of disorientation. He feels like somebody who is just standing aside. He knows that he is an adopted child and the awareness of this multiplies the effects of the above described sensations. He thinks about the possibility of returning to his (biological) family. When people are in an adverse situation for a long time and are not able to solve it in a suitable way, they may react impulsively and desperately – or sometimes they start to plan their escape. Initially, the boy is suffering only in his interior and he is silent. The stressful family situation affects his study performances. Eventually, he decides to leave his house secretly. The planned (but incautious) runaway from home is a sort of resistance to alleged unfair treatments. It is an effective way of expressing his sense of injustice and helplessness. The boy is not aware of the fact that his

escape to other parents is an inappropriate form of solving his conflictual situation. The naive view of a better life in his biological family vanishes quite rapidly. After a journey full of hardships, he manages to get to the Roma camp. Here, he is soon disappointed by the cold welcome he receives, by the rough lifestyle, rude behaviour, negligence in the care of the living space, and other dreadful conditions revealing the lack of functionality of his biological family. And he is like awakening from a long ingenuous dream. Initially, he tries to repress his distress. Somewhere, in his utmost inner side, he still feels the hope that that place is the environment he belongs to. His biological father is always repeating that “blood is not water” (Kollár, 2008, p. 104) and that it is important not to forget one’s own biological roots. The young man is actually dulled and manipulated by him. The biological father is also a drunkard and an aggressive man. One day, the young man gets alcohol-poisoning and ends up in hospital. Here, he meets his foster parents again. He realizes the differences between two milieus and he also understands the mistake he made because of impulsiveness. At this very moment, he manages to overcome his outsidership.

Slovak short story literature for teenagers was also recently enriched with the description of a peculiar type of girl outsider. Peter Karpinský published in 2011 a book entitled *Adela, neopováž sa!* [Adela, Don’t You Dare!] in a homonymous collection of short stories. In 2019, this story was also edited in another collection: *Vit’azné MORNIX DIRNIX, poviedky pre deti a nástročné* [Winning MORNIX DIRNIX – Short Stories for Children and Teenagers]. The prose of the larger concept of the book edition *Adela, ani to neskušaj!* [Adela, Don’t Even Try That!] (2016) describes a girl with boyish features. The female protagonist is placed in an Asylum Centre (the Yellow House) together with her two brothers. The building of the shelter is a sort of manor house, lined with statues of angels. It evokes sublimity and tradition, but also conservative, controversial, and unfamiliar feelings in the eyes of the heroine (the girl outsider). The author develops these features by using the background of the literary portrait of Adela and her siblings. He describes the new form of education, under the supervision of religious sisters in a community made up of several children. Adela is different than anybody else because of her unrestrained behaviour. Adela’s siblings are experiencing a tough life situation. Adela is older than them and she feels responsible for their protection. She has to come to terms with their uneasy destiny. In these complex conditions she acts heroically. The girl is actually still a child, but she must carry on her shoulders the excessively heavy burden of life. The narrator stands above all the story characters. He informs the child recipients about the adventures of the rebel girl – by means of her individual way of personal rebellion against her adverse destiny and against the existing authorities (in the personal and value-related meaning of the word).

