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THE EVOLUTION OF CHILD *FLÂNEUR:* STREET SMART KIDS AND THE CITY IN CROATIAN 20TH CENTURY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The paper interprets children's novels by the Croatian children's literature classic Ivan Kušan, written between the 1950s and 1980s, which explore the relationship between the child and the city. Based on the concept of the flâneur, it is examined to what extent Kušan's child characters can be read as flâneurs, and it is concluded that the pragmatics and organization of the plot in the form of a quest shape child characters focused on physical rather than cognitive action, and thus they do not fit into the concept of the contemplative flâneur. Instead, Kušan's child characters are interpreted as street smarts and their relationship with the city is read within the framework of walking as a process by which space (the city) is transformed into a place.

Keywords: Ivan Kušan, Croatian children's literature, walking, *flâneur*, child *flâneur*

L'EVOLUZIONE DEL BAMBINO *FLÂNEUR*: I BAMBINI STREET SMART E LA CITTÀ NELLA LETTERATURA PER L'INFANZIA CROATA DEL XX SECOLO

SINTESI

L'articolo analizza i romanzi per ragazzi del maestro della letteratura per l'infanzia croata Ivan Kušan, scritti tra gli anni '50 e '80, che esplorano il rapporto tra il bambino e la città. Basandosi sul concetto di flâneur, si valuta fino a che punto i personaggi infantili di Kušan possano essere interpretati come flâneur. Si conclude che la pragmaticità e l'organizzazione della trama sottoforma di ricerca modellano personaggi infantili incentrati sull'azione fisica più che cognitiva, che quindi non rientrano nel concetto di flâneur contemplativo. I bambini di Kušan sono interpretati come street smart *e il loro rapporto con la città viene analizzato attraverso la pratica del camminare, intesa come un processo nel quale lo spazio (la città) viene trasformato in luogo.*

Parole chiave: Ivan Kušan, letteratura per ragazzi croata, camminare, *flâneur*, bambino *flâneur*

INTRODUCTION[1]

The second half of the 20th century in Croatian children's literature – as in other Yugoslav children's literatures – was marked by a dialectic of innovative and normative poetic tendencies, which to some extent also reflected the social changes taking place in Yugoslavia during the period of early socialism. In the context of the topic of children's relations with the city, the most important social change is, of course, the growing urbanization of the population: after World War II, in the period until the beginning of the 1950s, the population of Zagreb, for example, increased by more than 100,000, numbering more than 350 000 inhabitants in 1953 (Žerjavić, 1993), and the situation was similar in other urban areas. It is therefore not surprising that among the most striking features of Croatian children's literature of that time is the spatial turn that imposes the city as the central space of children's narrative prose, which historians of Croatian children's literature (Crnković & Težak, 2002; Hranjec, 2006) see as a distinct sign of the new and innovative. The urban child becomes the protagonist of children's literature and its implicit reader, and urban spaces mark the topology of twentieth-century childhood. Authors who publish children's poetry and prose from 1950s to 1990s almost invariably incorporate the imagology[2] of the city into the experiential framework of the implicit reader, gradually forming the image of the urban children for who the relationship with the city represents a significant part of their identity.

In this paper, I examine children's use of urban space in Croatian children's prose from the second half of the 20th century, analyzing the relationship between the child and the city, as well as the author's conceptualization of the physical and mental (urban) spaces of childhood. Using the children's novels of Ivan Kušan (1933–2012), a children's literary classic of 20th-century Croatian literature, I will interpret the topic of the city in children's literature of that period. I am particularly interested in the motif of wandering around the city, of unsupervised children's walking, and the associated imagery of freedom or fear: is walking around the city in 20th-century children's literature a frightening or liberating experience? Kušan's novels are particularly suitable for analysis in this sense, since they all place children's characters in an urban space and give that space a significant role in the development of the plot. Moreover, roaming around the city associates with the figure of the *flâneur*, a creative wanderer who, by walking through the city, absorbs impressions and allows the city to transform him. This metaphorical figure has recently become interesting in the context of children's literature theory, in which the issue of children's independence is linked to the freedom of the *flâneur*. Kušan's children's novels open up interesting assumptions about children's ''use'' of the city and their unsupervised movement through the city, and therefore I will also address potential *flâneur* perspective of his novels in my interpretation, bearing in mind the complexity of children's relationship to space, which is regulated by the spatial, cultural and social transformation of children's social environment during the 20th century. In this sense, it is inevitable to question the adequacy of the metaphor of the *flâneur* in the context of children's literature in the late 20th century. The example of Kušan's children's novels shows that its reach has been exhausted and I see it as uncorresponding in the context of Croatian children's literature in that period.

