

Croatian Poetry for Children
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A DISCUSSION OF CROATIAN POETRY FOR CHILDREN

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I GENERALIA SPECIFICA

Before trying to define the *differentiae specifiae* of literature for children in relation to that for adults, it would be advisable to consider the similarities. Following the development of Croatian poetry for children from Petar Preradović (born 1818) to Dubravka Ugrešić (born 1949) we find a tradition which is about one hundred and thirty years old; in the course of time this tradition dialectically concentrated around the same poles to be found in literature for adults: mythos and lexis, subjectivity and objectivity, the semantic and asemantic. Although in Greek »mythos« means *word, speech, subject of speech, old tale, fairy tale, fable*, while »lexis« means *manner of speech or expression*, we shall take these words as used by Aristotle when he gave preference to the *mythos* as the *story* over *lexis* as *language*. Thus we can regard all modern European literature of the 19th and 20th centuries as a shifting of interest from the story itself to the language in which the story is told. The poles of subjectivity and objectivity separate on the one hand the traditional, »humanistic«, anthropocentric, instrumentalistic aesthetics of will and action which are formalistic and naturalistic in origin, from, on the other, the newer ontocentric, hermeneutic, immanent conception of art according to which the artist does not use art to rework the world of reality, but is himself, in a phenomenologico-existential sense, an »instrument of the dialectic of the being«. The poles of semantic and asemantic oppose *meaning* to *non-meaning* (Gk. verb »semaino«, to mean). According to this division, semantic art would seem to imply the known, positive world of meaning, from the ideas themselves to their various vehicles, while asemantic art would seem to indicate a world unto itself which can never be completely transformed into a meaning which is communicative and expressive to everyone. This is the essence of Susanne Langer's »unconsummated symbol«¹.

By applying these poles to the intertwining structures of Croatian poetry for children I have arrived at a scheme which to some extent

¹ Gvido Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *Savremena estetika*, Nolit, Begrade 1968, p. 250.

sheds light on the categories and axes according to which this interesting literature may be classified:

- 1) Mythical semantic subjectivity
- 2) Mythical asemantic subjectivity
- 3) Lexical semantic subjectivity
- 4) Lexical asemantic subjectivity
- 5) Mythical semantic objectivity
- 6) Mythical asemantic objectivity
- 7) Lexical semantic objectivity
- 8) Lexical asemantic objectivity

If we take the items in this scheme in the narrow sense which we have already established, we may define them in terms of the following poetic characteristics:

1 *Mythical semantic subjectivity: story, plot, action — meaning —* I. This is poetry in which the poet's »I«, often disguised as another character, interacts directly with the world through a rounded-off story with dynamic plot. This is the most communicative, recognisable and accessible model of poetry for children. Such is the poetry of *Hugo Badalić, Josip Milaković, Rikard Katalinić Jeretov, Bogumil Toni, Vladimir Nazor, Josip Rukavina, Zlata Kolarić-Kišur, Stjepan Jakševac, Ratko Zvrko, Nikola Miličević* and *Mirko Rogošić*, and all children's poets whose position in relation to the world is marked by an obvious distance, that between subject and object; they shape their language to suit the tale they are telling and deal with the world of known meanings, whether by direct statement or allegory, usually following the rules of normative ethics. In this poetry we most often find those works which were originally called »contes d'avertissement« (cautionary tales). »The goal of all these stories is to keep children away from the dangers of water, woods, etc (...) The best known of such stories in France is »Little Red Riding Hood« — writes the well-known French theoretician of literature for children, Marc Soriano². The existence of such cautionary tales in verse clearly indicates an instrumentalistic, subject-object, action-packed, anthropocentric and mythocentric conception of poetry for children. The advantage of this artistic approach lies in *kinetic conventionalism*, that is, in the inclusion of children in conventional action. This *conventional action*, whether it be a rescue from danger or self-transcendence in battle with something greater and stronger, has the deepest and speediest effect on the child's mind because it moves along well-trodden paths of normal and social convention, that is, within the framework of all that is best known to the child from his total early experience of the world. Why does this poetry not venture into linguistic, lexical experiments, instead of using all its strength to tell a tale in a traditional language? »Poetry for children«, writes the Italian theoretician, Antonio Lugli, »does not allow

² Marc Soriano, *Djetinjstvo umjetnosti*, »Umjetnost i dijete«, Zagreb 1973, no. 23, p. 71.

itself aesthetic adventures. As with folk poetry, it must make use of poetic material and practically unchanged expressive means because a child wishes to see clearly and likes to hear things in his own language. For this reason it is extremely difficult for a children's poet to be original and create new forms and content: he has constantly in mind the limitations of a child's nature (or that of the common folk) and must gradually introduce it to genuine poetic content while at the same time ignoring the question of whether the content is a »means of cognising the objective world«, as Santucci said, or merely evokes unclear impressions of an »undefinable magic picture« which is dearer to the poet than to the child, as C. Leone and L. Vecchione have said of some poetry for children³.

Poets of this group, therefore, make more use of eloquence than suggestion, but children easily and readily fall prey to this eloquence, for it springs from the immutable, essentialistic, individualistic substantiality of the poetic »I« towards which the whole of a child's upbringing aspires. »Poetry is an escape from personality«, wrote T. S. Eliot, »but one must already be a personality in order to want to escape from it«. A child is just learning about and getting used to having a personality, so the »poetry of personality« will be closer to him than the »poetry of personality disintegration«. The entire upbringing, schooling, education and social acclimatisation of a child contains an essentialistic urge towards the transcending of lower levels of objective values in favour of higher ones. Here the subject transcends the object's level, as opposed to existence which transcends the object by the transcendence of its own subjectivity.

The vast majority of children readily accept the poetry of this first level because it suits the system of family, school and social upbringing in which they live. Only a minority of children are aware of the inadequacies of such poetry; they unconsciously revolt against this system, demanding that poetry should satisfy the same levels in them as it does in adults. Instead of overcoming the objective world with the subjective individualistic »I«, such children want to fuse with the world, to dissolve their personality in such a way that both subject and object disappear and are replaced by a fullness, a totality, a traditionally aesthetic »Fülle« which corresponds to the recent phenomenological concepts of the »noema« of an object and »noesis« of an act, the semanticist's »icon«, existential definition.

2 *Mythical asemantic subjectivity: story, plot, action — non-meaning —* I. Here we find a type of poetry in which the subjective, individualistic, poetic »I« intervenes in the objective world with a coherent, logical story full of action and dynamism, but, in contrast to the first type of poetry, it does not aim at a definite meaning. In practice, this means that there is no »message«, no clear ideological conclusion.

³ Antonio Lugli, *Problemi povijesti književnosti za djecu*, »Umjetnost i dijete«, Zagreb 1973, p. 29.

It is as though the poet has exhausted himself wrestling with the objective world; he has courageously ventured into an exploration with great subjective initiative but, encountering the abundance of levels and structures in the objective world, does not find in them the meaning and ideas he expected to find. Instead of the latter, it is these levels and structures that exclusively occupy his attention. And thus, instead of a *value-bearing* poetry we have a *structural* poetry which retains its subjectivistic, instrumentalistic and individualistic character. We may say that poetry of this type shows the first signs of weakness in respect to the Object. Here we find the first traces of the magical impact that things can have upon us, the pale reflection of a phenomenological need.