Adela and her younger siblings were placed in the Yellow House after their mum became ill and there was nobody else who could take care of them. Since her childhood Adela was experiencing a dramatic life situation and she was forced to take charge of the household and look after her siblings. Her status and her fate moulded her early-adolescent identity and created defensive motherly mechanisms in her mind. In the children's house, she has frequent conflicts not only because of her mindset, but also because of her vocabulary (frequent vulgarisms, invectives, threats), her clothes (refusal to wear skirts, eccentric scenes when somebody tells her she must wear female clothes) and her peculiar behaviour in general. Through suggestive, lively, and humoristic narration, the author leads the reader to reflect on the seriousness of the issue of children's problems – notably those children that are at the margins of the standard society. Adela features some substantial characteristics of the outsider: provocative behaviour, rebellion, boycotting of authority or of social rules. She has a strong temperament and she is eccentric, but she is tormented by latent loneliness. Against the background of retrospective narration and events (directly in the Yellow House) the author reveals her complicated behaviour. Why did she choose roughness? Because she wanted to manage to protect herself and her brothers against cruel children. Behind the mask of a rough rebel woman and outsider, there is a hidden sensitive and noble child soul. Her soul longs for protection of the weakest ones, fairness, and bravery. Adela does not just care about her younger siblings (who are both handicapped: one affected by logopedical disorders and the other one affected by dysgraphia), but she is also passionate about football. Such a boyish predilection is paralysing her and also helping her at the same time. Football is a hassle for her when the religious sisters prevent her from playing football because of her disobedience; but it is also a blessing for her, because – thanks to it – she makes up new tricks and she fantasises about football games. In this way, she manages to relax and to compensate for her suffering caused by emotional discontent (which is a frequently observed phenomenon in children living in children's houses). For the sake of football, she is not afraid of breaking the taboo rules (e.g. climbing on the top of the rock cave chapel of the Virgin Mary and looking at the house where they used to live with their mother). For the sake of her brothers she is not afraid of fighting with the bullyboy Lukáš, in order to have her revenge after the derision with which her siblings were treated. In his mosaic of adolescence, Karpinský adds to Adela's unusual portrait also another element – her enuresis. Adela hides her health problem and threatens her room-mate who once discovered her secret. The rude form of Adela's stylised behaviour is also supported by the scenes in which she takes over the role of father. Her heroic position is strengthened by his ideal male idol: "A. Schwarzenegger carrying a rifle strapped on his back and with grenade behind his belt"

(Karpinský, 2016, p. 75). During a moment of self-reflection, she convinces herself that the character of such a tough guy is a much more suitable model than ridiculous girlish angels that look like “a winged fair-haired girl in her nightgown, like the one hanging above Silvia’s bed” (Karpinský, 2016, p. 75) – as the religious sisters try to persuade her. The author shows a peculiar narrator’s style seasoned with humour, deviation from plain moralism, a sensitive approach to a serious topic, but – at the same time – even benevolent cheerfulness underlying the suggestiveness of the whole story. In contemporary Slovak literature for teenagers, the outsider character of Adela represents an interiorly and exteriorly interesting entity and a source of inspiration – she is a girl that never gives up.

There is also another topic that is often related to the portraying of outsidership: bullying. In this sphere, a relevant literary example is a short story by Jana Bodnárová entitled *Psy* [Dogs]. This short story won the first year of the competition awarding the best original Slovak short story for children and youth – known as *Poletíme za dúhou. Poviedky pre deti a mládež* [Let’s Fly Beyond the Rainbow. Stories for Children and Youth] (2005). It was also included in the collection *Vítazné MORNIX DIRNIX, poviedky pre deti a náštročných* [Winning MORNIX DIRNIX – Stories for Children and Teenagers] (2019). The above mentioned story is part of a complete work by J. Bodnárová entitled *Trináť* [Thirteen] (2012). Bodnárová’s style is characterised by precise language expression, sensitive description of facts and an ability to empathise with the bullying victims through the eyes of a child. The story chronotope is implemented through diary reports written by a boy (as signalled by the subheading that evokes responsive reports). The protagonist writes down single episodes in which he narrates the tense situation in his family and his feelings after they moved to another house. The family is made up of his mother (single parent with two children) and his younger sister. The father is unknown to the children. From the point of view of his mother, he is an irresponsible loose trifter and “everybody feels better when he is away from home” (Bodnárová, 2019, p. 13). The boy replaces his father’s absence with fables in his mind, by imagining him as a cosmopolitan sailor. Through the boy’s comments on events, the story reveals the complicated position of the micro-world of his beloved ones and also his own personal micro-world – when his family try to adapt to a new environment. They were forced to move from the countryside to the city because of their mum’s salary. The children miss nature and animals, because they built a particular relationship with nature and animals when they lived in the countryside. Now, they feel lonely and saddened. Their mother works at a new place in a shop. Her work is physically demanding and her back pain is continuously worsening. Adela is the youngest daughter and she is not able to find her way around her new school. She is shocked by the large and complicated structure