Croatian children's literature during the 20th century affirmed the topic of the child in the city, starting in the 1930s with the novels of Mato Lovrak (1899–1974), Josip Pavičić (1895–1963), Zora Ruklić (1897–1982) and Mirko Jelenčić (pseudonym of Želimir Gumhalter, 1914–1947). The image of the city in children's literature during the 1930s is somewhat close to the presentations of the city in non-children's Croatian literature of the time, with an emphasized social component and in a dialectical range from a hostile portrayal – such as Mato Lovrak who in his novel *Enemy number 1* from 1938 presents the city as children's enemy number 1 – through an emphasized social-naturalistic

1 This paper was created as part of the institutional research project *Innovations in Reading and Teaching Literature: Reading through Film, Image and Emotion* (IUČIP), funded by Source 581, Recovery and Resilience Mechanism (NextGenerationEU).

2 The term imagology in the humanities is used, as interpreted by Davor Dukić in a propaedeutic manual on imagology *Kako vidimo strane zemlje* (2009), as the name for studying literary ideas about foreign countries and peoples, as well as one's own country and people (Dukić, 2009, 5), where the name of the discipline, as Dukić admits, has a ''much wider etymologically implied scope of meaning'', i.e. it could also mean the science of imaginaries (Dukić, 2009, 5). Zrinka Blažević, however, only partially accepting the content and interpretational emphases of traditional imagology, suggests transdisciplinary understanding, offering a more comprehensive definition of preconceptions as ''interfering configurations of mental images, textual and non-textual representations and forms of practice, which are constituted within a certain socio-historical context'' (Blažević, 2014, 130). I use the term image in the research of textual representations and practices as structures that are both productive and organizing, and which do not refer, as in traditionally understood imagology, exclusively to hetero-images and self-images of foreign countries, but to mental images that constitute the opinion about oneself and the world in general. In my research images are distinguished as fundamental discursive units – ambiguous, ambivalent structures that establish thinking shortcuts, i.e. perpetuate stereotypical thinking about complex phenomena.

portrayal in Mirko Jelenčić's novel *Kids* (1935) to a significantly more positive presentation in Josip Pavičić and Zora Ruklić who see the city (also) in the context of children's emotional space. However, until the first children's novels by Ivan Kušan, the topography of the modern city was not adequately reflected in Croatian children's literature.

CHILDREN AND THE CITY: THE HISTORY OF LOVE

Although it did not appear in Croatian children's literature until the 1930s, and even then only cautiously, children's walking around the city – independently, in the company of peers or accompanied by an adult – is not a new historical phenomenon: the imaginary history of children's walking around the city would begin with the first records as early as the Middle Ages, as reported by Barbara Hanawalt (1993) in her study of childhood in medieval London.

Children's involuntary and unwanted life on the streets and the consequent walking, wandering and ''cruising'' through city streets have persisted from the Middle Ages until modern times, as seems to be the case from (sporadic) historiographical insights into spatially and temporally distant historical articulations of childhood. The growth of cities in the late 18th and especially the 19th centuries, explains the historian of walking Joseph Amato, ''produces'' new types of walkers:

> *Cities fostered new breeds of walkers. The disciplined pedestrian, the speeding commuter, the idling window shopper, the elusive flâneur, and the organized marching groups were foremost among them. Nineteenth-century London and Paris perhaps best reveal, of all Western cities, the metamorphosis of the urban walking environment and the genesis of the gallery of contemporary urban walkers.* (Amato, 2004, 153)

The child is not a negligible part of this gallery: as Timothy J. Gilfoyle (2013, 400) states in an article about American urban child vagrants and delinquents in the 19th century, numerous abandoned children spent most, if not all, of their lives on city streets.

