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URBAN SPACE AND THIRD PLACES IN DRAGAN LUKIĆ'S POETRY AND PROSE

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the urban space as depicted in Dragan Lukić's poetry and prose, with a particular focus on third places for children. Lukić introduced a new sensibility into Yugoslav children's poetry after World War II, building on the avant-garde heritage of the 1930s and creating accessible texts for contemporary children. His poetry and prose integrated the new loci of urban third places, construing them as zones for play and children's autonomy, while highlighting the importance of the community for children's development.

Keywords: Dragan Lukić, Serbian children's literature, Yugoslav children's literature, third places for children, urban space

SPAZIO URBANO E TERZI LUOGHI NELLA POESIA E NELLA PROSA DI DRAGAN LUKIĆ

SINTESI

Questo articolo prende in esame lo spazio urbano così come rappresentato nella poesia e nella prosa di Dragan Lukić, con particolare attenzione ai terzi luoghi per l'infanzia. Lukić introdusse una nuova sensibilità nella poesia per l'infanzia jugoslava dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, sviluppando l'eredità delle avanguardie degli anni '30 e creando testi accessibili ai bambini del suo tempo. Nelle sue opere poetiche e narrative egli integrò i nuovi luoghi urbani riconducibili ai terzi luoghi, configurandoli come spazi di gioco e di autonomia infantile, sottolineando al contempo l'importanza della comunità per lo sviluppo dei bambini.

Parole chiave: Dragan Lukić, letteratura per l'infanzia serba, letteratura per l'infanzia jugoslava, terzi luoghi per bambini, spazio urbano

INTRODUCTION

A chair behind a closed door – war in the street.
A chair in front of an open door – this house is open.
Open windows and doors – no boundary between the house and the world.[1]
Pogađalica [Guessing-game] (1973)[2]

The children's poetry of Dragan Lukić (1928–2006) has rarely been studied in depth, with infrequent exceptions such as Radomir Životić's (2018)[3] monograph, and we may safely say that his prose opus has not been closely studied at all. Broadly speaking, his short stories and novels have been treated as secondary to his voluminous corpus of poetry. Until relatively recently, the criticism of his poetry was also largely confined to general judgments, with occasional detailed analyses (cf. Bojanić Ćirković, 2025; Panić Maraš, 2025).

On the other hand, if we look for an author who represents the era of Yugoslav 'reconstruction and construction', we can hardly find a more typical children's poet than Lukić. Almost from the very beginning, Lukić is a poet of modern urban spaces. It is no coincidence that one of the most frequently republished selections of his poetry is called *Nebom grada* [Across the City Sky][4] (1978).

This paper will focus on the urban child's third places as described in Dragan Lukić's poetry and prose, specifically the forms of third places detectable in narratives set in Belgrade, and covering the turbulent historical period from the late 1930s to the 1960s, while Belgrade transitioned from the capital of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the capital of FNRY and later SFRY.[5] In order to do that, we will have to rely on a hybrid methodological framework that includes both the literary-historical method and the concept of third places as developed by the urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999), as well as historical and architectural-historical studies dealing with Yugoslav cultural history and the architecture of Belgrade specifically. We posit that Lukić's opus presents a large body of texts featuring third places for children, as defined in the seminal sociological study *The Great Good Place*: "the core settings of informal public life […] a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg, 1999, 16). Oldenburg also describes third places as "inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it" (Oldenburg, 1999, 14). When juxtaposing this with Jenny Bavidge's (2006, 328) conclusion that "children's literature['s] […] real interest for children's geographers must lie in what it tells us about the discourses, genres and projections by which the city is imagined for children", it seems clear that an examination of Lukić's texts will show us both how the broader socialist context determined the idealized image of the city and child's life in Lukić's work, and the clash between that image and the reality, which also emerged in his poems and short stories. An overview of Lukić's work should offer an exhaustive list of third places, where the urbanists' plans intersect with the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld, the shared experience and cultural background) of city children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: 'RENOVATION AND CONSTRUCTION' – THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN CITYSCAPES AFTER WORLD WAR II

Lukić began writing after the Second World War, during a time when Yugoslavia, destroyed by wartime bombings, was being rebuilt. Radical social shifts were accompanied by major urban changes; the migration of the rural population to the urban environment increased the urgent need for new housing, organized in accordance with the demands of modern mid-century urban life. As Ivana Dobrivojević Tomić (2012, 121) has stated within her broader research of the rural and urban living in post-war Serbia, the living conditions were very hard for many urban dwellers, leading to a state of "constant housing misery".

Contemporary architects turned to a style nowadays known as Socialist Modernism (and its evolvement Socialist Brutalism), in a valiant attempt to create economical modern housing and living space for the citizens of the new society. Many authors have written about the architectural characteristics of that period – large residential buildings for numerous households and the abandonment of older small-scale housing models (for an in-depth discussion cf. Stierli & Kulić, 2018). Together with the mass migration from rural to urban environments such as Novi Beograd (New Belgrade), a typical example of a Belgrade district built entirely in the style of Socialist Brutalism,

1 "Stolica iza zatvorenih vrata – rat na ulici. / Stolica ispred otvorenih vrata – kuća se sasvim otvorila. / Otvoreni prozori i vrata – granice između kuće i sveta nema" (Lukić, 2024, 294).

2 It is important to note that all subsequent dates of first publication refer to first publication as part of a poetry or short story collection. Many of these works were first published earlier, in children's periodicals, but the lack of a complete bibliography has rendered it extremely difficult to establish the dates of first publication proper.

