

WAR SPACE IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN CHILDREN'S NOVELS

Lucijana Armanda ŠUNDOV
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Split, Croatia
larmanda@ffst.hr

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Sanja RADAČIĆ
Primary School of King Zvonimir, Solin
sanjavukorepa1@gmail.com

Abstract

In this article, the authors are studying three children's novels about the Homeland War: *A Little Wartime Diary* by Stjepan Tomaš, *Mum, I Am Scared* by Nikola Pulić, and *Mary's Secret* by Nada Iveljić. All three novels have little girls as main characters. In their analysis, the authors focus on the way in which these three writers portray the space of childhood and its disrupted image that is manifested in the way they developed the little girls' characters and their thoughts. Taking Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope as a starting point, the connection between the time of the Homeland War and the spaces that the war has reshaped is emphasized. Space is defined using the theories of cultural and literary geography which are interested in the atmosphere of places that these three authors create. The authors refer to Grgas' term of spatial imaginary, its subversive potential which includes ideological-political views and the relationship with the Other, the topophobic effects of places related to fear, and the five ways in which space is realized in a narrative text. Soja's postmodern concept of socio-spatial dialectics, which includes Firstspace and Secondspace that eventually take part in the production of Thirdspace (socially produced space), has proven to be the key one.

KEYWORDS: *children's Homeland War novels, spaces of childhood, Stjepan Tomaš, Nikola Pulić, Nada Iveljić*

Introduction

With the beginning of the Homeland War in 1991, many Croatian children's writers decided to present the experience of the war from a children's perspective as a response to new social and political circumstances. This seemingly naive perspective allowed them to translate their ideological views into literary works, which do not

only document a certain time, but also pose questions about the place that literature and the recording of experience have in contemporary children's literature. Croatian children's literature describes the war as a series of terrible and cruel events which befell many children on the threshold of growing up. War books mostly talk about the changes that war brings and the consequences it leaves behind. Children were faced with fear, and thoughts about normal children's topics were replaced by the concern for their lives and the lives of their families. Playgrounds and school desks were replaced by cold and dark shelters, and it was gunshots and shelling, and not the chattering of children, that was heard on the streets. In the terrible attacks, many children lost their loved ones, their homes, and even their own lives. The horrors of war present long-lasting, often lifelong traumas for adults, and especially so for children. In most children's works about war, writers try to show children's view of war that is achieved in numerous ways, and most often, children comment on what they hear from adults or through the media. In this type of children's view of war, the author's comments are also implied, and they make up the ideological layer of the novel. In children's war novels, best expressed is the chronotope concept by the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1989: 193), which refers to the "interconnection of temporal and spatial relations", or to the compression of time and space. Bakhtin's studies were focused precisely on the realization of time in space within the framework of different types of novels. Katarina Ivon (2016: 311) refers to the thoughts of Andrijana Kos-Lajtman, who, respecting Bakhtin, introduces the phrase "chronotope of childhood" for any version of autobiographism in children's literature. Kos-Lajtman (2011: 50-51) points out that "the term chronotope seems appropriate precisely for the representation of childhood in the light that we indicate here – within the framework of specific spatial-temporal combinatorics..." Children's war novels, although mostly written from the narrative perspective of a child, reflect to a large extent the experience of war which marked the authors and their experiences of time in space.

The subject of research in this paper are the following children's war novels: *Mali ratni dnevnik (A Little Wartime Diary)* by Stjepan Tomaš, *Strah me, mama (Mum, I Am Scared)* by Nikola Pulić, and *Marijina tajna (Mary's Secret)* by Nada Iveljić. For the purposes of this paper, we have taken precisely those novels in which war is presented as maturation, and not as an adventure; and that is because the latter are more often made according to established frameworks, have black-and-white characterization of the characters, place emphasis on adventure, and display a similar structure, which makes them less interesting for critical reflection.¹ In the first part of the paper,

¹ Ivo Zalar (1978: 46) states that in children's novels about the Second World War children are not depicted only as victims, but as active participants (illegals in occupied places, assistants in backgro-

the authors consider books on Croatian children's war prose written by Dubravka Težak, Stjepan Hranjec, Branko Pilaš, Dubravka Zima, Sanja Vrcić-Mataija. After that, the analysis is, methodologically speaking, based on theoretical works on cultural and literary geography, which "capitalizes on the power of imaginative literary descriptions to reconstruct the characteristics of real environments, landscapes, places or regions, trying in those reconstructions to show the kinship of geography and literature." (Šakaja, 2015: 255). Literary geography led to what is called the "spatial turn" in literature because, after a long period of preoccupation with time in the humanities and cultural sciences, the focus shifted to the consideration of space as an analytical category. It was contributed to by phenomena such as globalization, postmodern capitalism, and postcolonial insights into different cultures (Brković, 2013: 116). In the application of different theses of literary geography to the analysis of novels, it is emphasized that novels provide a cross-section of spatial and social reality. Literary geography emphasizes the connection of human subjectivity and emotions with space and environment and is interested in the atmosphere created by the writer, while literary works are analyzed with regard to information that includes feelings, points of view, values, meanings, and attitudes related to the landscape and place (Noble and Dhussa according to Šakaja, 2015: 256). In this way, the political and ideological dimension of literature comes to the center of the presentation, i.e., "the way in which literature constructs space, race, women." (Šakaja, 2015: 260)² Šakaja (2015: 274) also points out that our ideas about the world are constructed by imaginative geographies, which in turn are generated and reproduced through circulation of stereotypes, so that the ideas of space and place, but also of peoples and cultures from which the imaginative geography is made, "inevitably express the wishes, fantasies and preju-

und services, couriers, intelligence agents, active fighters); but in all that, readers can only see "romantically depicted warriors, and too rarely – children." Dubravka Težak (1997: 42) claims that in children's literature after the Second World War two approaches can be distinguished; in the first, writers focus on action novels in which children are fighters whose actions exceed children's capabilities, thus creating romantic one-dimensional characters and template books whose end is predictable, while in the second, children are only passive observers, and such books are somewhat more successful.

² The link between literary geography and political ideology is also confirmed by Stipe Grgas (2014: 49, 52), who believes that the appreciation of space in the interpretation and understanding of literature, culture, and society has a subversive, questioning tone, and "spatial imagery" is formed not only by positive determination, but also by strategies of exclusion and positioning towards the Other. Grgas (2014: 54) also claims that in the study of space in literature, much less attention is paid to "topophobic themes of literature", which bear a negative sign marked by claustrophobia, fear, and paralyzing effects of place. That can be applied to children's war novels in which children feel claustrophobia within familiar and unfamiliar spaces, and the fear refers to ideas about the enemy. The ideological-political function of the book related to the identity of space is also the topic of Ivana Brković (2014: 30), who applies contemporary reflections on space in literature to the analysis of the epic *Dubrovnik ponovljen* (*Dubrovnik repeated*) by Jaketa Palmotić Dionorić.

dices of their authors and the power proportions among them and the objects of their observation.” Stereotypes can be defined as established images of the Other, and in the case of the children’s war novels studied in this paper, the Others are Serbs as enemies and refugees. Social stereotypes are present in the categorization of children’s war novels into those in which the war is an adventure and those in which the war is portrayed as maturation because the protagonists are often boys in the former and girls in the latter. It is not about girls who fight in the war, it is about girls who comment on the newly created situation and their own view of the war, through which ideological positions of individual authors are also manifested. In this paper, the novels in which the main characters are girls were purposefully selected, because it is in these novels that the emphasis is placed on the interrupted process of growing up and the sudden maturation brought on by the war. The originality of the paper lies precisely in the fact that there has been no serious consideration of the relationship of the characters from these novels towards the enemy in the academic literature so far; instead, this was considered in newspaper articles dealing with the reasons for omitting certain titles from required reading lists. At the moment when children’s war novels reach the media, they actually become a part of social reality, as an example of the influence of literature on reality, i.e., the realization of imaginative geography.

The key theoretical concept of literary geography was introduced by Grgas (2010), who called it “spatial imaginary”, and suggested that it be approached as:

“a derivative term, more specifically, that it be understood as a regularly unarticulated, although always implicit dimension of the social imaginary... we could define spatial imaginary as that part of the world which an individual or a collective separate from the expanse and on which they stage and live a particular existence. Spatial imaginary is therefore the cognitive-affective framework of the individual and collective, constructed using lived experiences, perception and knowledge.” (Grgas, 2014: 51-52)

In the definition of that term, Grgas emphasizes the importance of a place as a part of the space that is experientially separated from the expanse.³ For the analysis of children’s war novels, Grgas’ thought that man reshapes and affectively-cognitively encodes space is also of great importance because it is what is manifested in children’s war novels, in which familiar places and real spaces acquire completely new contours determined by the reality of war. We can say that in such novels an atmosphere of

³ Ivon (2016) applies that term in the analysis of books in the field of children’s literature, so she writes about the spaces of childhood in the trilogy *Zlatni danci* (*Golden Days*) by Jagoda Truhelka.

fear is created, which includes the feelings of girls whose growing-up is interrupted by the war, and is closely related to the landscape in which the action takes place. Grgas arrived at the spatial imaginary concept using Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad of physical, mental, and social space.⁴ According to Grgas (2014: 52), at first glance, spatial imaginary belongs to the third part of Lefebvre's categorization (*representational space*), which is interpreted as a subordinate space which lives through images and symbols, and also includes the artist's counterspace, but if spatial imaginary is used in the analysis of identity self-constitution, then it also belongs to Lefebvre's second category (*representations of space*) of the dominant space and the space of scientists. All combined, it affects the first part of the aforementioned categorization (*spatial practices*), which is determined as time-space routines and locations by which social life is reproduced. Lefebvre's theory also influenced Edward W. Soja, who has written key texts about the spatial turn, developing the concept of sociospatial dialectics, while emphasizing that "socially produced space or *Thirdspace* is different from the physical space of material nature (*Firstspace*) and the mental space of cognition (*Secondspace*), which are part of the social construction of spatiality, but they cannot be conceptualized as its equivalents" (Soja according to Brković, 2014: 29).