of the school building and – on her second school day – she gets lost. Apart from mental stress and fear, she also has to face verbal aggression and derision by an arrogant battler. Her brother found a fitting nickname for this guy: “the Jackhammer”. Adelka looks different from other children. She has ginger hair and a lot of freckles on her face. At the expense of the otherness of her appearance, the vulgar dude will not forgive the pungent remarks. What is worse – Adela’s older brother is aware of her fear, but cannot do anything to defend her. Indeed, even her brother is affected by a physical anomaly. He feels ashamed of his handicap and impairment. He is helpless against the attacks of the provocateur. His physical limitation causes a sense of frustration. He is angry with himself. To a certain extent he is a victim who is suffering in an aporic manner. He is affected by a noticeable limitation in walking (he has got one leg shorter than the other, because of atrophied muscles), so he becomes the target of a cruel game organised by his classmate – the Jackhammer – who acts as the leader of the pupils’ clan. At the beginning, the aggression is only symbolic – provocative mockery, sound demonstration of physical dominance and verbal attacks targeting the impaired part of the protagonist’s body. Then, the bullying behaviour escalates to an extreme scene. The storyline approaches its climax when the dog pack game changes into wild chasing the boy, with the aim of hunting him as an animal. “The boys divided into two groups. Let’s say two dog packs. First, one pack had to chase the other pack. Then, the Jackhammer told them to chase me. ‘It will be funnier. That cripple is also a kind of dog. Actually, he is a carcass!’ – and he started to laugh. ‘Or we can chase him like a rabbit. We’ll give you a head start, cripple and just rush as fast as you can! Follow my advice! When we catch you, we will bite you. Like real dogs bite real rabbits’” (ibid., p. 14). In the entries of that given day, the reader discovers the confused and painful interior world of this boy and his gloomy position. He tries to get rid of his troubles by means of illusions. He opens up his heart only to his diary. His mum does not suspect anything. Through the personal motif of the sailor, the boy tries to find a rational explanation for his father’s absence. Indeed, he longs for a father and – at the same time – he takes over the role of father in their household (his mother reminds him that he is her support and the column of the family). The image of the sailor is also a stylisation of heroism, strength, and adventure – shrouded in mystery. Only in such a way can the boy get over his disadvantaged status, by using a means to replace his physical impairment and his sense of deficit of a male model. Through the animal motif of the horse – in the cruellest act of the story (where the boy is depicted as prey) – he imagines himself as a healthy favourite runner, because he wants to come to terms with grievance and fear caused by the group of bully boys. At the end of the fabula, the animal motif marks symbolically the nobleness and the interior bravery of the boy (and of his family).

It is purposely placed in sharp contrast with the anthromorphising attribute of his disparaging status – metaphorically described by the title of the story.

Finally, we will focus on the topic of outsidership in the historical prose by Jozef Cíger Hronský – *Sokoliar Tomáš* [Thomas and the Falcon King] in a modern film production (2000). The outsidership topic appears not only through a playing character, but also by means of the film art itself. The historical prose about Thomas and the Falcon King became the basis for a film produced with the same name. The screenplay of the film was drawn up by the Slovak screenwriter Ondrej Šulaj. The film was directed by the Czech film director Václav Vorlíček. The literary researcher Patrik Šenkár explained that – in recent times – literary science methodology is giving “more and more importance to historical approach to the topic, with the aim of promoting deeper knowledge of genetic and typological substance of the literary phenomenon” (Šenkár, 2018, p. 19). Historical prose uses thematic material from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It narrates the story of Thomas (and the Falcon King), his relationship with people, nature, and animals. After the tragic death of his father – who was a shepherd in the service of a lord named Baláž – Thomas lives together with his grandfather Metodej and with his sister Agata. One day, the boy killed lord Baláž’ favourite dog (Lapaj), a ferocious beast affected by rabies – who represented a threat for people and animals. Consequently, Thomas became an outsider and fell into disfavour with the lord of the castle. The lord’s servants started persecuting Thomas. Thomas escaped punishment of lord Novohrad and sheltered in the house of a falconer named Varčiak. In this part, the whole story “passes from a position of social conflict to a position of moral conflict” (Vítězová, 2002, p. 18). The boy is able to communicate with animals and nature and – thanks to this skill – he manages to overcome many obstacles. Later on – after the occurrence of certain facts and after old Varčiak helps reveal the real cause of evil – Thomas can start to live a peaceful life and he becomes the most famous falconer in Zvolen castle.