In Croatian cities during the same period, the situation was similar, although the numbers were certainly less dramatic: as Štefka Batinić (2013) states in her study of orphans at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, children during that period were often left on the streets, caught begging, wandering, selling or running away from home. In 1911, Croatian pedagogue Stjepan Širola testified to a very similar situation to that described by Gilfoyle:

> *Anyone who has even looked around the streets of larger cities, and the streets of our white Zagreb are enough for him, has noticed a whole host of children, often ragged, naked and barefoot, wandering and fooling around the city without aim or purpose. These are little vagrants for whom the street is a school of all those evils, which will later – when they grow up – bring them into conflict with existing social institutions, with the law, and finally into prison. These are the unfortunate neglected children, the streetwalkers, the biggest and most angry wound of our cities.* (Širola, 1911, as quoted in Batinić, 2013, 28. [My translation])

However, the child and the city still have a complex, albeit only indirectly articulated, common history, which is not only marked by pathological phenomena such as child homelessness, vagrancy, begging or crime. Amato emphasizes this connection with a lovely sketch of the special way children ''adopt'' urban space: ''Old and young did not move the same. Children played, chased and darted, lolled and went arm and arm, and moved at slowing speeds as they put themselves on display and flirted'' (Amato, 2004, 164).

Croatian historical experiences of children's relationship with the city are relatively wide-ranging, from children's unsupervised, homeless wandering around the city and surviving on the social fringes, which Širola emphasizes, to the civic custom of structured walks that developed during the 19th century and persisted until the mid-20th century, and which included children from bourgeois families who, by walking with their parents or nannies, learned the rules of good civic behavior and in that context did not have the opportunity to explore the city independently. Only after the mid-20th century, with the rapid development of cities and the growth of the urban population, the modernization of urban housing and transport, and the changes taking place in urban families in the new, socialist social order, did children gradually gain opportunities to explore the city independently, with the key change in that period relating to the employment of both parents and therefore extended daily periods of children's independence. This independence, however, was under attack by pedagogical authority conceptualized in the negative image of the so-called street upbringing, which includes notions of negative peer influence and the influence of older age groups, of the city street as a criminogenic factor, and of adults' fear of not having control over a child's free time (Duda 2015). However, as Igor Duda (2015) shows in his study of childhood in the 20th century, the street gradually took shape in the 20th century

as a social space in which the child learns the process of self-articulation outside the reach of family and educational authority.

KUŠAN'S URBAN SETTINGS AND DIALECTIC OF SPACE AND PLACE

Ivan Kušan, a classic of Croatian children's literature from the second half of the 20th century, published his first children's novel in Zagreb in 1956, introducing the emblematic child character of the boy Koko, who remains the main character of the author's six children's novels. Already in his first, and then in subsequent children's novels, he accepts and develops the influences of so-called Western novels, emphasizing the action, adventure and justice as constructive narrative elements. His protagonists – elementary school-age boys – are faced with a puzzle in each novel that they are trying to solve, moving more or less independently through urban and suburban spaces and establishing a strong sense of urban identity. As an author with a distinct spatial imagination, Kušan uses the urban topography of Zagreb (in four novels) and Paris (in one novel) as an important narratological device, organizing the plot layout within specific spatial coordinates of both Zagreb and Paris, thus shaping the city as a plot. To solve the puzzle, the boys must "solve" the city.

The literary history of Croatian children's literature agrees that Kušan's children's novels produce a modernist paradigm in Croatian children's literature of the mid-20th century. The key features of this paradigm are rhetorical autonomy with a deflection from the linguistic standard, a relaxed attitude towards storytelling, and benevolent irony. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to establish that an important element of the reception success of Kušan's children's novels is the motif of boyish empowerment and circumvention of authority. On the other hand, organizing the narrative around a group of boys in the first novel and then boyish couples in subsequent novels has the effect of normalizing and even normatizing the inelastic gender paradigm that dominated the literary space of Croatian children's literature until the end of the 20th century. In the critical reflection on Kušan's children's novels, the following stand out: originality, new approach, authenticity, persuasiveness, likable and mischievous children's characters, and urbanity as a specific characteristic that stands out from the previous rurality of Croatian children's literature personified in the work of Mato Lovrak.