In this work, we also refer to Marie-Laure Ryan, who offered five ways in which space is realized in a narrative text: 1. *spatial frames* refer to the various locations shown by the narrative discourse (room, house), 2. *setting* denotes the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action, enacted by the whole of the text, takes place, 3. *story space* is the space relevant to the plot, and it consists of spatial frames plus all the locations mentioned in the text, even though the action does not take place in them, 4. *narrative (or story) world* is the story space completed by the reader's imagination, which he possesses thanks to cultural knowledge and real world experience, 5. *narrative universe* means the world as it is presented in the text, and to that should be added all the counterfactual worlds that the characters create such as beliefs, desires, fears, imaginings, thoughts, dreams, and fantasies.⁵ In the analysis of the selected children's war novels, we will use the aforementioned ways

⁴ Brković (2013: 116) notes that the beginnings of thinking about space as a social product can be found already in the 19th century, in the books of German geographers such as Carlo Ritter (1779 – 1859), Fridrich Ratzel (1844 – 1904), and others. Even before Lefebvre, Michel Foucault (1996: 10) elaborated the concept of heterotopias, which he defines as "real places – places that really exist and are shaped in the very foundation of society – which are like counter-positions, a kind of effectively realised utopia in which the real positions, all the other real positions located within the culture in question simultaneously represent, dispute and twist." Foucault makes a distinction between illusory spaces, i.e., utopias and real spaces, and heterotopia is both a material and an illusory place.

⁵ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023. All quotes and paraphrases from Ryan in this paper are cited according to this webpage.

of achieving space in the narrative text, as well as Lefebvre's special triad and Soja's spatial trialectics. We will especially look at the positioning towards the Other, i.e., the relationship towards the enemy, because it is a part of the subversive charge of children's war novels, but we shall also look at the paralyzing effects of places, which include traumatic experiences caused by the war interrupting the growing-up and the maturation of children.

Children's literature about war

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Homeland War took place in Croatia and it left a mark on literature too, as many writers decided to record their impressions in the form of autobiographical prose, prose about the war, and there were also those for whom, for example, fantastic literature served as an escape from the reality of war.⁶ Jagna Pogačnik (2009) believes that from today's perspective, the prose from the beginning of the nineties is mostly literary irrelevant and at the level of a document of the time, with some exceptions.⁷ According to the same theorist, Croatian war prose reached its peak with the novel *Kratki izlet* (*A Short Trip*, 1997) by Ratko Cvetnić, while the novel *Ovce od gipsa* (*Plaster Sheep*, 1997) by Jurica Pavičić represents the second dividing line. In the second half of the 1990s, there were writers who were critical of the reality of which the Homeland War was a large part. Krešimir Nemeč (2003: 413–416) notes that a small number of novels with the theme of the Homeland War was written in the form of suspense action novels⁸, and only a few novels were shaped with the help of postmodern narrative techniques such as intertextuality.⁹ Nemeč criticizes Tomaš's novel *Srpski bog Mars* (*Serbian God Mars*, 1995) with the theme of the Homeland War, as he believes that there is a direct ideological and emotional engagement which is an obstacle to greater artistic achievement. Therefore, it is no wonder that all of this was reflected in children's literature too, which had the need to describe the horrors of war from children's perspective, in which writers recorded their own

⁶ As an example, we can cite Goran Tribuson and his novel *Sanatorij* (*Sanatorium*, 1993), in which the war still appears in the background of the novel.

⁷ He cites the following works: Alemka Mirković's *Glasom protiv topova* (*With a Voice against the Cannons*, 1997), the prose of Siniša Glavašević, *Krhotine* (*Debris*, 1991) by Željka Čorak, *Šapudl* (1995) by Pavao Pavličić, some of which were published in the second half of the 1990s, although they belong to the prose concepts typical of the early 1990s.

⁸ *TG5* (1997) by Igor Petrić stands out.

⁹ *Partitura za čarobnu frulu* (*Partiture for Magic Flute*, 1997) by Ludwig Bauer and *Smrt Vronskog* (*Vronsky's Death*, 1994) by Nedjeljko Fabio.

views and experiences. Probably one of the most frequent categorizations of children's war novels, but also the most inadequate one, is the categorization into novels about the Second World War and novels about the Homeland War.¹⁰ In that categorization, the theme is taken into account, while less attention is paid to the motivation, narrative organization, narrative perspective, and the type of characters that appear in such books. There is another categorization: action novels in which children are active fighters, and those in which children are mere passive observers of the war, who are forced to mature and grow up earlier because of everything that is happening to them in the war. As already mentioned, Težak (1998: 42) calls the former "template-written works with predictable endings", and Zima (2001: 85) calls them simpler in terms of motivation and narrative.¹¹ Nevertheless, Vrcić-Mataija (2006: 40-41) emphasizes that these war adventures are not wanted, children are forced into them, and that puts their lives in danger: "Captured by the existential sensation of fear of death, children in novels with the theme of the Homeland War yearn for a family reunion, they suffer because of their fathers' absence, search for other family members, join other people's families and wait for their return, even if it is to destroyed houses."¹²

Talking about children's prose works about the Homeland War, Težak (1997: 42) defines three areas of presentation of the topic: documentary works that are testimonies of tragedy from a child's perspective, works of an adventurous nature with emphasized action, and war themes in a fairy-tale veil. The first group includes precisely the novels that are covered in this paper, and to this, we can conditionally add Miro Gavran's novel *Kako smo lomili noge (How We Broke Our Legs)*.¹³ In defining children's war prose, Zima (2001: 84-85) starts from common assumptions, the first of which is about war as a social phenomenon, so the authors refer to the Second World War and the Homeland War; the second assumption is the narrative perspective, so

¹⁰ The categorization is present in the theories of children's literature by Milan Crnković, Zalar, Muris Idrizović, Težak, Hranjec, Zima, whose papers are listed in the bibliography. Zima (2001: 83) states that the categorization is only conditional and auxiliary in determining the corpus of Croatian children's literature about the war, and refers only to the thematic circle and not to the structure. Zima further analyzes the aforementioned categorization, which will be discussed under this subtitle.

¹¹ Among such novels, Zima (2001: 105) includes Maja Gluščević's *Bijeg u košari (Escape in the Basket)* and *Ivin Vučko (Iva's Vučko)*, Nikola Pulić's *Čuvari amfora (The Amphora Keepers)*, and *Kanjon opasnih igara (The Canyon of Dangerous Games)* by Hrvoje Hitrec and Vladimir Tadej, while Težak (1997: 43) also adds Pulić's novel *Maksimirci (People from Maksimir)*.

¹² Vrcić-Mataija (2006) analyzes family discourse in children's realistic prose works about the Homeland War, categorizes them into adventure and socio-psychological prose, and then singles out individual books within those categories and explains their peculiarities.

¹³ That novel was not written for children, even though a child is the narrator, and an additional problem lies in the fact that the author's intention is socially critical, which goes beyond the boundaries of children's literature (Zima, 2001: 100).

in one perspective, the war is narrated as seen and experienced by a child, and in the other, the war is presented as adults narrate it to a child; the third assumption is the categorization of war as maturation and war as adventure. With the help of those assumptions, Zima categorized children's prose into works about the Second World War and those about the Homeland War, and within those categories, there is again a categorization of war as maturation and war as adventure. A special category among children's prose works about the Homeland War is fantasy literature.¹⁴

Based on selected examples from children's novels about the Homeland War, Hranjec (1998b: 24) comes to a conclusion about common characteristics, the first of which is about an emotional approach to the topic; the second is about striving for non-fictional genres such as diaries, letters or reportage; the third is that with every writer a recognizable thematic corpus prevails, which in this case is only transferred to a war setting¹⁵; the fourth is that the style is devoid of ornamentation and fairy-tale likeness; the fifth is that optimism and faith in victory and freedom prevail in such works. In his paper, Pilaš (1998: 38) also includes all the novels of Croatian children's literature which talk about the war, but also singles out short prose forms on the same topic and tries to make critical observations about the quality of such works. It is interesting to note that most of these critics single out short stories in which the Homeland War is only a motif. Thus, Pilaš and Zima mention *Petrovača* (*Petrovača Fig*) from Milan Taritaš's collection *Gdje izvire potok* (*Where the Stream Springs*), in which the main character is a bee which encounters war on a tree. While Pilaš and Zima single out Iveljić's collection of stories *Dimnjačar i bijela golubica* (*The Chimney Sweep and the White Dove*) with the story *Čudesna zrnca* (*The Miraculous Grains*), and Stjepko Težak's collection *Zlatookin osmijeh* (*Golden-eyed's Smile*) and the stories *Na Kupi čun* (*The Boat on the Kupa*) and *Mjesec u rijeci* (*The Moon in the River*), Zima also mentions Iveljić's picture book *Božićna bajka* (*A Christmas Fairy-tale*). Hranjec (1998b: 19) calls the first book of the *Ratna vjeverica* edition of the Zagreb publisher Mladost – *Ubili su mi kuću* (*They Killed My House*) by Mladen Kušec from 1991, a war picture book, while Zima (2001: 99) calls the same book a documentary project composed of children's short notes, art pieces, the author's short remarks and com-

¹⁴ Težak (1997: 43) writes about war themes in a fairy-tale veil [Iveljić: *Božićna bajka* (*A Christmas Fairy-tale*), *Čuvarice novih krovova* (*The Female Guardians of New Roofs*)], but this is also mentioned by Zima, who writes about an additional category of fantastic literature about the Homeland War, which includes books such as Hrvoje Hitrec's *Smogovci u ratu* (*Smogovci in War*), Dunja Kalilić's *Crobinhoodovi* (*Crobinhoods*), Predrag Raos's *Od rata do zvijezda* (*From War to Stars*), and *Koko u Kninu* (*Koko in Knin*) by Ivan Kušan. Both theoreticians single out the prose of Zlatko Krilić's *Krik* (*Scream*), which has a fantastic level, but again, conditionally belongs to children's war prose.

