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Cultural and Social Inclusion Efforts – a Significant Aspect of Early Lithuanian Children’s Literature

Summary

Children's literature is an important part of national culture. Its mission has always been to help mature a young person, to form valuable foundations of personality. The aim of the article is to reveal the work of early Lithuanian children's literature, especially of the 19th century, playing an important role in the life of society, i. e. playing the role of a mechanism of cultural and social inclusion, changing society and human mentality. It is necessary to emphasise that the field of children's literature discussed here also includes early Lithuanian writing, which cannot be directly considered children's literature, but it undoubtedly integrated the care for children (in the form of catechisms, elementary publishing, etc.). What functions of cultural and social inclusion did the texts intended for children (or also for children) perform, and what impact did they have? Methods used: sociology of literature, cultural analysis, interpretation of the text.

The phenomenon of inclusion is an important aspect of Lithuanian children's literature and culture. This is also testified by the history of Lithuanian books for children and works of particular writers. It is significant that in the cultural situation of the 19th century, children's literature contributed to overcoming children's illiteracy and helped create and unite the readership community in the making. Children (and often youth) were getting used to the book, a completely new form of communication for them. Little by little, people became aware of the importance of reading, writing, and education in general. Some texts of educational type have been left by Lithuanian writers of the 18th–19th centuries, and their traditions were continued by the creators of the early 20th century, portraying the fate of the book smuggler, the wish of a country child to learn, the authority of a published book, and other similar aspects. The book and the ability to read decrease seclusion, include the child and the youth into community life, and open wider horizons for thinking.

Different aspects of inclusion (and there are more of them than mentioned in this paper) can also be found in modern children's literature. A book and literature dedicated to the child or young person help to survive social seclusion, isolation and show the ways and means of overcoming them. Finally, children's literature adjusts to the social environment, participates in society modelling, change, and establishes itself as an integral part of an inclusive society. Today children's literature is perceived as an integral part of an inclusive society.

Keywords: Lithuanian children's literature, interaction of society and children's literature, cultural and social inclusion, needs of the child's addressee.

KULTŪRAS UN SOCIĀLĀS IEKĻAUŠANAS CENTIENI – NOZĪMĪGS ASPEKTS AGRĪNAJĀ LIETUVIEŠU BĒRNU LITERATŪRĀ

Kopsavilkums

Bērnu literatūra ir nozīmīga nacionālās kultūras daļa. Tās misija vienmēr ir bijusi palīdzēt jaunajam cilvēkam kļūt pieaugušam, iegūt vērtīgus personības pamatus. Raksta mērķis ir atklāt agrīnās lietuviešu bērnu literatūras, īpaši 19. gadsimta literatūras, nozīmīgumu sabiedrības dzīvē, t. i., tās lomu kā kulturālās un sociālās iekļaušanas mehānismam, sabiedrības un cilvēka mentalitātes izmainītājam. Nepieciešams uzsvērt, ka šeit apskatītā bērnu literatūra ietver arī agrīnās lietuviešu grāmatas, kas nevar tikt uzskatītas par īstu bērnu literatūru, bet neapšaubāmi ietver rūpes par bērnu audzināšanu (katehismi, vienkārša lasāmviela u. tml.). Kādas kultūras un sociālās funkcijas veica bērniem (un arī bērniem) domātie teksti, un kāda bija to ietekme? Izmantotās metodes: literatūras socioloģija, kultūras analīze, teksta interpretācija.