Kušan, on the other hand, places seven of his children's novels written from the 1950s to the 1980s (*Uzbuna na Zelenom vrhu*, 1956; *Koko i duhovi*, 1958; *Domaća zadaća*, 1960; *Zagonetni dječak*, 1963; *Lažeš, Melita*, 1965; *Koko u Parizu*, 1972 and *Ljubav ili smrt*, 1987)[3] in an urban setting, starting with the suburban settlement in which the action of his first novel *Uzbuna na Zelenom vrhu* (*The Mystery of Green Hill*, 1956) takes place and continuing to the metropolis which is the setting of the novel *Koko u Parizu* (*The Mystery of the Stolen Painting)*, published in 1972. In this sense, Ivan Kušan's novelistic oeuvre is suitable for analyzing children's relationships with the city. It is not unimportant that in all of his children's novels, this author engages his children's characters outside the political constraints that were an important means of regulating the field of Croatian children's literature until the mid-1950s – the heroes of his children's novels do not see their social environment as marked by political interpretation at all.

Already in his first children's novel (*The Mystery of Green Hill*, 1956) and then in the sequels of the narrative saga about the boy Ratko Milić Koko (*Koko and the Ghosts*, 1958; *Zagonetni dječak* [*The Mysterious Boy*, my translation of the title], 1963; *The Mystery of the Stolen Painting*, 1972), Kušan makes poetic decisions by which he adapts typical and representative patterns of children's adventure storytelling to his narrative. This primarily refers to the gathering of thematic nodes around a secret and the quest to unravel the secret and solve the task, then to the introduction of a group of boys with an atypical, hierarchical group dynamic, and the spatial motivation of the plot by limiting the space of events and paying special narrative attention to the dialectic of space and place. In using the terms space and place, I rely on the interpretations of Michel de Certeau (1988), who emphasizes space as somewhat ambiguous, while place is more concrete and ''practiced'' (which in children's literature could mean practiced through play), and on the interpretation of Yi-Fu Tuan (2001), who distinguishes space from place by seeing the former as abstract and undifferentiated and attributing to the latter characteristics of familiarity and security.

Spatiality in children's literature, as Maria Sachiko Cecire et al. (2015) show, forms an important structural framework for storytelling insofar as the ontological demands of children's literature are established in intrinsic negotiations about the contact and separation of adults from non-adults in order to maintain the illusion of the child within

3 Kušan's children's novels have been translated into a number of languages, and three are available in English translation: novels *Uzbuna na Zelenom vrhu,* translated as *The Mystery of Green Hill*; *Koko i duhovi* translated as *Koko and the Ghosts* and *Koko u Parizu*, translated as *The Mystery of the Stolen Painting*.