In this group we could include such poets as *Milka Pogačić*, *Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević*, *Josipa Radošević*, *Ljudevit Krajačić*, *Rudolfo Franjin Magjer*, *Mihovil Pavlek Miškina*, *Dragutin Tadijanović* and possibly some others. They are all characterised by an initial desire to appropriate essentialistic values by means of subjective initiative with the help of a fully-developed story — and the eventual failure of this intention. The transition from the will to passive contemplation of the object and the subjective initiative come about in various ways. In some cases scenery plays the role of catalyst. In the poem *Veliko je more* (*The Sea is Vast*) by *Milka Pogačić*, the poetess loses herself in the phenomenon of the sea's expanse: »Veliko je more, ne vidiš mu kraja« (The sea is vast, one cannot see its end), and a little further on: »U dubini njegovoj sto se čuda krije« (And in its depths a hundred wonders hide). The meaning here is diffuse; the poetess wraps her image of the sea in conventional naturalistic, social and moralistic attributes (a flock of seagulls, sailors brave as falcons, etc.) but one senses their tenuous link with the icon of the sea, and the poem leaves a final impression of diffusion, discontinuity, plurality and of the sea's expanse of which man can be no measure. Nor do *Tadijanović's* plots attain the clear meaning they are striving for: in the poem *Da sam ja učiteljica* (*If I were a Teacher*) the message is clear in terms of meaning, but stronger still is the suggestive power in the command »U razred! U razred!« (Into the classroom! Into the classroom!) with the teacher interrupts the children's pleasure at the sight of the army and sends them back to work. »... I svi odmah trčimo / kao da nas čeka med a ne računica« (And we all run in straightaway / as if honey were awaiting us and not arithmetic) shows inexplicable subservience to the Object's suggestiveness, which ranges from technological epiphany to ontological fascination. For *Ljudevit Krajačić* the objects »wolf« and »pine forest«, which also provide the titles for his poems, constitute suggestive outlets for his imaginative aspirations »Sred duboke šume i šutljiva mraka / sovni tek se gdje kad čuje huk; / uz rub tamne šume straži zvijer opaka: / krvoločan, strašan vuk«. (Midst the deep woods and silent darkness / The owl's hoot is heard just now and then / At the edge of the forest a wild beast is on guard / The bloodthirsty, terrible wolf.) *Krajačić's* wolf, as was the case with *Pogačić's* sea, is conventional both

in its plot and moral (wild beast, sure of its wretched prey) and is set in its ethnic space (the edge of the dark forest), but all these meanings collapse at the end of the poem, and there emerges the suggestion of the wolf as an icon, as a mysterious subject, as a pure structure which through its fascination covers over and destroys our range of values: »Iza nje tek samo dršće nijema strava / i protkiva užas lug i gaj; / urla vuk, a uz rub neba svijetlo plava / iskri prve zore sjaj«. (Behind it trembles mute dread / And terror fills both field and grove / The wolf howls and on the blue horizon light / Dawn's first radiance glows).

The advantages of this type of poetry lie in the greater elasticity of the connection between subject and object, in the interesting interchange of eloquence and suggestion, in the first retreat of value in the face of structure. The disadvantages are a diffused impression, a loss of »weight« and the lack of a clear, meaningful and directly communicative point.

3 *Lexical semantic subjectivity*: language — meaning — I. Here the subjective, individualistic poetic »I« attempts to become meaningful in the objective world by using as its instrument primarily language itself, and, to a lesser degree, the story. To this group belong the following poets: *Petar Preradović*, *Ivan vitez Trnski*, *Mijat Crnko*, *August Harambašić*, *Nikola Pavić*, *Gustav Krklec*, *Vjekoslav Majer*, *Dobriša Cesarić*, *Zdenka Jušić-Seunik* and *Luko Paljetak*.

In their poems rhetoric overrules the plot. But at the same time it tones down that objective world which it is trying to present in plot form. The only thing that this rhetoric does not overpower is the subjective poetic »I« which remains in charge of the situation. »Veselo sada, veselo svi! / Kupimo cvijeće, pletimo vijence, / Vjenčajmo dvoje kao mladence;« / Gaily now, gaily all! / Let us buy flowers, let us bind garlands, / Let us marry a couple as bride and groom)* — these lines by *Petar Preradović* are a lexical arabesque with a supplementary story. He attempts to attain the essentialistic value of the vital gaiety of youth by syntactic, lexical and metrical values. The romantic conception of poetry as music and not images also influenced that couple of Croatian Illyrian poets. *Brodarska* (*Sailor's Poem*) by *Ivan Vitez-Trnski* and the exuberant poem *Poljskom cvijeću* (*To Meadow Flowers*) by *Mijat Crnko*, are based on an onomatopoeic fusion of language and nature; *Harambašić's* lines: »Ja sam junak, do Boga / ne bojim se nikoga: / Imam pušku drvenu, / imam sablju limenu,« (I am a hero, and but for God, / I do not fear anyone: / I have a wooden rifle, / And I have a tin sword) move the diaphragm rather than the mind or the imagination.

In their poetry for children *Pavić*, *Krklec*, *Cesarić* and *Majer* also show themselves to be skilful performers on the instrument of language. Although it may be difficult to distinguish what comes first

* Translator's note: in this text literal translations of the Croatian verses are provided while the translations of the poems themselves in the second section are (attempts at) poetic renditions, ergo often not literal.

in their poems, the language or the story (the chicken or the egg), it is not difficult to ascertain that they attain their meaning through the heights of an instrumentalised language and not the story, which here does not reach the level of the finely plotted ideas in their poems for adults.

The inventiveness of the language and the conventionality of the story brought together in the poetry of this group give rise to interesting illusions and reciprocal exchanges, with the result that the language often seems conventional and the story inventive. Whatever the case, the impression the reader gets, be he adult or child, branches into something twofold. There is obviously a dualism here which results in lexis emerging beyond mythos. It should be pointed out that in this particular group there are quite a few poets who are far better known for their poetry for adults. This may be the reason for their making use of ready-made stories from literary history such as, for example, the *topos of the topsy-turvy world*. »In the animal world, too, roles are reversed — this is an ancient *adynaton*. We often meet it in proverbial forms. A donkey playing the lute, a dancing bull, an animal harnessed to the wrong end of a cart, a brave rabbit, a fearful lion, etc.. Some of these reversed roles can be found in ancient literatures. They display the gnomic manner of expression which appears in folk literature. Chrétien de Troyes (Cligés 3849 onwards) shows us a dog running before a rabbit, a fish chasing a beaver, a lamb chasing a wolf: *si vont les choses à envers*. Dante's great and distant teacher, Arnaut Daniel, raised this and other such *adynata* to the level of a very exclusive art. The *topsy-turvy world* can, in the twilight of a bewildered consciousness, become an expression of terror. An example of this is to be found in a poem by Theophile de Viau (1626), who may be regarded as akin to the surrealism of the 1920's: »That stream flows to its source; a bull climbs a bell tower; the rock wrings blood out of itself; here a snake and she-bear mate; on the top of an ancient tower a snake tears a hyena apart; a fire burns under ice; the sun has blackened; I see the moon falling and a tree leaves its place« — writes Curtius in his work, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*⁴.

Ludi dan (Crazy Day) by Gustav Krklec contains the *topos of the topsy-turvy world* free of the encumbrance of a story. That is why it is better to classify this poem according to its language structure which in its formal paradoxicality captures the meaning of the *topsy-turvy world* more successfully than a *topos* worn out by centuries of use:

Pijetao mi jutros reče:
 — Kume dragi, dobro veče!
 — Je li ovo san il' java?
 S miševima mačka spava.
 Krezub jarac puši lulu,
 siv magarac svira frulu,
 za rep liju guska vuče,
 šaran leti iznad kuće...
 S punom torbom majmun stran
 čestita mi — ludi dan!«

(Rooster this morning said to me:
 Dear friend, good evening!
 Is this a dream or reality?
 A cat sleeping with mice.
 A toothless goat smoking a pipe,
 a grey mule playing the flute,
 a goose pulling a fox by the tail,
 a carp flying over the house...
 A strange monkey with a full sack
 wishes me — a crazy day!)

It should be stressed that the *topos of the topsy-turvy world* is not characteristic of this type of poetry alone, but links Krklec to poets of an entirely different orientation, such as Drago Ivanišević, Grigor Vitez, Branko Hribar, Zvonimir Balog and Luko Paljetak.

The value of the group we have just been examining is to be found in their originality, in the novelty of abandoning mythos in favour of lexis, which creates a tension and dialectic of dualism. But this is also a source of inadequacies: it is harder to achieve meaning through language than story. It is more difficult to convey a particular meaning through the suggestion of language than through the eloquence of story; and this is the reason why poets from the group of lexical semantic subjectivity often fail; not having sufficient trust in language itself, they reinforce it with the story and thus the language loses in suggestiveness as much as the story — because of the intrusion of linguistic suggestion — loses in eloquence.