3 It should be noted that Životić's monograph on Lukić's poetry was first published in 1975, as a reworked version of his master's thesis. It is both a testimony to Lukić's importance and the sole book-length work dedicated to his opus.

4 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of titles and quotes are mine.

5 FNRY – Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1963), and SFRY – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1991).

this often led to a deep disorientation of new residents and alienation from their new surroundings (for a short overview of contemporary criticisms regarding life in the apartment towers of Novi Beograd cf. Le Normand, 2008, 147–150). On the other hand, people adapted, developing coping strategies, re-coding and appropriating segments of their new environment in order to satisfy their social and emotional needs more fully. Among the many changes of this period, the one we are most interested in this context is the gradual transition from one model of the third place to another: in Belgrade, the collective life and children's freedom within the loose neighbourhood communities, although nearly infinite from today's point of view, were actually shifting from the framework of one urban model to another. As we shall see, Lukić's protagonists continuously negotiate the use of the new third places and new forms of outdoor activities.

EMERGENCE OF A NEW YUGOSLAV CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Cultural production transformed along with the socio-economical changes (that included, as we shall see, significant changes in urban planning and housing). As Jovan Ljuštanović (2009) demonstrated in his influential study on the development of modern children's poetry in Serbia, *Brisanje lava* [Erasing the Lion], after the initial wave of Socialist Realism, Serbian children's authors embraced the legacy of Surrealism, creating a modern, playful and less ideologically charged form of children's poetry. To varying degrees, the same process was at work in all parts of Yugoslavia. In Serbian poetry for children, however, the informal but undisputed programmatic and poetic leader of the new movement was Dušan Radović (1922–1984), who wrote for children and adults alike, edited various magazines (*Pioniri* 1951–1952, *Poletarac* 1973–1975), and worked as an editor of children's programmes at the state-owned broadcaster Radio Beograd and later Radio-Televizija Beograd. Dragan Lukić soon became one of Radović's most reliable and creative younger followers and associates.

Born in Belgrade in 1928, he graduated at the University of Belgrade in 1954 and at first worked as a professor of Serbian language and literature at the Belgrade Pedagogical School. Lukić's first poems appeared in high-school periodicals in the late 1940s, and from the early 1950s onwards, he published stories and poems in various children's periodicals and joint collections. Over that decade, he established himself as one of the leading Yugoslav and Serbian children's poets, writing across multiple media and genres (radio, theatre, television). In later years, he turned to writing autobiographical and autofictional narratives. He lived and worked in Belgrade until his death in 2006.

Paradoxically, literary theorists and historians were sometimes dismissive of Lukić because of the great popularity of his poetry, its accessibility, and the fact that Yugoslav children of the socialist era grew up with Lukić's poems and stories not only as part of the compulsory school reading, but also as part of popular culture (children's music, TV shows, etc.). What also worked against him was his productivity – Lukić wrote on demand, quickly and assiduously, even on a day-to-day basis, for newspapers, radio and television. Nevertheless, his effort to address his contemporary children audience directly and to establish a good rapport with them resulted in a lyrical opus that offers a carefully observed, sensitive depiction of mid-twentieth century childhood that is both idyllic and urban.

BELGRADE CHILDHOOD AROUND 1940

The vision of the city that Lukić provides in his poetry and prose is significant today for striking a precarious balance between realism and socialist idyll, depicting both home and school as idealized forms of first and second place. With rare exceptions, Lukić does not generally problematize the world in which his heroes live, work, and study (Ljuštanović, 2009, 173). Lukić's representation of the third places, however, i.e. the spaces where children play, socialize, and spend their free time, still contains a measure of realism and authenticity, and he often describes these spaces as clearly demarcated and recognizable, tied to a specific socio-historical context. Lukić's protagonists play outside the home – but over time, the nature of the home and its surroundings shifts implicitly. We can distinguish two very different types of urban buildings appearing in the background of Lukić's texts: the pre-war tenements and their post-war remnants, and in sharp contrast with them, the new high-rise buildings.

The first type is most typically embodied by the form of housing known as *partajas* or *avlijske zgrade* (courtyard buildings). In her authoritative study on the housing of the poor in interwar Belgrade, Zlata Vuksanović-Macura (2018, 186) describes them in detail, as "elongated courtyards of a rectangular or trapezoidal shape, 10–12 meters wide and about 25–45 meters deep" with apartments (usually low-rise buildings) lined up along the sides, with a common water fountain in the middle and common toilets and sheds at the bottom of the yard; all apartments had entrances from the courtyard. The *partajas* were intended for poor working families or individuals, and this was reflected in their size (one or two rooms) and an average ceiling height of 1,5 to 2 metres (Vuksanović-Macura, 2018, 186–187). Such accommodations were usually situated on the

city outskirts, but the rapid development of Belgrade often turned them into inner-city slums.

Naturally, lacking privacy and personal space, the tenants of a single *partaja* were by necessity quite familiar with each other, and in good weather many activities such as food preparation, socialising etc. were performed in the yard. This included, obviously, children's games. The children, however, were usually not strictly supervised, and the play spilled over and outside the courtyards: into the liminal space of the streets and parks, and the interstitial spaces or "urban voids" left between urbanized and structured parts of the city. As Sousa Matos (2014, 66) notes discussing the potential uses of interstitial spaces, "this is where their children go in search of free spaces for socialising".