The film director did not just transcribe a historical prose. He actually staged a historical adventure story. The narrative characteristics of the story are preserved in Thomas’ ability to understand the language of the animals. This aspect results as a natural consequence of the coexistence between Thomas and nature. It is a testimony to the time sphere and in the flow of time.

Today’s compulsory school children tend to rather be film viewers than book readers. Consequently, when they read or directly experience something unexpected, unforeseen or deemed as impossible, they perceive these facts as part of a film. In their minds, a real event may have a strong aspect of illusion, fiction or dream. Everything is occurring too rapidly

around them and as if without their intervention. They are only partially participating in the events, because – in most of the cases – they are not able to influence actions. They often identify themselves with their peer Thomas, who is also struck by the whirl of events (and the result of his actions is his new outsider position – i.e. exclusion from his family and community).

The film dimension of the witnessing expression can be perceived by means of signs and proceedings that are typical of film works (as an artistic genre). By means of the literary and technical screenplay, the percipient can follow a distinct film testimony which differs from the testimony of the historical prose. In his attempt to capture the basic features of the characters, the screenwriter (Ondrej Šulaj) is not obliged to be totally loyal to the literary model. For example, his characters can have different names (the lord of the castle's name is Balador in the film and Baláž in the original story; the falconer Varčiak – Vagan in the film or for the envious servant Il'ok/Iver, etc.). In the mind of the percipient, the film dimension of the expression can evoke artistic proceedings that could be taken over from other fields of art. The film becomes a prerequisite for comparing historical prose and film making (with a certain tendency to consider films as “speech without language”). The film is built as a work based on image, word, music, and sound. The witnessing power of video and the possibility of recording events in motion/development/process are decisive properties of the film dimension (i.e. what makes films different than other forms of testimony). The film is capable of “narrating” a story by using images. It mediates a testimony focused on meaning. The film essence is manifested not only through images in motion, but also through different lengths of scenes, different dynamics of alternation between scenes, and numerous montage options – so that the percipients can use their personal aesthetic and semantic potential. Films recall properties and proceedings that may be felt as though they were taken from the field of artistic text or artistic language shaping. By means of film dimension, it is also possible to refer to the work with the text, through the influence of film receptive habits (e.g. in literary narration). An ideal example is the film making of a historical prose by Jozef Cíger Hronský *Sokoliar Tomáš* [Thomas and the Falcon King]. This story has become one of the most favourite thanks to a film making project resulting from cooperation between several film studios from various countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, France, Germany). That's why the cast is made up of international actors. The film offers views of several beautiful regions and places in Slovakia, e.g. Krásna Hôrka, Orava, Súľov, Turiec, High Tatras.