Iekļaušana ir svarīgs lietuviešu bērnu literatūras un kultūras aspekts. To apliecina lietuviešu bērnu grāmatu un atsevišķu rakstnieku darbu vesture. Zīmīgi, ka 19. gadsimta kultūras apstākļos bērnu literatūra deva ieguldījumu bērnu analfabētisma pārvarēšanā, kā arī palīdzēja radīt un vienot lasošo sabiedrību, kas vēl tikai veidojās. Bērni (un bieži arī jaunieši) tika pieradināti pie grāmatām – viņiem pilnīgi jaunas komunikācijas formas. Pamazām cilvēki aptvēra lasīšanas, rakstīšanas un izglītības nozīmību. 18.–19. gadsimta lietuviešu rakstnieku izglītojošo tekstu tradīcijas tika turpinātas 20. gadsimta sākuma rakstnieku darbos: grāmatu kontrabandista likteņa attēlojums, lauku bērna vēlme mācīties, drukātas grāmatas autoritāte un citi līdzīgi aspekti. Grāmata un lasītprasme mazina nošķirtību, iekļauj bērnu un jaunieci sabiedrības dzīvē un atver plašākus domāšanas horizontus.

Dažādi iekļaušanas aspekti (to ir vairāk, nekā minēts šajā rakstā) atrodami arī mūsdienu bērnu literatūrā. Bērnam vai jauniešiem veltīta grāmata un literatūra palīdz pārdzīvot sociālo nošķirtību, izolāciju un parāda veidus un līdzekļus, kā to pārvarēt. Visbeidzot, bērnu literatūra pielāgojas sociālajai videi, piedalās sabiedrības veidošanā un izmainīšanā un pierāda sevi kā iekļaujošas sabiedrības sastāvdaļu. Mūsdienu bērnu literatūra tiek uzskatīta par iekļaujošas sabiedrības neatņemamu sastāvdaļu.

Raksturvārdi: lietuviešu bērnu literatūra, sabiedrības un bērnu literatūras mijiedarbe, kultūras un sociālā iekļaušana, bērna kā adresāta vajadzības.

Children's literature is an important part of national culture. Its mission has always been to help mature a young person, to form valuable foundations of personality, to teach faith and raise a good member of the community (it goes without saying that the concept of "good" has been changing based on social context, cultural situation, time spirit). The aim of the article is to reveal the work of early Lithuanian children's literature, especially of the 19th century, playing an important role in the life of society, i.e. the role of a mechanism of cultural and social inclusion, changing society, and human mentality. It is necessary to emphasise that the field of children's literature discussed here also includes early Lithuanian writing, which cannot be directly considered children's literature, but it undoubtedly integrated the care for children (in the form of catechisms, elementary publishing, etc.).

Thus, it is worth asking what functions of cultural and social inclusion did the texts intended for children (or also for children) perform, and what impact did they have? For example, Danish literature researcher Torben Weinreich considers what impact children's literature has on society. He states that "[c]hildren's literature has indeed influenced society" and gives an example from the 19th century's American literature: "Let me give you concrete examples right away, starting with the best known of them all in terms of major social issues and decision-making: Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from 1852. This book, with its moving account of the wretched conditions suffered by black slaves on plantations in America, became an enormous success [...]. It was the kind of book that set an agenda. Legend has it that when the US president Abraham Lincoln met the author, he greeted her as "the little lady who made this big war", in other words, the American Civil War. [...] By focusing at the start of this talk on the influence children's literature has had on society, not the other way round, I would like to emphasize that children's literature is not a frail, little dinghy tossing around out of control on society's stormy waters. No, it is not a case of 'poor' children's literature; it has had huge significance both for individuals and society as a whole." (Weinreich 2009: 3–4).

The beginning of the development of Lithuanian literature for children is closely connected with the development of Lithuanian writing in general. It can be stated that the first book in Lithuanian, Martynas Mažvydas' *Katekizmas*, for the main part, was dedicated to the young reader. The subtitle to the book read: "[f]or the young lads". This is also demonstrated by the genre of the book (catechism is a concise presentation of the main Christian truths) and its composition – besides the Catechism, the book contains a small Book of Psalms, and, which is most important, a primer, "a cheap and brief guide to reading and writing". The primer presents the Lithuanian

alphabet, introduces the letters, and offers some reading exercises in which letters are joined into syllables. It means that next to teaching Christian truths, this was also a mother tongue textbook. At the same time, the rhymed preface to the book "The Books Themselves Speak to the Lithuanians and Samogitians" (*Knygeles pačios byla lietuvinykump ir žemaičiump*) is considered to be the first Lithuanian poem for children.