a relationship marked by a disproportion of power and influence. In Kušan's first children's novel, the events take place in a suburban, isolated settlement with only a few houses, which allows the children's characters to independently manage the space. Adult characters in such a spatial definition can be moved to the edge of the events, and even completely thrown off that edge, and the dynamics of the children's group are generated by the spatial and through it emotional distance of the parental generation from their offspring and the children's compensation for this distance in the peer environment. We find a corresponding spatial organization, but with the development of the author's condition more carefully developed, in all of Kušan's children's novels. In the novel *Koko i duhovi* (*Koko and the Ghosts*), for example, one can apply Johan Huizinga's (1992) interpretation of play as constituted by abstract shelter, separation from reality, and the creation of separate places – fenced, forbidden, isolated, with their own rules. The boys' search for a mystery, and then for its solution, is based on shelter, mysterious places, secret underground tunnels, buried hideouts, deserted islands, almost as a textbook example of Huizinga's interpretation. Huizinga's theory of the metaphorical doubling of the space of play in ''temporary worlds'' nested in real spaces is even more impressively manifested in the parallelism of children's and non-children's spaces in this novel, where the topology of the children's world is located in the domain of the superfluous, discarded, uninteresting to adults – in an unused scrap metal warehouse, but right next to a familiar home, on a deserted island in the middle of a city park, in a secret underground corridor in one's own basement. This attractive spatial dialectic of the familiar/unfamiliar and the foreign/mysterious in the novel is very skillfully complicated into a whole series of binary oppositions whose persistence is destabilized and even abolished by the end of the novel. This is particularly evident in the problematization of the useful versus the useless, whereby usefulness is usually, and even conventionally (in children's literature), grouped on the adult side and uselessness is attributed to the childish, which Kušan mimics by placing the children's game in a useless, neglected warehouse in the immediate vicinity of adults, but to which adults have no access. However, by the end of the novel, such an expected semantic distribution is destroyed and the children's investigation leads to the resolution of a very real mystery: boys discover a supposedly deceased man hiding in an underground hideout,[4] and they expose the criminal activities of two adult villains, who sent threatening letters to Koko's family, intimidated them, tried to poison them with gas, and organized the kidnapping of a girl, Koko's sister Marica. Furthermore, the boy's relationship with the city is emphasized by the structure of gradation: the boy's search for answers and the solution to the dangerous riddle leads them from the first spatial circle in which they are perfectly at ease – their own street, an abandoned warehouse next to the house, the streets leading to the school, to the second spatial circle that is somewhat wider, but still familiar enough – the nearby square, the city park, the cinema, and all the way to the most distant, unknown and threatening city spaces in which the title character Koko wanders in search of his kidnapped sister. This spatial arrangement, which reflects the dialectic of safety (near the house) and danger that grows the further the child characters move away from home, does not signal, as it might seem, the conventional fear of adults from children's independent wanderings through the city, since the child successfully navigates unfamiliar parts of the city (with a little help from his pet dog) and solves the difficult task of rescuing his kidnapped sister.

In his subsequent novels, Kušan will avoid such topographical semantics and will not mark more distant spaces as more dangerous, but will use his child characters to free more and more of the city space from the strict supervision of adults. Perhaps the most representative in this sense is the novel *Domaća zadaća* [*Homework*, my translation of the title], in which the child characters use the city space almost without any restrictions, and children's walking through the city is marked by a wide range of moods and emotions, starting from anger, rage and frustration, through fear and nervousness, and ending with more pleasantly intoned walks associated with the motifs of children's romance. In this novel, the author very directly undermines both the narrative and real power of the adult characters, thereby freeing the children's autonomous spaces and allowing the child characters to make contingent use of the city. It is interesting to note that among the consequences of such a relationship between a child and the city is also peer violence: in a heightened conflict between different children's groups, one of the boy characters – who is also the main villain in the novel – will suffer punishment prepared for him by his child opponents, which consists of kidnapping and locking him in a box in order to frighten him and punish him, but the box and the boy inside it unexpectedly end up in a city cleaning truck, which causes panic among the boys who put the culprit in the box.

4 Berislav Majhut (2022) also attributes a political dimension to this motif, believing that the character of a rich miser hiding underground immediately after World War II (the events in the novel are dated to 1946) can also be interpreted as a sympathizer of the failed Ustasha regime hiding from the new socialist government.

This motif seems significant to me in the context of the relationship between a child and the city, pointing to the dialectic of children's freedom and danger: unsupervised wandering around the city and ''conquering'' city spaces also entails responsibility. Fortunately, the boy is rescued from the box in time and none of the children's characters will experience any lasting negative experiences in interacting with the city. On the contrary, this novel materializes Yi-Fu Tuan's metaphor about the transformation of abstract space into more emotionally charged place: '''[s]pace' is more abstract than place. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with meaning'' (Tuan, 2001, 6). The city that the boys get to know by ''acting'' in it from space becomes a place marked, among other things, by emotion.