In Lukić's poems and stories, the nature of this life before and immediately after the war is clearly reflected: mothers send children outside to fetch water in *Joca je oprao beton* [Joca washed the concrete] (1965) (Lukić, 2024, 349); neighbourhood children join a single child's game instantly in *Ivin voz* [Iva's Train] (1963) (Lukić, 2024, 278); and children often play with damaged or improvised toys that signal poverty, like headless dolls in *Lutka bez glave* [Doll with No Head] (1965) (Lukić, 2024, 340), or a football made of rags in *Krpenjača* [Rag Ball] (1965) (Lukić, 2024, 352).[6]

But for an extended analysis, we can turn to a series of texts that are often omitted from consideration[7] when discussing Lukić's opus: a series of autofictional children's novels on growing up in Belgrade during the 1940s, published between 1972 and 1985, and written from the viewpoint of a slightly fictionalized Lukić himself. Our discussion of third places for children and young adults will be limited to the first three titles in the sequence. *Tri gusketara* [The Three Gooseketeers] (1977), covers roughly 1937 and 1938; *Bomba u beloj kafi* [A Bombshell in the Morning Coffee] (1972), describes the World War II period between the April war and the liberation of Belgrade (1941–1944); and *Cvetkovci* [The Boys of Cvetko's Marketplace] (1981), focuses on the immediate post-liberation period (1944–1945). In his later years, Lukić himself stated that his aim was to create a faithful depiction of the place and time:

> *In these five books, I have provided an authentic geography of the eastern part of Belgrade, from the Pančevo Bridge, across Zvezdara to Autokomanda* […] *By writing down my memories of this city from 1937 to 1948, I think I have created a kind of historical archive of the capital with the names of its streets, descriptions of buildings, listing cinema repertoires and memories of a generation that practically lived in three states – the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Nedić's state*[8] *and Socialist Yugoslavia.* (Kosanović, 1999, 8)

Tri gusketara [The Three Gooseketeers] is situated in Pašino brdo (Pasha's Hill), a neighbourhood on the outskirts of pre-war Belgrade (cf. Figure 1). That area represented a typical example of the settlements analysed by Vuksanović-Macura (2018) – small family houses, often built by the inhabitants themselves, along an unpaved street, with garden plots, chicken coops and pig pens. The residents are generally working-class – from craftsmen and factory workers to itinerant musicians and policemen. Lukić delineates the boundaries of the suburban community very clearly, centring it around the primary school named after the poet Vojislav Ilić and a large brickyard. The school is explicitly stated to be the locus of 'another life' for children, closely resembling Oldenburg's definition of second space: "The musketeers didn't just live with geese on the green meadow and they had friends beyond their street and 'enemies' beyond Mali Mokri Lug. They were pupils of the Vojislav Ilić elementary school and lived another life there" (Lukić, 1991a, 60).

The Belgrade suburb of Pašino brdo is described lovingly, with strong Arcadian overtones, and the children' protagonists (aged 9 to 10 years old) are presented as nearly completely autonomous within that sphere, with the boundaries between home and street almost non-existent. The local boys meet daily under one of the few street lamps, using its circle of light as a shared space where they can talk and read together until late into the night (Lukić, 1991a, 47). Other meeting places include an empty field between their street and their school, a typical "urban void" as described by Sousa Matos (2014), as well as various meadows and wild groves in the area where children play and daydream while taking their geese out to graze. Beyond the boundaries of Pašino brdo, the situation is different. To the south lies Trošarina, the former excise check point and the boundary of the city proper and further on the village of Mali Mokri Lug (Lukić, 1991a, 45), which the children view as a fairy-tale space where their geese might turn into princesses. The single other part of Belgrade they visit outside Pašino brdo is Topčider, a popular picnic spot for families and school trips. Although these places are within easy reach, the children see them as remote, mysterious and alluring.

6 The titles of Lukić's works are provided in original and in translation. As for the quotations from his texts, prose fragments are quoted in translations only, while excerpts from poems are provided in the original as well.

7 For a detailed analysis of the autofictional aspects of this sequence of novels cf. Tropin (2026).

8 "Nedić's state" refers to Serbia under occupation in World War II.

