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THE THIRD SPACE OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: THE WORK OF FICTION AND THE POLITICISATION OF SOCIALIST MOTHERHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Through a multimodal reading of the spatio-temporal construction of social reproduction in two stories from 1960 by Ela Peroci, illustrated by Ančka Gošnik Godec, and drawing on critical feminist historiography, this article shifts reflection on socialist motherhood away from descriptions of motherhood as an institution and alienated work that predetermines and closes maternal subjectivity. Instead, it examines the constitution of experience and the formation of subjectivities, presenting the work of fiction – that is, the labour of producing fiction – as a wedge for the political: a third space for negotiating care, agency, and futurity.

Keywords: children's literature, artistic work for children, social reproduction, motherhood, childhood, socialism, third space, Ela Peroci, Ančka Gošnik Godec

IL TERZO SPAZIO DELLA RIPRODUZIONE SOCIALE: IL LAVORO DELLA FINZIONE E LA POLITICIZZAZIONE DELLA MATERNITÀ SOCIALISTA

SINTESI

Attraverso una lettura multimodale della costruzione spazio-temporale della riproduzione sociale in due racconti del 1960 di Ela Peroci, illustrati da Ančka Gošnik Godec, e alla luce della storiografia femminista critica, questo articolo riconsidera la maternità socialista andando oltre le descrizioni della maternità che la presentano come un'istituzione e un lavoro alienato, il quale predetermina e circoscrive la soggettività materna. L'analisi si concentra invece sulla costituzione dell'esperienza e sulla formazione delle soggettività, interpretando il lavoro della finzione – cioè il lavoro di produzione della finzione – come un cuneo che apre uno spazio al politico: un terzo spazio in cui negoziare cura, agency e possibilità per il futuro.

Parole chiave: letteratura per l'infanzia, lavoro artistico per l'infanzia, riproduzione sociale, maternità, infanzia, socialismo, terzo spazio, Ela Peroci, Ančka Gošnik Godec

INTRODUCTION[1]

When is Ljubljana at its most beautiful?
In the evening, at noon, or in the morning?
The world is beautiful in the evening. It is covered
in soft shadows, and the last rays of the setting sun
shine in the stream, on the mountain peaks,
in the windows of my house and yours, and
in the clouds in the sky.
When they fade away, darkness slowly descends,
bringing peace and sleep. Nature falls asleep, but
I find my own joy when I turn on the light and
spend a few more hours in its glow.
I would like to take a break from work and worries, to
read a few pages of a beautiful book, to lie by
the window and look at the evening sky,
or to go to the cinema or the theatre.
Someone else might just be starting work
in the evening, before the dark night falls
and no one can resist sleep any longer.
But you, children, have fallen asleep, and no one
noticed when. You look so sweet in your beds,
your cheeks all red. ***I would snuggle up***
to one of you to warm you.
But no. I call you. Wake up! Rub your eyes and come
with me to see what Ljubljana is like in the evening.
(Peroci, 1960, 86)[2]

As the title of the 1960 children's story *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?* [When is Ljubljana at its most beautiful?] by Ela Peroci (1922–2001) suggests, the story takes place in the capital of Slovenia, at that time part of socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1991). The narrator, figured as a mother-author, initially answers the title question by evoking the evening, when the daily rhythm of obligations subsides and leisure becomes possible. Instead of resting, however, she turns to her "joy" (Peroci, 1960, 86): writing fiction. She calls on her children, both the implied listeners of the bedtime story and figures within it, to wake and climb with her to the terrace of Nebotičnik, Ljubljana's first skyscraper, from where they observe the city at night.

Just as the 1933 Nebotičnik had become a symbol of Ljubljana's twentieth-century modernisation, the writing mother and her children – the story's gendered authorial voice and implied listeners – may also be read as figures of modernisation: both were expected to develop new subjectivities during post-war reconstruction and socialist modernisation. The article presents a multimodal reading of various editions of two selected stories by Ela Peroci, first published in 1960 and illustrated by Ančka Gošnik Godec (1927–2025).

The widely translated and canonised Ela Peroci was among the post-war writers in socialist Slovenia and Yugoslavia who not only addressed children and their caregivers within the new social reality but also turned to fantasy as a privileged genre for imagining emerging socialist relations.[3] The modernist and, in particular, socialist discovery and social construction of children as holders of "special psychology" (Alečković, 1955, 364), as "symbolic representatives of societal change" (Ule, 2012, 30), and as "bearers of the future" (Erdei, 2004, 171) was also reflected in the new social relations, which always have spatio-temporal dimensions: who inhabits which spaces, when, and how? These changing social realities were also visible in geographies and temporalities that included or excluded children. The spatial and temporal dimensions of children's and women's lives – especially those of the women who were their primary caregivers – were likewise reflected and (re)imagined in children's fiction. In Ela Peroci's fiction, these were primarily schools, streets, public transport, homes, children's rooms, abandoned houses, seaside campsites, woods, and similar settings. These environments often spilled over into fantasy realms accessible not only to children but also to fantasy creatures – animated toys, animals, and architectural elements – and to women caregivers, especially mothers. The article explores the spatial proximity created between children and mother figures in these shared fantasy spaces in order to examine the spatio-temporal dimensions of social reproduction – that is, the paid and unpaid work through which everyday life, social relationships, norms, and differences, as well as future generations, are sustained. More specifically, it asks how reproductive labour, particularly mothering and the labour of producing

1 This article was prepared as part of the project *Picturing Modernist Future: Women Illustrators and Childhood Conceptions in Socialist Yugoslavia (Follow-up)*, supported by the Recovery and Resilience Plan and funded by the European Union's NextGenerationEU programme (MN-0010-618). The project also supported the editing of the thematic section on third spaces in socialist Yugoslav children's literature in this issue of *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia*, guest-edited by Katja Kobolt. The article draws on research materials collected within the framework of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions project 101024090 (SOC-ILL).

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations and emphases are by the author.