This process is even more pronounced in the metafictional novel *Koko u Parizu* (*The Mystery of the Stolen Painting*). Two boys go to Paris to visit relatives, one of whom has already been to Paris and in the process of preparing for the trip scares his younger friend with fantastic and exaggerated stories about the dangers of the big city: kidnappings, murders, thefts, robberies. The boys do find themselves in danger in Paris, and the younger and more inexperienced of them is kidnapped by two young men who demand a high ransom for him. The adventure develops into a kind of slapstick comedy in which several groups of children rush through the city in a stylized, dizzying chasing in search of each other, and the central motif is the painting Mona Lisa, or rather its copy, which becomes the ransom for the kidnapped boy. The stylized event in the unstylized space (which is determined by the topography of the real city) is ultimately resolved as a dream of one of the boys, but this metafictional intervention is only the final act in the process of taming and domesticating the metropolis, which from the initial frightening and dangerous, through children's wandering and getting to know it, gradually becomes a familiar and beautiful, and even safe city.

In the novel *Lažeš, Melita* [*You are lying, Melita*; my translation of the title], however, the motif of the city is firmly connected to the problem of children's perception and incorporated into an interesting dialectic of the pedagogical and ethical that is realized in the problem apostrophized in the title: children's lying, or making up. The protagonist Melita constantly makes up things and events what her worried parents see as a pedagogical problem and call lying. When the mother has to leave home urgently for few days to care for her sick aunt, Melita's father and brother use this time without mother's regulation to ''cure'' or discipline the girl's tendency to make up stories, using pedagogically and also to a common sense dubious methods: by making her every ''lie'' come true with the help of a wide network of adult friends and acquaintances. However, in the end, the child's lying is opposed by the ethically much more serious offense of adult lying, since almost all the adult characters in the novel have blatantly lied, including the father who takes sick leave even though he is completely healthy and the mother's supposedly sick aunt who invented the illness in order to get the mother to visit her. The author's argument is clear that the boundary between lying and making up stories, or between what is permitted and what is not permitted, is the boundary of adulthood. This is also reflected in the relationship to (urban) space, which opens up to the child and the adult in different ways, favoring a personal perspective over the conventional relationship to space. A good example of this is the metaphor of art, or rather the conversation that a girl has with a painter acquaintance who is trying to teach her to accept and nurture her own perception of the world in which her numerous and imaginative inventions are possible and real, and the imagology of the city, which changes and adapts to the child's view, is also adjusted to this perspective. The girl, who is cheerful and lively at the beginning of the novel, also sees the city as a happy and bright place, but as the story develops in which her foolish lies begin to come true, the city also changes and becomes gloomy and confused. In this sense, the novel's acumen is completely compatible with the thesis of David Harvey who maintains that the city is created through the imagination: it is imagined before it becomes material and representations are the product of the imagination (Harvey, 2003, as quoted in Murray, 2015, 34).

FLÂNEUR OR STREET SMARTS: CONTEMPLATING AND AGENCY

All of Kušan's children's novels are novels about children and the city, and in this context the theme of walking through the city comes to the fore: children's independence in the city intersects with the motif of walking as the most common and ordinary way of children's urban mobility. The motif of walking through the city is contained in one of the most vital cultural images of modernity: in the figure of the *flâneur*. The *flâneur* is a city walker, a man of the masses, who wanders aimlessly through the streets of a nineteenth-century city, constantly searching for new sensations, which he finds on the city streets. He is an idle, well-off man, who in his *flâneuring* develops highly perceptive, artistic affinities and at the same time affirms the commodification aspect of the modern city by looking at shop windows and wandering through shopping arcades. The *flâneur* is a figure of the multitude, he uses the refuge of anonymity in the newly growing cities

