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Lowland Slovak youth literature and its interpretational and educational aspects (within and outside the school)

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Abstract

An integral part of the Slovak cultural context is also Lowland Slovak literature, which includes certain areas of Hungary, Romania and Serbia. The paper outlines the partial development of Slovak youth literature in these regions. It gradually characterizes the most important aspects of diachrony of this segment of writing (in a certain chronotope that is bound to selected prototexts). Based on objective-subjective interpretations of three emblematic works of this context, it highlights - as a certain typology - not only the general / universal, but also the specific / particular (that is particularly relevant to the context) in intra- and intercultural relations. It accentuates the literary tradition, which is still a useful source of realistic short stories and novels for child percipients in these diasporas. It also traditionally and innovatively points out the typical features of teaching in individual national-minority schools in the mentioned countries. Methodologically (but also practically) it is, of course, based, on thematic, motif related, etc. aspects of the analyzed (selected) works and their possible reflection in school education and learning environment. Finally, the use of language / features / motifs / aspects / procedures is concretized in specific conditions outside the physical boundaries of the homeland as a kind of perspective on the correlation of the difficult process of cultural education itself.

Keywords: nationality, Lowland, education, particularity, youth-literature, interpretation

Introduction

Naturally, cultural and literary development has primordially been a continual event that touches on contemporary reality and directs, understandably, into an unknown future. However, it is not a bad thing, because every individual (whether a person, a juvenile, a pupil, etc.), creating a society, can assume a multidimensional point of view. From a certain educational point of view, he or she is helped by books (or even schools), that provide him or her with testimony of the life and activity of ancestors and offer the opportunity to capture some sort of interpretative moments and thoughts of presence for the offspring. This dynamic,

straightforward dimension of the phenomenon is natural, self-evident, necessary. On the other hand, it is also desirable to have a synchronous view of the continuum - in our case primarily from the aspect of interpretation. The reception of the temporal and geographical determinants of the aforementioned development involves the problem of sorting out the differences between the literary-historical and actual value of the work (and its educational credo). The present time of literature is not only the result of the literary past, but also the outcome of our active reading attitude towards this past. At the same time, it is one of the means to defend oneself by means of the effect of cultural time against the consequences of physical time (the text is a shelter against noise, the school is a shelter against illiteracy). In fact, tradition in a certain sense will stimulate the actual literary communication of the present. The development of culture (including literature) is therefore also reflected in the returns to works already previously communicated, which (based on the terminology of the Nitra semiotic school) represents an update of literary communication. Therefore, the (already mentioned) retrospective view is needed, albeit accompanied by an outlook to the future. Thereby they enter the cultural and literary context of intellectual spaces and apertures for written patterns of the past, creative activities of the present, and plans for the future. This view is extremely important and useful in the educational process itself. However, its possibilities, forms or methods differ in the individual enclaves of the Lowland (also in their literary processing). It is traditionally contaminated by the specific, by a "d'urišinesque particularity" (as conceptualized by Dionýz Ďurišin), and thus a multidimensional testimony is given that we are not only similar but also different - hence as diverse as our Central Europe has been. This is also reflected and concretized in the various Lowland cultural-educational contexts: in Hungary, Romania and Serbia (also based on the independent existence of the Slovak minority).

1 Contours of Slovak language education in Hungary (also from the aspect of national identity)

Few deny the importance of education in the mother tongue. However, national minority schools are more vulnerable than schools that provide instruction in the state language. It was already, the Ratio Educationis (1777), the organizational order for the school system in Hungary, that enabled the establishment of schools with mother tongue instruction. Despite the formulation of the need for teaching in the native language, the functioning of national minority schools has not been without issues, which in the 20th century have often become a tool of assimilation processes. The radical decline in the number of Slovaks in Hungary is also largely due to the imbalance in education. The most serious problem in contemporary schools of this type is that "*... most children communicate only in Hungarian when they enter the kindergarten, when joining schools they speak Slovak only at the level*

of their kindergarten, in their family circle they do not learn the mother tongue of their ancestors. If the child is bilingual, the dominant language is mostly Hungarian" (Farkašová, 2008, p. 583). During the centrally managed school system in 1946-1979, only the curricula changed seven times (while changes in the number of lessons were even more frequent). However, since 1958 the teaching of Slovak language and literature showed a constantly decreasing tendency. Even today, we consider *"... the main cause of the current unflattering state of language proficiency the given change to bilingualism"* (Pečeňová, 2003, p. 42). In addition, it is important to note that the changes in teaching Slovak were followed by innovations in teaching with a certain delay. This process is well identifiable today; the mother tongue has become a target language. However, a relatively new phase of language teaching begins both quantitatively and qualitatively at the second stage of primary school. The number of subjects taught in Slovak is slightly increasing. This gives some hope for making the language competence of pupils of Slovak nationality more effective. The roots of this - overall, ambivalent - process can be traced back to the 1970s, when in more and more places *"... the teaching of national minority language returned to the framework of normal lessons, and the prescribed number of hours increased slightly. In several schools, that until then only taught the national minority language as a separate subject, they attempted to extend the teaching, to introduce a bilingual system, but these attempts did not bring substantial results"* (Paulik, 2002, p. 131). The fluctuation in the number of lessons for national minority languages, the introduction of zero - so-called extra - teaching hours, of course, also influenced the social prestige of these languages and the education of teachers for these given subjects.