¹⁵ Težak (1997: 49) claims something similar; according to her, the majority of authors did not shift from their usual writing, so the war is only a framework for the topics they normally write about.

ments, and official documents about the killed and wounded children up to November 1991. Pilaš also singles out the collection of short stories *Zvezdana košulja (The Star Shirt)* by Maja Gjerek Lovreković and Anica Gjerek, created during the war.

The theme of war can be found in a few more prose works of Croatian children's literature from the 1990s, in which it is only a marginal motif (Zima, 2001: 100), but various theorists do not mention the collection of the Split writer Matko Marušić, *Plaču li anđeli (Do Angels Cry)*, from 1997, in which the writer tries to describe the horrors of the Homeland War from his own perspective, that of his family, friends, and children.¹⁶ One of the reasons lies in the fact that, as stated in the foreword by Stjepan Lice (1998), it is neither a book for children nor for adults. However, there are children in it, and impressive descriptions of the mark the war has left on them. First of all, this refers to the author's children Stjepan and Berislav, who, for example, wanted to make an anti-tank bomb, but also to other children and young adults, who had to mature to the sound of shelling and by hiding in basements during the war. In the short story *Vukovar*, it is described how the writer's son Stjepan played with Lego bricks, sang the song *Gospodine generale (Mr General)*¹⁷ with his father, and kept a symbolic Vukovar Lego in his room for two months after the city fell. In the short story *Razgovori o Crnoj legiji (Conversations about the Black Legion)*, Marušić, 1998: 84), Stjepan asks awkward questions about the Black Legion Ustasha unit, and the narrator, who is also his father, points out that the fight for freedom included mistakes too. The saddest and most impressive is certainly the short story *Plaču li anđeli (Do Angels Cry)*, which describes the conversation between the dead boy Goran and his angel. A poignant scene is described, in which an angel takes pity on his father, who kisses the boy's dead and cold body after digging it up in a shelter. It is concluded that (Marušić, 1998: 92): "Angels cry the most, Goran, because angels protect children, and the saddest thing is when children suffer." In the second edition, in addition to Marušić's stories, there are also illustrations by Vasko Lipovac, not all of which are children, especially not the one on the cover, which shows the sad face of Goran's father hugging the boy's dead, stiff body. In that story, the spatial frame¹⁸ is the shelter, and the evocation of the place where the dead child's body was found is an example of what Grgas calls the paralyzing effect of a place. The aforementioned metaphor about the weeping angel is extremely difficult for children to comprehend, even though it

¹⁶ Here, more space is devoted to Marušić's book precisely because other theorists do not discuss his book.

¹⁷ The famous Croatian anti-war song that was first performed by a singer called Vladimir Kočiš Zec in 1991.

¹⁸ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

is about them. In the objectivity of the approach towards the enemy, the short story *Povratak (The Return)* stands out; it is not children's prose at all, and it tells the story of a man who crosses into enemy territory in order to see his house, which a Serb lets him into. It is pointed out that he could have killed him whenever he wanted, and yet he did not. From all of the above, it is quite clear that the book was not written for children, but some stories possess sensibility that could suit a child.¹⁹

Before analyzing the three selected novels, it should be pointed out once again that what they all have in common is that the Homeland War is presented as a maturation process, not as an adventure. That maturation process is shown from the perspective of female characters, who in Croatian children's literature generally more often have a traditional role. In addition to the maturation process, which is part of the space of childhood, the novels analyze connections between space and events, attitudes towards the enemy that are linked to ideological attitudes, narrative techniques used by the authors, intertextuality, and the very current refugee issue. All those components make some of these novels more of a quality read for children, and some of them less so. We focus on the pedagogical aspects because the mentioned novels are still primarily intended for children of school age, although we are aware of the dual purpose of children's literature.

The space of childhood, maturation process, and attitude towards the enemy in Tomaš's novel *Mali ratni dnevnik (A Little Wartime Diary)*

Although Tomaš was criticized for *Mali ratni dnevnik (A Little Wartime Diary)*, some of his books were still well received, especially the book of short stories *Smrtna ura (The Mortal Hour)* from 1983, because in it, Baranja is introduced as a new area, in the years from 1941 to 1945 (the time of the Hungarian and German occupation) (Matanović, 2000: 724). He writes about the Homeland War for adults in the novel *Srpski bog Mars (Serbian God Mars, 1995)*, with the theme of destruction in Eastern Slavonia, just like in the short story *Odnekud dolaze sanjari (Dreamers Come from Somewhere, 2001)*, whereas in children's literature, he writes about the same thing in *Mali ratni dnevnik (A Little Wartime Diary, 1992)*. His first novel for children was *Moljac i noćni čuvar (The Moth and the Night Watchman)*, published in 1982, and other works for children include *Dobar dan, tata (Good Afternoon, Dad, 1987)* and

¹⁹ The collection may not be uniform, and there are pages which open up serious ideological and political questions, but there are also pages that were completely spot on as to how children felt during the war, which deserve to be read.

Halo, ovdje komandosi (*Hello, Commandoes Speaking*, 1991), all novels with a family theme. Julijana Matanović (2000: 724) points out that Tomaš is accepted by both the readers and the critics as one of the most important novelists of his generation, but this assessment was written before Tomaš was attacked for *Mali ratni dnevnik* (*A Little Wartime Diary*). Zima, who at first gave the novel a positive review²⁰, according to the opinion of the journalist with whom she spoke, distanced herself from the novel, and said that it should not be required reading for “literary and aesthetic reasons.”²¹

Mali ratni dnevnik (*A Little Wartime Diary*, 1992) consists of three parts; in the first part, *Moj tata spava s anđelima* (*My Dad Sleeps with the Angels*), the narrator is a twelve-year-old girl, Cvijeta, who writes down her experiences of the Homeland War in her native Osijek in the period from 6 September to 2 December, 1991, in the form of a diary; in the second part, *Sto pinkafeldskih dana* (*A Hundred Pinkafeld Days*), Cvijeta describes her stay in exile in Austria, and in the third part, *Mir, ali rat* (*Peace, but War*) she writes about her return to her native Osijek, where the war is still going on. Although in the second part the story takes place in an Austrian small town, Osijek is also included in the setting²² because it is always present in Cvijeta's thoughts due to nostalgia. From Cvijeta's point of view²³, the war is described as a

²⁰ She evaluated it positively in the article *Hrvatska dječja književnost o ratu* (*Croatian Children's Literature on War*) from 2001 (103), highlighting the author's persuasiveness, which is achieved by “records about the girl's biological growth, first menstruation, awakening of interest in sexuality, and longing for love”, although she emphasized that in certain places, Tomaš “still puts political remarks into the mouth (or hand) of a child...”. She did the same in the foreword to the book, published by Mozaik knjiga in 2002. In the book *Kraći ljudi. Povijest dječjeg lika u hrvatskom dječjem romanu* (*Shorter People: The History of Children's Characters in Croatian Children's Novels*, 2011: 149-150), Zima states that the child characters from Cvijeta's environment reject the position of victim by agreeing to the ideologization of their own situation. That is true because the implicit author often speaks through the mouths of those characters and expresses his views in that way.

²¹ In a conversation with Mirela Lilek (2017: 10), Zima expressed the following position for *Jutarnji list*: “I don't think this book should be required reading, primarily for literary and aesthetic reasons. I'm not inclined to bans, rather to talking with children about all topics, even controversial ones, such as the Ustasha, or a child's sexual maturation, which is present in the novel as a badly, even pedagogically completely wrongly handled motive...”.

²² Spatial frames, setting, story space, narrative world, and narrative universe are all terms used by Ryan: <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

²³ In the view of some critics (Težak, Hranjec), Cvijeta Matković is the Croatian Anne Frank, because Tomaš is extremely skillful and convincing in constructing Cvijeta's character, so in most parts of the novel, it seems that it is really written by a girl affected by the horrors of war, and not a fictional character behind whom there is an implicit author. Zima (2001: 103) calls it a “simulation of a teenage diary”, with the help of which an indirect narrative instance is avoided. Credibility is achieved by a combination of different narrative techniques, such as the diary technique, pasting letters that arrive to the girl, inserting quotes from other works and media, quoting radio shows and songs, letters, and photos from the daily newspapers of the time, Cvijeta's tireless recording of conversations with her parents and neighbors.

horror that has forever changed the space of her childhood and forced her to mature earlier. At the beginning, Cvijeta describes her sadness about not going to school, and complains about the humidity and coldness of the basement, which too often replaces her home. She is also unhappy because of frequent power outages, which prevent her not only from heating her house, but also from watching television and listening to the radio – a connection with the outside world. Spatial frames in the first part are most often a damp basement and a flat, and from those frames, Cvijeta observes the street, which, because of the attack, cannot be a spatial frame for her, but it does represent a setting. The story space is represented by all of Cvijeta's thoughts, fears, actions, which will be discussed in the rest of the article. In the second part of the novel, the emphasis is placed on Cvijeta's feelings of separation from the people she knows and her hometown in exile, where she is rapidly growing up, and in the third part, the emphasis is on fear, even more so than in the first part, because Cvijeta is afraid that she will never stop being afraid (Tomaš, 2008: 153). Fear is part of Cvijeta's narrative universe, which, according to Ryan²⁴, in addition to the world presented as actual by the text itself, includes all the counterfactual worlds that the characters create, such as their fears.