Thus, the appearance of the first Lithuanian book is also related to the beginnings of Lithuanian children's literature. On the other hand, with regard to the preface mentioned above, we return to the topic of inclusion. The first verses of the preface sound like this, "Brothers and sisters, take me and read me, And reading, consider this." This unquestionably active invitation to take the book into one's hands and read it is the first demonstration of an active and inclusive position in Lithuanian writing. This position, which began with Mažvydas, was later supported by many representatives of early Lithuanian writing. The importance of writing to the individual and the nation can be illustrated by the words of Mikalojus Daukša's *Postil* speech published in 1599 and still valid today: "It is neither because of the fertility of the land, nor differences in clothes, nor the beauty of the landscape, or fortitude of cities and castles that the countries exist, but because of preserving and using their language, which increases and keeps the affinity, peace and fraternal love. Language is a common love bond, the mother of solidarity, the father of public spirit, the sentinel of the state. Destroy it, and you will destroy the oneness, unity, and wellness..."

Regarding early Lithuanian writing and reading for a child, it can be said that for a long time before the emergence of more original children's literature, the main genre for a little reader was the primer. When more Lithuanian books began to appear, the primers were separated from the catechisms, descriptions of holy lives (hagiographic literature), and published independently. Particularly noteworthy is the primer "Reading Science of Polish Language for Small Children" (*Mokslas skaytima rašto lėkiško del mažu vaykialu*) (the text is available in Lithuanian and Polish, 1763), in which the first religious poem "Christmas Wafer for Little Children" (*Kalėdaitis del mažu vaikeliu*) was published. Later, the poem was reprinted with a changed title of the primer "Reading Science of Lithuanian Language for Small Children" (*Mokslas skaytima rašta lietuviška diel mažu vayku*) which, before the abolition of serfdom, appeared more than 50 times (see Auryla 1986: 26). The books "Bible for Children in Polish and Lithuanian" (*Biblija diel vaikun lenkiškai ir lietuviškai*, 1823) prepared by Kazimieras Vizgirda and "New Reading Science for Small Children of Samogitians and Lithuanians with 51 Picture" (*Naujas mokslas skaytima diel mažū vaikū Žemayčiu ir Lietuvos*

su 51 paveikslais, 1824) are also worth mentioning. In the middle of the 19th century, Simonas Daukantas published the primer “Alphabet of Lithuanian, Kalnėnai and Samogitian languages” (*Abeciela lijtuviu, kalnienu ir žiamajtių kalbos*, 1842), he also translated Phaedrus's fables (*Pasakas Phedro*, 1846). In this context, the publications of Lithuania Minor should also be remembered, first of all – the famous book of Jonas Šulcas translations *Aesop's Fables* (1706) which is the first book with secular content for children. It is worth emphasising that the didactic poem “The Seasons” (*Metai*) (of secular content, although religious motives are evident here), written by Kristijonas Donelaitis and published in 1818 (even though written much earlier), also depicted children¹.

It should be noted that all of the listed literature has played an important role in social and cultural inclusion. Writing and books were used to educate, and they solved the tasks of the society of that time, reflecting the general logic of culture and its laws. The primers of that time performed the function of education and training, alphabetized children. It was important to spread religious truths, catechetical knowledge. Some of the texts were illustrated, thus developing the readers' imagination and aesthetic taste.

The 19th century was a new stage in the development of Lithuanian literature for children. The writers of this period, especially representatives of didactic prose, paid a lot of attention to the young Lithuanian reader.