The forms of outsidership could be re-evaluated even by means of extra literary bases (topical fact), inserted in the thematic level of compositions (literarily transformed range of life

phenomena) which the author selects from topical facts. Nowadays, this issue is becoming less and less relevant, because of the variability of alternative sources, which results from a shift in terms of perception. For example, single individuals can select lifestyles in their own personal way (i.e. they can internalise cultural and social contents); and they can also choose the modes of managing such contents. The result of the analysis of the film elaboration of the historical prose *Thomas and the Falcon King* resides in the following observation: the interpretation work with the text (film and technical screenplay) opens the way to children percipients, but – on the other hand – it does not allow them to receive important structural messages included in the text (which in this concrete case are represented by outsidership). In this case it is not possible to focus on various types of outsidership resulting from racial, ethnic, opinion-based, and religious differences; but we can notice the recipient's ability to deal with either the material status criterion (e.g. the clothes worn by the lord of the castle and by grandpa Metodej) or with the social status criterion (e.g. the position of the lord of the castle vs. the life led by Thomas the Falconer). Moreover, it is possible to differentiate the image status and the physiognomic status (e.g. physical dispositions of single individuals and their ability to carry out concrete actions). By means of the above mentioned statuses, the recipients can build friendship and create a fictitious relationship with the outsider (on the basis of their sympathies and their favours for the outsider character).

The analysed literature belongs to those artistic works presenting excellent inspiring stimuli for discussion and reflection about child characters (or adolescent characters) with an outsider status within the artistic stylisation, by developing a positive or empathic relationship with the outsider or – on the contrary – by taking critical and doubtful views with regard to the outsider. The analysed literature is an example of understanding, respect, and development of inclusive relationships towards a person who has a certain form of diversity. The selected authors modify the motif of outsidership in inter-human relationships in several ways. They are functionally portraying a heterogeneous range of attitudes. Thus, their texts can potentially contribute to positively shaping recipient's attitudes in favour of social awareness, altruism, or other forms of good social behaviour; and – in such a way – one of the main functions of child literature is well fulfilled.

#### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Values and value orientation are currently among the topics discussed at the societal level. (...) Values are expected to offer a solid foundation to provide a reliable orientation to people and society, especially in a situation where everything is changing. However, values are not immune to this movement either (Knapík, 2020, p. 128).



<sup>2</sup> His conception is carefully analysed through a concrete artistic text for children and youth by Eva Vítězová in her monograph *Contemporary Slovak Literature for Children in Theory and Education* (2020), in the section *Reading comprehension in generic projections*.

<sup>3</sup> Anthologies of short stories were exploited as a model for excerpting texts within the frame of the “reading with comprehension” programme for lower secondary education in Slovak language, under the project APVV-17-0071 *Support for Reading Literacy in the Mother Tongue and Foreign Language*.

<sup>4</sup> Film making cooperation between Central European countries was relevantly boosted between the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third millennium – i.e. exactly when the film *Sokoliar Tomáš* [Thomas and the Falcon King] was produced. These co-production works are not simply the result of common economic interests of their Central European creators. Actually, they also represent a sort of cultural counterbalance to the Anglo-Saxon film production that is currently dominating our media market. They are a contribution to the discourse about common characteristics of the identity of the Central European region (Timko, 2019, p. 3). In this regard, Miloš Zelenka and Lenka Tkáč-Zabáková state that Central Europe and its geographical-cultural areas do not represent a typologically different social-cultural system with a large number of exogenous processes, but – on the other hand – even in this region we can observe the formation of specific cultural constructions, identity images and diversities, which are acting in reciprocal communication and are expressing a desire of symbolic unity (Zelenka – Tkáč-Zabáková, 2018, p. 5).

#### **Acknowledgment:**

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract no. APVV-17-0071.

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*Ján Gallik*  
*Faculty of Central European Studies*  
*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra*  
*Dražovská cesta 4*  
*949 74 Nitra*  
*Slovakia*  
*jgallik@ukf.sk*

*Renáta Hlavatá.*  
*Faculty of Arts*  
*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra*  
*Štefánikova 67*  
*949 74 Nitra*  
*Slovakia*  
*rhlavata@ukf.sk*

*Mariana Hrašková*  
*Faculty of Arts*  
*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra*  
*Štefánikova 67*  
*949 74 Nitra*  
*Slovakia*  
*mhraskova@ukf.sk*