In this constellation, the issue of identity building is also extremely important, which *"... is the most important self-educated consciousness through which one can with a well-founded motivational base create out of a hidden identity even a dual identity. The emergence of a balanced dual identity is conditioned by a certain intellectual level and a strong mental resonance of the individual"* (Maruzsová Šebová, 2002, pp. 132-133). However, gradually emerging schools of the bilingual type *"... do not meet even the most basic requirements for preserving the mother tongue and national identity..."* (Polónyová, 2016, p. 117). However, with emerging pedagogical methods that are consciously targeted but not directive, some positive shift can be achieved. Effective are disciplines developing self-knowledge, such as cultural history of Slovaks, knowledge of Slovak nationality in Hungary, ethnography, etc. It is worthwhile to devise a way of working for pupils, which could, after all, result in a positive image of Lowland Slovaks also thanks to Slovak literature in Hungary.

When it comes to the language situation of Slovaks in Hungary, it must be stated that the national minority is actually struggling to preserve the mother tongue itself. The base place where the Slovak language is so-so cultivated and preserved

is school. In general, the situation of the Slovak language in the school system of Hungary is very critical. A whole complex of factors contributed to this situation: deficiencies in the system of teaching the Slovak language during the past regime, the dominance of the Hungarian language in the current school system, the consequences of the relative weakness of identity within the Slovak community, etc. That is why Slovak intelligentsia in contemporary Hungary considers it an extremely important task to *"build Slovak language education on holistic and humanistic foundations. It must be ensured that, in the context of language education, the youngest generation implicitly creates and strengthens national identity, preserves the traditions of ancestors, while ensuring that the national minority school meets new societal demands"* (Barthová-Fazekašová, 2002, p. 180). Most Slovak families in Hungary are unable - or only partially - to pass on to their children the linguistic and cultural heritage of their ancestors. This responsibility has shifted to school institutions that have several specific roles (Hornoková-Uhrinová, 2003, p. 35): pupils must learn the language of their ancestors at school; one of the main tasks of the Slovak school is to maintain, further develop, actively cultivate and pass on Slovak culture to its pupils; teachers should strive for their pupils to become aware of their Slovak origin, national identity, or at least consciously accept their double bond and bilingualism. Thus, education is becoming a decisive factor in the future life of Slovaks in Hungary. In this way, pupils learn the principles of national behavior at school, and their overall relationship with Slovak culture and language is developed. However, other Slovak minority institutions and organizations need to consolidate the influence of schools. Students, parents, educators need to feel "Slovak lives" outside the school. Most pupils must be able to acquire communicative competence from the Slovak language at oral and written level. However, it is difficult to ensure real bilingualism. At the same time, it is regrettable from the point of view of language that the dominant Slovakian enclave is today the dominant diaspora language community in Hungary, which has almost been replaced by Hungarian; however, in recent times there has been a slight increase in the interest in revitalizing Slovak, especially in the field of the intelligentsia with the possibility of growing Slovak in kindergarten, in bilingual primary schools, in Slovak grammar schools, at university level; there is also mass media support for the preservation of Slovak language (Dudok, 2008, p. 19).

In schools where Slovak is taught as a subject, the achievable level of language acquisition is relatively low due to the modest number of Slovak language lessons. Therefore, in relation to issues of nationality, it is also necessary to speak explicitly about the language of the national minority. The child will maybe not adopt his or her national language first, but may nevertheless identify with it, whereas belonging to a certain nationality means, first of all, national consciousness and, secondly, commanding the language itself. Although parents do not speak with

children in Slovak - thanks to the atmosphere, habits and traditions - in the family the child can realize that it belongs to the Slovak national minority. The school could achieve a status when commanding the Slovak language could get close to commanding the mother tongue or the first language. The newly introduced subject of Slovak education offers great possibilities in the development of national identity.