3 In the immediate post-war years, Yugoslav children's literature followed a centralised Soviet model of children's publishing, defined by Maxim Gorky's programme (Alečković, 1955, 367). It mainly addressed children through the experience of the Second World War and the National Liberation Struggle (NOB, 1941–1945) as well as through new socialist social aspirations, in line with socialist realism and social realism. From the 1950s, however, Yugoslav cultural policy on children's literature favoured the fantasy genre.

fiction for children, is portrayed in the selected stories. In doing so, the article demonstrates how women's artistic production for children, or fiction more broadly, created a space for negotiating care, motherhood, and childhood.

First published in 1960, both analysed stories – *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?* and *Za lahko noč* [For a good night] – unfold from conflicts within social reproduction. The stories appeared in two different editions and were illustrated somewhat differently in each.[4] Beyond their shared thematic focus, they were selected because their illustrations were revised across subsequent editions. How did the illustrations change, and what do these visual revisions suggest about how social reproduction, motherhood, and childhood were organised in socialist Yugoslavia? By situating the stories' politicisation of social reproduction within past and contemporary discourses on social reproduction, particularly on motherhood and childhood as well as on artistic work in socialist Yugoslavia, the article aims to offer a productive rereading of the intertwined histories of socialist Yugoslav women's politics, childhood politics, and the politics of social reproduction. Following the 'end of history', these histories were repeatedly rescripted, often through presentism, revisionism, and depoliticisation, producing yet another discontinuity in women's history and obstructing our ability to learn from the past in today's struggles for a more just future.

Conceptually, the article draws on Adrienne Rich's distinction between motherhood as institution and motherhood as a potential relationship (Rich, 1986, 13), together with Henri Lefebvre's (1991) and Homi Bhabha's (2009) concepts of space. It pays analytical attention to spatio-temporal constructions and asks: Where, when, and how are motherhood, childhood, and social reproduction represented in the stories? The article is especially attentive to alternative spaces of motherhood and childhood in which social reproduction, care, self-care, community, and futurity – that is, how the future is imagined – can be negotiated. In further developing Lefebvre's thinking on space, Homi Bhabha conceptualised the potentially emancipatory experience of space as a third space, where politics becomes possible. Henri Lefebvre, who, interestingly, almost simultaneously with his groundbreaking The Production of Space, also researched Yugoslav self-management (Lefebvre, 1975), distinguished three synchronic registers of spatial practice:

I. the physical organisation of space, as defined by everyday activities – or *perceived space*;
II. the perspective of *representations of space* as created and imagined by space-producing specialists; and
III. the *representational spaces* or lived spaces, covering the subjective experience of space in relation to both prior registers – the representations of space and the perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991, 33).

Homi Bhabha adopted this conceptualisation and infused it with Walter Benjamin's concept of translation to develop the third space as "an intercultural site of enunciation, at the intersection of different languages jousting for authority", opening up "a translational space of negotiation through the process of dialogue" (Bhabha, 2009, x). The following reading attends to all three dimensions of the spaces of social reproduction, particularly those of mothering and the labour of producing fiction. Particular attention is given to representational spaces as a potential third space in which difference, agency, alternative spatio-temporal relations, and motherhood as a potential relationship can emerge. The article suggests that the labour of producing fiction offered working mothers in socialist Yugoslavia not only a space in which to make social reproduction politically visible but also one in which to negotiate and potentially resolve its conflicts.

CHILDHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD IN SOCIALISM

Because of the immense suffering of children during the Second World War and its aftermath, and because children under fourteen constituted more than one third of both the post-war global and Yugoslav populations (United Nations, 2024), children became central to post-war peace reconstruction. In the socialist pacifist and feminist political imagination, embodied by organisations such as the Women's International Democratic Federation (founded in 1945), of which Yugoslavia was a member, social protection and care for children underpinned peace reconstruction, modernisation, and women's emancipation (Jeraj, 2005; Tomšič, 1978). The politics of Yugoslav children and Yugoslav women were therefore closely interconnected.

Women's emancipation through paid work and economic independence was to be supported by

4 The two stories first appeared, together with eleven others, in the collection *Ptičke so odletele* [Birds flew away] (1960). They were later included in *Za lahko noč* [For a good night], first published in 1964 and subsequently republished eleven times in Slovene and translated into five other languages (Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Hungarian, and Polish).

the gradual socialisation of reproductive labour. At the same time, Yugoslav school reform in the 1950s addressed the care and education of a large young population that at the time spent less than 10 per cent of its time at school (Petrović Todosijević, 2019, 266).[5] Where children should spend the rest of the day, and who should care for them, were therefore social, political, and economic questions. Education and upbringing thus took place not only in schools and children's mass organisations, established following the Soviet model during the war, but also elsewhere. During the UNESCO-supported school reform (1953–1958), education and care extended from the "classroom into the schoolyard, onto the street, into the new residential neighbourhoods, among all the members of the future socialist community" (Petrović Todosijević, 2019, 266), and also into children's media, literature, and culture (Jerbić, 1973). In the pre-digital period, children's literature held an important place in formal education and everyday life; beyond entertainment, it helped imagine new social relations and subjectivities and, as the two stories analysed here show, provided a space for negotiating social reproduction. Yet the family was rearticulated as a privileged site of upbringing and care. Because of post-war housing shortages, extended intergenerational households remained common, although the nuclear family of mother, father, and children living in new modernist apartment blocks gradually became normative.