The *topos of the topsy-turvy world*, strongly present for the first time in this group, with its emphasis on absurdity brings us near to the following group where the search for objective meaning has given way even more to the loss of subject.

4 *Lexical asemantic subjectivity: language — non-meaning — I*. Here we have a set of poems in which the starting point of subjective initiative and instrumentalistic will is still recognisable. The poetic »I« uses language as its instrument and not story. But an essential feature of this poetic orientation is that no attempt is made to capture an objective meaning by means of language. So we find ourselves

⁴ Ernst Robert Curtius, *Evropska književnost i latinsko srednjovekovlje*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb 1971, pp. 103-104.

faced with an instrumentalistic, subjective action without a definite goal. The following hierarchy may be discerned here: a) the poetic »I« b) language c) story d) meaning. In this small group of poets we find *Ivo Kozarčanin*, *Pero Budak*, *Vesna Parun* and *Mladen Bjažić*. If by way of illustration we take Vesna Parun's popular poems about kittens, it is immediately clear that we are dealing here with a powerful subjective projection; but what is projected and reached by projection in the objective world is not even the topsy-turvy world, which suggests universal absurdity, but rather chaos, a heterogeneous conglomeration of the adventures of these small kittens which never attains any sort of meaning and remains a pure game. Instead of values, Parun's poems present a sheer play of plot structures which suggest more to us by means of the ecstatic rhetoric of language than by the logical links in the story. There is no coherent story here: kittens go from adventure to adventure with cat-like leaps of language, not following the gradual development of the elements of a story: »Digli su jedro, razapeli flok / i poduprli kormilo štapom, / A najstariji ribar Rok / mačiće pokri suknenom kapom«. (They hoisted the sail, set the jib / and braced the tiller with a stick / And the oldest fisherman, Rok / covered the kittens with his cloth cap.) If there were no jib (flok) there would be no fisherman Rok, or new adventures.

We have reached the second part of our scheme in which objectivity dominates. The poem is no longer a subjective, individualistic action which uses language or story as instruments for attaining or not attaining meaning; rather it tends to become dictation by the being. The poet as an »instrument of the dialectic of the being« has overcome his »original« subjectivity and passively surrendered to the being. »The being conceals itself by revealing itself in the existing«⁵, just as the poet's objectivity conceals itself by revealing itself in subjectivity. We are witness here to Heidegger's »metaphysics of light«: light disappears in an illuminated object, and appears when the object disappears. In Grigor Vitez's poetry we find for the first time in Croatian poetry for children that *lexis* has freed itself of the instrumentalistic role and yoke of the subjective poetic »I« as well as of the *mythos-story*. Language here has become the dictation of the being and the story is no longer an instrument broken off from the linguistic existing and added deliberately to a productive, technological, communicational language in which words are technological signs rather than ontological realities — rather it has remained in its original state, interwoven with the dialectic of the linguistic existing. With this group of poets, therefore, we have the impression of a simultaneous a-priori nature of both language and story instead of the successive posteriority which we find in poets of the subjectivity class where the poetic »I« is successively followed in a distinct, positive hierarchy by *lexis*, then *mythos*, then meaning. The combi-

⁵ Gvido Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

nation of these elements can be reversed, but they always follow each other in a hierarchy, and never appear simultaneously in a dialectic. The only thing which has remained hierarchically posterior with the objectivistic poets is the poetic »I« in the sense of original, material, psychological subjectivity. But by losing this subjectivity in the dictation by the being, the poet has in fact attained it. Brought through the existing to the being, freed of positive psychological materiality, it returns in the form of transsubjectivity, bearing the clear sign of the transcendence of existence.

For these reasons it cannot be said that in the poetry of Grigor Vitez and others of the same category there is no impression of the existence of an »I«. It is merely that this »I« is not only quantitatively more intricately interwoven with the monads of language, plot and meaning, but it is also carried through them emitting at times a personalistic naturalism, and even organicism, and fascinating us with the identity of this personal and organic structure. At the same time the methodology of this poetic device appears as an antinaturalistic operativeness which, as an expression of personalistic existentiality, resists genesis.

5 *Mythical semantic objectivity*: story, plot, action — meaning — dictation by the being. *August Senoa*, *Ivana Brlić-Mazuranić*, *Zvonimir Golob*, *Dubravko Ivančan*, *Nada Iveljić*, *Truda Stamać*, *Goran Babić* and *Dubravka Ugrešić* are all poets who belong to this group in that the being dictates to them a meaningful story, or, more exactly, existence moves towards meaning. *Postolar i vrag (The Cobbler and the Devil)* and *Kugina kuća (The House of the Plague)* by August Senoa are, in the poet's existential orientation, undoubtedly close to Goran Babić's poems *Zmija (Snake)*, *Vampir (Vampire)* and *Ljudolov (Hunting People)*. It is not just a question here of the similarity of the theme of »damned beings«: the devil, plague, snake and vampire, but also a tendency towards the theme of the »wrong and the impossible«⁶. In the poem *The Cobbler and the Devil* the poet, admittedly with a subjectivistic instrumentalised sense of humour, rejects the devil as an object, but the devil keeps returning until he becomes an obsession, even a »dictation by the being«. The fact that the cobbler nevertheless finally manages to send the devil »to the devil« does not help much. We still expect his return.

The House of the Plague is even more impressive in its fascination with Evil. Let us leave aside shallow moralism and the censuring of egoism; This is of secondary importance to the author; of primary importance is the magical image of the Plague which compels the author to portray it. In accordance with the cultural conventions of his time, Senoa clothed the image of the plague in a moralistic tale. The contemporary reader will be struck by, above all, the preoccupation with the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 530.

phenomenon of Evil here which through its cathartic effect on the human soul is identical with Freedom and the Beautiful:

*Nasuprot kipu čudna žena sjela,
Crnoj smrti posestrima bijela,
Zmijska kosa niz rame joj pada,
Čelik-zubi stižu se od jada,
Krvav mjesec oči su joj plame,
A sred noći vijori se tamne
Bijela halja — gole kosti krijuć,
Crni vazduh bijelim bičem bijuć.*

*(Opposite the statue a strange woman sat,
To black death a pale blood sister,
Snaky hair down her shoulders streaming,
Steel-like teeth gnashing in anguish,
Her burning eyes bloody moon,
Midst the dark night her white dress
Fluttering — covering bare bones,
Black air whipping with white whip.)*

It is important to realise that the plague is not only an uncommon and unusual, but an anti-usual, anti-natural being. Upsetting the normal order of things with its unusualness, it represents a breach of this order, and freedom. »A value is good when it leads to reality; it is beautiful when it pleases itself⁷. The plague is an anti-real figure, a fiction, a product of the imagination, and since, according to the existential definition, good means existence and evil non-existence, and the beautiful is opposed to good as non-real is to real⁸, we easily arrive at the equation: beautiful — evil — freedom⁹.

It is important to realise that plague is not only an uncommon and snake and vampire of Goran Babić who writes more than one hundred years later. What is the use of convincing a child not to be afraid of the dark and of snakes when the dark really does hold dangers and snakes are waiting to strike? The message of Babić's poem *Snake* is highly charged with meaning: »Kad ode tata, ode i mama, / zmijska jede djecu koja su sama« (When Daddy goes, and Mummy goes too, / The snake eats children left alone). One of the postulates of existential humanism is to accept the dreadful conditions of one's existence, in this case the danger of the snake. If, according to Kierkegaard, fear, is a »somersault to freedom«, and real existence is attained by surrendering to despair, then in Babić's poems, instead of the maliciousness some pedagogues reproach him for, we find only a genuine, honest effort to free children of fear by leaving them at its mercy. To give oneself to fear means to give oneself to freedom. In this evil-freedom which the snake repre-

⁷ Ibid., p. 521.
⁸ Ibid., p. 521.
⁹ Ibid., p. 522.

sents, the third member of the equation is beauty; thus both Senoa's plague and Babić's snake are not only aesthetically beautiful in their terror and destructive effect, but they are also artistically effective.