Each part of the novel begins by quoting other books; at the beginning of the first part, there is Herbert's quote about undefeated dreams (Tomaš, 2008: 16), which refers to Cvijeta's shop of dreams as an escape from the harsh reality²⁵, the second part begins with Mađer's quote about the feeling of sadness for the homeland because of which the new region cannot be fully experienced (Tomaš, 2008: 75), which implies that Cvijeta was present in Pinkafeld only in her body, while the third part begins with Zvrko's quote about how today's childhoods are marked by bags full of sand (Tomaš, 2008: 125), referring to protection against bombing, which is a sign of war-time as an extra-aesthetic quotation within an interliterary quotation. Cvijeta's narrative universe²⁶ often consists of constructed worlds such as the shop of dreams, which represent a kind of defense mechanism. Ideological views are evident in the citation

²⁴ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

²⁵ This is an example in which the author shows himself to be an excellent connoisseur of children's psyche, which seeks escape from unpleasant experiences, and this suggestion of escaping to a shop of dreams is a successful attempt to describe such an experience, and thus materialize it and bring it closer to children. The shop of dreams is an example of Foucault's illusory space of utopia, although Cvijeta creates a heterotopia with the help of her thoughts and the search for safe spaces. Listening to a radio show in the occasional safety of her own flat or basement, Cvijeta constructs a mental framework in which she feels at least somewhat safe, and questions the pointlessness of war. The school in Pinkafeld presents Cvijeta's version of Foucault's heterotopia of crisis (Brković according to Foucault, 2013: 117), which overlaps with Cvijeta's physical and mental crisis, i.e., puberty.

²⁶ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

of Kanižaj's verses about how it was not allowed to admit to Christmas celebrations during communism (Ibid: 90), so it is an open criticism of the communist system. When it comes to children's literature, *Peter Pan* is also mentioned (Tomaš, 2008: 124), because Cvijeta says that she does not want to grow up like Wendy, but would rather remain a child like Peter Pan, which refers to the feeling of security related to the space of childhood. From this, one can also infer the slightly exaggerated maturity of a girl who is only too aware of the fact that she is growing up too fast. There is also an impressive metanarrative comment on bans in children's literature in the part when Cvijeta, again too maturely, writes about how in an American primary school, *Snow White* was put on the list of banned books because of the scenes of violence. Cvijeta wonders which books will be banned for the children in Osijek, who have seen much worse war scenes. Interestingly, it was Tomaš's *Mali ratni dnevnik (A Little Wartime Diary)* that came under criticism as a work that children should not read. While the spatial frames, setting, and story space²⁷ are actualized at the level of the action of the narrative work, metanarrative comments are connected to the world outside the literary text. Of the intermedial quotes, the mentioning of the songs *Krila leptira (Wings of a Butterfly)*, those by Thompson, Alice Cooper, as well as TV and radio shows that had marked that time, such as *Cheers* or *America's Funniest Home Videos*, stands out. Non-artistic texts, such as graffiti, are also cited²⁸, along with poems and letters in which impressions of the war are presented from children's perspective²⁹, and newspaper articles from *Glas Slavonije (The Voice of Slavonia)* that talk about the war. From life quotes or time stamps with power outages, sandbags and the Albertville Olympics, civilizational objects such as the Commodore computer, the transistor, and the Barbie doll definitely stand out. These objects represent fragments of a childhood that was stopped in the whirlwind of war suffering. The space of childhood is marked by suffering, fear, anxiety, and the desire for a normal childhood. It is a combination of the physical space of material nature and the mental space of cognition, and when it turns from the narrative space into reality due to ideological coloring, then it becomes a social space according to Soja's typology (1996: 61-81).

In the first part, Cvijeta often lists everything that represents childhood, which has become unavailable to her and her peers due to the war. According to *the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, every child should have the right to education, but classes

²⁷ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

²⁸ Examples are graffiti: *Osijek will never be Ocek* (Tomaš, 2008: 69), *I was glass, now I am chipboard, but I will be glass again* (Tomaš, 2008: 161).

²⁹ For example, a letter from a five-year-old boy to his father in Nuštar near Vinkovci, in which a child's handwriting and thoughts are simulated, a poem by the eight-year-old girl Marina from *Glas Slavonije (The Voice of Slavonia)*, a letter from her friend Zlatica.

have been postponed due to the war, and Cvijeta only listens to the radio school when there is electricity. However, listening to the radio school excludes the socialization moment, so the spatial frameworks³⁰, i.e., various locations where the action takes place, are characterized by loneliness and frequent physical separation from peers. Also, Cvijeta would like to play in the street, especially when the weather is nice, but because of the fear of shells, she is not allowed to go further than the window on the ground floor, overlooking the street. In one article, Cvijeta has read about a little girl whose hair turned grey after seeing the murder of her mum and dad: Cvijeta then looks at herself in the mirror, and wonders if the same thing will happen to her (Tomaš, 2008: 63-64). Cvijeta describes all the fears that run through her head during sleepless nights (Tomaš, 2008: 71-72), and the reader can see that those are the things that today's children take for granted, because Cvijeta wants her parents to work normally, her Serb neighbors not to be afraid, she wishes that she no longer has to go to the cold basement and that the noise from the tram can be heard again. In such descriptions, it can be seen that the girl actually just wants the return of the normal and even somewhat boring everyday life that makes up her space of childhood. All of Cvijeta's thoughts represent mental spaces of cognition (Soja's Secondspace), and take place in physical spaces (Soja's Firstspace) (1996: 61-81). Due to the circumstances of the war, Cvijeta and her peers are forced to watch scenes that are not for children, so they mature earlier. Zima (2001: 103) claims that Tomaš also achieves credibility with the records of the girl's biological growing up, her awakening of interest in sexuality, and longing for love. It is precisely the descriptions of the awakening of interest in sexuality that are often completely unmotivated because they are written into the text without announcement or explanation. If we take into account the fact that this is not a diary written by a twelve-year-old girl, but a novel written by a middle-aged man, then this can be problematic. In one part, at her mother's insistence, Cvijeta admits that she and Zatica talk about "pleasant touching down there" (Tomaš, 2008: 27), and the novel could work quite well without that discussion, which is not motivated. The novel has been mostly criticized for its attitude towards Serbs and the insertion of the Ustasha salute, which is flawed in every respect, but not enough attention has been paid to the parts about sexual maturation; they are not motivated enough and are flawed in terms of aesthetics, education, and composition. A better motivation is seen in the second part of the novel, which describes Cvijeta's biological maturation that is marked by getting her period in exile. In the second part of the novel, the author also paid attention to the description of romantic relationships between boys and girls, so he writes about Valentine's Day greeting cards, dances, falling in love

³⁰ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

for the first time, and similar topics. All that takes place in the relocated space of the small Austrian town of Pinkafeld, where the children were transferred because their hometown of Osijek became unsafe. The subject of physical appearance is also discussed, as evidenced by the comment of the girl Tihana: "I read that Japanese women used to wear tight wooden shoes to keep their feet small, which was a sign of beauty. How much that must have hurt!" (Tomaš, 2008: 100). Children's literature is full of stereotypes about beauty, the interpretation of which depends on the reader and the way he/she interprets it, and Ryan³¹ calls this way of creating space in a literary work a narrative world.

Finally, it should be explained why Tomaš's *Mali ratni dnevnik (A Little War-time Diary)* was so criticized for its attitude towards Serbs, and was omitted from the required reading list in 2017. The attitudes towards Serbs in imagology are called conceptions, and they "cannot be considered true or false, either by its literary nature, or its extraliterary reference." (Syndram, 2009: 77)³² Objections to the fact that the novel was one of the three titles on the required reading list for the sixth grade of primary school began around 2006, and the Ministry of Science and Education, headed by Predrag Šustar in 2015, saw nothing objectionable in the novel, unlike Blaženka Divjak, who held the same ministerial position from 2017 to 2020. Minister Divjak participated in the preparation of the curriculum reform, which caused a lot of debate³³, and in which Tomaš's novel did not find a place as required reading. Minister Divjak stated that fascist slogans and symbols have no place in public space.³⁴ The debates that the novel caused in the public are the best example of a socially produced space, as well as proof that the influence of real life on literature is reversible.³⁵ It is also a good example of the realization of Grgas' (2014: 52) spatial imaginary, which means "the cognitive-affective framework of

³¹ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

³² Karl Ulrich Syndram (2009: 77) points out that conceptions reflect social points of view, and their relationship to the empirical reality is not a straight-line one. Literary representations produce a pseudogeographical imaginary which can adopt and determine a genuine experience (Syndram, 2009: 79), and it is precisely because of it that Tomaš's novel is thought of as problematic.

³³ As part of the curricular reform, numerous Croatian and world literary classics were omitted from the required reading lists, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, mentioned in this article.

³⁴ The statements can be read in the aforementioned article from *Jutarnji list*, from 2017, written by Lilek.

³⁵ Interpreting Truhelka's trilogy *Zlatni danci (Golden Days)* in the key to the spatial turn, Ivon (2016: 313-314) concludes: "Spaces 'produce' events, feelings, and moods, but vice versa as well, spaces become objects in which individual memories are recorded. Ultimately, it is a reversible process in which subjective experience is intertwined with historical, cultural, social dimensions that participate in the creation of space."

the individual and the collective, constructed using lived experiences, perception and knowledge.” With the help of Cvijeta, the motivation for writing the novel is explained, which is that everything the girl knows about her homeland is written in stone, so that this paper record by Tomaš could be interpreted as a modest contribution to that history.

