Comparative Analysis of Children’s Literature – *Dečki* (Boys) and *Fantje iz gline* (Clay Boys)

Social changes influence children’s literature with problem-oriented topics, which is an umbrella term for motifs such as refugees, illness, difference, poverty, death, gender, war, etc. The search for identity is a literary universality in children’s literature. In contemporary times, the theme of searching for (gender) identity in picturebooks is written mostly from an adult’s and less from a child’s perspective. The main criterion for this type of literature is *crosswriting* (B. Kummerling Meibauer) or *infantile text and adult contexts* (L. Seifert) but not for all of them.

The problem topic of difference is one of contemporary themes in animal stories with, for example, ferrets (*Dihurlandija* [Polecatland]), penguins (*And Tango Makes Three*), snails (*Mavrična maškarad* [Rainbow Masquerade]), pigs (*Toot & Puddle, Toot & Puddle: A present for Toot*), etc. In the picturebooks *Heather Has Two Mums* (1989), *Daddy’s Roommate* (1991) and *The Two Fathers* (2012), the main characters are adults and children. Babette Cole’s *Mummy Never Told Me* (2003) is one of the rare picturebooks written from a child’s point of view (child-centred) (adoptions, disabilities, genders, teenage pregnancy, conception, sexuality, etc.).

The searching for (gender) identity is the central theme of the young adult novels *Dečki: roman iz dijaškega internata* (Boys: A Novel from a Boarding School, 1938) by France Novšak and *Fantje iz gline* (Clay Boys, 2005) by Janja Vidmar. On the basis of the problem-oriented theory (I. Saksida: *Tabuji v mladinski književnosti* [Taboos in Children’s Literature], 2014), the theme in the novel *Dečki* is the search for (gender) identity or coming-of-age. The story has internal and external conflicts, the boys are not outcasts, it is character-oriented. The novel *Fantje iz gline* is a plot-oriented story.

*Milena Mileva Blažić*, PhD, teaches children’s literature, fairy tales and picturebooks at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her fields of interest include children’s literature, the pedagogy of children’s literature, folk tales and fairy tales, and multicultural children’s literature, picturebooks, women fairy tale writers. She has published articles in Slovenian and English in these areas of study.

In Search of Territories of Freedom: Ivan Kozlenko’s *Tanzher* and the Queer Challenge to the Ukrainian Canon

Ivan Kozlenko’s novel *Tanzher* (Tangiers) became one of Ukraine’s biggest cultural events of 2017. Published by a prominent mainstream publishing house, Komora, it was also vigorously debated in the country’s media and was shortlisted for multiple prizes. This was unprecedented for Ukrainian literature: a queer-themed novel whose plot centers on two bisexual love triangles, one taking place in the 1920s, the other in the early 2000s, did not provoke a torrent of homophobic abuse. Its presentations were not picketed by right-wing extremists, the way this happened on multiple occasions to other recent gay-themed publications, most notably the 2009 anthology *120 storinok Sodomu* (120 Pages of Sodom). The novel, set in the city of Odessa, constructs an alternative affirming myth, reinterpreting the episode in the city’s history associated with the days when it served as Ukraine’s capital of filmmaking in the 1920s and seeking to reinsert this queer-positive narrative into the national literary canon. Previous attempts to queer prominent figures of Ukraine’s literary pantheon invariably resulted in scandals. What caused the reception of Kozlenko’s novel to be so different? My paper analyzes the project of utopian transgression the novel seeks to enact and situates it both in the domestic sociocultural field and in the broader contexts of global LGBTQ writing, countercultural practices, and the challenges faced by post-communist societies struggling with the new conservative turn in national cultural politics.

**Vitaly Chernetsky** is an associate professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and director of the Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies at the University of Kansas. He is the author of *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (2007) and of numerous articles and literary translations.