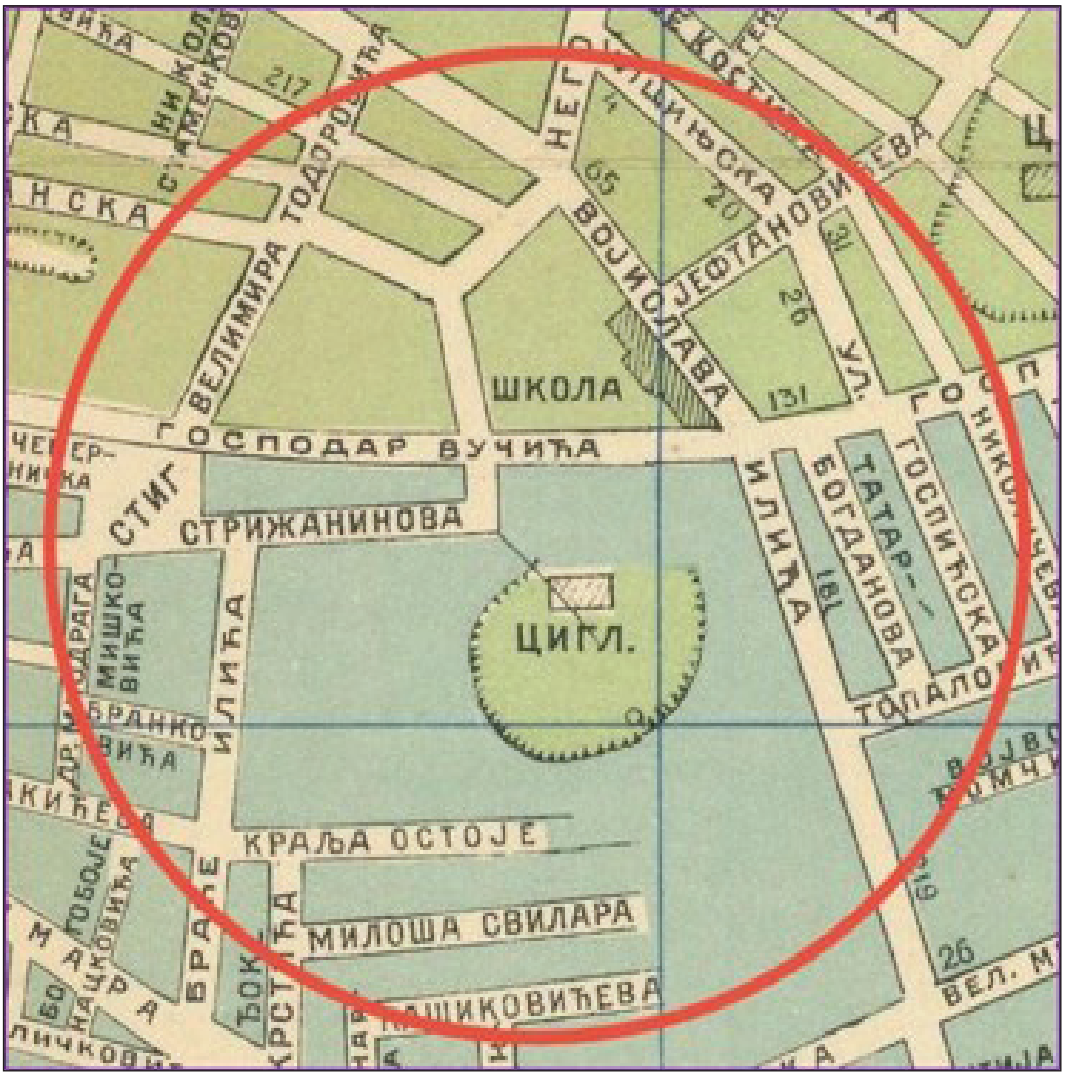


Figure 1: Map of Belgrade in 1940, detail (Source: RAREMAPS, 2026).

The second part of the sequence, *Bomba u beloj kafi* [A Bombshell in the Morning Coffee] (1972) (Lukić, 1991b), uses the same setting, but the tenor of this novel is quite different and much darker. It is also much more tightly plotted than any other of Lukić's Belgrade novels and, naturally, the shift in the protagonist's spatial experience is dramatic.

Bomba… [A Bombshell …] opens with the description of the German bombing of Belgrade in 1941. The first chapter contains an almost obsessively detailed listing of the neighbours' houses, their names and occupations, as well as their ethnicity – many of them are Romani, a fact that will later gain tragic significance. In an instant, the streets and open fields of Pašino brdo transform into places of danger, and the protagonists' family, together with their neighbours, escape to the nearest villages in a mass centrifugal exodus. Although they return home after the first few days of war and find their district unscathed by bombs, everything has changed: there are no places of safety any more and no freedom of movement. The former communal spaces are endangered or gone, as the German army is using the fields around the abandoned brickyard as training grounds and SS troops are often patrolling along the streets or raiding houses.

During the war, courtyards emerge as new, localised third places, where children can play in relative safety. "That's why parents kept their children at home, in rooms and yards. And what else would children do in their rooms and yards, when they forget about the war, but invent games?" (Lukić, 1991b, 42). These games are described in great detail: the boys replace their lost football pitch with a miniature simulation in the protagonist's yard, using buttons to represent players and a gaming die as the football (Lukić, 1991b,