If, within the framework of Heidegger's concept that existence is the putting-up with the indeterminate possibility of death, we regard Babić's snake as a symbol of death, then the *snake*, as a confrontation with death, represents the transition from false to genuine existence: »Death is the most characteristic possibility open to the human being ... (...) Since our direct existence exists in decaying, man's attitude towards this most particular, absolute, unequalled, certain but indeterminate possibility is above all not truthful. Man tries to make death trivial by regarding it as an event which belongs to the future and which in the present does not concern him at all. In this way, he hides from himself the fact that death is possible at any moment. Real existence together with (and because of) death means accepting the fact that it is inescapable, that one must, moreover, put up with it in its indeterminate nature of possibility¹⁰. We need not, of course, share the opinions of existential philosophers, but the problem of death, whether presented as the romantic, metaphysical tragedy of Senoa's plague or the hermeneutic existentialism of Babić's snake, is not the prerogative of poetry for adults in which it has become a *central problem*, but rather must also find its place in poetry for children, who are just as interested in it as adults are.

The fact that traditional and a large part of contemporary literature for children is inevitably provided with a »happy ending« does not mean that it will always remain so. Both children and artistic doctrines are changing — the communication between philosophy, literature for adults and literature for children has become more intense and direct, with the result that there is no theoretical or practical reason why Jasper's »boundary situations« or some bitter tone of his philosophy of »failure« should not one day enter into or inspire literature for children. Babić certainly is not some kind of »kulturträger« on the line between philosophy, literature for adults and literature for children, but he is a child of his times and his spiritual life is indubitably influenced by modern philosophy.

In Croatian poetry for children the phenomenon of death is present in the following three forms: a) pathos: the romantic, sentimental, pathetic mourning over a mother's grave in the style of Hugo Badalić and Josipa Radošević, often interwoven with religious motives, b) eidos: the magical fascination with the figure of death as in *The House of the Plague* by August Senoa where, despite, the attributes of romantic pathos (that inevitable tribute of the spirit of the times) the poet tries to portray the pure eidos of death, i.e. the pictorial substantiality of death which enslaves us through fascination, c) eidos — pathos — index: image — emotion — ideological indicator in the figure of Goran Babić's

¹⁰ Wolfgang Stegmüller, *Glavne struje savremene filozofije*, Nolit, Belgrade 1962, pp. 184-185.

snake, which is not only a fascinating image, nor just an emotinal stimulant, but also an indicator of actual spiritual, ideological and philosophical attitudes (Hugo Badalić expresses himself through *declaration*, while Babić uses *indication*, the latter being more appropriate to the artistic task than the former).

Which of these three approaches is closest to a child's conception of death? In the introduction to Sylvia Anthony's essay, *The Child's Idea of Death*, we find the following resumé: »Death, extremely upsetting to adults who witness it, does not seem initially to cause great anxiety in children«. In this paper Sylvia Anthony, the English psychoanalyst, traces the development of the child's conception of death. »As children at first attribute all events to personal causes, death in their eyes is inevitably a kind of »killing«, and for this reason it is often associated with their aggressive impulses. Similarly, death is associated in the child's mind with birth because it is the second great, irrevocable experience of separation. In fairy tales incidents of death often correspond to the early reactions of children to death. The fact that children do not comprehend the generality and impersonality of death until the age of seven to twelve years must be borne in mind by adults when they attempt to explain death to young children«.¹¹

Later in the same essay we find: »In the folk-lore of European peoples which we call fairy stories, incidents of death are frequently of a kind corresponding to a very early stage of children's emotional maturity, when the centre of interest and activity is the mouth and the digestive system. In the stories of Little Red Riding Hood and Jack and the Beanstalk, for instance, death comes by eating. It does not have to be final. The victim may return to life if extracted from the aggressor's body. Aggressor and victim communicate with each other with alternating friendliness (or eating together) and hostility. The wolf takes the place of the grandmother. This is the idea of incorporation at the level of thinking at which death is oral, and killing-dying is also a communication of life ... (...) It belongs to the stage before the *Why* questions. At the beginning of the *Why* stage, according to the Swiss psychologist, Piaget, children attribute all events and beings to personal motivation. Causality is the will or intention of human or divine beings ... (...) Many children of primary-school age will define the word 'dead' by reference to violence, such as 'killed' or even 'murdered'«.¹²

In Babić's poems *Snake*, *Vampire*, *Sto je sve u mraku* (*What There is in the Dark*), *Sto sve ima u šumi* (*What There is in the Woods*), *Hunting People* and *Kuća na brijegu Kri* (*The House on Kri Hill*) death is oral: snakes, vampires, fish and wolves eat people. It nothing else, these poems display a proximity to the real conceptions of oral death which children have.

I would like to go back once more to *Snake*: »When Daddy goes, and Mummy goes too / The snake eats children left alone«, means that

¹¹ Sylvia Anthony, *The Child's Idea of Death*, essay in the collection *The world of the Child*, Garden City, New York 1967, p. 325.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333.

the adult world into which children are forced to enter when their parents leave them can be terrible, equal to death. The poet does not comfort the children that their parents will live for ever, or that they will be taken care of by God, nature or society (which in the essentialistic consciousness amounts to the same). When I referred to existential humanism as the only human position in this poem, I was thinking specifically of the negation of the absolute of Good which, whether it be in the form of God, nature or society, would take care of children. The *mauvaise foi* of certain pedagogues who have attacked this poem springs from the fact that in poetry for children they look for the essentialistic, traditionally metaphysical absolute of Good (very similar to the clerical symbol of the guardian angel), which has grafted the happy ending onto all our traditional and the greater part of our contemporary literature for children. The only point on which one could criticise Babić is that he has replaced the absolute of Good with absolute Evil, and has taken away from this Evil — which is not a form of oral death, i.e. a natural, expected, *morally indifferent act* — its meaningfulness.

6 *Mythical asemantic objectivity: story, plot, action* — non-meaning — dictation by the being. To the poets of this group being dictates story, with which they try in vain to capture some objective meaning. This vain search has the ring of authenticity of every failure in life, with the result that the poets of this group appear to be more sincere than the others. With their poems we have the feeling of genuine immersion in the story itself, i.e. we witness a story which relates the poet and not the other way round. The only thing missing is real meaning. We either find a pluralism of meanings, far too diffuse to be individually valid, or we find that meaning has failed. However, this vain search and these failures, as we have said, can intensify the artistic effect, and we find in this group some very competent poets, such as: *Stjepan Buzolić*, *Krunoslav Kuten*, *Branko Halusa*, *Marija Barbarić-Fanuko*, *Dubravko Horvatić* and *Ibrahim Ibn Kajan*. The poems of Dubravko Horvatić and Marija Barbarić-Fanuko are representative of this group. Horvatić's poem about a river called Flaulilalufli represent complete immersion in an absurd but beautiful story. As this absurdity is also reflected in the asemantic structures of lexis, this poet could be considered close to the group of lexical objectivity; these structures of lexis, however, are not independent objects, but essential factors in the story, i.e. mythos-object. The story is what dictates them, and that is the very reason why Horvatić belongs to this group: »I nemoj se začuditi kad se najednom / životinja fru / koja živi u toj prostranoj kotlini / na obalama rijeke koja se zove / Flaulilalufli / počne glasati u tišini: / žbu žbu žbu«. (And do not be surprised if, all at once / the animal fru / which lives in that broad valley / on the banks of the river called / Flaulilalufli / begins to mutter in the silence / shboo shboo shboo). This »shboo« is an asemantic structure of lexis, but it does not attain enough independence to be a story on its own; it is just one, albeit important, element in a story about a river and an animal with strange names.

Marija Barbarić-Fanuko gives herself up in passive contemplation to her stories about rain-drops, ants, daisies stars. Although they are provided with a certain meaning, these stories are more eidos than pathos, more perception than vision, more pictures than paradigmatic figures, more structures than values. On her way towards meaning the poetess has been overwhelmed by smells, colours and sounds, and if it were not for tones of spiritualistic naturalism (the human soul is nature conscious of itself) her work would resemble an early romantic pastoral about a shepherdess who falls asleep while looking for a lost sheep. The shepherdess wakes up in the grass with dragon-flies and stars around her, and the real story, the true mythos of this poetess's work is the opening and closing of the subjective spirit in the structures of nature, through which her poems take on the appearance of a spiritualistic, naturalistic centaur: half spirit, half nature; and violent friction between these two, without a realistic support, can, in totally mythical and mythological conditions, even lead to mysticism.