2 Specifics of minority being from the perspective of education in the prose of Michal Hrivnák

Michal Hrivnák (1936) applied such a cultural and literary approach in a multi-directional way in his collection entitled *Tulips* (Slovak: *Tulipány*, 1986), in which he published intentional prose for the youth called *Boys from Dead end street* (Slovak: *Chlapci zo Slepkej ulice*). It is a novel with boys' heroes, temporally distinctive, supported by a certain educational intention. It's a book about children, about the feelings of boys growing up, about their efforts to live properly. In the background, Hrivnák's talent appears *"... to appeal in a non-violent way to the conscience of adults who, for their own problems, do not see the problems of others, not only in a closer family environment but also in the social dimension"* (Čipková, 1989, p. 87). The textual space is based on the Lowland environment of the village bounds surrounded by corn and wheat fields, houses and *sálašes* (places of solitude, dwellings with farm buildings in the land area). It is a world of children's mischief, but also of specific adaptations to objective conditions. The pure natural world is contaminated with human anger. Common moments are also determined by school hardships. From a national point of view, it is important that the boys are taught Slovak at school. Probingly they pursue the world of adults, they are receptive and confront the peculiar state of the times. There is also an important question in the text about the kind of double identity of Slovaks in Hungary, which is concretized in the figure of a Slovak teacher. Didactically, however, slightly exaggerated is the fact that the boys cling to him and his Slovak language, which is a "pleasure to listen to". National consciousness, the need to cultivate the mother tongue and traditions, deepens, both directly and indirectly, because: *"For everyone the most beautiful and sweetest thing is the language one has learned from his or her mother. And that is how it should be!"* (Hrivnák, 1986, p. 149). Thus, an individual associates with a community and common work (for example, the establishment of a Slovak club). A significant feature of this is the road sign with the Slovak village name - Konopište. This suggests that they understand their own villagers' identity as being "also" Slovak: *"How is it actually? – he started contemplating ... His parents talk in Slovak every now and then. And especially ol' gran; she doesn't talk to him and his parents otherwise, only in Slovak! - It may hence be true that we are Slovaks!"* (Hrivnák, 1986, p. 143). Even the children try to achieve symmetrical bilingualism, especially for practical reasons. Age is a

differentiating sign of the language level of the inhabitants of Konopište: the elderly, who did not have the opportunity to learn Slovak at school, often variate their Slovak testimonies with Hungarian expressions. However, there is also an obvious effort to establish Slovak clubs, to meet not only for fun, but also to spread knowledge mutually. Slovakness emerges first out of shyness at school, but it gradually grows into pride. Interest is thus expressed in the Slovak micro-environment both in and outside the school.

However, it was not always like this... The sharp stratification of the village in the past was gradually replaced by a new, post-war generation with an effort to raise its own nationality. The lords were no longer the mayor, the notary, the sworn and the *gazdas* (landlords) who grinned against the poor. The cruel mockery for Slovakness is replaced by mutual tolerance at the beginning of the new era. School education of the past, backed by compulsory hungarization, is described in the text only by Herbartian methods (i.a. those who cannot pray in Hungarian, must kneel at the wall and are to be mocked not only by classmates but also teachers). The teacher is a relentless authority that applies official state policy to the school environment: he tries to make the Slovak language disgusting not only to pupils but also to parents. However, at that time, the general impulse of the Slovaks was their request to have their own school in the village, so that the scribes in the local community house would be able to speak Slovak appropriately and also to deal with their official affairs in their mother tongue. The Slovaks took in these cruel times mainly refuge in the surrounding housings (*sálaše*), which, by means of their enclosures, perhaps even maintain the complex Slovak traditions. Is it a however starting point or a goal?

The specific presence of Slovak surnames with their etymology determines this tradition (Červenák, Keleš, Kešiar, Komár, Moťovský, Pavlík, Vozár and others) and is actually based on the hemp paradigm of the Lowland. The Konopište village with the land bounds where people sowed, chopped, soaked, shook and combed hemp, symbolizes persistence; in fact, the pulsating life of the settlers from somewhere up there in the "Upland" in Lowland *sálašes*.

The psyche of the Lowland pupil is similar to but also different from his peers in the parent country. He enjoys holidays, football and carefree moments of doing nothing but he cannot use his native language where and when he wants to. He must keep some distance, think deeper, and be more tolerant. However, he has a solid Slovak identity inside. This fact in the text of the children's protagonists is confirmed by a slightly idealistic description of the behavior of a boy who likes to read Slovak and goes to Czechoslovakia with his parents to improve his native language. The Dead end street is thus a witness to the psychological development and gradual maturation of the new Slovak generation in Hungary. The symbolic (even archetypal) cane-covered home gradually turns into shingles and a tiled roof. An interesting visit from Czechoslovakia is coming to the Lowland by this