MOTHERHOOD AND CHILDHOOD THROUGH THE LENS OF WORK: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Socialist projects sought to transform all areas of human existence, from political and economic relations to the material conditions of everyday life and relations between people, as well as the relations in and to space, time, and nature. Central to these transformations were changing conceptions and forms of labour, aimed at overcoming so-called alienated work – work over which people lack control and in which they are estranged from that which they produce – in favour of collectively organised, socially meaningful and self-directed activity through which people can realise their capacities as human beings. The socialist reshaping of labour regimes and, with that, of everyday life had spatio-temporal, material, relational, and affective dimensions, as labour is always performed by someone, somewhere, with particular means, often with others, and above all requires time. Efforts to challenge hierarchies between forms of work, expressed in the maxim 'all work has value', also reshaped the relation between paid productive labour and unpaid social reproduction. Women's emancipation was strongly tied to entry into paid work and economic independence, while social reproduction was revalued and, when socialised, also acquired economic recognition. To facilitate women's paid employment, the state gradually socialised parts of reproductive labour through kindergartens, schools, after-school programmes, public kitchens, laundries, and institutions of children's culture. Many women worked in these new institutions and fields, including in children's culture and literature. The socialist challenge to social, economic, material, symbolic, and gendered hierarchies of work also raised questions about the status of artistic labour (Praznik, 2021), including artistic work for children as a feminised field of production (Kobolt, 2023; Lunder, 2025). Compared with autonomous artistic production for adult audiences, children's culture offered women greater opportunities to work as artists. Its gendered dimensions concerned both symbolic valorisation and spatio-temporal organisation: When, where, for whom, and with which materials could women do artistic work? (Kobolt, 2023). These conditions were also shaped by artists' living situations, parenthood, and especially motherhood and its reproductive labour (Kodrnja, 1985; Kobolt, 2023; Lunder, 2025).

Already at the time, and especially in postsocialist scholarship, socialist women's emancipation was regarded as incomplete. Although women increasingly entered paid employment and secured important rights and responsibilities, social reproduction remained primarily their responsibility despite its social recognition, while many of these achievements were later eroded by postsocialist transformations or had to be reclaimed. Like many women today, though under different historical conditions, socialist women also carried the 'double burden' of productive labour and social reproduction. The unequal distribution of reproductive work was criticised at the time, particularly by neo-feminists, who critiqued the inability of economistic Marxism to address the problems of the labour of social reproduction (Ler-Sofronić, 2024; Zaharijević, 2017; Lóránd et al., 2024), including in relation to artistic work (Kodrnja, 1985). Fathers were also urged to take a more active role in care (Petrović Todosijević, 2019), research and political discourse called for greater gender equality and a redistribution of social reproduction (Mihovilović, 1975; Tomšič, 1978; Filipović, 2024).

5 The historian Sanja Petrović Todosijević (2019, 266) points out that in the post-war years, schoolchildren, on average, spent only three hours a day at school for 200 days a year.

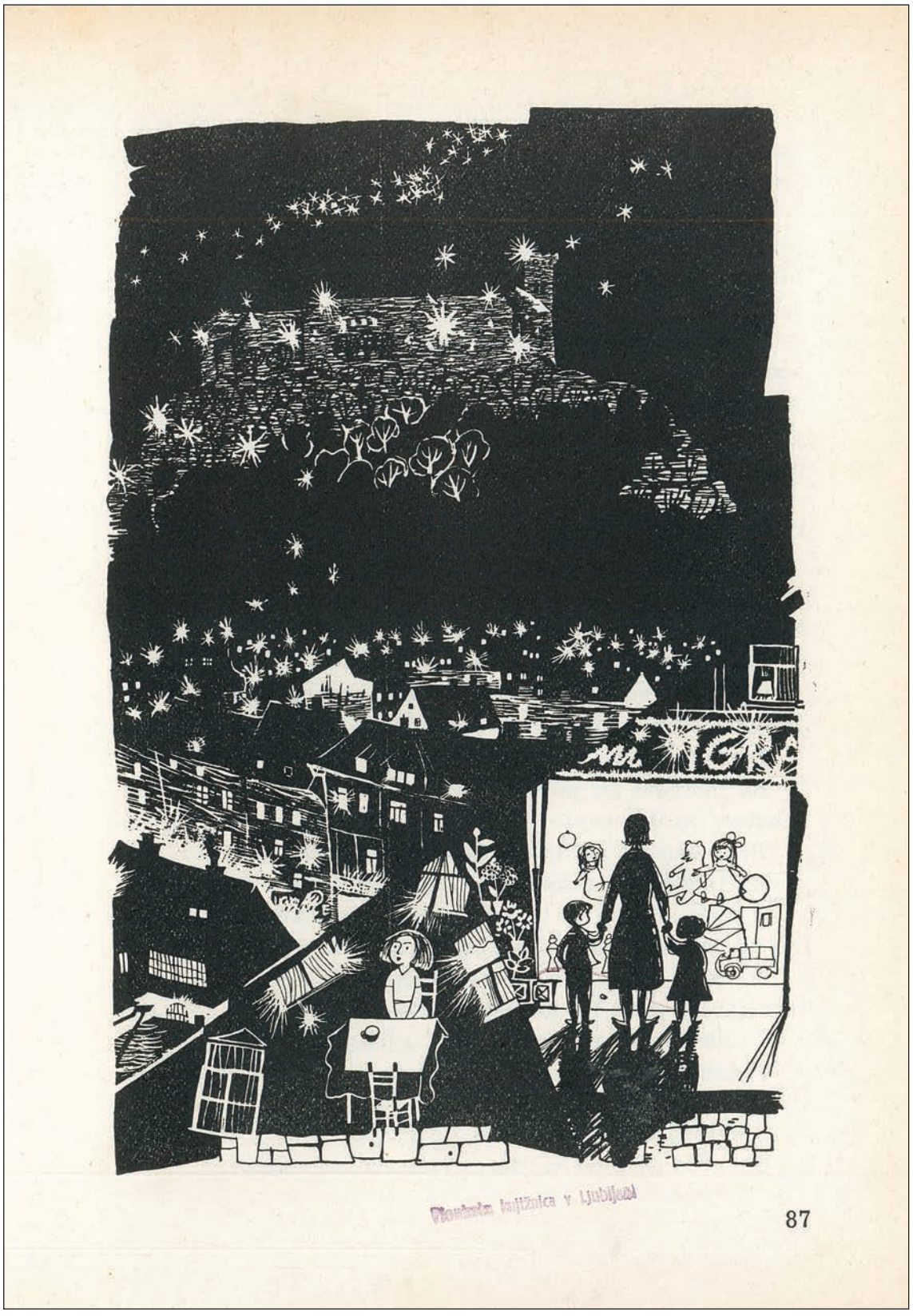


Figure 1: Illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec for the story* Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša? *in the collection* Ptičke so odletele *by Ela Peroci (1960).