7 *Lexical semantic objectivity*: language — meaning — dictation by the being. The being dictates to the poet language which already has or acquires meaning. Grigor Vitez, Vojin Jelić, Stanislav Femenić, Miroslav Dolenc, Mladen Kušec, Tito Bilopavlović are poets who by means of language capture meaning according to the dictation by the being Grigor Vitez in many respects goes beyond the other. Drago Ivanišević, Boro Pavlović, Zvonimir Balog and some other poets of this type, having once found their existential orientation in lexis, that is, in language itself, could not resist the temptation of becoming »poets of poetry«, which means that in the content of their poetic work they glorify a technological system of poetics, advocating even the theoretical destruction of various poetics based on meaning, from metaphysical to ontological ones. Grigor Vitez, on the other hand, who was so intoxicated by the organicist naturalism of language up until the discovery of his bioenergetic »conditioned reflexes«, has avoided, perhaps consciously, all these lures, and does not understand or feel the need for a consistent, radical progression towards an obsession with lexis, to antiphysis.

In a word, Vitez's lexical technological operativeness immediately and entirely, which means, therefore, naturally, fused with the genesis of lexis; proof that his fusion is personal and poetic lies in the linguistic structures: they are natural structures which give the impression of having been picked at random and by chance:

*Pa sad sriču svakog dana
Razna slova progutana.
Naglas viču, te čurliču
I cvrkuću i čuviču
I žvrgolje i živkaju
I čučore i civkaju,
Pište, žvrlje i ciliču,*

*Kriješte, cvrče, i čivriču
Kriče, grču i grliču
I pijuču i cvijuču,
Zuborkaju, čučorkaju,
Pirikaju, cirikaju,
Cvrljugaju, švrljugaju,
Cirlikaju, grljukaju,
Fičukaju i biglišu
I pjevaju i uzdišu ...*

(Ptičja pjevanka)

*(Now they spell out every day
Various swallowed letters.
Shouting out and warbling
And twittering and burbling
And chittering and gurgling
And giggling and chirping,
Hissing, tweeting and twirping,
Shrieking, purring and squeaking,
Squawking, choking and screaming
And peeping and cheeping,
Rippling, whispering,
Twirling, whistling,
Muttering, murmuring,
Cackling, hackling,
Trilling and shrilling
And singing and sighing ...)*

(Bird Sing-Song)

What is this? Bird talk. Like Lofting's Doctor Dolittle, the only man in the world who knows the languages of various animals, Grigor Vitez is the only man who knows the language of birds. We really do have their words before us, and the reader is reluctant to tear himself away from that wild shrieking, twittering and biting speech to return to the conventional plot with which the author has framed this unique language. A virtuoso in operative techniques such as Zvonimir Balog would have thought up a more contemporary, witty plot, or he would have thrown the plot completely aside, but it is questionable whether he would be sensitive to that bird language; whether he would have an ear for genesis, because Balog's extraordinary lexical combinations are far more operativistic than genetic. As we have already mentioned, the semantic quality of Grigor Vitez's lexical objectivity springs from the identity of the persona and the organic structure in the personalistic naturalism, according to which the persona is nature conscious of itself as an individual, or, according to the medieval definition, »the individual substance of rational nature«, which in modern terms would be »the value-bearing form of structural nature« or perhaps »the individual informativeness of natural entropy«. It is hard to find a suitable expres-

sion, but in Grigor Vitez's poetry it is either a case of the unbelievably accurate, sensitive, refined moulding of his own personal substance into the labyrinthine organic structures of nature — or the trans-substantive giving of an individual, continuous, informative model to natural, discontinuous, entropic currents.

We can illustrate the first possibility with the following lines:

*To sve može biti,
To sve može biti.
(This could all be so,
This could all be so.)*

This repetition concerning the origin of the colour of the violet reminds us of the uniformity of entropy and »implies« the monotony of the violet's existence. Then we have a sudden turn towards structure and information:

*Ali od čega su se mogle latice načiniti,
Pod grmom u tišini?
I gdje su samo našle takav miris fini?*
(Od čega su načinjene ljubice)

*(But what could those petals be made of,
Under a bush in silence?
And where did they find such a fine fragrance?)*
(What Violets are Made of)

After the monotonous, uniform affirmation of the violet's existence Vitez's personalistic substance suddenly pours into the winding complexity of a violet's bud, indicating with the syntactic form of a question the questionability of a violet's organic form. Thus we have here both artistic penetration into informative channels (the question: but what could those petals be made of?) through the former entropic uniformity (this could all be so, this could all be so) and at the same time the introduction of individual, personalistic substance into the tortuous labyrinth of the violet's bud and the arabesques of the organic network of the lines of the plant world »under a bush in the silence«, which trans-substantiate this objective structure into a value-bearing model: and where did they find such a fragrance? — because this last question indicates shame, humility, the violet's feeling of inferiority, ie. the violet's value-bearing status in a hierarchy of plants, similar to the value-bearing status of the poet's persona in the hierarchy of the world.

8 *Lexical asemantic objectivity*: language — non-meaning — dictation by the being. The being dictates to the poet exclusively that language which has as much meaning as the *minimum of rational information* requires. This type of poetry has radically turned its back on the transcendental world of meaning, ie. on *the maximum of rational information*.

Drago Ivanišević, Boro Pavlović, Branko Hribar, Zvonimir Balog and Pajo Kanižaj are examples of poets who, as we have said before, »having once found their existential orientation in lexis, that is, in language could not resist the temptation of becoming »poets of poetry«, which means that in the content of their poetic work they glorify a technological system of poetics, advocating even the theoretical destruction of various poetics based on meaning, from metaphysical to ontological ones«.

What does it mean when we say that these poets consistently and radically followed their obsession with lexis to the point of antiphysis, if not that they *place their operativity in opposition to genesis*, ie. nature? It is the very sharpness of this opposition which is the most essential characteristic of this group's work, for such an opposition in normal amounts is present in all groups and levels. Here the opposition between the technological and ontical or ontological develops into a real revolt, even into a revolution. Critics usually refer to this opposition in our poetry, whether for adults or children, as the »depathetisation«, »demythification« or »demythicalisation« of traditional poetry, correctly sensing that this opposition is directed against »pathos« (ie. the empirical totality of pain, unhappiness, passion, great excitement), against »mysticism« (ie. against »mysteria« which in Greek means: secret, secret science, secret service, sacrament¹³) and finally, against »myth« (Gk. old tale, old story, especially sacred, a legend which is marvellous, incredible and thus we have: a fairy-tale, a fable, a myth¹⁴). If we can reduce these three oppositions to resistance to *passion, secrecy and incredibility*, then the poetry which opposes these elements would have to be called *rational, generally communicative and empirically verifiable*.

These terms must, of course, undergo certain modifications. *Rational* will become *ironic, humorous, comic*, terms with which we make fun of great passions. Ivanišević, Pavlović, Balog, Hribar and Kanižaj are all very fond of ridicule. All five also strive to *publicise* their poetry as much as possible by creating as many communicative channels with the public as possible and by thematically covering, in a quantitative sense, as much space of the world as possible, ie. factography, regional centres, the sectors of ideological and material production. This can be seen in the *great thematic variety and richness* of these poets, of whom Boro Pavlović is particularly well-known as a poet who writes about everything from the produce of the Zagreb dairy to the Trade Fair. But the essence of this poetry which opposes secrecy is maximal openness and exposition which almost reaches shameless exhibitionism, something which is characteristic of Ivanišević, Balog and Kanižaj.

Secret and myth, in this interpretation, are something sacred and holy; these poets *make vulgarity sacred* (Hribar being an exception as he maintains traces of an older, subjectivistic-spiritualistic respect towards poetry).

¹³ Stjepan Senc, *Grčko-hrvatski rječnik za škole*, Zagreb 1910, p. 624.
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 622.