holiday time. Its attribute is a Škoda with a Czechoslovak registration mark, which stops under a mulberry in The Dead end street. In the child's soul, this - at that time atypical - moment creates an ambivalent feeling (typical of the chronotope). But it is a lively and exciting expectation of an unknown boy from Czechoslovakia with new adventures. However, this emotion is also contaminated by distress, confrontation with the new, the unknown, the strange: *"He, I guess, was afraid they would not understand each other that he would stay in shame, for he did not know Slovak that nicely as those from Slovakia..."* (Hrivnák, 1986, p. 176). However, the symbolic Rákóczi march is international, general, unifying. It creates a common children's world of understanding, hideouts, games, experiences - the psychic development of a young child in a group. It is an invisible bond of belonging that unites the representative of a nationality with the land of ancestors. However, the holidays are naturally spiced up with common trips around the area. As a pendant, the invitation of Janko Kmeťko from the Lowland to visit the High Tatras is used. It is a journey of physical and mental nature, expanding the natural diapason of his world (and young readers), spiced up by the encounter of the Lowland with the hills, greenery with blue sky; accompanied by a mystery and an indescribable feeling of a young person's desire for knowledge. These are the outer and inner mysteries of our world, the moments of expeditions to unknown regions. Buda Mountains represent a kind of curtain between the home and the new world. Elisabeth Bridge, Boráros Square, Gellért Hill, Kossuth Street or Margaret Island are the trails on the road to the new, unknown. However, new knowledge of the life of Slovaks in the region is also important. In the text, the coordinates of the contemporary cultural being of this nationality and its most important creative acts are mentioned. Significant is the mutual understanding, partially concretized in the repair of the car and the meeting of the Slovak with the Hungarian. The world of the High Tatras is generally similar to that of the atmosphere of the Lowland; only smells are different. People are the same - friendly - towards the boy from the Lowland, who in the High Tatras gradually creates a perfect children's world thanks to his imagination (chasing, playing bandits, hide-and-seek). Of course, Slovak and Hungarian are also important in this environment as a kind of connection by means of communication between children. Their world here is also interwoven with humor, but it is written with a great deal of didacticism. In the High Tatras, children become Jánošík, captains or thieves, and their commitment to mental and linguistic understanding is important. The fact that the young hero is delighted by the fact that even in this far region he has happened upon a compatriot is a reader-friendly event. The journey home (to the Lowland, to Konopište) is presented with impressions that are not lost even when helping adults at home in the field or at the market at the Evangelical Church. Thus, work and beliefs are combined with the child's psychological development, which in these Lowland parts is gradually understood without words.

Thus, in the book *Tulips*, stories with children's motifs dominate, in which the author has demonstrated excellent characterization abilities. Overall, Hrivnák's favorite world is the world of teenage boys in the background of knowledge of their psychology and the propensity to moralize, and the humorous elements in his prose are also evoked. Fictionalization does not cause him any difficulty, he creates playful stories, controls situational humor, without any fuss he knits episodic situations into larger epic units, which could be sufficiently impressive even from the educational aspect. However, the delivery of the didactic message can be regarded as a lack of authorial self-confidence. Seen from this point of view there is also some analogy between Molnár's *The Paul street boys* (Hungarian: *Pál utcai fiúk*, Slovak: *Chlapci z Pavlovskej ulice*) and Hrivnák's *Boys from Dead end street*. Apart from the somewhat artificial character, *"... we can find an artistic representation of the search for one's national roots. In this prose, Hrivnák undertook to show that the process of getting rid of roots and looking for a way back to one's own society has its own rules"* (Andruška, 2013, p. 52). When examining Hrivnák's texts, there is a clear work with the language - in the case of a minoritarian author, the matter is not negligible: he uses a dialect and does not avoid archaisms. Boys from the Dead end street are like all other children - direct and playful. In one thing, however, they differ from others: they awaken in their awareness of Slovakness, the feeling of pride that they know something that others don't (in Slovak). In fact, the novel is a reaction to a problem: children do not adequately command literary Slovak nor Slovak dialect. Thus, the author puts the focus on promoting good knowledge of the Slovak language in the circle of adolescent boys of the given epic space-time. His concept of cultural revitalization of Slovaks in Hungary is specified in the text by a pupil of a Slovak primary school who is open to accept new information on the basis of which he gradually builds Slovak awareness. The writer applies a realistic method when writing the text. The heroes are from the 70s of the 20th century leading a communicative "battle" about national issues. The author *"... attempts to transform national-political ideas towards the school youth ... This intention is also followed in the selection of captains of two groups of boys who represent a diametrically opposed attitude to their nationality. It will come to light after the discovery of a new sign with the Slovak village name "Konopište", which is also the plot of the story"* (Maruzsová Šebová, 2013, p. 33). Under the influence of new knowledge and personal experience, Janko tries to define his identity and also considers the importance of his mother tongue. In his fate as a lonely pioneer of Slovak feeling, the eternal lot of the harbingers of idealistic views is reflected in their isolation. Janko compensates for his condition by the company of an unknown older gentleman, a former resident of Dead end street, who visits the village from Czechoslovakia to visit his family (mister Červenák).