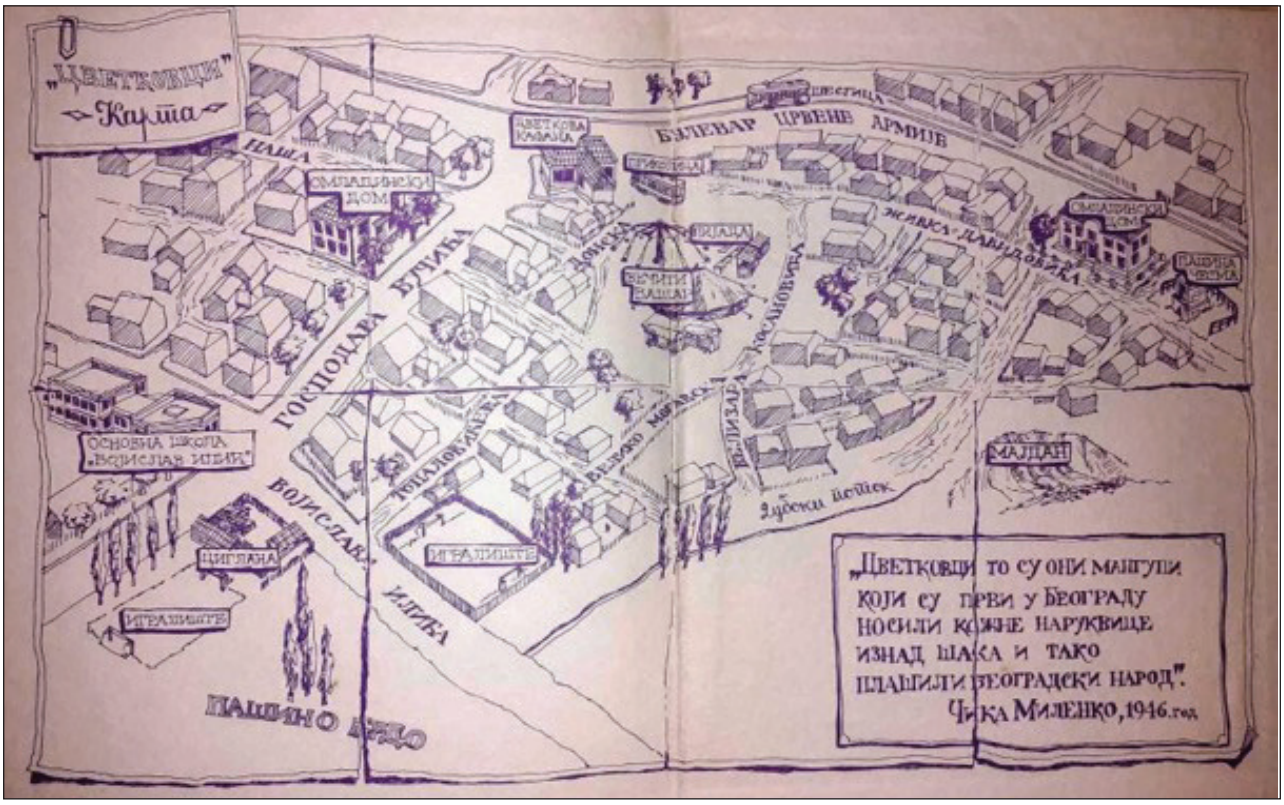


Figure 2: Frontpapers for the first edition of Cvetkovci, drawing by Rajko Kovačević, 1981 (Source: Lukić, 1981).

42–46). The construction of toy airplanes, tanks and cannons merits an even longer chapter, including a meticulous description of the procurement of materials (often by theft) and the manufacturing process (Lukić, 1991b, 59–71). The children's play and the intricacy of their games constantly intersect with the harsh reality of war – limited freedom of movement, hunger and cold – a dynamic that culminates in the boys' decision to use their toys for kindling, symbolically ending their childhood.

It is important to note that this watershed event is bookended by two episodes that describe children venturing into streets beyond their neighbourhood. The first episode narrates the rescue of two of their Romani friends from the Germans: the boys dress up as a group of *vertepaši* (a folk custom linked to Orthodox Christmas, similar to *koledari* or Christmas carolling), and escort their disguised Romani friends to another part of the town and into relative safety. The other episode (and the single collective excursion downtown described in this novel) occurs soon after the toy burning, when the boys decide to accompany the neighbourhood girls on a walk. Although set before the end of the war, the entire episode determines the tone of the next novel: the protagonists are on the cusp of adolescence, discovering both the city beyond the limits of Pašino brdo and the possibility of sentimental attachment (Lukić, 1991b, 89–94). The breaking out from the constraints of war will change both the boys and the city around them.

"GEOGRAPHY AND MAFIA" – *CVETKOVCI*

This novel is the last in the sequence set entirely in Belgrade. It is also doubtlessly the most successful in depicting the immediate post-war period, the reshaping of society in accordance with the socialist model and, at the same time, the protagonist's adolescent exploration of the changing city.

The beginning represents a narrative throwback to the period before the war, with a nostalgic description of the Lukićs' home that focuses on the 'Ottoman empire' (the affectionally nicknamed ottoman in the living room). From that safe space of childhood, the spatial focus zooms out to encompass the street where they live, then the entire Pašino brdo, and finally other parts of Belgrade. Simultaneously, the narrative switches to the time after the war.

Dragan and his brother Jovica are learning how to navigate other parts of town, establishing a rivalry with the informal street gang called *Cvetkovci* [Cvetko's boys], a pack of apprenticed

car mechanics and blacksmiths (Lukić, 1991c, 46). *Cvetkovci* rule their neighbourhood by sheer physical strength and intimidation.

The fact that the first edition includes a map of that part of Belgrade (cf. Figure 2) is very deliberate. The short chapter "Geografija i mafija" ["Geography and mafia"] includes a comprehensive description of the area, naming all the streets, listing all important landmarks – from schools to restaurants to factories – and, most importantly, it explains the gang's pride and sense of identity. Their territory has carefully and precisely defined borders, but they also appropriate the tram line Nr. 6 and any interesting locations along its route – in fact, any and all third places open to adolescents in the late 1940s. "The Cvetko's boys claimed the right to Cvetko's market, to the fairground, to the tram No. 6, to all dance halls, to all cinemas, to all football fields, to all boxing clubs, to all Belgrade riverside beaches, to all of Belgrade. They claimed that right and fought for that right" (Lukić, 1991c, 46).