Serbian enemies are criticized in various places in the book, so Cvijeta very ironically writes about uncle Bora, who is the commander of the barracks from which the building of the little girl Ivana was hit by a shell, and she was killed by the same man to whom she was bringing flowers in that same barracks.³⁶ The inhuman voice that Cvijeta's father gets when he calls his friends in Baranja, which fell and became part of the SAO Krajina, is further mentioned. The inhuman voice is an example of a stereotyping utterance in a fictional text; Joep Leerssen discusses it in his imagological research, while Davor Dukić (2009: 18) questions Leerssen's claim that such utterances “have a stronger impact on the audience than factual utterances in non-fictional texts/media.”³⁷ In the third part of the novel, there is a description of Chetniks beating a deaf and mute man, as well as that of drunken and violent Chetniks. Šakaja (2015: 274, 278) states that imaginative geography is made of ideas of spaces and places, peoples, and cultures, and that it inevitably expresses the prejudices of their authors, and among the most effective mechanisms of drawing imaginative boundaries is the stereotyping of the Other as dirty. Šakaja (2015: 278) emphasizes that it is not about the physical; it is the symbolic dirt that breaks the canon: “Dirty is associated with deviation from a certain cultural norm. The attitude towards something as disgusting appears thanks to the violation of the rules of a certain symbolic-value system, therefore the feeling towards the other as dirty is often mutual.” During the Homeland War, Serbs founded a few political and paramilitary groups who followed the Chetnik ideology, while in the Croatian public and culture, they were regularly associated with an untidy appearance marked by a long beard and with the worst types of crimes they committed, mostly against the Croatian and Muslim population. Although Cvijeta rarely comments on events or gives her opinion when presenting her observations, in some places, it is obvious that the implicit author is speaking through her, writing his

³⁶ A similar irony is expressed in the film *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku* (*How the War Started on My Island*), directed by Vinko Brešan, from 1996, in which one of the main characters is the commander of the barracks, Major Aleksa, who starts a war against his former fellow residents on a small Adriatic island.

³⁷ Hugo Dyserinck (2009: 30) also questions in what way “‘the image of another country’ really impacts extraliterary judgments and prejudice.” The discussion caused by Tomaš's novel in the media confirms the fear that the images of the Serbs from this novel could impact the disturbed relationships of Serbs and Croats, especially in the areas most devastated by the war, such as Vukovar.

ideological views into the text. One of such places is a record about a pregnant country that a twelve-year-old girl could not have created (Tomaš, 2008: 29): "The earth is silent, groaning pregnant with her fetus, like a pregnant mother who cannot bring her expected child into the world."³⁸

On the other hand, none of Tomaš's critics point out the fact that, for the sake of objectivity, the text also points out dubious moves of the Croatian soldiers. Imago-logical research (Syndram, 2009: 79) highlights that the representation of what the Other is corresponds to the ideas of what is familiar and domestic, interrelating heteroconceptions and autoconceptions, while the foreign can be celebrated or rejected as alien and raw. It would mean that Tomaš's novel depicts Serbs negatively and Croats positively, but it is not that simple. For example, Cvijeta comments that her aunt's sons were not called up to the army because their father is Serbian, to which Cvijeta's father says (Tomaš, 2008: 38): "They could have taken at least one... their mother is Croatian." Dad's comment implies that the treatment of children from mixed marriages is unfair, and Cvijeta and her dad often comment on the Serb neighbors who are going through difficult times because neither side understands them. In the second part of the novel, the boy Korička receives a letter from Osijek which mentions the cafes owned by those who fled to Serbia, and that they are being blown up, and that the military police are using force to pull those Croats who are fleeing to Serbia from the train (Tomaš, 2008: 112). There are ambiguous comments in the text because in one place, it is stated that brotherhood and unity were fake, and in another place, Cvijeta claims that it is better to live with Serbs than with shells.³⁹ The negative attitude towards the mistakes of the Croatian army is most evident in Cvijeta's description of the dull blows that are heard when Croatian soldiers throw a knife into the door of their headquarters, and their headquarters is the house of a refugee Serb, to which Cvijeta sighs (Tomaš, 2008: 48): "My God!" Although unspoken, the attitude can be seen in that sigh of astonishment, and in the description in which it is pointed out, with the help of a dash, that the soldiers' headquarters

³⁸ There are such comments in various places, and all of them are imbued with irony, which is not typical of a child. For example, Dad calls Cvijeta on the telephone at one point, but the connection is lost, and he says that it's the Chetniks who are (Tomaš, 2008: 79) "hanging themselves on the wire". Remarks about the communist times, which the girl certainly did not understand, are also ironic. The same is true of the remark that the enemy will build an even "more beautiful and older museum in Vukovar" (Tomaš, 2008: 163). Those parts are not really intended for children because children would have difficulties understanding them, and they represent the author's commentary on his destroyed hometown and homeland.

³⁹ Such ambiguous comments on the national stereotypes may be taken as what Leerssen (2009a: 179) calls textual strategies, with the help of which the author tries to be objective, although stereotypes are always subjective.

is actually the occupied house of a Serb. The complex relations between Croats and Serbs become part of the girl's mental space⁴⁰ because it is something that has marked her space of childhood.

The reason why Tomaš's novel is criticized the most is its use⁴¹ of the forbidden Ustasha greeting *Za dom spremni* (*Ready for Home*) and the mention of Ustasha songs. The criticism mostly refers to the second part of the novel, which first describes the incident when the Croatian boys in exile cross out all Cyrillic texts in their book of literary texts. The boy Marijan explains that he did it because of his brother in the Croatian army, who is being shot at by Serbs every day, thus implying that there is a justification for the said incident, and it may be an ambiguous message to the readers. On the other hand, the teacher prophetically declares that the problems surrounding the Cyrillic alphabet should be left to time (Tomaš, 2008: 91). As the question of bilingual inscriptions is still being heavily discussed in certain parts of Croatia⁴², we could say that the author has hit the nail on the head as far as this problem is concerned. Although teachers talk about tolerance, boys on the threshold of puberty persistently sing songs, along with those of Michael Jackson, about Bruno Bušić⁴³, Chief⁴⁴, Jure and Boban⁴⁵, and the notorious *Čavoglave*⁴⁶. Cvijeta concludes that one cannot dance to such songs, but only fight (Tomaš, 2008: 96), and thus criticizes the boys. In general, the boys in the novel are portrayed as somewhat belligerent, while the girls are

⁴⁰ Secondspace according to Soja (1996: 61-80).

⁴¹ Here, the authors of the article use the word *use*, although critics in various newspaper articles alternately use the word *emphasis*, which does not correspond to the actual state of affairs in the novel because the author does not emphasize such greetings.

⁴² One thinks first of all of Vukovar, where in 2013 plaques with bilingual inscriptions (Latin and Cyrillic) were installed, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities (in this case, Serbs). The Headquarters for the Defense of the Croatian Vukovar protested against that, and the plaques placed on the Tax Administration and the Police buildings were removed by protesters who announced and justified their act by saying that the Cyrillic alphabet is one of the symbols associated with crimes in that area. The issue was revisited in 2015, and then again in 2019. Cf. <https://studentski.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/cirilicni-natpisi-u-vukovaru>, accessed on 25 February 2021, https://sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2019-02-04/162301/DVOJEZICNI_NATPISI_VUKOVAR.pdf, accessed on 25 February 2021.

⁴³ Ante Bruno Bušić (1939-1978) was a Croatian dissident, journalist, writer, exile in the 1970s, and leader of the Croatian emigration, who was assassinated in Paris by the State Security Service (Yugoslav secret police).

⁴⁴ The name for Ante Pavelić – the Ustasha leader and the head of the Independent State of Croatia.

⁴⁵ Jure Francetić – the founder and commander of the Ustasha Black Legion; Rafael Boban – Francetić's deputy.

⁴⁶ It is a song by Marko Perković Thompson, who in recent times has often been accused of inciting fascism and Ustashism because he greets his audience at concerts with the cry "*Za dom (For Home)*". He is also criticized for wearing black clothes, which allegedly alludes to the uniforms of some Ustasha units. Because of such accusations, his concerts abroad were often banned.

more conciliatory. It is considered controversial that the Croatian boys began and ended their essays with the exclamation “*Za dom spremni (Ready for Home)*”, and one of them pointed out that he wanted to be named Pavelić.⁴⁷ This is justified by the portrayal of boys as rebels not adapted to a refugee life, and the boy Korička, who persistently plays *Čavoglave*, is particularly noteworthy; he is in fact deeply unhappy that none of his relatives come to visit him, so he attracts the attention of other children and teachers in negative ways. Subjectivity can be inferred from the justification of the Croatian boys, so we could conclude that Marušić did a much better job in the already mentioned collection of war stories *Plaču li anđeli (Do Angels Cry)* because he clearly distanced himself from the Ustasha.⁴⁸ Perhaps even more controversial is the fact that Cvijeta describes how her mother listens to the song *Čavoglave* with interest, and a special excitement occurs with the song about Jure and Boban (Tomaš, 2008: 151). It is a part that should definitely be re-examined because it is not about children who defy, but about an adult whose words reflect a pronounced ideologization.

In the end, the question arises whether, because of these parts, Tomaš's novel should be omitted from required reading. The answer is neither simple nor unequivocal, and should be given by the experts, guided by the much-mentioned literary-aesthetic criterion, according to which books are categorized as being either of high quality or poor quality, although such lists actually depend on various social, political, and ideological issues. Of course, this criterion is even more difficult to determine in the field of literature intended for children, which should also take into account the pedagogical criterion. The goal of this article is not to provide recommendations for required reading, but to discuss how growing up and attitudes towards the enemy are presented in the book. After all, teachers of Croatian language and literature in the upper grades of primary school have the right to include a book on the topic of the Homeland War in their required reading, and Tomaš's novel is of sufficient quality to be a part of that selection. There are disputed subjective political and ideological positions in that book, which should be discussed, and in the structural sense, the biggest mistake in the book is the unmotivated part about the taboo topic of girls' masturbation written by a male author. Despite the objections, Tomaš cannot be denied the already explained innovation in the use of various narrative techniques that do give the novel high quality. The analysis has shown how in that novel the spaces shape the events and influence the feelings, fears, anxieties, and experiences of the characters, which achieve reality

⁴⁷ An allusion to Ante Pavelić.