At the same time, parents are completely absent from the process of the children's self-recognition. At this point, Hrivnák points *"... to their indifferent*

attitude towards their roots, as a result of which the transfer of cultural traditions moves from the family to its outside, and becomes either institutional in nature or based on random, spontaneous situations" (Maruzsová Šebová, 2013, p. 36). All the following episodes are focused on creating negative content of Fero's remark and on proving Janko's truth, who, through his output, will be admired by his new Slovak friends, which is a satisfaction for him due to the infidelity of his domestic friends. Finally, in an international youth camp in the High Tatras, two alienated friends meet: Janko and Fero. Janko takes over responsibility for Fero as his rescuer, who then acknowledges that commanding Slovak is important and can even save a life.

After all, everything comes from the Dead end street, which is not a dead end after all. It is the center of existence, a fiery and symbolic cross path of the development of a young Slovak generation in Hungary. The boy's friendly match is not only about football but also about meetings here and there: in Konopište and in the High Tatras - about coherence, memories and plans, which may be attributes of brighter tomorrows of newer and newer generations of this nationality in Hungary.

3 The presence of the national aspect in the (out of) school environment of Slovaks in Romania

Maintaining Slovak national awareness by the Slovak minority is also a permanent process in Romania. Several actors and institutions are and have been involved. The most important of these is the Slovak school. It can also be concluded from the complex work that the success in the pedagogical process *"... can never be permanently achieved through stereotypical repetition of the same procedures"* (Porubský, 2005, p. 46). The professional equipment of the teacher also includes such skills as activity, creativity, permanent search for more effective methods and means of education (also in national schools) - but also appropriate language competence. In Romania, we have a well-developed type of enclave with a very diversified language, after Vojvodina in Serbia it is the most prominent Slovak enclave with a developed school, folklore, church, publishing and mass media network (Dudok, 2008, p. 21). Slovak - as a mother tongue - has an important place in "their" schools with Slovak language instruction. Its key position is determined by three factors, including the various areas in which Slovak is manifested and applied: linguistic, didactic and socio-political. Slovak is a language, and its role also follows from it. Language as a system and specific communication realization - speech, discourse, language pragmatics - performs certain basic (primary) and secondary functions. Basic functions include cognitive and communicative functions. Slovaks do not succeed in life without the Slovak language, which, of course, also applies in the school, where these functions are fully applied, even deliberately developed. The learning process cannot do without Slovak as a

carrier. Its importance is given by the fact that it is used for learning and supervising the participants of school education as a means of realizing goals also in the lessons of other subjects. This position is also influenced by the subject Slovak language and literature, which is of particular importance in the system of subjects and in the teaching process, since its functions can be hardly substituted by the extracurricular environment in the case of minority existence. In a minority position, "*... the representative national / minoritarian, cultural / ethnic symbolic function leads to self-identification, to understanding of mutual belonging to others at home, in the mother country and in the world ...*" (Anoca, 2012, p. 8). If a variety of Slovak is acceptable in common communication, it is necessary to strive (at least) for a good standard of standardized Slovak in terms of building competence and promoting performance. Slovak as a learning discipline is taught starting from the kindergarten in present-day Romania and its status is equivalent to the majority language. Out-of-school or extra-curricular activities make it possible to extend the scope of Slovak as a language, a means of communication and a learning discipline. A common factor includes the state's macro-structural elements as a ministry, defining the education plan and approving the curriculum. Non-structural components, consisting of civic associations and fellowships, also affect the position of Slovak. These can also be associated with cultural incentives from the societal environment (such as radio and television).

Bilingualism is a natural phenomenon in a multicultural environment. It leads to creolisation, alternation of codes in communication, which is normal in linguistic terms; in terms of identity, existence and school - unbearable. In the 5th to 12th year of school attendance, to the mother tongue "*... the same number of lessons per week is devoted as to teaching Romanian in schools with Romanian instruction*" (Heckel, 1996, p. 177). Overall, Slovak schools in Romania have played a decisive role in preserving national (minority) identity. Nevertheless, it is not to be denied that there has been a strong assimilation of Slovaks in Romania in terms of recognizing one's identity. The roots, however, are binding, because the idea of establishing a secondary school in Nadlak (Romanian: Nădlac) was also supported by Slovenský týždenník (Slovak weekly), published in 1929-1932. However, the necessary material conditions, qualified teachers were not there - even the general interest in such a school among the Slovaks was not great. The children of the Slovak peasants and the poorer craftsmen hardly went to four-five years of folk school and they were already working. The question of establishing a Slovak secondary school in Romania was settled only after World War II, when the "Czechoslovak" State Gymnasium was founded in Nadlak in autumn 1945. Thus, the desire to acquire higher education in the mother tongue in the home environment has become a reality. So the organization of minority education was activated. An important role in the development of Slovak education in Romania has up to this day been played by the Theoretical Lyceum of Jozef Gregor Tajovský