and symbolizes the appropriation of public space. His imagological outlines were most extensively articulated by Walter Benjamin in his monumental but unfinished work on the Parisian arcades in the 19th century (published posthumously in 1982 under the title *Das Passagen-Werk*). In Benjamin's interpretation, the ontology of the *flâneur* is inextricably linked to the child, which refers not only to the child-*flâneur* that Benjamin constructed in his writings on his childhood in Berlin, but also to the identification of the child and the *flâneur* in Charles Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (*The Painter of Modern Life*, 1863), on the basis of which Benjamin develops his concept of the *flâneur*. Baudelaire likens the *flâneur's* cognitive and admiring wanderings through the city to a child's discovery of the world, a child who absorbs everyday impressions without inhibitions. It is precisely this characteristic of flaneurism that Eric Tribunella (2010), who was the first to address children's wandering around the city in American children's literature and proposed the concept of the child *flâneur*, relies on. Tribunella (2010) singles out the element of cognition as a key characteristic of children's flaneurism: for children's characters in the novels he interprets,[5] walking around the city represents a cognitive activity. A child's independent wandering around the city is a kind of a liminal event in a child's life, and children's flaneuring, as Tribunella shows, is contained in the effect of reciprocity by which the child and the city reflect each other and in which there is no place for adults. In the novels that Tribunella interprets, children's direct experiences of the city exclude adult figures, who function as marginally present children's mentors or advisors, thus freeing the children's experience of the city as an exceptional, extraordinary experience that abolishes the usual family order and bypasses or temporarily suspends parental authority. In Olga Bukhina's paper (2019), children's strolling is intertwined with observation, even voyeurism, in a similar way to Tribunella's interpretation: children's strolling is a contingency of independent exploration, walking, and cognition. On the contrary, Ada Bieber (2021), in her article on the child *flâneur* in East German film around the mid-20th century, reads children's strolling primarily in the context of the politicization of a child who, walking through the large East German cities of that period, primarily Berlin, is exposed to a series of political messages, including propaganda, in line with the general political image of socialist society in the 20th century. All these interpretations of the child *flâneur* coincide in the motif of the (independent) child's strolling through the city as a liminal experience from which the child emerges changed.

Given that all of Kušan's children's novels use the motif of a child's strolling through the city, it is interesting to consider whether it represents the child's liminal experience: are Kušan's child characters actualy *flâneurs*? In all of Kušan's children's novels, children's use of the city is pragmatic and active, and is similarly connected to the motif of boyish empowerment and circumvention of adult authority, as is the case in the novels interpreted by Tribunella. In conceptualizing space in all of his children's novels, Kušan directly negotiates the relationship between adults and non-adults, not only in organizing spatial coordinates, but also in using, occupying, and appropriating space in realistic children's novels (*Uzbuna na Zelenom vrhu* / *The Mystery of Green Hill*, *Koko i duhovi* / *Koko and the Ghosts*, *Domaća zadaća* [*Homework*, my translation of the title], *Zagonetni dječak* [*The Mysterious Boy*, my translation of the title]), in which children are assigned marginal, neglected, and even dangerous spaces that, through children's actions, become central spaces of the plot, while in children's novels with a metafictional structure, the author's conceptualization refers to the metaphor of space – the metaphor of the metropolis as a space of excitement and danger in *Koko u Parizu* (*The Mystery of the Stolen Painting*) and the metaphor of the love circle in which the lovers move in *Ljubav ili smrt* [*Love or Death*, my translation of the title]. The agency of the children's characters, however, is focused on physical, not cognitive action. They move through the streets to complete a task entrusted to them, discover new information, achieve their goals, and ultimately solve the central enigma of the novel. Kušan's novels are about action, not contemplation, and there is no aimless wandering in them. Walking through the city serves the plot, not the transformation of the child's character. In short, walking is pragmatic and ordinary, and its flânerie aspect is restrained, and even abolished. The practicality, activity and detective motivation of Kušan's children's characters distance them from the liminality and cognition of the *flâneur* child and bring them closer to the image of the streetsmart child, the child in a group whose agency is social and collective, the child who constructs and manages his own urban landscapes. In short: although Kušan's children's characters occasionally get lost and wander, turning into the wrong streets and following the wrong tracks, the relationship between the child and the city in his children's literature is nurtured by tasks,

5 These are Elizabeth Enright's *The Saturdays* (1941), Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964), E. L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankveiler* (1967), and Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971). All of the novels are set in New York.