While contemporary researchers and politicians sought solutions to the problem of social reproduction, later feminist scholarship has criticised the symbolic valorisation of reproductive work, motherhood, and childhood for making it difficult for socialist women to contest their reproductive burden and the normativity of motherhood. Ksenija Vidmar Horvat (2021; 2023), who also drew on Ela Peroci's children's literature, treats motherhood and childhood as central to the Yugoslav socialist politics of affect, moral stability, and futurity. Vidmar Horvat argues that motherhood could not easily become a site of political conflict because it was ideologically valorised and naturalised as a moral and affective feminine obligation (Vidmar Horvat, 2021). In this critique, the social valorisation of social reproduction restricted maternal agency, while challenging traditional motherhood risked delegitimising not only socialist gender politics but the socialist project itself.

This article therefore returns to the question of socialist women's and mothers' agency: How and where could they problematise their burden of social reproduction? By analysing the spatio-temporal representation of social reproduction in children's literature from socialist Yugoslavia, I argue that fiction for children provided women and mothers with a space in which to develop and exercise agency.

Before turning to the analysis, it is useful to clarify the concept of social reproduction and, by extension, its relationship to motherhood, childhood, and artistic work, particularly artistic work for children. Following Rachel Rosen (2023), social reproduction has several meanings. Most basically, it refers to reproduction, care, and upbringing; in education, it can describe the transmission of social norms, class positions and inequalities. A third meaning stresses the continuous work that establishes and maintains the conditions of life and therefore the 'production' of workers, who are always more than labour power (Rosen, 2023, 281). This perspective asks generally: who performs this work, how, with what, where, when, and why? More specifically, it asks who cares for new generations, vulnerable people, and communities; who transfers knowledge and values; and what kinds of subjects emerge. Rosen emphasises the relational and intergenerational character of these processes and treats children not as passive recipients of care but as active participants. Their material, emotional, and reflexive contributions make social reproduction a two-way process of mutual dependence that can both sustain existing relations and open a third space for alternative relations and forms of world-making.

WALKING IN PUBLIC SPACE AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PASSAGE

The introductory illustration (Figure 1) executed in mixed media (india ink, tempera, pen drawing) uses strong black-and-white contrast and expressive lines to juxtapose an intimate domestic scene in the foreground with a panoramic nocturnal view of Ljubljana. Because the mother appears twice, first at the kitchen table imagining a night walk and then walking with her children, the image can be read as a continuous narrative in which the same character appears at different moments within one pictorial field. At the top is the night-time veduta of Ljubljana seen by the mother and children from Nebotičnik.

The implied voice of the author belongs to a woman who, after a hectic day of obligations, sits down to write for children instead of reading "a few pages of a beautiful book", looking "at the evening sky", going "to the cinema or the theatre", or "snuggling with her children". The last gesture marks her as a mother. In an interview about Peroci's creative work, her older daughter Jelka Pogačnik recalled:

> *When I was little, I didn't feel my mother's creative process. She wrote at night when the rest of us were asleep. When I was older, I sometimes saw her writing at the kitchen table or by the stove. When I grew up, we sometimes talked about how tales came to her: how she wrote them down and what was most important to her in her creative process. Apparently, I once very consciously participated in the creation of a tale – I extorted a story. She had to tell me a tale so that I would get up from the pavement and continue the afternoon walk with my little sister in her pushchair.* (Predin, 2012, 2)

"It is no secret that she is referring to the popular story *Slipper Keeper Kitty*, which has sold 140,000 copies to date" (Predin, 2012, 2). The recollection confirms a familiar pattern in gendered artistic labour: when artistic work is not women's primary paid occupation, and especially when they are mothers, it often follows productive and reproductive obligations (Lunder, 2025; Kobolt, 2023). After the Second World War, Peroci worked first as a teacher, mostly with children with disabilities, and later as a journalist, writer, and editor for children's and family periodicals (*Pionir, Ciciban, Mladi svet*) and for children's radio at Radio Ljubljana. She began writing children's fiction after the birth of her two daughters. From her first publications in 1955,



Figure 2: Illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec for the story* Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša? *in the collection Ptičke so odletele by Ela Peroci (1960).

Peroci became a frequently published, translated,[6] awarded,[7] adapted,[8] and canonised author in Slovenia and other parts of Yugoslavia. Several stories became widely known picture books, including *Muca copatarica* (*Slipper Keeper Kitty*, 1957, which appeared in 1963 as an edition with new illustrations),[9] *Moj dežnik je lahko balon* (*My Umbrella Can Turn into a Balloon*, 1955), and *Hišica iz kock* [Block house, 1964].

Ančka Gošnik Godec, an academically trained painter and graphic artist with experience in lithography, became one of the most active and awarded children's illustrators in Slovenia and Yugoslavia from the mid-1950s. She illustrated Peroci's work from the first edition of *Muca copatarica* onward and received awards for illustrations of the story volumes *Ptičke so odletele* (1960) and *Za lahko noč* (1964), where both stories analysed here were published.[10]

In other fantasy stories from these collections, children share fantasy spaces with anthropomorphic animals, toys, and animated elements of Ljubljana's architecture. In the two stories analysed here, mothers also gain access to these spaces. In *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?*, the mother-writer herself generates a shared fantasy world with the children through narration on a night-time walk across Ljubljana. As night turns into day, the narrator describes the hectic traffic and life of Titova cesta (Tito Road), where even ships sail and passers-by stroll and window-shop. In front of the department store Narodni magazin (NAMA), another Ljubljana landmark, the narrator-author-mother sits at a desk selling lottery tickets (Figure 2). The only enthusiastic customers are schoolchildren celebrating the first day of school. Public schooling was a central institution and symbol of post-war reconstruction, socialist democratisation, and modernisation, and it also created paid employment for many women. The story ends in the early morning, when "people hurry to work and hope for the best. And this hope shines in their eyes. That's why Ljubljana is most beautiful in the morning" (Peroci, 1960, 96).