in Nadlak and the Jozef Kozáček Lyceum in Bodonoš (Romanian: Budoii) (and, of course, about 15 elementary schools). Of course, such a creative environment of the school, has brought up personalities in the field of literature, who have given a specific picture of the complex and partial existence of their nationality.

4 The young person as a paradigm of determined education in the text of Pavol Bujtár

From the point of view of the youth topic in Romania, Pavol Bujtár (1936), who published a novel entitled *Shepherd* (Slovak: *Pastierik*, 1996), written in 1960, can be mentioned as an example. So the author subscribed to literature before he made his successful debut in 1965; a proof of this is also this book. In general, Bujtár "*... is the most authentic when he grasps the spaces, realities and figures of the Lowland from an earlier and closer past*" (Štefanko, 1997, p. 96). He has enough power to bring the author's voice closer to the soul of his teenage heroes. Thanks to the linear story, he follows his young hero's actuation in his "vocation" as a shepherd; the facts are presented through his perspective. These descriptions are engaging; the storyline turns into a number of side stories that give the prose a more engaging touch. The author's presentation converges with the soul of teenage heroes. The traditional story, characters, the theme, motives, environment, types and the mentality of people are depicted with a certain typology. The author used the child aspect method; the dominating topic is adolescence itself with a psychological depiction of characters. This process (in the highly distorted world of adults) is featured with a social undertone and an ubiquitous moral attitude of the narrator, who follows the action of a young hero - farm-hand (*bírešík*) (a young cotter) in a *sálaš*. Bujtár's *Shepherd* comes from modest circumstances; the author describes the poor conditions of people's life with an alliance to the texts of Fraňo Král'. In terms of motifs it is based on a meeting between the mother and a teacher, who has to allow the young person to drop out of school when they need him at home and in the field. The strenuousness, honesty, sensitivity and decency of the young boy are accentuated by his home and school nurture despite his modest proportions. The world of the book is contrasted to the shepherd's environment, which, however, does not want to give up letters even on the *sálaš*. It is a sign of his certain mental maturity and education. Of course, his company cannot be made by just a book; three similar swains (*chasníci*) (grown up lads) such as him are relieving their grief for their relatives. The common destiny (of a cruelly experienced childhood) makes them allies who sometimes, naturally, invent mischiefs. However, they want to free themselves from an uneasy status. The author emphasizes that this is only possible if they learn to read and write at school. Janko's empathy with a weak-minded boy is a sign of his kindness, which he also learned at school. With a dramatic sequence of events, the author describes in a reader engaging way that the young shepherd has forgotten about the cows

when reading a calendar on the fields. He uses the words of an old (and therefore experienced) man of wisdom who talks about the possibilities to break out of poverty by reading: *"Read for the reason that you are poor and read there where you can because being a swineherd is your school. Read, for you have no father, you have no possessions, and the people around you are just as poor as your mother. Maybe there will be a time when you will become someone..."* (Bujtár, 1996, pp. 54-55). Jankov's peaceful life of serving is interrupted by his brother Mišo's visit, who is reserved. He has no sympathy for his hobbies and is a supporter of physical work despite his uneasy fate: *"Remember, you are poor, you have to live with a bowed head ... the school is for reading, here you are working with your hands and hard so"* (Bujtár, 1996, p. 61). It is actually a clash – even a confrontation – of two worlds and ideas. Therefore, the young boy uses his leisure time (also) meaningfully in the service of others: he teaches his friends – shepherds to read and write. His way of searching for books, copybooks and pencils for others is engaging for the reader. He thinks collectively, but performs actions individually. He is left to his fate from which he can only be liberated by his own tenacious work, diligence and cleverness – that is, also by the knowledge gained in school. Gradually, in the story, the motif of the book is raised to the level of a symbol as a spring of wisdom, which the teacher gave to Janko. After acquiring skills, young boys-shepherds become beings who are already thinking deeper. The space of a young boy's imagination is opened by the hope to conquer a new world of the future. There is also an opportunity to pull oneself out of this world with one's own cunning: Janko Sýkora overcame his reeve and read something out of the newspaper aloud. Therefore the reeve had to fulfill his promise and let him go home for at least two days, at least temporarily freeing himself from the daily drudgery. His visit to the teacher is described emotionally. The teacher's directions addressed to the boy arise from his fatherly effort to hone his character. At the same time, the physical and psychological (character) development of a young shepherd gets to a higher level, which symbolizes the departure from the *sálaš* back to his home. This return is spiced up by the empirics of the (un) easy laws of life. In the context of the wider epic space, a contrasting chronotope with a tendency to migrate is thus used in the text. In Bujtár there is a constant "domestic" space (the young shepherd's *sálaš*) which is also disturbed by the "exotic" (the arrival of his brother, and later his mother). In fact, the cycle begins and ends in the *sálaš* type of life and duties of a young shepherd. However, his gradually acquired education is also evident.