⁴⁸ This especially applies to the story about the Ustasha Black Legion, when the narrator explains to his own son that there were many mistakes in the fight for freedom (Marušić, 1998: 84), which has already been highlighted in the paper.

from the novel through the media, thus creating a socially produced space.

The space of childhood, war sufferings, and attitude towards the enemy in Pulić's novel *Strah me, mama (Mum, I am Scared)*

According to Hranjec (2004: 295), Pulić belongs to Croatian children's classics, although he wrote books for adults and children, mostly travelogues and novels, and his frequent inspiration was his native Skradin, which he left as a seventeen-year-old and moved to Zagreb. Since then, as he himself says, he has had two homelands – his native Krka and Zagreb, and accordingly, Hranjec (1998a: 159) categorizes his books into these two thematic circles. Hranjec (2004: 302) also lists four thematic units of Pulić's books: homeland, homelandness, urban themes, and history. Similarly, Zima (2011: 231) categorizes Pulić's books, and thus singles out novels about the Second World War – *Posljednja igra (The Last Game)* and *Zli brodovi (Evil Ships, 1976)*, novels about the Homeland War – *Strah me, mama (Mum, I am Scared, 1992)*, *Čuvari amfora (The Amphora Keepers, 1994)*, and *Kormoran (The Cormorant, 1997)*, the novel *Ključić oko vrata (The Key around the Neck, 1985)*, which talks about life in the city, while the novel *Sablja Vuka Mandušića (Vuk Mandušić's Sabre, 1994)* is classified as a book with a historical theme. In the novel *Čuvari amfora (The Amphora Keepers)*, the theme is the Homeland War in the writer's homeland. The story is set in a small coastal town where everyday life has been marked by the war. The war is described as an adventure in which an unarmed, naive group of children in a wooden boat confronts a far superior enemy. Hranjec (2004: 317) believes that with that novel, Pulić has “left another written monument to the Homeland War”. In *Kormoran (The Cormorant)*, Pulić's third novel about the Homeland War, the writer once again chooses his hometown as the location. That novel does not talk about maturation in war nor does it present war as an adventure. With *Kormoran (The Cormorant)*, Pulić wants to convey the message that war kills peace, i.e., that the enemies, by killing the bird, have also killed peace. The most famous and most appreciated writer's book is certainly the psychological and social novel *Ključić oko vrata (The Key around the Neck)*. The plot of the novel is set in another thematic circle – Zagreb's urban environment. In that, as well as in other novels of this series, Pulić points out the disharmony between the city lifestyle, which often negatively marks the space of childhood, and idyllic rural environments where the child is connected to nature. Contrary to that, in the books from the first thematic circle, he emphasizes the beauty of nature and the blessings of rural life (Zima, 2011: 231, 234). From all of the above, it is clear that spaces form an important part of Pulić's literary imaginary, and are realized in different ways in his narrative texts.

The novel *Strah me, mama* (*Mum, I am Scared*) belongs to children's war novels that describe war as the sudden and forced growing-up of children affected by war events, although Hranjec (1998b: 20) considers it children's psychological prose. The novel is written in the third person, and the narrator is the mediator between the characters and the reader. Because of this, it is easier to identify with Cvijeta from *Mali ratni dnevnik* (*A Little Wartime Diary*) since her diary entries function as the real entries of a girl who was faced with war on the threshold of her maturation. *Strah me, mama* begins with a retrospective description of a close encounter between the girl Marija, her brother, and grandfather with the enemies in August 1990 in Bukovica, on the way from the seaside to their native Zagreb. That was the time when the first attacks and acts of terrorism by the Serbian rebels against the Croatian people started to happen. In the book, it is shown how Marija's character changed after that encounter, so that the faces of "apparitions" and "creatures" from Bukovica appeared to her every day in the dark. As in Tomaš's novel, here, too, imaginative geography is linked to prejudices against the Other, whose deviant behavior violates the existing Croatian cultural norm. This norm represents the cultural imaginary through which a society sees itself and writes about itself, thus the talk about the Other includes the talk about the self, as highlighted also by Daniel-Henri Pageaux (2009: 129-130):

"I wish to talk about the Other (most often due to necessary and complex reasons) and when talking about the Other, I negate it and talk about myself. In a way, I also talk about the world which surrounds me, about the place from which the 'view' and the judgement about the Other start; the image of the Other reveals the relationship which I established between the world (original and real space) and myself."

Evoking the place of Bukovica has a topophobic effect characterized by the fear of enemies. Previously, Marija's fears were unreal, but after meeting the enemies, they ceased and the fears of the war reality appeared. According to Leerssen (2009c: 113), the discourse of national stereotyping deals primarily with psychologisms, which is confirmed by the description of the female protagonist's mental state - for her, the image of Serbs evokes fear.⁴⁹ The feeling of fear and the caricatural nature of apparitions of the first edition is enhanced with the help of frightening black-and-white illustra-

⁴⁹ While discussing mental conceptions, Pageaux (2009: 140-141) cites Georges Duby's claim: "The opinion held by individuals and groups on their position and the behaviour dictated by such behaviour are not immediately determined by the reality of their economic position, rather by the image they create of it, which is never faithful, rather it is always distorted by the action of a complex set of mental conceptions." Mental conceptions are what Soja (1996: 61-81) calls Secondspace.

tions by Antun Babić, in which Serbs are depicted as bats with *šajkača*⁵⁰, who disturb the sleeping girl at night. All that is interwoven with her grandmother's stories about vampires, so Serbs are alluded to as vampires.⁵¹ Although Hranjec (1998a: 116) states that Pulić was not driven by hatred towards the enemy nor did he adopt a one-sided approach, one can still find descriptions of Serbs as “apparitions”, “creatures”, “extras from horror movies”, and the little girls Janja and Tanja describe them literally as dirty and drunk.⁵² Although the stereotyping of the Other as dirty, according to the aforementioned Šakaja's claim, is usually not connected with physical dirt, here it does denote the exterior which reflects the mentality of the enemy. Serbs are also described as human creatures who have forced Marija, her brother, and grandfather to drive along side roads, and these spatial frameworks⁵³ have paralyzing effects.

The implied author introduces the character of a Serbian boy who is a friend of the Croatian children and does not differ from them in any way. Duško is characterized as a lovable child, and the only problem is that his father is a Serbian officer, the enemy of his friends and all Croats. From that, one could infer that a friendship between Serbs and Croats was difficult to achieve among adults. With Duško departing to Belgrade, while his father and older brother stay behind, Pulić describes a situation in which Serbian women and children went to safety, while Serbian soldiers remained in Croatia to attack those who had nowhere to escape. The child's naivety is reflected in the fact that Duško's Croatian friends understand why Duško has to go to Belgrade, where there are no air raids and shelters, but it is unclear to them why his father and brother stay in Croatia. The relationship of displacement between the Croatian and Serbian spatial frames⁵⁴ causes confusion in the mental space⁵⁵ of Duško and his group. It is clear to the adult characters, who appear in the novel incidentally, why that is so. From that, we can conclude that children do not really understand war, because in their eyes all people are equal and there is no nationality-based intolerance.

⁵⁰ Part of the Serbian national costume, a double-sided cap made of the *šajka* material.

⁵¹ It is interesting that Serbs are also portrayed as vampires in the novel *Vampirica Castelli* (*Vampires Castelli*) by Robert Naprta from 2006, in which vampirism is, among other things, a metaphor for the war suffering in which Serbs behaved like vampires on a denotative and connotative level. It is a national stereotype which is the “intellectual product of discourse” (Leerssen, 2009b: 87), and which is clearly repeated. The recurring metaphor of Serbs as vampires confirms Leerssen's (2009c: 111) claim that national conceptions, which function as general spaces, “do not refer primarily to a given nation, rather to a circulating of other, previous conceptions of that nation.”

⁵² “You haven't seen the ones with *šajkača*. And all that they did... I saw how dirty and drunk they were – said Tanja – From that you can tell what they are like...” (Pulić, 1992: 86).

⁵³ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

⁵⁴ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

⁵⁵ Secondspace according to Soja (1996: 61-81).

On the other hand, the children in the novel are aware of the war horrors experienced by many people throughout Croatia at that time, and they are especially proud of the heroes from the places where the cruelty of the war was felt the most.

The book features a little girl Janja, a refugee from Dalj – a city that suffered terrible attacks, and the children of Zagreb quickly accepted her. The spaces in Dalj do not form the spatial frames⁵⁶ of the novel, but Dalj appears as a story space because it is part of the girl's thoughts and memories. Children from Zagreb generally did not experience the war like their peers from Vukovar, Osijek, Slavonski Brod, and other Croatian cities, but with daily viewing of suffering in the media and due to frequent air raids in the city, they were well aware of the war events. It is emphasized that the refugees are well accepted, and they themselves quickly accept the speech and customs of the regions they come to, which will not be the case in Iveljić's novel. With the help of Janja's character, the writer presents the image of refugee children waiting for their parents to return, but also the theme of forgiveness, because Janja responds to Tanja's claim that Janja's father will take revenge on the Serbs who ran over her dead mother (Pulić, 1992: 85): "That won't bring back my mother or grandmother. Nor any of those they killed. That won't bring back a single roof on the house." This sentence shows the mental superiority and maturity of a girl who suffered the demolition of her house and the death of her loved ones, but it did not incite hatred, intolerance or prejudice towards her enemies. The tragedy and the predominance of dishonesty are manifested at the very end, when Duško's father wounds Janja, who did not deserve that in any way. This criminal act shows all the brutality and cruelty of war, and the consequences of the aggressor's intolerance towards the victim. The novel ends with the sentence: "The same evening, the Serbian television reported that Croatian soldiers attacked peaceful tenants in the officers' skyscraper" (Pulić, 1992: 126). That sentence includes a spatial frame ("in the officers' skyscraper") with an ironic implication ("peaceful tenants"), the setting and the story space⁵⁷ which are actualized in the ambiguous narrative world of the phrase "the Serbian television", and it is up to the reader to interpret the report of the Serbian television as true or false with the help of experience, knowledge, and culture.