Walking thus carries the narrative from fictionalised everyday family and urban spaces to a scene in which the mother-author becomes a lottery seller who can make someone happy each morning. Unlike the illustration in Figure 1, that in Figure 2 does not use a continuous narrative but centres the storyteller-lottery seller in a morning street surrounded by children. The lottery tickets, associated with hope and good fortune, also become a metaphor for fiction, especially children's literature.

Peroci also uses the walk through the urban landscape as a passage from fictionalised factual space into a shared imaginary space for mother and child in the story *Za lahko noč*. A heterodiegetic voice narrates events unfolding on a peaceful afternoon in the home of an extended family: a young girl, Mojca, her mother and father, and her grandparents. The girl plays with a doll, carefully tending to it. However, the doll slips from her hands; after the fall, its eyes, which normally open, remain closed; they have broken. The girl cries out in frustration. Mojca's father reacts first and offers to take his daughter and the doll to have it repaired. However, one of the grandparents expresses doubt and discourages him from going out in the rain. In the first published edition, the black-and-white ink illustration (Figure 3) reveals how the conflict was resolved: in heavy rain, a disgruntled mother takes the girl, carrying the broken doll, through the city to find a shop where it can be repaired.

6 Peroci's works were often published simultaneously with the Slovene originals in other Yugoslav languages–Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, and Albanian – as well as in the languages of the Yugoslav minority communities, including Slovak, Italian, Hungarian, and Romanian. They were also translated into German, French, Czech, English, Lithuanian, Polish, Finnish, Russian, Spanish, and Esperanto. Her works were additionally published as audiobooks and in Braille.

7 Peroci was included on the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Honour List in 1958 for *Majhno kot mezinec* [Small as a pinky finger], illustrated by Ančka Gošnik Godec, and in 1966 for *Za lahko noč*, illustrated by Ančka Gošnik Godec. In 1970, she and the illustrator Lidija Osterc received the IBBY Medal (IBBY, 1956–1980, 4, 9, 13). In addition, she received the Slovenian Levstik Award in 1956 for *Moj dežnik je lahko balon* (*My Umbrella Can Turn into a Balloon*) and in 1957 for *Tisočkratlepa* [A thousand times beautiful]. In 1971, she received the Prešeren Fund Award, one of Slovenia's highest awards for cultural achievement, for *Na oni strani srebrne črte* [On the other side of the silver line], as well as several awards at the *Zmajeve dječje igre* [Zmaj Children's Games] festival in Novi Sad, Serbia.

8 Ela Peroci's works have been adapted as audiobooks and radio plays nearly 50 times. *Muca copatarica* was adapted for the screen in two animated films, released in 1972 and 2024.

9 The Croatian translation of *Muca Copatarica* appeared simultaneously with the Slovene original in 1957. Italian, German, Serbian, and Macedonian translations followed in 1963. The first English translation was published in 2017 as the picture book *Slipper Keeper Kitty*.

10 Ančka Gošnik Godec illustrated more than 130 children's books. Works featuring her illustrations have been published in the languages of the nations and ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia, including Slovene, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Albanian, Italian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Slovak, and Romanian. They have also appeared in German, French, English, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Lithuanian, Arabic, Lower Sorbian, and Esperanto. Gošnik Godec received numerous awards, including the Levstik Award for her illustrations in Ela Peroci's *Ptičke so odletele* and *Za lahko noč*, Ađelka Martić's *Deček in gozd* [The Boy and the Forest], *O treh grahih* [About Three Peas], and *Zlata ptica* [The Golden Bird].