However, it is necessary to remember what difficult historical and political situation Lithuania faced at that time. After the uprising of 1863, the Tsarist authorities placed a ban on publications in Latin script, so the publication of Lithuanian books became an underground activity. This period, known in the history of Lithuanian writing as *graždanka* is one of the most painful experiences for Lithuanian writing from the time of Mažvydas up to the 21st century. *Graždanka*², “the nightmare of civilisation” (Kudirka 2002: 209), was thrust onto the Lithuanians by the Tsarist authorities hoping that “the Russian letters will accomplish what the Russian sword has begun” (Merkys 1994: 37). The efforts to impose the foreign script rallied Lithuanian society to confrontation, and a network of secret schools teaching Lithuanian soon appeared as an opposition to the official school. The phenomenon of ‘book smuggling’ and ‘book smugglers’, difficult to understand for other

¹ For more information, see Maskuliūniėnė 2014: 2–7.

² See DLKŽ⁷ 2012: 186: „**graždánka** (1) *hist.* a variety of Cyrillic alphabet – Russian script, by which during the period of the ban on Lithuanian writing the Tsarist authorities wanted to substitute Latin script. The so-called “civil Russian script” (*гражданский шрифт*) was introduced at the beginning of the 18th c. after the reform of Russian script carried out by Peter I in 1708–1710 (ЛЭС 1990: 112–113).

nations, have contributed a lot to preserve the Lithuanian language and spirits³.

A very important role here is played by contrafactions. Contrafactual publications are an important reality of the period of the ban on Lithuanian writing. It is an action when the information about the book's publication date or place, sometimes its author, is deliberately misleading for security. Sometimes the book would be issued without any date of publishing.

On the whole, the period of the ban on Lithuanian writing between 1864 and 1904 was one of the darkest periods in the history of Lithuanian writing and publishing, lasting for the whole of four decades and finishing in the shameful defeat of the Tsarist policies. On the other hand, it was a period which helped the consolidation of the nation, giving Lithuania the phenomenon of 'book smuggling', paving the way for the Lithuanian newspapers *Aušra* and *Varpas*, stimulating Lithuanian national movement and making the base for the formation of the standard Lithuanian language.

The book, often an illegal book, satisfied the needs of the reading community in the making. A similar situation was also observed in Latgalia (the Eastern region of Latvia), where Latin script was banned the same way as in Lithuania. The fact speaks for itself: Lithuanian readership did not read the texts written in *graždanka*; they simply ignored them, while the number of prohibited books, banned by the Tsarist censorship, was a few times greater. Homeschooling or mother schooling, the tradition of secret Lithuanian village school teachers, are inscribed in the history of Lithuanian children's literature and culture as a concrete realisation of the ideas of Enlightenment and as an important sign of waking national consciousness.

In the second half of the 19th century, the first Lithuanian secular literature works meant especially for children appeared. The first to be mentioned here is "The Book for Children", published in 1868 by a Samogitian Bishop Motiejus Valančius (see Valančius 2001). In the preface to the book, the author writes: "Almost always, the children, having finished with the primer, go on to the "Golden Altar", which contains only prayers and litanies. While the children want to find things in books that they could tell others, and failing to do this, they no longer want to study. With this in mind, I have written a book of stories, which children will hopefully enjoy; let it be the first book after the primer."

Printed in small format and being short (17 short stories, 100 pages), the book was also destined to become the first illustrated book in Lithuanian

³ As is explained by the Contemporary Lithuanian Dictionary (see DLKŽ⁷ 2012: 319), 'book smuggling' (*knygnešystė*) is carrying and distribution of books banned by the Tsarist authorities (1864–1904); books were mostly smuggled from Eastern Prussia.

literature for children. It included 15 colour lithographs, the author of which is unknown. Ingrida Korsakaitė, an art historian, says: “Each story, except two, has an illustration. The illustration has a short description, a typical element of the graphics of old books, and it straight away relates the picture to the corresponding text of the book.” (Korsakaitė 2001: 15)

The book was published in Tilsit, by Karl Albrecht & Co publishers. The only known surviving copy is kept in Poland, in the library of the University of Poznan. In Lithuania, there is a microfilm of the first authentic issue in the Library of the Academy of Sciences.