Further, the opposition towards the incredible is expressed as a trust in, or respect for, the criteria of the technical and operative. These poets arm themselves more against the *superficial glance* than against deep analysis and thus they nurture an almost true passion for the arrangement of the *surface*. That is why we find in them a highly developed verisimilitude, the psychology of everyday life, an obvious insistence on realistic detail and a phobia of universal plans, abstractions and conceptual apparatus.

According to the above indications it would seem that these poets could be numbered among humorous documentary writers who make children laugh with nice little tales in verse about mice who steal cheese, if it were not for the rationalistic fantastic element which completely distorts the above characteristics. Realism, documentary faithfulness and the psychology of the everyday world full of vulgarity and cynicism merely serve in the work of these poets as an appropriate base for the construction of their operativistic imagination. Fear of pathos, mystery and myth, avoidance of the universal, which means of the metaphysical and ontological, also serve the same purpose. As »poets of poetry« they wish to create everything themselves. That is why they choose lexis, language, as a medium for the dictation by the being; for language possesses technology and operativity which universal existence or transcendency do not.

The fantasy which marks these poets does not include mysterious, unusual beings and events related to them, because this would be the fantasy of pathos, mystery and myth. The fantasy of poets who belong to this group of lexical asemantic objectivity is the fantasy of linguistic constructions. It may be divided into four types:

a) Fantastic self-sufficiency of rhyme: »popela se mala luda na vrh duda« (a little fool climbed to the top of a mulberry bush, D. Ivanišević, *Mala luda na vrh duda — The Little Fool in the Mulberry Bush*); »njima se više ne bježi / njima se radije leži / u mreži / ili na stolu / one vole / da ih kolju« (they don't want to run away / they'd rather lie / in a net / or on the table / they like / to be killed, B. Pavlović, *U Ribarnici ribari, Fishermen in the Fish Market*).

b) The topos of the topsy-turvy linguistic idiom: »Šeširi su imali svoju šeširsku modu: / Skidali su ljude na pozdrav u hodu« (Hats had their own hat fashion: / They took off their people when they greeted each other in passing, Z. Balog, *Šeširi se šeširaju, Hatting Hats*).

c) The fantastic elevation of morphological, syntactic mistakes to the level of INCORRECT LANGUAGE: »na kraju kažem / samo još / ne to baciš / mi u koš« (and at end say I / only just / don't throw that / me away, P. Kanižaj, *Pjesmica, Little Poem*); »GLAVA se GLAVATA / DRM se DRMAO / KLOPA se KLOPOTALA« (The head shook its head / the shake shook itself / the nosh noshed, Z. Balog, *Klin se klimatao, The Nod Nodded*); »Bio jedan teški gnjavator / imao

je tup glavator« (There once was a terrible bore / whose head was really a borer, Z. Balog, *Gnjavator, The Bore*).

d) Imaginative discovery of language in language: »Jabuka: / ja buka, / ti buka, / on buka« (literally: Apple! / I noise, / you noise, / he noise, — cf. in Eng. You scream, / I scream, / we all scream, / for ice cream! — D. Ivanišević, *Brojanica, Number Game*); »Od VINA se pravi djedoVINA, jugoVINA« (literally: From wine you make the motherland, yugoland, Z. Balog, *Što se pravi od vina, What You Make out of Wine*).

The fantastic consequences of these operations in the technology of language have, therefore, a completely rational origin. One simply has to decide to play with the language. The fantastic lexis of these poets is, in the realm of content, often accompanied by the *topos of the topsy-turvy world*. We have already found this in Gustav Krklec's poems, though as a main and not a secondary source of inspiration, for Krklec, unlike Ivanišević, Pavlović, Kanižaj and other poets of this group, is a poet of mythical and not lexical fantasy. To the above-mentioned poets absurd mythos is a condition or necessary context for absurd lexis. Their models should also be mentioned: spontaneous flexibility (according to Guilford,¹⁵ a precondition for creativity) such as we find in Grigor Vitez's language, has been raised to an independent function by these poets, and herein lies their originality. Some of Kanižaj's poems, written in the style of Ogden Nash, cannot, of course, be called original, but still, his choice of this model augments the originality of the group.

Boro Pavlović and Zvonimir Balog were the first to destroy the synthesis between operativity and genesis, as found in Grigor Vitez's poetry, and free operativity from its mythico-subjectivistic role by giving it an independent function. Boro Pavlović was the first to accept the poetic Eastern sin of »submission to rhyme« as sacred, and to make rhyme the only content and meaning of the poem. However, the pressure of tradition expressed itself in his later development of myth and genesis. Zvonimir Balog likewise later added mythical and genetic values and structures to total operativity but only after he had demolished them with irony and humour, i.e. the standpoints of a technological consciousness. The process involved in his poems approximately as follows: *the poet's technological consciousness gives rise in one direction to verbal games or total linguistic operativity and in the other direction to attitudes of irony and humour which, as the tools of a technological consciousness, demolish the ontological, i.e. mythical and genetic values and structures. After the totalitarianism of linguistic operativity, i.e. a verbal game, is established, it becomes clear that this is after all not self-sufficient, and the poet adds those very ontological, i.e. mythical and genetic values and struc-*

15. J. P. Guilford, *Značajke kreativnosti*, »Umjetnost i dijete«, Zagreb 1972, no. 21, p. 65.

tures which he demolished shortly before with technological irony. Thus the poem becomes a synthesis of victorious technology and defeated ontology. The following progression is discernible:

I) Grigor Vitez: synthesis: operativity-genesis / (techno-mythos: ANAGNORISIS¹⁶

II) Boro Pavlović: Analysis: search for genesis in operativity: techno — mythos — antitechno: ALAZONEIA¹⁷

III) Zvonimir Balog: synthesis of exclusion: operativity-antigenesis // techno-antimythos: EIRONEIA¹⁸

In other words, Grigor Vitez as a poet of *anagnorisis* (recognition) celebrates the kinship of his language with nature; Boro Pavlović as an *alazon* (boaster, overrater) boasts about his ability to separate language from nature and afterwards to reintroduce nature into language, and Zvonimir Balog as an *eironeia* (underrater, understater) ridicules debunked nature (topos of the topsy-turvy world) and compassionately draws it back into his debunked language (topos of the topsy-turvy language).

If from these three very characteristic poets we return to the objectivistic/ orientated section of Croatian poetry for children, we see that it is pervaded by precisely these three existential orientations: the discovery of the objective, overrating of the objective and underrating of the subjective. And while *anagnorisis* is in the sphere of semantic orientation, *eironeia* and *alazoneia* are asemantic.

II DIFFERENTIAE SPECIFICAE

In the first section we considered Croatian poetry for children as a poetry which is integral and unique, whether intended for children, adults, the public at large or esoteric, closed circles. For the difference between poetry for children and poetry for adults (in this sense) is no greater than the difference between, for instance, mass and salon poetry, or between the poetry of primary sensory evidence and that of philosophical cognition.

The established scale, or rather division into various poetic levels, should enable an insight into the general problems of poetic creation, ie. into the poetic *generalia specifica*. We have so far discussed the essential, single dimensions of the poetic range with regard to whether they belong to the mythical or lexical, semantic or asemantic, subjectivistic or objectivistic orientations, because these characteristics seem to us to be more important and essential than the naturalistic-metaphysical, psychologistic-phenomenological and technologic-ontological oppositions according to which poetry is often classified.

¹⁶ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, New Jersey 1957, p. 192.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

These characteristics seem to us to be even more important and essential than the definition of »children's« poetry according to its character and intention, which we have already sufficiently covered in the first section; here, in the second part, we will summarise its system, problems and methodology under a few content classifications.