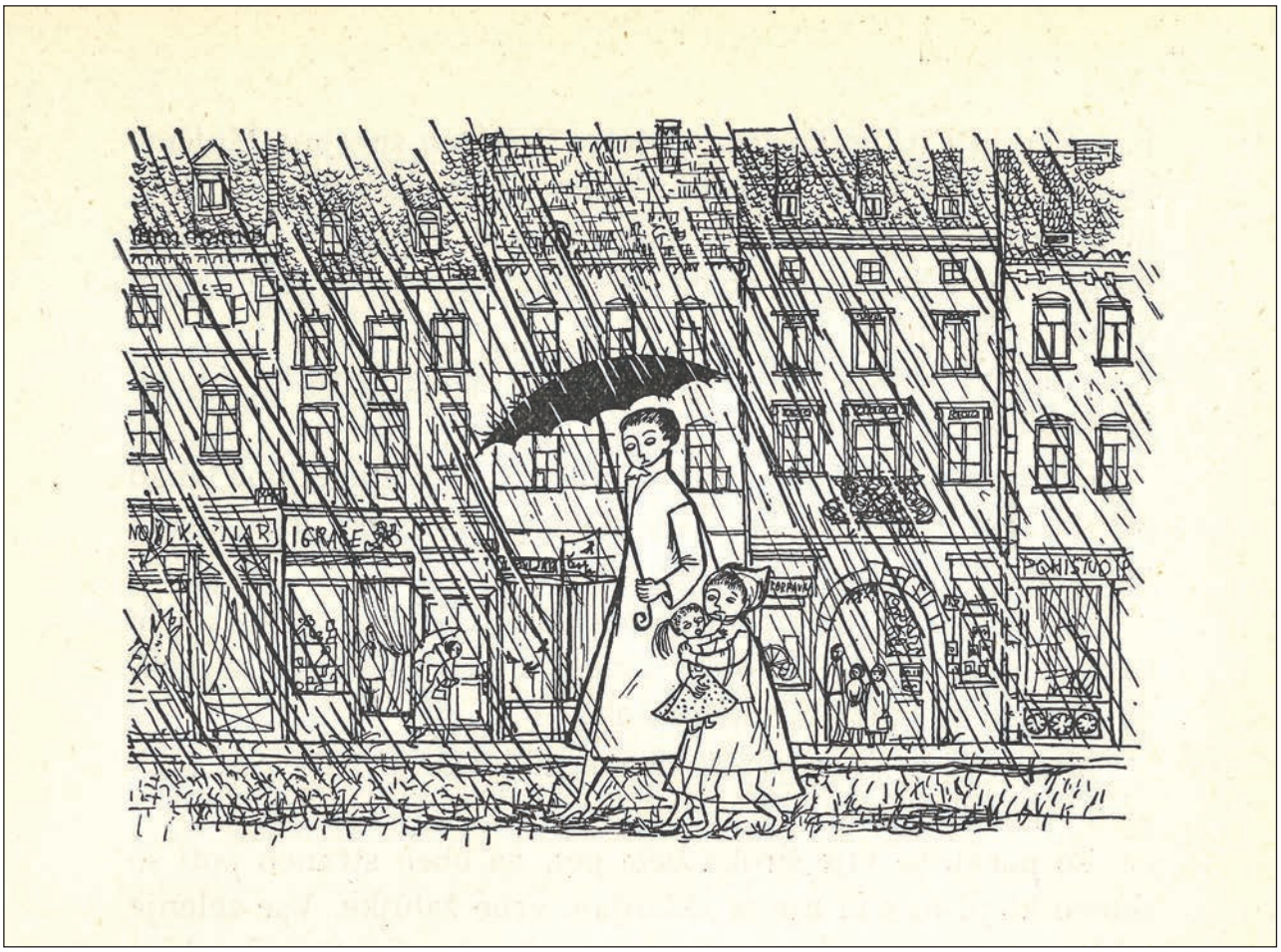


Figure 3: Illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec for the story* Za lahko noč *in the collection* Ptičke so odletele *by Ela Peroci (1960).

The father delegates the doll repair to his wife, Mojca's mother:

'Actually, you could go with her, I have urgent work to do,' he said to the mother, and she knew very well that he didn't want to go out in the rain.
She didn't feel like going either. She had already been looking forward to Mojca and her father leaving so that she could have some peace and quiet. She wanted to read Andersen's fairy tales; that was her greatest pleasure. But she had promised Mojca, or rather, her father had promised her.
Mojca waits, clutching her blind doll.
Her mother sighs, takes an umbrella and sets off with Mojca into the rain.
They walk along the wet street until they reach a toy shop. They go in and ask if the doll can be repaired. When they are told it cannot, they try another shop. Their umbrellas are wet. The rain is so heavy that it pours off them. They jump over puddles for a while, but then they stop. They step into the biggest puddles. Mojca does it because she enjoys it, and her mother does it because she is in a bad mood.
They get wet up to their knees. (Peroci, 1960, 67)

After the mother and daughter find a shop where the doll can be repaired, the rain stops, leaving behind big puddles. As they deliberately jump into the biggest puddles, the mother's mood also changes from bad to cheerful. They continue to Ljubljana's Tivoli Park. There they pass the infamous cast-iron dog sculptures – the four ancient Molossian hounds that guard the entrance to the mansion at the top of the stairs. According to urban legend, the artist Anton Dominik von Fernkorn (1813–1878) forgot to give them tongues, and the shame supposedly drove him to suicide (Kermavnar, 2018). "'They are never happy. They have no tongue. But I love them,' Mojca says to her mother. Then they climb the stairs to the top" (Peroci,



Figure 4: Illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec for the story* Za lahko noč *in the collection* Ptičke so odletele *by Ela Peroci (1960).

1960, 68). Yet the staircase, which usually leads them to the path into the woods, seems endless. They climb and climb until they find themselves before an unknown city (Figure 4). They join hands and enter through the city gate – a portal with a golden orb suspended within the arch.

They see unusual, leaning, colourful houses arranged without apparent order, where children live together with animated toys. Through expressive contour drawing, decorative ornamentation, compressed and flattened spatial organisation, and a continuous narrative composition, the illustration combines graphic precision with lyrical fantasy, using rhythmic line work and symbolic motifs rather than naturalistic modelling. The architecture functions almost like a theatrical stage or story map: interior and exterior spaces merge, scale shifts freely, and large anthropomorphic suns oversee the scene. The image invites the reader to wander through it rather than read it from a single fixed viewpoint.

The children have built the houses in the magical city from blocks; some lack doors and windows, and suns decorate their façades. At a house with three painted suns, a talking toy bear in an apron tells Mojca and her mother that they have reached the Sun City, where the suns represent children's parents. The bear and a blind toy deer care for the wet visitors. The bear explains that children spend most of the day outside while their toys stay home to cook and clean. Asked by the blind deer what the world looks like, the mother describes its colours but also complains that in cities with tall houses people cannot find peace. She links this to her crowded home and lack of self-defined free time: "For a whole month now, I've been longing for a little peace and quiet so I can read fairy tales, but there's no peace to be

found anywhere. There are so many of us in the house that we get in each other's way" (Peroci, 1960, 71). Even after their clothes dry, she delays leaving and continues describing Mojca, the broken doll, and the privilege of being able to read and daydream undisturbed (Peroci, 1960, 74). Mojca interrupts when the blind deer asks to accompany them to have its eyes repaired. Meanwhile, the girl Špelca, who lives with the bear and the deer in the house, returns from fishing, and the bear begins to cook, but the fish escapes through the window, leaving a pearl behind. Mother and daughter look through books; the mother asks to be left alone to read, and Mojca watches the landscape from the window. As darkness falls, Mojca becomes frightened and asks why they are not asleep. The mother persuades her to draw for a while longer. Only when she sees Mojca's drawing of a girl, a house, and a sun representing her mother shining on her little sister does she stop reading, moved almost to tears. They collect the blind deer and hurry home, where the worried family awaits.