In the same year of 1868, the book had its second big edition of 5000 copies as a contrafaction. The second edition was correct; the book itself remained identical to the first edition. The only things it lacked were the time and place of publishing. As has been mentioned before, this was due to the historical and political circumstances, the ban on Lithuanian writing.

The fact that Valančius' “The Book for Children” was issued in such great numbers shows its immense popularity and authority among Lithuanian country children. Lithuanian poet Kazys Binkis has rightfully said about Valančius: “M. Valančius has taught Lithuanians to read, and they have not forgotten this.” (Binkis 1935: 59) Besides other works of Valančius, he also had in mind the discussed “Book for Children”.

Here it is important to emphasise that Lithuanian literature for children of the period under discussion by losing part of its artistic value and being an essentially didactic phenomenon, contributed a lot in a wider perspective to all Lithuanian culture, to meeting the needs and solving the problems of its society, which were abundant at that time. We can also rightfully ask the following question: could “simple” didactic literature serve as an inclusion mechanism in the cultural situation of those times, and if yes, then how?

One of such specific cultural phenomena, also clearly seen in children's literature, is the formation of standard Lithuanian. It is the 19th century that has a special role in the development of the written Lithuanian language. Right from its beginning, “the rudiments of standard written Lithuanian are obvious” (Palionis 1995: 165). There were a lot of discussions, disputes, and reasoning regarding the suitability of separate dialects for the written language (see Palionis 1995: 165–224; Jonikas 1987: 155–208, 234–352; Zinkevičius 1990: 64–224); theories of written language suitable for all dialects were proposed (Antanas Baranauskas), efforts at reforming the spelling were made (Daukantas, brothers Juškos, Kazimieras Jaunius, and others), before one dialect, that of Western Auštaitians, prevailed in the usage of written language.

A very important characteristic, typical of almost all writers of the

19th century, was their attempts to write understandably to all Lithuanians. The texts produced at that time for children also contributed to the development of written Lithuanian. To those writing for young readers, it was important to be read and understood by all children in Lithuania. It has to be emphasised that the linguistic expression of the books of the mentioned Valančius, especially their stylistic code, is an exceptional phenomenon in all Lithuanian literature. The unique usage of interjections, the vividness of his verbs, the shades of the Samogitian dialect made the book suggestive and attractive for the children's audience; it conquered its attention⁴.

Another important aspect is the consolidation of the readers' community and efforts to introduce literacy among the rural population, raising literacy questions. Among peasants living in rural areas of Lithuania in the 19th century (we are not talking here about the situation in the country estates – this is essentially another, different discourse), the tradition of reading was only beginning to develop. The examples of Latvia, Estonia, and other countries show similar reading traditions among the villagers of those times. We should talk separately about reading nights, which are an interesting fact in the cultural history of the mentioned countries, later mentioned and described in detail more than once in various literary sources, also in children's literature (e. g. in Pranas Mašiotas's autobiography "When Books Were Banned", 1924). It is very important to stress the fact that these reading nights (they usually took part in autumn or winter in the house of a wealthier farmer) invited both the young and the old, while the audience was of two kinds: *those who could read and those who could listen to the reader*. This process could be viewed as an obvious phenomenon of inclusion: the archaic form of presenting the text orally meeting the novel needs of the Enlightenment epoch, the advocacy of the idea of initial and further education, different ways of dissemination of culture. Children listened to orally presented hagiographic literature (it was also written by Valančius and others), excerpts from calendars, containing very diverse materials – practical advice, fictional texts, the calendars were illustrated with primitive drawings, but even such visual means were new in those times and attractive to children's eyes. Thus children (and often youth) were getting used to the book, a completely new form of communication for them. Little by little, people became aware of the importance of reading, writing, and education in general⁵.

⁴ For more information on the dialectal color of Valančius's prose, see Maskuliūnienė, Maskuliūnas 2005: 133–140.

⁵ For more information on the reading tradition in the Lithuanian countryside, see Maskuliūnienė 2005.