Before long, a larger conflict emerges between the gang on one side and the apprentice tram drivers and the SKOJ[9] members on the other. Lukić sketches the struggle between the opposite groups while minimizing its ideological background and softening the potentially troubling aspects of gang life. In *Cvetkovci*, and even more in the two final Belgrade novels, Lukić aims to present a detailed and largely verifiable, yet idealised and nostalgic picture of a Belgrade adolescence in the late 1940s. The basic sentiment is not far from the semi-ironic formulation, "They never had it better?" selected as the title of an exhibition devoted to modernization of everyday life in Socialist Yugoslavia (Panić et al., 2014).

However, the depiction of a socialist childhood in Lukić's poetry and prose was contemporaneous to the way of life he was describing, and therefore both the imagery and the fundamental sentiment underlying his early works are quite different.

COMMUNAL LIVING IN HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS

The era of 'reconstruction and construction' also meant the emergence of the new brutalist architecture, which in some places represented the construction of entire new neighbourhoods (Novi Beograd). In his early, expressive poetry, which often experiments with novel graphic forms, Lukić shapes the image of a modern city. One of the most successful examples is the *Bajka o soliteru* [Fairy-Tale of the High-Rise] (1963), in which it anthropomorphizes the high-rise as a living, sentient, extremely tall being. We have to quote the opening in the original, in order to reproduce the characteristic graphic form:

S S
O O
L L
I I
T T
E E
R R
Kakvo čudno ime! (Lukić, 2024, 298)[10]

Other poems describing modern Belgrade range from *Šest balkona* [*Six Balconies*], 1962, (Lukić, 1979, 106) to *Dok se Beograd sprema da sanja* [As Belgrade Prepares for Sleep] (1961). *Šest balkona* present a dynamic picture of an apartment building's façade, with the titular balconies appearing as repetitions of a single image and establishing a collective identity of the building: they are likened to "six naval crow's nests" and "six pulled-out drawers", and they display "one boy each" in the morning, and grandmothers later in the day, imperceptibly linking their age with the time of day (Lukić, 1979, 106).[11] While this poem is not explicitly set in Belgrade, by contrast, *Dok se Beograd sprema da sanja* is not merely an extended fantasy of living buildings talking a walk on their night out, it is also very precise in regard to the locations, the building and even neon signs:

"Terazije street goes for a walk / dressed as a great lady / with a necklace of silver neon / and quietly, so as not to cause a stir in town, / she pins on the blue brooch of Chromos' neon sign / and puts on her shoes with concrete heels" (Lukić, 2024, 297).[12] The "blue brooch", was, in fact, a well-known feature of the Igumanov Palace, situated on Terazije Street – the first animated neon sign in Belgrade, depicting the Chromos' logo designed by Milan Vulpe in 1954.

Life in a modern, vibrant city had its drawbacks. Tenants of new buildings had to get used to a new way of life in multi-storey buildings and develop new forms of community and common life. This was especially true for children, who were now often left alone, without the loose community network

9 SKOJ or Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije [League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia] was the most important youth organisation in the postwar years.

10 "High-rise / High-rise /What an odd name!"

11 "Na našoj zgradi ima / šest okačenih balkona / ko šest mornarskih korpi […] Na našoj zgradi ima šest okačenih balkona / ko šest izvučenih fioka" (Lukić, 1979, 106).

12 "Tada ulica Terazije pođe u šetnju / obučena kao velike dame / sa ogrlicom od srebrnog neona / i tiho da ne načini u gradu pometnju / zakači plavi broš hromosove reklame / i obuje cipele sa štiklom od betona" (Lukić, 2024, 297).

present in the suburbs. One of Lukić's later stories, *Devojčica na repu reda* [The Girl at the End of the Queue] (1977), concerns a five-year-old girl who leaves her solitary confinement in the high-rise family apartment and escapes to the park she can see through her window, in order to look for company. The short story subtly criticises the system in which kindergartens are inaccessible to all children, while their parents are required to work all day and claims that the modern comfort of urban living is not an adequate substitute:

> *It is not easy to live in high-rise buildings. It is neither easy nor comfortable. The rooms are freshly painted and there is always hot water in the bathroom and there are many windows in the rooms and the parquet is not very hard, and you can go out onto a small balcony. But it is not easy for the little girl Jasna, whose parents go to work and leave Jasna alone in a huge skyscraper, alone, without a brother, without a sister, without a grandmother and without a grandfather, without an aunt and without an uncle, without a housekeeper and without a neighbour... And without a dog, and without a cat.* (Lukić, 1977, np.)

The society depicted in this picture-book has moved away from the happy, close-knit, conflict-free environment Lukić portrayed in his poems of the 1950s and which Ljuštanović (2009, 174) described as "creating a new family idyll", as well as the hybrid urban-rural space of Pašino brdo in the 1930s. Lukić published two versions of the story, and in the longer 1977 version, he explicitly resolves the situation with the little girl enrolling in a nearby kindergarten. Here, the motif of the playground and park also appears as a place intended for children and clearly separated from the living space. However, the third places where children and adults meet on common ground shift from courtyards and streets to the staircases and corridors of the new apartment complexes.