While the illustration of the Sun City (Figure 4) employs a continuous narrative composition – the girl and mother climbing the stairs, the Sun City and its portal, and the events in the house with three suns – the subsequent illustration (Figure 5) focuses on a detail: the daughter with a blind toy deer from the magical city and the mother in the park, the factual world infused with fantasy.

Magic follows the mother and the daughter back into Tivoli and the city (Figure 5): goldfish fly above the fountain, the mother imagines Mojca one day flying from her birthplace "like a tiny bird" (Peroci, 1960, 77), and the tongueless dogs



Figure 5: Illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec for the story* Za lahko noč *in the collection* Ptičke so odletele *by Ela Peroci (1960).

follow them home to guard the house. Before going to sleep, Mojca calls all the family members the suns of both herself and her mother. Her father replies that his daughter and wife are his sun and that he could not live without them. The family then wishes one another good night.

ARTISTIC WORK FOR CHILDREN AS A WEDGE INTO THE THIRD SPACE

Both stories are built around the conflict between mothers' social reproductive work and their free time. In *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?*, instead of taking a "break from work and worries" to "read a few pages of a good book", the mother turns to writing fiction, through which she transforms fictionalised factual urban space into a magical space for herself and the children. In *Za lahko noč*, the mother looks forward to some peace while her husband and daughter take the doll for repair, hoping to read Andersen's tales, "her greatest joy". She cannot experience this joy, however, until she walks through public space with her child and opens herself to the child's perspective; in the shared fantasy space, where animated toys take care of children, the mother finally reads (Peroci, 1960, 66). As is usual in Peroci's stories, the father plays only a minor role. Yet it is he who delegates care of the girl to the mother, depriving her of the pleasure of reading by sending her into the rain with their daughter.

The narration and the black-and-white illustrations (Figures 3–5) in the original 1960 edition of *Za lahko noč* portray all three spatial registers identified by Henri Lefebvre (1991). They depict perceived space, shaped by habitual family relations; representations of space, embodied by the rainy streets of fictionalised Ljubljana where mother and daughter search for a repair shop; and representational or lived spaces, formed by Tivoli Park and the Sun City, where they enter fantasy before returning home. This last register is a subjective experience produced in relation to the other two.

In the 1960 edition, the mother's bitterness at leaving home to deal with the broken doll instead of reading is also conveyed visually (Figure 3): a distressed mother and daughter search the rainy streets for a repair shop. However, this illustration, which zooms in on the mother and girl walking through Ljubljana's empty, rain-soaked streets, has been absent from editions published since the illustrations were revised in 1964. Instead, editions published since 1964 present a colourful illustration of mother and daughter arriving in the Sun City (Figure 6). Since 1964, the story has included only two illustrations – one black-ink illustration and one mixed-media full-colour mixed-media illustration – both depicting only the fantasy space of the Sun City: the representational spaces.

The visual revisions of *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?* likewise removed the original 1960 illustrations from the 1964 edition onward. The composite image that depicted, beneath the veduta of Ljubljana, a mother writing in the glow of a light bulb and imagining a night walk with her children (Figure 1) was altered. The 1960 illustrations combined representations of space and perceived space structured by habitual family relations, in which it is a mother who can sit down to write only in the evening; and the representational spaces of the mother and children's fantasy-infused walk through Ljubljana's public space. Later editions also omit the illustration in which the mother-author appears in public as a lottery-ticket seller, another image of representational spaces, leaving as the story's only illustration the veduta of Ljubljana. However, instead of night, it is day: a huge sun is shining on Ljubljana Castle.

To answer the question about how the described visual revisions are to be read in the context of socialist Yugoslav children's and women's politics, we should also look at focalisation: from whose perspective is the action seen? At the beginning of both stories, the narration and, in the 1960 edition, the illustrations are also focalised through the mother's affective perspective: in Figure 1, the mother sits down in the evening to write; in Figure 3, the disgruntled mother walks with her daughter through the rain to have the doll repaired. The 1960 illustrations thus foreground the maternal perspective on the initial conflict and visually trace the passage from Ljubljana's fictionalised factual space into a fantasy space encompassing both maternal and child perspectives. By contrast, the two illustrations used from 1964 onward depict only the fantasy space. In *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?*, through her narration, the writing mother opens a space for the children in which they take a night walk together and she becomes a lottery-ticket seller. In *Za lahko noč*, the mother's receptiveness to her daughter's perspective opens a magical Sun City. In both stories, the walk enables the passage from representations of space and perceived space to representational spaces, with a shared perspective between mother and child: both are fascinated by the magical space. In both stories and in the illustrations in Figures 2 and 4–6, this shared perspective opens a space not only for children to play but also for mothers to problematise the burden of social reproduction and enjoy writing and reading children's literature, respectively. The extension of focalisation to a

perspective shared by mother and child indicates relationality.

Read through Lefebvre's spatial practices and Bhabha's third space, these stories make visible the negotiation of social reproduction as maternal work. In the perceived space of habitual family relations, the mother has no time to read or can write only at night. A walk from the familiar family home through public urban space or perceived space generates a representational fantasy space shared by mother and children. Whereas children's literature has often figured passage into imaginary space as a departure from family security and thus a danger,[11] in Peroci's fiction and Gošnik Godec's illustrations, the shared passage is not only pleasurable for children but also transforms space for the mother. It opens a site where motherhood as institution can be negotiated in relation to motherhood as a potential relationship. The joint walks through built urban environment produce a shared, though not identical, subjective space in which both maternal and child perspectives coexist. This third space enables children to play and mothers to enjoy writing and reading fiction, respectively. The stories therefore support feminist accounts of motherhood and childhood as an affective infrastructure of socialism and as carriers of political imaginaries of the future (Vidmar Horvat, 2021), while also showing social reproduction itself being contested and reimagined as relational.