We could say that this is actually a maturation novel that shows children's fears, which, unlike the war, are the focus of the book. The fundamental fear starts from the paralyzing effect of a place that is associated with the attack of the enemy, and after that, the fear in the book becomes a mental space⁵⁸ of knowledge that would ultimate-

⁵⁶ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

⁵⁷ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

⁵⁸ Secondspace according to Soja (1996: 61-81).

ly turn into a social reality. It is emphasized (Pulić, 1992: 120) that those children's childhoods were interrupted because after a little learning and playing, "a lot of fear, uncertainty and hiding in shelters, basements, and house doorways follows." Marija experienced traumatic events early in the war, but there are several other children in the novel who did not experience the war like Marija, yet they have some of their own fears that are related to growing up and becoming independent. Tanja is thus afraid of loneliness, Zlatko of child kidnappers, Šumarica of dangers from the forest, Duško fears of going to Belgrade. Given that every child is afraid of something, Zima (2001: 101) states that fear is the backbone of this novel, and Hranjec (1998b: 20) believes that fear, darkness, and blackness are thematic words of the novel. There aren't too many exciting moments in the novel, and when the excitement does rise, it generally subsides quickly. As Pilaš says (1998: 34), the writer "gets more into the mental states of his heroes", and then transfers these states to the reader, while Hranjec (1998a: 118) believes that with this novel, Pulić proved himself an excellent war psychologist by depicting the consequences of war. On the other hand, Težak (1997: 44) points out that Pulić failed to provide psychologically convincing situations in which fear is expressed. Since children's war novels are one type of the realistic children's novel that is guided by mimeticism, we could say that Pulić is not particularly successful in this because he focuses too much on abstract fears that are part of the mental space⁵⁹, but do not always manage to be realized in a socially produced space.⁶⁰ In this novel, Pulić narrates events one after the other, and most of them are not even related to the war and war events, but by reading the book, it is revealed how some parts describe the war in a symbolic or indirect way. The thought of the boy Ivan: "It's always like that: after bad, comes good weather" (Pulić, 1992: 112) carries hope for a better tomorrow, and gives the book an optimistic tone. Pulić introduces the most drama at the very end, when Duško's father, a Serbian officer, shoots from a skyscraper and wounds Janja, the little refugee whose family and home have already been destroyed by the war, home being a physical and mental category. On the one hand, everything is saturated with events (Hranjec, 1998a: 118), and on the other, the plot and the composition were neglected in favor of forming impressions and less successful psychological portraiture. Despite the visible shortcomings, the author has successfully presented the consequences that war leaves on children and their space of childhood; the childhood that was interrupted.

⁵⁹ Secondspace according to Soja (1996: 61-81).

⁶⁰ Thirdspace according to Soja (1996: 61-81).

The space of childhood, the consequences of war, and the refugee issue in Iveljić's novel *Marijina tajna* (*Mary's Secret*)

According to Hranjec, Iveljić (2004: 249) is a Croatian children's classic, but also more than that, because he ranks her at the very top of Croatian children's literature, where, together with Sunčana Škrinjarić and Višnja Stahuljak, she forms the "trifecta" of Croatian children's literature (Hranjec, 1998a: 163). Christian and patriotic motifs are common in her books, and the Homeland War is a part of the patriotic theme. Prompted by the events during the war, she wrote war-themed books – the picture book *Božićna bajka* (*A Christmas Fairy-tale*, 1992), the novels *Marijina tajna* (*Mary's Secret*, 1995), *Želiš li vidjeti bijele labudove?* (*Would You Like to See the White Swans?*, 1998), and *Čuvarice novih krovova* (*The Female Guardians of New Roofs*, 1995) (Hranjec, 2006: 148). The picture book *Božićna bajka* (*A Christmas Fairy-tale*) interweaves the real and the unreal and carries a message about the transience of evil. The novel *Čuvarice novih krovova* (*The Female Guardians of New Roofs*) is an atypical war novel because it belongs to the fairy-tale war novel category. In that novel, by introducing fairies, Iveljić explains to children what war is, and gives hope that evil will end because it will be overcome by good. The author dedicated the novel *Želiš li vidjeti bijele labudove?* (*Would you Like to See the White Swans?*) to all Croatian veterans, and it is about the consequences of war sufferings and a sincere friendship that can help in recovery from experienced traumas. All of Iveljić's war books carry the message and hope that evil will end and people's lives will return to normal. Her war-themed books have a therapeutic effect on the war-endangered and interrupted space of childhood.

The war novel *Marijina tajna* (*Mary's Secret*), like the two previous novels discussed in this paper, depicts the war as a forced and abrupt growing-up of children affected by the sufferings of war, and describes the consequences of war. The novel takes place in the summer of 1994 in Makarska, one of the tourist centers of Croatia, typically crowded with tourists in the summer. However, in the first half of the 1990s, there were no tourists, and the rooms in Makarska hotels were filled by refugees from Slavonia and other places, who had to leave their homes to save their lives. One of them is the girl Marija, the main character of this novel, who, together with her mother, had to go to save herself from enemy attacks and seek shelter in the south of Croatia. The book shows how Marija longs for her dead brother and her missing father, even though in Makarska she found a safe haven from the shelling. The reader learns about all the events indirectly through the omniscient narrator, and that, along with Marija's excessive maturity, is the main reason why today's children will find it harder to identify with the main character. The novel emphasizes the difference between

the areas that were more affected by the war and those areas that were not exposed to direct attacks very much.

It is already on the first page of the novel that the horrors of war are mentioned; there is also the author's implicit attitude that the world did not react and did not prevent the crimes, but watched them through the media and did nothing – “it is a heartless conquest, the likes of which the world does not remember since Hitler. And yet, it looks at it calmly” (Iveljić, 1995: 7). In this and other similar sentences, Iveljić blames the enemy and condemns the war, however, that guilt is not strong enough to create a bitter taste of war in the reader, but only sadness and compassion for those who felt its reality. It also expresses political views in which there is an obvious criticism of the countries that did nothing to prevent the war in Croatia. With the help of the author's comment about foreign countries that did not react to the crimes, a certain time period is described and criticized, and the space appears in all three of Soja's (1996: 61-81) categories; first as a series of physical spaces in Croatia that were affected by the war (Firstspace), then as a mental and imaginary space that includes representations of space, cognitive processes, and ways of construction (Secondspace), and then as a lived social space that does not depend only on the narrative text (Thirdspace). The main difference between this and the previous two novels is that in the novel *Marijina tajna* (*Mary's Secret*), we do not find descriptions of war events such as shelling and direct enemy attacks. Instead, readers learn, again indirectly, via reporters, newspapers, and other characters, about the destruction of Vukovar, the attack on Dubrovnik, children who have been left without parents and family homes. The narrator mentions the outcomes of war exchanges on television, where one can see scenes of tortured people, thus suggesting a certain distance from immediate war events.

In the novel, it is rare for the protagonist to comment on the enemy, so others do it instead; at the beginning, it is two old men who talk about the sufferings of war; throughout the novel, certain information is occasionally given by Grandmother Ana, who talks about universal evil; in a letter from her friend Jasna, Marija learns that the enemies destroyed houses, schools, churches; the fisherman Ante is specific and says that we will soon chase the Serbs back to where they came from (Iveljić, 1995: 30); television reports about the enemies are listened to; the school principal makes comments that the enemies should have been arraigned a long time ago (Iveljić, 1995: 67). The condemnation of the enemy is most pronounced in the sentences of the fisherman Ante and the principal, while in Marija's words there is no condemnation, the grief and longing for her father are intertwined, and it is emphasized how much the war is to blame for the fact that she had to mature faster. This creates the impression that the little girl is not outraged, because the adults are the ones whose sentences show the condemnation, first of the enemy, and then of those countries that observe all this without reacting.

The novel describes the traumas experienced in the war, which interrupt a carefree childhood filled with laughter, inciting fear and worry, which emphasizes how children grow up overnight after such experiences. The reality of war has a great influence on the space of childhood, which does not have a normal course, but is interrupted, filled with fears, and negative topophobic experiences and memories are written into that space. It is that wartime reality that Iveljić depicts in this novel, describing the relationships between Marija and her peers from Makarska. The novel depicts children who accepted Marija, but did not understand her situation because their childhood remained unchanged. One gets the impression that the plot of the novel is removed from the events of the war, and that the children from Makarska were not familiar with reality, except through the media. Acceptance is manifested in the friendly relationship between Marija and the old woman Ana, also a refugee from the Sinj area, whose words "the evil will be spent" give Marija hope that the war would end, that her father would return, and that she would again have some kind of normal life in her hometown, which for her marked the space of a normal childhood. Marija's somewhat unnatural maturity and irony characteristic of an adult is noticeable when she realizes that Swiss psychologists want to examine the refugees, although she claims to the other children that they are there for the sake of tourists, implying that she is aware of her superiority over the other children. She also shows herself to be mature in her conversation with the principal, when she claims: "I don't want them to feel sorry for me" (Iveljić, 1995: 65), but also in a conversation with the mayor, who praises her for saving the municipality from an arson attack and tells her that God brought her there, and she answers him: "If that's the case, as you say, then I kindly ask him to take me back too" (Iveljić, 1995: 86). Marija's character is shown as an overly mature and smart girl who organizes her thoughts, analyzes her enemies, and after each analysis becomes more mature, which is somewhat unconvincing. Nevertheless, by comparing Marija to a transplanted young fruit tree, the narrator emphasizes that full maturity is not possible until she returns home (Iveljić, 1995: 32). This refers to the importance of homeland, which is an integral part of growing up and the space of childhood, and in Marija's case, the war abruptly interrupted it and separated her from the homeland, which nevertheless marks the story space because it is constantly present in her memories and thoughts.