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

In Lukić's poetry and prose, city streets and public spaces as safe play spaces are much more common than parks and playgrounds proper. The children that Lukić depicts in his early short stories, written in the 1950s, occasionally blur the line between inside and outside, between house and street. The extremely short story *Merenje* [Weighing] (1965), is indicative in this regard. Jasna runs out of the house to weigh herself on a public scale and takes off her shoes before stepping on it, so as not to dirty it; for her, the rules of conduct are the same for the street weighing-scale and for entering someone else's living space. The city district is described in the first sentence: "On the street where multi-storey buildings are stacked like large boxes, a small scale for measuring passers-by stands on a corner" (Lukić, 2024, 337). This contrast between multi-storey buildings as "large boxes" and the "small scale" operated by an individual is not explicitly activated, but it is present as important context for the image of a child that views the street scale as intimately familiar and related to home. That experience of intimacy and connection is even more emphasized in another short story, *Jasna i professor matematike* [Jasna and the Mathematics Professor] (1965), (Lukić, 2024, 343). Here, Jasna brings her little dog to weigh it on the street scale; since neither she nor the scale operator can make the dog stand still, passers-by spontaneously gather, make suggestions, and in the end the mathematics professor solves the problem by a simple subtraction operation. For today's readers, one of the most noticeable differences between the depiction of street life in Lukić's early work and our everyday life is precisely this ease of communication with strangers and specifically the feeling of safety within the community. This holds even when the conversation demonstrates an essential misunderstanding between children and adults, as in the story *Lutka bez glave* [Doll with No Head] (1965) (Lukić, 2024, 340), in which the little girl does not hesitate to argue with an unfamiliar adult.

A strong signal of familiarity is the fact that the unnamed adult characters in these stories are mostly addressed as *čika* and *teta*. Although the terms in question mean respectively "uncle" and "aunt", in the modern context they have become informal names for adults used by young children. Lukić's adult characters are usually not addressed as *drugovi*, socialist comrades: *čika* and *teta* connote intimacy and a kinship context. The short story *Čika* (1965), (Lukić, 1979, 94) focuses precisely on the forms of address: the narrator remarks that children address him alternately as *ti* (informal "you", an equal) when he is bareheaded, *drug* ("comrade") when he's wearing a beret, and *čika* ("uncle") if he's wearing a hat – and the last form is coupled with a warning to be careful on the slippery sidewalk.

TRAMS AND TROLLEYBUSES: MOBILE THIRD PLACES

Perhaps the most distinctive variant of the third place that we find in Lukić's opus are trams and trolleybuses. These public transit vehicles are among the most common themes of Lukić's urban poetry (from his early collection of poetry, *Moj trolejbus* [My trolleybus] (1962), to one of the last ones, *Troletramvajbus* [Trolleytrambus] (2002). The trolleybus and the tram, viewed as symbols, represent focal points for

various thematic aspects of children's poetry during the socialist era: they are symbols of technological progress, but at the same time of social, collective work, visualized as fun and attractive, and above all an indispensable part of urban childhood.[13] Poems depicting realistic, everyday travel by public transport and its unavoidable conflicts, such as *Mali grof u tramvaju* [The Little Count on the Tram] (1962), (Lukić, 2024, 257–258), or *Dokle ti trolejbusi* [How Long Will the Trolley] (1977) (Lukić, 2024, 264) though relatively rare, are present.

As Jovan Ljuštanović (2009, 172–176) has shown, Lukić takes an important pedagogical socialist impulse from the pre-war poetry of Aleksandar Vučo, especially his classic poem *Moj otac tramvaj vozi* [My Father Drives the Tram]. For Lukić's lyrical self, as well as for his child protagonists, the trolleybus is a mobile space for play and imagination. The poem *Moj trolejbus* [My Trolleybus] (1962), could be viewed as programmatic: the poet's imaginary trolleybus is to represent "a children's car – it goes around all the time"[14] and would go from one pastry shop to another. The poem *Za Mesec* [To the Moon] (1962), similarly offers a vision of the first trolleybus that will travel to the Moon: the driver will be a scientist, and the passengers "children and poets".[15]

Other poems and stories are closer to everyday life. *Poslednja stanica* [The Last Stop] (1962), describes an anthropomorphised, tired trolleybus, resting at the final stop before returning to work. As Ljuštanović (2009, 176) perceptively notes, "The last stop is near the subject's house and he often looks at the trolleybus. It seems that this is about urban intimacy that emerges from necessity, from the physical proximity of certain objects, things and places". Urban intimacy is, indeed, a good description of the relationships that Lukić's children protagonists develop with their surroundings, imbuing them with an animist energy. The eponymous protagonists of the short story *Trolejbus i lopta* [The Trolleybus and the Ball] (1965) (Lukić, 1979, 60–61), hover on the verge between animated and unanimated beings: as children play football in an empty field near the street, in a typical third place, a trolleybus drives by, "fat from his many passengers, red from running" (Lukić, 1979, 61), the ball rushes under its wheels, and only the driver's quick reaction saves it. Lukić ends the story both with a realistic, friendly interaction between the driver and the boys and the image of the front wheel "kissing his girlfriend, the ball".

Children's fascination with technology and vehicles is translated into children's play, but also into vacant time spent in the street while 'hanging around'.[16] In the short story *Vožnja po gradu* [A Ride Around the City] (1965), the boy protagonist Joca finds a screw and hopes that the owner of the screw will come along and give him a ride. He imagines a sequence of various vehicles (bus, truck, car, etc.), but in the end it turns out that the screw belongs to a more modest means of transportation, more suitable to Joca's age – a scooter. The initial situation already realistically sets the framework for Joca's 'entertainment': "Today Joca has no money for the cinema, he is not interested in football, so he walks around the city and looks at vehicles. It doesn't cost him anything, and he is interested in bicycles, cars, trucks and trolleybuses" (Lukić, 2024, 348–349). One of Lukić's most famous poems, *Ivin voz* [Iva's Train] (1963), also connects children's play, the street and vehicles, in its image of children running down the street simulating a train composition.