Overall, the goal of both the parent and the teacher is that *"... our children's literature will be read with pleasure, that children will read it, and so that our children continue to grow their and our mother tongue. So that we remain children and do not die"* (Štefanko, 1998, p. 220). Bujtár's prose *The Shepherd* is marked by a certain cliché, perhaps even an inevitable one, when we consider the period of its origin. With this prose, however, the author has proven that he can masterfully

navigate in traditionally written texts, where he views people and the environment through children's - especially boys' - heroes. His narrative talents can grasp the young reader. And that is the beauty of (also national) youth literature.

5 Traditional but always up-to-date didactic motifs in the youth prose of Ján Kopčok (among Slovaks in Serbia)

Schools are both an environment and a means by which the nation(al minority) is maintained or revived. These lessons are much more demanding, requiring an increased pedagogical measure from the teacher. However, the results of his work *"... cannot be measured in the usual way. The methodology and methodological procedures have their own peculiarity"* (Bujtár, 2005, p. 51). Things are not different in the Slovak national schools in Serbia (in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina). There, too, the Slovak school should guarantee that Slovaks can live on in the Lowland. At the same time, the existence of Slovak instruction is their distinctive feature. As for the language competence en bloc, we can say that in the given territory, the Slovak enclave and the diaspora Slovak language are the most viable, developing as a diversified language with pluricentric characteristics within public communication spheres and interpersonal communication with a strong sense of diglossia; a fully developed school network from pre-school establishments to university education, a diverse publishing network, a public private network of radio and television broadcasts of regional and local character, vibrant theater professional and amateur activity (the only Slovak professional theater outside Slovakia), a scientific research infrastructure focused on linguistic-ethnic parameters (Dudok, 2008, p. 21). On the whole, it can be stated that the use of Slovak (and the overall cultural creativity) of Slovaks in Serbia has deep roots, contemporary instantiations and perspectives. This is also reflected in a pars pro toto manner in the intentional youth prose of Ján Kopčok (1929 - 1993), entitled *Boys from the sálaš* (Slovak: *Chlapci zo sálaša*, 1986), in which the themes of anti-fascist resistance and rebuilding of society resonate. Youth literature has gradually begun to lean towards different typological orientations in the given chronotope. On the one hand, the traditions of didactic focus continued and, on the other, *"... the efforts of expressive and thematic modernization were also clear"* (Harpáň, 2000, p. 111). This feature is also concretized in the above-mentioned text of Kopčok, in which the author points to typical Lowland attributes. It is a world of fertile plains where the adventures of three boys - friends are standing at the center of the sujet, who together herd a *falka* (flock) of cows near the Varadin road. This determined chronotope is the co-ordinate of the story taking place at the end of World War II. Thus, the author applies his didactic intention in the typical atmosphere of Yugoslavia being progressively liberated by the partisans. The educational moment, which is, however, unobtrusive, is introduced as a part of the story of carefree childhood. However, it is, of course, contaminated by war experiences at