It is narration – in *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?*, explicitly the mother's labour of producing fiction – that makes possible the expansion of motherhood from institution towards relation and experience, based on love, shared but not identical perspectives, intimacy, and creativity, without hiding the structural, relational, and affective complexity and ambivalence of motherhood or its political potential. The symbolism of parent-suns, drawn from Christian iconography in which the sun represents divine love and authority, does not resolve the tensions within the family as a site of social reproduction; rather, it extends this symbolism to all members of the family. When Mojca calls all her family members her suns and the father replies that she and her mother are his suns, the symbolism shifts from parental authority towards relationality among family members. However, the visual revisions introduced in 1964 make the family less visible as a site of conflict over social reproduction, thereby encouraging readers to focus on the fantasy space and adopt the child's perspective at the expense of the mother's.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the spatio-temporal dimensions of social reproduction in *Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša?* and *Za lahko noč* reveals narration and fiction as transformative passages, enacted through the mothers' walks with children through public space, from the perceived space of the socialist family, through representations of Ljubljana's urban topography, to representational fantasy spaces, where maternal and child perspectives can be negotiated. The mother's opening towards the child's perspective, explicitly through narration and writing for children in one story, becomes a wedge into the third space: a transgressive operation (Iser, 1993, 4) between the real, motherhood as institution, and the imaginary, motherhood as potential experience.

The labour of producing fiction may therefore constitute a third burden for the working mother. At the same time, by negotiating the child's perspective, the labour of producing fiction enables mothers both to problematise motherhood as institution and to reimagine it as experience and relational practice, as "a translational space of negotiation through the process of dialogue" (Bhabha, 2009, x). In this reading, social reproduction (Rosen, 2023) appears as (i) relational care, (ii) the transfer of knowledge and values open to different perspectives, and (iii) the negotiated production of subjectivities not confined to predefined positions but open to alternative forms of world-making. Revisiting selected fiction by Ela Peroci from the socialist Yugoslav era through the lens of social reproduction – and attending to artistic work for children – recentres it as socially and politically relevant relational work and as a space for the ongoing political struggle to dismantle enforced hierarchies between forms of work deemed more or less important and subjectivities deemed more or less self-defined. In line with proposals from critical feminist historiography (Mohanty, 1993; Scott, 1991), such an approach moves theoretical reflection on socialist motherhood from descriptions of motherhood as something that predetermines and closes maternal subjectivities to the interrogation of the constitution of experiences and the formation of subjectivities, thereby revealing the work of fiction as a wedge for the political – a third space for negotiating care, agency, and futurity.

11 The arcadia of socialist modernisation was often located in urban spaces and sometimes, particularly in avant-garde works, incorporated technological innovations, as in Aleksandar Vučo and Dušan Matić's 1933 *Podvizi družine "Pet petlića"* (*The Fine Feats of the 'Five Cockerels' Gang*).



Figure 6: Colour illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec for the story* Za lahko noč *in the collection* Za lahko noč *by Ela Peroci (since 1964).

This reading does not overturn the socialist symbolic valorisation of reproductive work and motherhood as central to Yugoslav socialist politics of affect and moral stability, especially in relation to traditional gender roles within the family, or of childhood as the reproduction of the future (Vidmar Horvat, 2021; 2023). Rather, it shows that socialist Yugoslav conceptions of motherhood and childhood were dynamic, thereby recentring these questions within a more differentiated understanding and pointing to the need for a critical reconsideration of liberal conceptions of motherhood that often position women as victims through motherhood. Such a reconsideration is especially urgent in comparative historical perspective, as globalised exploitation, extraction, patriarchal authoritarianism, populism, and warfare again disproportionately expose children and women to harm.

TRETJI PROSTOR DRUŽBENE REPRODUKCIJE: DELO FIKCIJE IN POLITIZACIJA SOCIALISTIČNEGA MATERINSTVA

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POVZETEK

V besedilu z multimodalnim branjem dveh zgodb Ele Peroci – Kdaj je Ljubljana najlepša? *(1960) in* Za lahko noč *(1960) – ter ilustracij, s katerimi je Ančka Gošnik Godec zgodbi opremila v različnih izdajah, obravnavam prostorsko-časovne razsežnosti družbene reprodukcije, materinstva in otroštva ter umetniškega dela za otroke v socialistični Jugoslaviji. Pri analizi se opiram na takratne in sodobne študije materinstva ter družbene reprodukcije. Izhajam iz ugotovitev o družbenem in moralnem vrednotenju ter naturalizaciji materinstva, otroštva in skrbstvenega dela kot osrednjih stebrov jugoslovanske socialistične afektivne politike spolov in prihodnosti, pa tudi moralne stabilnosti. Takšno vrednotenje naj bi omejevalo delovalnost socialističnih mater ter oteževalo problematizacijo materinstva in družbene reprodukcije, – nalog, ki so jih matere predvsem znotraj družin kljub plačanemu delu, ekonomski neodvisnosti ter pridobljenim pravicam in odgovornostim tudi takrat večinoma opravljale same. Družbeno reprodukcijo razumem kot relacijski proces, zato prostorsko-časovno analizo zgodb umestim v teorijo prostora Henrija Lefebvra ter koncept tretjega prostora Homija Bhabhe. Pokažem, kako sta feminizirani področji dela fikcije in umetniškega ustvarjanja za otroke odpirali tretji prostor za premišljanje, problematizacijo in usklajevanje materinstva, skrbstvenega dela, otroštva in prostega časa. V tem prostoru se materinstvo ne kaže zgolj kot institucija in odtujeno delo, ki materinsko subjektivnost vnaprej določa in omejuje, temveč tudi kot relacijska izkušnja, ki odpira možnosti za preizpraševanje in politizacijo skrbi, utrujenosti, želj, ustvarjalnosti in skupnosti. V članku zato predlagam drugačno razumevanje socialističnega materinstva ter kritičen premislek o liberalnih in konservativnih pojmovanjih in politikah materinstva ter družbene reprodukcije, ki pogosto prav prek slednjih ženske na različne načine viktimizirajo.*

Ključne besede: otroška književnost, delo umetnosti, družbena reprodukcija, materinstvo, otroštvo, socializem, Ela Peroci, Ančka Gošnik Godec

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