1 Characteristics of the *Einfühlung* of the »childish« in poetry.

a) *Charm*: the overall impression of the »childish« in poetry for children virtually boils down to feelings of simplicity and naïveté which are *intentional*. It seems to us that the »children's« poet intentionally overshoots the development of each form a moment before its full maturity; before the moment of actual acumen he diverts the thought to a fictitious acumen of conventional usualness. It is a question of the *balance of overshooting*, or *charm*, about which the French aestheticist, Raymond Bayer, has written. According to Morpurgo-Tagliabue this means the following: »That which we call *beautiful* is a structure with a harmonic balance in which neither the means nor the intentions obtrude. From this we can distinguish the sublime which is the *balance of falling-short*. Here expression, the means, is always beneath its meaning, the intention, which surpasses it. In this dynamism there is the effort, and the inability, of the subject to assume form. On the completely opposite side we find *charm*, the *balance of overshooting*, a result which goes beyond its means, a wonder of the economy of means. Here everything is spontaneous, casual, flexible, effortlessly strong... (...) The negative side of the sublime is the *baroque*: the sublime which leans towards charm, monumentality which is decorated like costume jewellery. The negative side of charm is the comical: if charm means flexibility, then the comical is (to use Bergson's word) 'rigidity'«¹⁹.

The charm of poetry for children is not, of course, the same as in poetry for adults; Bayer seems to rate this charm more highly than *sublimity*. The peculiar nature of the charm in poetry for children consists of overshooting, or *anticipated completion*. »Reading a children's poem or story I cannot shake off the impression of anticipated completion. The end is present right at the very beginning and the story or poem is told not to discover something, but to wind up all discoveries in order to return to the starting point. It seems that the goal of children's literature is not the historical transcending of the discontinuity of existence, which we find in adult literature, (Bayer's »sublimity«, author's note) but a sweet, pleasing, hedonistic automatism of the nostalgic repetition of firm constants preserved in the mythical »Golden Age« (Bayer's »charm«, author's note).

»In practice this is expressed in a lack of tension, ie. of conflict between thesis and antithesis in children's poetry. Statistically it would

¹⁹ Guido Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

be possible to prove that poems for children are made up more of accumulated impulses than of discontinuous lyrical intuitions united by tension²⁰.

b) *The comical* as the »negative side of charm« is also to be found more often in poetry for children than in poetry for adults. Bergson — according to Bayer — called it »rigidity«. This *rigid charm* is quite significant in poetry intended for children because there is hardly a children's poet who does not rigidify the development of anticipated completion in the comical. The hedonistic, continual automatism of the comical in relation to the discontinuous, teleological, intentional progression of the tragic, is a relationship comparable to that of eidos and pathos, myth and history, eironia and anagnorisis, fascination and idea. Therefore, from the characteristic of the comical we can easily move on to

2 Characteristics of the *Sichtbarkeit* of the »childish« in poetry.

c) *Fascination*: according to Maurice Blanchot »our childhood fascinates us because childhood is a moment of fascination. It is fascinated itself and this Golden Age seems to be bathed in a shining light, for it is undiscovered; that is because it is alien to discovery and there is nothing to discover. It is a pure reflection, a ray which is only the emanation of a picture. Perhaps the strength of the Mother figure lends its glow to the very strength of fascination; it could be said that the Mother, by appearing at a time when the child lives entirely under the influence of fascination, exercises a fascinating attraction and becomes the centre of all powers of enchantment. The Mother fascinates because the child is fascinated and because all impressions of this early period have a motionless quality which springs from fascination.

He who is fascinated does not in fact see that which he sees; he grasps and appropriates it through an immediate contiguity, although allowing it at the same time to remain at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to a certain neutral presence, to a faceless, indefinite »self«, to a huge imageless Somebody. It is a relationship which is maintained by sight, a relationship which is in itself neutral and faceless, of a depth which has no view or shape, an absence which is evident because it blinds.²¹

The period of childhood, therefore, corresponds to the »Golden Age« and that which in poetry for children belongs exclusively to the »childish« is often the embodiment of the »Golden Age«, i.e. fascination, anticipated completion, rigid charm, the balance of overstatement, where the *acumen of form and idea are covered with the cloak of fascination*. What else does the »Golden Age« or »Aurea aetas« mean?

²⁰ Dalibor Cvitan, *Knjižernost za djecu u Jugoslaviji — između mythosa i lexisa*, »Književne novine«, Belgrade L:IV 74, no. 460, p. 5.

²¹ Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire*, Gallimard, Paris 1955, pp. 26-27.

Ernst Jünger explains it in these terms: »In the sense in which these or similar words have been used since Hesiod, the temporal meaning fuses with the ideal meaning, by which is meant the idea of the human race. The Golden Age, which people have continuously searched for and used as a model, is to be found where that idea is often realised. It can be sensed among the shepherds and patriarchs of the Ancient Orient, in the long since sunken Atlantis, on the islands of the southern seas, in the forests of Paul and Virginia, or, according to Gotthelf (the Hesiod of our times), in the distant mountain valleys... (...) The poet comes close to an arch-image, he reflects it in a model which then attracts realistic forces, for example in politics. Here the model becomes Utopia. Great sacrifices are made for its sake. An example of this is Rousseau's attitude towards the French revolution. It is impossible to overestimate the strength of the arch-image which is mirrored in the model. For the same reason we must not regard it as imaginary, we must reverse the accepted concepts about reality and imagination. The »Golden Age« is more real, more actual than the plans of historical man and his strivings. It confers upon him strength from its own overabundance... (...) Even today the reflections of the Golden Age are stronger than all others. Rousseauistic man stems from this, while Nordic man represents the Bronze Age... (...) The human quality conquers because it is nearer the core of the human race than the heroic. It comes closer to the Golden Age.«²²

As we have seen, the Golden Age belongs to Rousseauistic man, and that means to his Emil too, i.e. to childhood. Blanchot also calls childhood »l'age d'or« which fascinates. From his interpretation of fascination it follows that fascination engenders that which is motionless (fixé); thus we can conclude that Bergson's »comical«, meaning »rigid« — i.e. the negative side of *charm*, which is overshooting but which we have also equated with the definition of »anticipated completion« — emphasises the static, closed, prematurely completed, undeveloped, and therefore ahistorical, mythical character of childhood.

3 Characteristics of the *Gestalt* of the »childish« in poetry.

d) *Ahistorical-mythical*: »Repetition and delight in repetition, which characterise the child's spirit in poetry for children, are nothing less than a drive towards the creation of a historical base. A child, who has no history, wishes to create his own history as soon as possible. But his drive is misdirected. Instead of history he creates myth; he does not realise that history is not an accumulation of past facts (because that is vulgar historicism which inevitably becomes transformed into myth) but the continuity of transcending the discontinuity of existence. All the virtues and vices of children's literature are based on this misdirected drive to create myth instead of history. Why virtues? Because it somehow seems that mistakes and delusions

²² Ernst Jünger, *O kraju povijesnog razdoblja*, in the collection *Nova filozofija umjetnosti*, ed. by Danilo Pejović, Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, Zagreb 1972, pp. 429-430.

have greater authenticity and autonomy than truths; thus children's literature can count on the fact that it will successfully replace artistic effect with sincerity, if it manages to express in a sufficiently truthful manner its delusion that automatism, accumulation of impulses and facts, creates history instead of myth. All Croatian children's poets show themselves to be conscious of the delusion of this child's search which in their poetry is expressed in terms of a conscious search for delusion... (...) A marked example of the »anticipated completion« of the mythical projection of the artistic intention is to be found in the Croatian children's poet, Luko Paljetak, whose book *Miševi i mačke naglavačke* (*Mice and Cats on Their Heads*) says a great deal even in the title alone about the totemisation of themes. Because, however many variations we invent on the theme of cat and mouse, we still invent them only within the framework of the theme-totem. Only poetry for adults can change the cat and mouse, a fact which indicates its all-creative and absolutely creative character. Literature for children decisively expresses its intention not to change the totem of cat and mouse and thus its relative creativity, to which the moment of fascination with its limitations, ie. sincerity, occasionally conveys, however, dimensions of an absolute.