an appropriate age. In the center of the short story are *geregy* (melons) and the *geregár* himself (melon grower). Everything is directed towards the *pl'ac* (weekly market), where *jahodače* (strawberry schnapps) are sold symbolically and particularly. The melon field as an atypical (and specifically Lowland) environment is the center of the psychological development of the young boys. Their adequate debates are followed by "just" the surrounding nature with mulberry leaves as significant attributes of the Lowland, where: *"High cornfields towered against the purple sky as dense skirmish lines of javelineers with hairy headbands on helmets lined up to attack. Maize was shucked, cornrolls were tied behind the last leaf, and the intoxicating scent shook the crumbly pollen to the delicate blue-greenish hairs that had sprung from behind the leaf, where a long and thick cob would grow later"* (Kopčok, 1986, p. 20-21). In their shadows, the houses-*sálašes* are blazing like solid walls of physical and mental resistance. The *šujgar* (the end of the frayed whip), *bačkory* (traditional slippers), rocker wells and threshers are actually symbols of this flatland. It is a world of youth work in the field, which - regardless of age - thanks to home and school education helps where it can. Rotten melons as a remuneration for helping the *geregar* constitute fiery flames of an increased sense of justice among the youth. As children of war, they should be extremely receptive and literally watch their surroundings. However, they must also be neutral in relation to the *periaš* (the Hungarian fascist gendarmerie) and the partisans. Their behavior is thus the result of the (mentioned) correct home and school education, which breezes through the text in secondary order. In the background of the child's mind, the image of the partisans appears - perhaps naturally - whereas they are talked about as being certain roles models for the youth with grenades, machine guns and bunkers. Jánošík's and Tito's parallel is characteristic for the time, but from author and reader perspective unintrusive. The starting point and goal of the young are the surrounding land bounds, which serve not only as a backdrop, but also as a hideout of the mysterious partisans in the eyes of children. The young boy witnesses a friendly secret visit of the resistance fighters in their dwelling, unconsciously learning coherence and discipline. The gradual psychological development of the children is specified by the fact that they slowly put together war events in their minds, which are essentially related to their micro-society. It is a sign that children are exposed to more intense emotional experiences in the war. An interesting, but slightly didactically unnatural motif is their unwavering way of keeping the secrets of the partisans even towards their friends. Nevertheless, they (as children of war) are playful and courageous, because they bring out a comic revenge as a retribution to the niggardly reeve (they mark his beautiful melons prepared for collaborators with five-pointed stars). In such escalated periods, the human (and thus child's) character will crystallize, which can be the basis for the future adult's

straightforwardness through proper education and guidance at home and at school.

This environment for raising children, naturally, is also affected by the national environment (Croats, Slovaks, Serbs, Swabians...). Therefore, it is necessary to learn (at home and at school) adequately to understand and create human and social conditions of different coexistence. This is also facilitated by the opening of the gymnasium, for it gives hope to a more peaceful tomorrow. However, they are gradually reduced because of the war period. In the lives of children, it is concretized by the presence of the *Hitlerjugend* (a German fascist youth organization) in the village. It confronts their character and overall education. But *apko's* (father's) word is law, a friend's idea a model. It is a period in which even a children's uniform is important for further psychological development. Service to oneself, one's friend, family, village and homeland is the basis for a solid character, concretized in the moderate primacy of the author's ideas. Thus, the individual develops especially in family and school, the social in camp life. Apart from the horrors of the war, it would be the ideal state of psychodidactic development of the young generation. However, it is the time of the *štukas* (pikes) (the German army's headlong strikes during World War II) and the death that is contingent. However, it is important to point out these attributes, which have a lot to say to today's young reader and that can serve his/her complex education.

Conclusion

Slovak culture in the Lowland, i.e. in Hungary, Romania and Serbia, has something to say to today's man (also in the field of literature). It gives testimonies not only to different times, but also to human characters. Some of them, of course, may also be models for child percipients. They are general and specific texts, both classical and modern, and bearing in themselves, of course, distinctive symptoms of their own chronotope. What, for example, is a matter of course in the cultural context of Slovaks in Serbia, is only a desire in the Slovak community in Romania or Hungary (or the other way around). However, the effort is uniform: to demonstrate to oneself, to one's ethnicity, to the majority nation and the mother country, what is significant about being Slovak in the context of nationality. It is therefore important to accentuate the peculiarity - even uniqueness - of one's existence as a minority by means of literature. This is especially true for youth literature, because this age category is particularly perceptive of the outside impulses in the school and extracurricular environment. And there is an unrepeatable opportunity for the teacher as a human to "grasp" a young pupil or student who gradually perceives the world in its peculiarities. The didactic process itself, thanks to the interpretation in and outside the school (with some hyperbolization in fact throughout life), also helps to develop it.

On the basis of selected literary texts, we have tried to point out the specificity of individual Lowland Slovak communities from the cultural-literary and educational aspects. However, the choice of texts was not accidental: all three were intentional prototexts of the middle epic with a Lowland color, its minority being and spacetime, and boys' heroes who had an integral experience of that which is specifically national. On the other hand, these texts were in terms of themes and motifs classical, real, general. By combining these two amplitudes, a fundamental symbiosis of the cultural-literary development of the Slovak enclaves outside the physical boundaries of Slovakia was created. The second pillar was presented in terms of coordinates of the educational features of these minorities. However, "only" those basic, typical attributes of school minority education were sketched out that are related to these individual literary texts in terms of age and topic. After all, school and family, adult and child, teacher and pupil, minority and majority... thus human and human, were put together in order to present a partial picture of the existence and specificity of Slovaks (Slovak children) in the Lowland.

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