Also interesting is the portrayal of Marija's relationship with Ivan, a refugee from Bosnia, whom she includes in her company in the classroom. Because of the similar fate that befell them, they understand each other, but they differ in the way they deal with problems. While the mature Marija prefers solitude, Ivan desperately needs the company of his peers to recover and forget about the horrors he has experienced. This contrast emphasizes even more Marija's maturity in dealing with the problem that

the label of refugee necessarily implies. The refugees in Makarska represent Otherness because, despite adaptation, they yearn for their own homeland, and are never fully accepted because their behavior and dialect differ from that of local children. Also, Ivan's problematic relationship with his possessive guardian, who is overprotective of him and forbids him everything, makes it impossible for him to establish a normal relationship with his peers. If the author had delved deeper into the issue of guardianship, the book would have probably been more intriguing, but this way, she only broaches another topic that is not fully addressed. Relationships with peers are a very important part of growing up and make up the space of childhood, and in Marija's case, as in the case of most children today, they are categorized into those with whom she can identify and those with whom she cannot identify. Marija's maturity and dominance come to the fore even more in contrast with the immaturity of other children, and her peer Doris is one of the more immature ones, preoccupied with her physical appearance. Her character is more convincing than the main heroine because she behaves more in keeping with the transitional period of puberty, when the space of childhood is reshaped and new experiences emerge. It is logical that Marija feels close to those children who also carry the label of Otherness and refugeehood due to a similar experience, and on the other hand, feels separated from those children whose space of childhood is not marked by trauma, but by concern about their physical appearance and falling in love.

Zima (2001: 104) states that Iveljić hesitates about the introduction of action parts and greater penetration into the girl's thoughts, and thoughts are shaped by lived experiences, memories, perception, knowledge, and an important part of what Grgas (2014: 51-52) calls "spatial imaginary". Although she tries to increase the tension by introducing sudden events such as the wounding of a dog, the fire that Marija discovers, relationships between peers, and the discovery of Marija's secret, significant tension is still missing. It is the discovery of the secret that is one of the most exciting events and one of the most important realizations, but also the turning point of the novel. Marija's only hope, instilling in her the faith that she would return home, was a piece of roof tile from her ruined house. That piece of roof tile represents a physical piece of the spatial frame⁶¹ of the house, which is a symbol of the space of childhood, and it can also be an example of a spatial synecdoche because a part, or in this case a piece, is taken as a whole (family house). Since she had to leave the place where she was born, she carried it with her, and no one was allowed to know about it because she believed that if no one discovered her secret, she would return home. At the moment when the secret is disclosed, political attitudes are again manifested,

⁶¹ <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

shifting the blame to the countries that calmly watched the situation in Croatia: "There are thousands of people and children who have been left without a home and without their loved ones. Many didn't make it out alive. And the whole world watches it calmly. The culprit for the crimes and my misfortune continues to destroy" (Iveljić, 1995: 64). Marija soon realizes that the belief in the secrecy of the piece of roof tile is superstition and rejects it, and Zima (2001: 104) states that the act of rejecting superstition is her growth and maturation. This act could be compared to a similar one from Škrinjarić's novel *Ulica predaka* (*The Street of the Ancestors*, 1980), in which the little girl Tajana throws away her teddy bear at the moment when she begins to mature. By discarding the material objects that are symbols of the space of childhood, both girls enter a new and more mature period of their lives.

While Iveljić was writing this novel, the war was raging in Croatia, and a happy ending and the return of refugees and exiles was not yet possible. Nevertheless, since she had the power of a writer, she wanted to give the story a happy ending, and thus bring happiness to all those whose fate was similar to Marija's. She did this by giving the little girl her father back, and in doing so, gave her hope for a better future and her return home. Hranjec (1998a: 123) points out that this novel is another confirmation of Iveljić's value and receptivity, but we cannot fully agree with that because not all children will understand Marija's maturity. Pilaš also gives a positive review (1998: 37), saying that *Marijina tajna* (*Mary's Secret*) is a condemnation of war, but also an expression of empathy towards all those who felt its consequences. On the other hand, Težak (1997: 44) believes that Iveljić's novel failed because, in trying to show all the sufferings of the refugees, she got lost in the descriptions and instructive parts that still failed to "reach a strong enough emotional charge to show the traumas and scars of the victims." Zima (2001: 104) reproaches her for forcing events, although she praises the author's playing with narrative conventions and the self-referential game at the end. In that game, the author offers readers two possible endings; in the first one, Marija's mother returns with an emaciated and tortured father, whom Saint George himself shows to Marija in a fantastical scene, raising doubt in readers whether the father has really returned. An implicit author intervenes in the story, that is, the writer who claims that he can add as many endings as he wants (Iveljić, 1995: 92). In the second ending, the writer appears again, admitting that the first ending is inconclusive because at the time of writing, most refugees have not yet returned to their homes, so in this book, there is also the possibility that the father did not return, but that Marija only dreamed it (Iveljić, 1995: 93). Nevertheless, the writer wonders how he could make use of his pen and change the sad current state of affairs, and concludes (Iveljić, 1995: 93): "If you don't have that power in real life, at least as a writer you can give the story a happy ending. Do it." In this way, Iveljić is actually talking about the fact

that literature, if nothing else, has the power to make children happy by offering them a happy ending to a sad refugee story. While reading the novel, we come across Hrvoje Šercar's black-and-white illustrations with sad and tortured faces that increase the reader's empathy because looking at them creates an image of the real faces of people during the Homeland War. Such is the picture of Marija and her parents at the table at the end of the novel, in which the visibly tortured father looks like a character from a horror story. Empathy is one of the more emphasized qualities which Marija and Grandma Ana possess and is initially lacking in the children who interact with Marija. Also, Christian motifs are visible in the illustrations, such as a damaged church, a cross around Marija's neck, crucifixes above Grandma Ana's bed. Those illustrations complement the faith and hope that run through this children's novel, which, despite its many shortcomings, also has positive characteristics that stem from the fact that the author is aware that one of the main tasks of children's literature is to offer a stimulating and not a destructive story to young and old readers. According to Ryan's categorization,⁶² the narrative world is the story space surrounded by the imagination of the reader, who in this case can choose the ending he/she wants, while the narrative universe includes the world presented as actual by the text itself, and this world can differ from the real one, in which many fathers did not return home. The greatest value of this novel is that the narrative text becomes a healing space that makes possible all options that are otherwise not possible in real life.

Conclusion

The three analyzed novels deal with the theme of the Homeland War, and the main characters are the girls who were blindsided by the war on the threshold of growing up. What all of them have in common is certainly the fact that they convey the message of war in a series of terrible events that change and reshape the space of childhood, and effect earlier maturation. The wartime space of childhood is marked by fear, traumas, anxiety, and the desire for a normal upbringing that was abruptly interrupted. Cultural and literary geography, in which space is viewed as a social product, proved to be a good theoretical basis for the analysis of the aforementioned contemporary children's war novels. The main point of departure was Grgas' concept of the spatial imaginary as a cognitive-affective framework that is formed with the help of lived experiences, perception, and cognition, and has a subversive charge, pointing to the fact that man reshapes and encodes space. Marie-Laure Ryan's five-part classification and Soja's

⁶² <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>, accessed on 16/09/2023.

socio-spatial dialectic, which includes Firstspace, Secondspace and Thirdspace, have been the key concepts in the novels' analysis. In all three novels, there is a strong connection between time and space: in Tomaš's novel, the spatial frame includes Osijek in 1991 and Pinkafeld; in Pulić's case, the topophobic experience from Bukovica and the coexistence of Croats and Serbs in Zagreb in 1990 are shown; and in Iveljić's case, the spatial frame is Makarska in 1994, filled with refugees who had to leave their homes. All those spaces carry symbolic meanings, they are related to suffering, so the personal experiences of children are intertwined with social reality. Each of the analyzed novels has specific real spaces in which the action takes place, and it is possible to separate them from the mental spaces that are connected to all the memories, dilemmas, and thoughts that mark the space of childhood of those heroines. What distinguishes those novels the most is the special way in which each of them plays a part in the production of the social, lived, simultaneously real and unreal space. In Tomaš's novel, this connection is realized precisely with the help of the subversive impulse and ideologization due to which the novel has reached the media, moving the discussions about the attitude towards Serbs, the Other, the Cyrillic alphabet, and historical facts about the Homeland War from literature to reality. In Pulić's novel, there are also ideological-political implications and notions of the Other as dirty and identification with one's own culture. Iveljić's novel includes a metanarrative game in which the narrative text becomes a healing space with a therapeutic effect. The peculiarity of this analysis is that it emphasizes that the three-dimensional space of childhood at the time of the Homeland War was largely determined by positioning towards the Other, thus appreciating the subversive potential and the ethical dimension of spatial imaginary.

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RATNI PROSTOR U ODABRANIM SUVREMENIM HRVATSKIM DJEČJIM ROMANIMA

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KLJUČNE RIJEČI: *dječji romani o Domovinskom ratu, prostor djetinjstva, Stjepan Tomaš, Nikola Pulić, Nada Iveljić*