Perhaps the purest example of mythical, magical epiphany or fascination with the totems of one period, which is actually an artificial construction of and total opposite to the »Golden Age« composed of random fragments of the gloomiest antique and medieval myths, ranging from Dionysian ones to the Druids' bloody cults, can be found in the book by Goran Babić, *Strašna djeca* (*Terrible Children*), where totems are no longer good-natured dogs, mice and cats, but snakes who eat children and fish who catch people. We could say, then, of this book that it is thematically refreshing, although the general aesthetic formalism of totemising theme, so characteristic of literature for children, remains the same. Not even Babić could or did want to free the theme from the totem-like formalism of meaning. But he introduced new content into it: Evil. And as opposed to the myths of Love for the world which all literature for children to the present day has dealt with without exception, Babić has perhaps opened a new chapter: he has introduced into poetry for children the myth of fear and horror of the world, whose prospects, apart from being ahistorical, are both hopeless and antihuman. Thus, in the case of his children's poetry we may talk about the mythical, magical antiperson.²³

The Gestalt, or the configuration of the objects of experience²⁴ of the »childish« in poetry — in terms of what we have thus far discussed — is composed of *charm, comedy, fascination, anticipated completion, overshooting, the mythical constant of the Golden Age and ahistoricism*. The conscious search for the delusion that history is created from myth can be seen in children's poetry in the form of the already mentioned

²³ Dalibor Cvitan, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁴ Guido Morpurgo-Tagliabue, op. cit., p. 398.

anticipated completion, ie. the prematurely plotted denouement, which is created with the intention of prolonging and augmenting the fascinating immobility and closed quality of the mythical picture of the Golden Age, but which produces the opposite effect, becoming an obstacle to the autonomous, spontaneous, intentional development of the poet's powers, this development being history. That is the reason for the feeling of heteronomy in poetry for children; for its restraint, limited range and narrow base. And that is a reason for making way for inventions from without, pedagogical ones, for example. Poetry for children is *ancilla paedagogiae*, just as poetry for adults was once *ancilla philosophiae, or religionis, or scientiarum*. And just as poetry for adults tries to free itself of its servitude (something it will never completely achieve), so poetry for children also shows similar tendencies, especially in recent generations, but with far less success and less vindication than adult poetry; for while *autonomy* lies at the very essence of adult poetry, it is quite clear from our discussion that poetry for children is *heteronomus per se*.

In short, just as *the child is not yet a person, poetry for children is not poetry*. It can contain all the qualities of adult poetry but it lacks that *poetic transitionality* about which Morpurgo-Tagliabue says the following: »The paradox of art consists in the fact that figurative and aesthetic perception as such leads to a picture, and that picture is artistic in as much as it is contained in an image; but the picture, however, is recognisable by its very possibility of escaping from the aesthetic, ie. by its poetic power of extending into a dream, crystallising into culture, and living in our moral life. We can speak of the inexhaustible dialectic process between the (artistic) intransitionality and (poetic) transitionality of the aesthetic object.«²⁵

Poetry for children, being of limited range and overshooting its mark in its prematurely completed thought, and enslaved and entrapped by the fascination of the Golden Age of childhood, does not have that poetic possibility of transition into dream, into moral life, into culture, which poetry for adults has. The latter poetry, in fact, containing Bayer's »sublimity« as a *balance* of falling short, establishes a relationship between its means and ends on the basis of transcendency ie. transitional quality, which can always be recognised by the feeling of incomplection, inadequacy, things left unsaid, its unattainable quality, its own contradictions. »In a sense poetry is always the opposite of poetry«, says Georges Bataille, and continues: »I think that in the picture that Sartre gives of Baudelaire we have all the wretchedness of poetry. In poetry we have one essentially inherent task, and that is to build a dense object out of unsatisfactoriness. In its first impulse it destroys the objects which it grasps and, by this destruction, surrenders them to the evasive fluidity of the poet's existence in the hope that it will again find co-identity of world and man. But in the very moment of

²⁵ Ibid., p. 424.

negation it tries to *grasp that negation*. All that it can do is to replace the *grasped* objects of a condensed life by *negation*: it is inevitable that negation should take the place of objects.²⁶

It is important that in this poetry for children there is no such *construction of destruction or accumulation of negation*, and wherever this appears — from Vitez to Balog and the poets of the new generation — the »childish« character of that poetry is brought into question, at least in the definition of this poetry we find in accepted, established concepts of children's literature or the child itself — for example, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: »In preliterate societies he (the child) was and is viewed in the light of his social, economic and religious relationship to the tribe or clan. Though he may be nurtured in all tenderness, he is thought of not as himself but as a pre-adult, which is but one of his many forms. Among Old Testament Jews the child's place in society replicated his father's, moulded by his relation to God. So, too, in Ancient Greece and Rome, the child, dressed in the modified adult costume that remained his fate for centuries to come, was conceived as a miniature adult. His importance lay not in himself, but in what Aristotle would have called his final cause: the potential citizen-warrior. A female child was a seed-bed of future citizen-warriors. Hence classical literature either does not see the child at all or misconstrues him. Astyanax and Ascanius, as well as Medea's two children, are not persons. They are stage props. Aristophanes scorns as unworthy of dramatic treatment the children in Euripides' *Alcestis*.

Throughout the Middle Ages and far into the late Renaissance the child remained, as it were, *terra incognita*. A sharp sense of generation gap — one of the mottos of children's literature — scarcely existed. The family, young and old, was a kind of homogenised mixture. Sometimes children were even regarded as *infrahuman*: for Montaigne they had »neither mental activities nor recognisable bodily shape« whatever that might mean. The year 1658 is a turning point. In that year a Moravian educator, Comenius, published *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (*The World of Pictures*), a teaching device that was also the first picture book for children. It embodied a novel insight: children's reading should be of a special order, because children are not scaled-down adults. But the conscious, systematic and successful exploitation of this insight was to wait for almost a century.

It is generally felt that both as a person worthy of special regard and as an idea worthy of serious contemplation, the child began to come into his own in the second half of the 18th century. His emergence, as well as that of literature suited for his needs, is linked to many historical forces, among them: the development of Enlightened thought (Rousseau and before him John Locke); the rise of the middle class; the beginnings of the emancipation of women (children's literature, unlike that for grown-ups, is in large measure a distaff product); and Roman-

²⁶ Georges Bataille, *La littérature et le mal*, Gallimard, Paris 1957, p. 50.

ticism, with its minor strands of the cult of the child (William Wordsworth and others) and of genres making a special appeal to the young (folk tales and fairy tales, myths, ballads). Yet, with all these forces working for the child he still might not have emerged had it not been for a few unpredictable geniuses: William Blake, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, Collodi, Hans Christian Andersen. But, once tentatively envisaged as an independent being, a literature proper to him could also be envisaged. And so in the mid-18th century what may be defined as children's literature was at least developing.²⁷

This short survey of the history of children's literature with emphasis on the socio-psychological situation of the child throughout history has shown us the gradual emancipation of the child's being from the sphere of total inferiority during Antiquity and Classicism to a relative recognition during the Enlightenment and Romanticism. But he who has once been repressed can never hope to become completely equal to those who have always been respected. Children's literature even today shows signs of an inferiority complex towards adult literature and it is unlikely that it will ever free itself from this.

»To it may be added five colonies or dependencies: first are »appropriated« adult books satisfying two conditions — they must generally be read by children and they must have sharply affected the course of children's literature (Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the collection of folk-tales by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the folk-verse anthology *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*The Boy's Magic Horn*), and William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*). Second are books the audience of which seem not to have been clearly conceived by their creators (or their creators may have ignored as irrelevant such considerations) but which are now fixed stars in the child's literary firmament (Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Charles Perrault's fairy tales, and J.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*); third, picture books and easy-to-read stories commonly substituted under the label of literature but qualifying as such only by relaxed standards (though Beatrix Potter and several other writers do nonetheless qualify); fourth is Lilliputian in area — first-rate children's versions of adult classics (Walter de la Mare's *Stories from the Bible*, perhaps Howard Pyle's retellings of the Robin Hood ballads and tales), and finally there is the domain of once oral »folk« material that children have kept alive — folk tales and fairy tales, fables, sayings, riddles, charms, tongue-twisters, folk songs, lullabies, hymns, carols and other simple poetry; rhymes of the street, the playground, the nursery; and, supremely, *Mother Goose*, and nonsense verse.²⁸

In the same source we find the affirmation that the world's children's literature is richer in the North than in the South, and in the West than in the East. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the

²⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 5, 1972, p. 520.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 519.