quests and adventures, thus leaving a contemplative and aimless *flâneur* behind. In this sense, Kušan's children's novels from the mid-20th century produce a new type of children's cultural imagination and imagology, privileging street-smarts as the protagonists of children's culture of the time. This typological change in Croatian children's literature is not only found in Kušan: in the novels of his contemporaries Milivoj Matošec (who shapes his child protagonists with a somewhat more contemplative, but still dominantly active motivation), Nada Iveljić, Zvonimir Milčec, Hrvoje Hitrec or Zlatko Krilić, who each of them writes about city children and form their experiential horizon in interaction with the city, they prefer an active, engaged child whose autonomy is manifested primarily in mastering (city) space. However, Kušan's oeuvre is perhaps the most significant in this sense, not only because of his pioneering status, but also because of the radical transformation of semantic paradigms within the field of children's literature. Through his direct questioning and even challenging of the normativity of adulthood in children's literature, Kušan transforms its traditional pedagogical stability, negotiating and challenging the authority of adults, which fully corresponds to the anti-authoritarian European children's literatures of the 1960s. In this process, among his most important imagological tools is the motif of the city, whose complex topographical grid and characteristic landscape of urban everyday life produce a children's cultural experience. As I have shown, Kušan does not present the city to his child characters, as a liminal, forbidden space, but as a living organism that, together with the child's action, contributes to the solution of the puzzles. The author is particularly successful in using ideas of useful and useless in interaction with the city: walking or wandering through the city, which the pragmatic world of adults may see as a useless waste of time, becomes a key puzzle-solving tool in Kušan's interpretation, articulating street-smarts as a late 20th-century children's hero.

RAZVOJ OTROKA *FLÂNEURJA*: IZNAJDLJIVI OTROCI Z ULICE IN MESTO V HRVAŠKI OTROŠKI KNJIŽEVNOSTI 20. STOLETJA

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POVZETEK

V drugi polovici 20. stoletja se je v hrvaški otroški književnosti zgodil svojevrsten prostorski preobrat, v katerem se je mesto oblikovalo kot osrednji prostor otroške pripovedne proze. Mestni otrok je postal protagonist otroškega literarnega polja in hkrati njegov implicitni bralec, za katerega je odnos do mesta postal pomemben del njegove identitete. Članek preučuje otroško rabo mestnega prostora v hrvaški otroški prozi druge polovice 20. stoletja. Analizira odnos med otrokom in mestom ter konceptualizacijo fizičnega in mentalnega (urbanega) prostora otroštva v otroških romanih Ivana Kušana. Kušan, klasik hrvaške otroške književnosti druge polovice 20. stoletja, je v obdobju od petdesetih do osemdesetih let 20. stoletja napisal sedem otroških romanov, kateri so postavljeni v urbano okolje. V vseh so tematska vozlišča zbrana okoli skrivnosti in njihovih razkritij. V vseh so protagonisti organizirani v fantovske skupine z nehierarhično skupinsko dinamiko in v vseh je zgodba poudarjeno prostorsko motivirana. Prostorska organizacija romana se kaže v strukturiranju različnih prostorov za odrasle in otroke, v dialektiki koristnega in nekoristnega v podeljevanju prostorskih značilnosti ter v intenzivni interakciji otrok z mestom, kjer se otroški liki gibljejo prosto in brez nadzora odraslih. Skratka, Kušanovi otroški liki so proučeni v povezavi z metaforo flâneurja glede na teorijo Erica Tribunelle o otroku flâneurju, ki potepanje po mestu dojema kot transformativno, kognitivno in s tem liminalno izkušnjo. Kušanovi otroški romani pa potrjujejo akcijo in fizično delovanje, poudarjajo iskanje in otroško odločenost, da raziščejo skrivnost, s čimer se oddaljujejo od kontemplativne, kognitivne in liminalne narave pohajkovalca.

Ključne besede: Ivan Kušan, hrvaška otroška književnost, hoja, *flâneur*, otroški *flâneur*

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