We can bring this segment to a close with *Pesma za robnu kuću* [A Poem for a Department Store] (1977) (Lukić, 2024, 302), a less-known work from Lukić's mature period that transforms the public-owned department store into a space for play. The little girl protagonist does not ask her father to buy her anything, but rather to ride the escalator with her, emphasizing that later she will be doing it on her own: "I don't need either you or mum".[17] It would be easy to connect this poem with the advertising campaigns that accompanied the opening of the Department Stores Belgrade chain in the mid-1960s and the broader cultural context – the success of department stores reflected the rise of consumerism in Yugoslav society. As Ana Zorić and Aleksandra Đorđević (2021) have shown in their paper (based partially on the analysis of extant advertising material), the entire architecture, positioning and internal spatial organization of the new department store buildings were determined both by consumerist culture and by socialist ideology. Yet, in Lukić's poem

13 An interesting interpretative possibility has been opened by Ivana Damnjanović (2023, 9), who offers a short overview of the development of the Belgrade public transit system viewed through the lens of sociotechnological imaginaries: "The concept of sociotechnical imaginaries was introduced by Jasanoff and Kimi, with the explicit intention of facilitating research on the "relationship of science and technology to political power". This concept would also prove remarkably useful in a future examination of literary representations of technology.

14 "Ova su kola za decu – / Idu stalno u krug. // Stanice naše bi bile / poslastičarnice sve" (Lukić, 2024, 260).

15 "U prvi trolejbus za mesec / deca i pesnici će sesti. […] Voziće ga naučnik, jedan / prijatelj tajanstvenih čuda" (Lukić, 2024, 259).

16 For an extended discussion of various leisure activities children can perform in the streets cf. Murray and Cortés-Morales (2019, 119–123).

17 "Vodi me, tata, u kuću robnu, / da napravimo vožnju probnu. […] A posle probe ići ću sama, / niste mi potrebni ni ti, ni mama" (Lukić, 2024, 302).

the child's attention is not focused on objects such as toys or sweets, but to the adventure of independent travel: the escalator, a modern means of transport, belongs to the same type of mobile third space as the tramway or the trolleybus. Simultaneously, the entire space of the department store is reinvented and re-coded as a safe third place for children.

CONCLUSION

In a way, Lukić's long career accompanied the development and disintegration of the SFRY. As we have seen, his children protagonists move through a rapidly changing urban environment, adapting and reinventing both their surroundings and themselves with exuberant joy. From the early short stories and poems that describe both postwar poverty and the emergence of modern cityscapes, to the autobiographical novels depicting Lukić's own childhood, the urban third places Lukić's child characters discover and exploit in their games are a testament both to the radical social changes of the twentieth century and the boundless creativity of childhood. The third places of Lukić's childhood included courtyards, urban voids and rural meadows, but after World War II they were superseded by third places created in the urban spaces of high-rise apartment towers, in parks and playgrounds, and even in such counterintuitive places as trolleybuses or department stores. By introducing these unlikely third places into Yugoslav children's literature, Lukić also created a distinct version of socialist sociotechnological imaginaries, intended for a children's audience and suffused with the spirit of child's play. Since that aspect of his work has not been sufficiently examined, this paper should be regarded as a preliminary examination for further research regarding both the representations of urban spaces in Serbian and Yugoslav literature and the opus of Dragan Lukić.

URBANI IN TRETJI PROSTORI V POEZIJI IN PROZI DRAGANA LUKIĆA

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*Članek obravnava urbani prostor, kot ga prikazuje poezija in proza povojnega pesnika, književnika in urednika Dragana Lukića (1928–2006), s posebnim poudarkom na tako imenovanih tretjih prostorih (*third place*; Oldenburg, 1999) za otroke. Lukić je v srbsko in jugoslovansko otroško poezijo po drugi svetovni vojni vnesel novo občutljivost, pri čemer je gradil na avantgardni dediščini tridesetih let in ustvarjal dostopna besedila za takratne otroke. Z uporabo večdisciplinarnega okvira na presečišču literarne zgodovine in analize, sociologije urbanega prostora, arhitekturne in kulturne zgodovine članek preučuje Lukićeve otroške protagoniste v družbenih spremembah, katere so se odražale tudi v prostoru. Kot predstavnik socialistične moderne je Lukić upodabljal urbane tretje prostore. Njegove kratke zgodbe in pesmi opisujejo tako povojno revščino kot tudi nove mestne pokrajine socialističnega modernizma. Medtem, ko so pred- in medvojni tretji prostori Lukićevega otroštva vključevali dvorišča, mestne praznine in zapuščene travnike, so jih po drugi svetovni vojni nadomestili tretji prostori novih stanovanjskih blokov, parkov in igrišč, pa tudi trolejbusov ali veleblagovnic. S takšnimi, novimi tretjimi prostori otroštva Lukić soustvarja posebno, socialistično (jugoslovansko) različico socialističnih družbeno-prostorskih in tehnoloških predstav, namenjenih mlajšemu občinstvu. V njegovih delih, ki jih Lukić postavi v njegovo sodobnost, je tretji prostor prostor igre, svobode, hkrati pa tudi prostor, v katerem se vzpostavlja in gradi zavest o odgovornosti odnosa med posameznikom in skupnostjo.*

Ključne besede: Dragan Lukić, srbska otroška književnost, jugoslovanska otroška književnost, tretja mesta za otroke, urbani prostor

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