Talking about further development of children's literature, it has to be pointed out that Vaižgantas, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė, Povilas Višinskis, Lazdynų Pelėda, and other Lithuanian prose writers have also left some texts of educational type: they portrayed the fate of the book smuggler, the wish of a country child to learn, the authority of a published book, and other similar aspects. The book and the ability to read decreased the seclusion, included the child and the youth into community life, and opened wider horizons for thinking.

In this context, it is useful to emphasise that children's literature as a mechanism for cultural and social inclusion is no less important today.

Today the situation is different; however, there are quite a lot of similarities. The problems of motivating children to read, improving their writing skills, general problems of education in the age of computers and new technologies have become urgent again. Children from social seclusion groups often do not attend school, their development is lagging, and gaps in education become wider. Other media (TV, the world of computers, social networks) compete with books; to read a book slowly, reading between the lines, becomes a luxury, more an ideal pursued by teachers than the reality experienced by children or students. This problem is tackled by sociologists and pedagogues. Comprehensive research "IEA PIRLS 2006 Secondary Data Base" was carried out in Lithuania, dealing with modern children reading development strategies and providing recommendations. It states: "One of the components in reading achievement is the motivation for reading. Motivation for reading and reading outcomes [...] are not easily matched parts of reading achievements. [...] it has been noticed that as a rule, higher reading outcomes correspond to lower reading motivation [...]. This can be explained by the fact that reading of the text, next to the informative function of the text [...] also has the function of meeting emotional and aesthetic needs. The students like reading, they experience pleasure while reading..." (Merkys et al. 2010: 211–212)

The image of a reading child can hardly be found in modern children's literature; it is not admired as much as it was in the Lithuanian literature of the 19th century, written for children and about children. In the 21st century, this would sound like a very archaic concept. However, the issues of literacy acquire a new social note. Modern children's literature is invaded by urgent contemporary social problems: emigration, abandoned children and children returning from emigration, and the problems of their adjustment to the new environment. The issues of cultural literacy occupy an important place.

The story written by Vilė Vėl "Write to me from Africa" (Vėl 2003), was

awarded the title of the Best Book of the Year. The story is about a nine-year-old boy Jonas, a diplomat's son. He is returning from Paris with his mother, having spent there a few years. His nanny in Paris was Marija, a refugee from Angola, who couldn't speak either French or Lithuanian, but was able to make a close relationship with the boy, communicating with him in sign language and drawings. The book subtly raises the problem of the cultural identity of the child, it discusses the importance of the native language, one's own environment, and cultural codes. This theme is also popular in modern Scandinavian books for children. It pays a lot of attention to the issues of integration of immigrants, and children's literature is an important tool for revealing the phenomenon of inclusion, at the same time encouraging and showing ways for solution making.

Another telling fact is that at international IBBY congresses, where various issues of children's literature and culture are discussed, the problems of children's illiteracy or low literacy are essential topics. This has been discussed in many congresses, and various international initiatives to eradicate illiteracy have been awarded. In Spain, for example, at an IBBY Congress, the award was won by Swedish women who taught girls in Africa to read. After all, this is the focus on writing and books, literature as a proper mechanism of inclusion. The book creates conditions for a child, adolescent, young person to fully participate in culture and diverse modern life. The importance of eradicating illiteracy is also mentioned by Weinreich: "When the numbers of children-readers constantly increase, one of the explanations is that we have had success in the struggle against illiteracy. Never before, according to UNIFEC, have there been so few children, who do not go to school and do not learn to read. Let us hope that this struggle against illiteracy will continue." (Weinreich 2009: 7) Children's literature, as an integral part of an inclusive society, also helps to solve this sensitive problem, which, unfortunately, is still prominent in today's world. For many centuries, texts for children and the creators of those texts have demonstrated their efforts to participate in public life and change it, involving their readers in the process.

Conclusions

Over the centuries, children's literature has had a profound impact on society as a whole, on our way of thinking and behaving. The phenomenon of inclusion is an important aspect of Lithuanian children's literature and culture. Writing, books, literature function as an important and powerful factor and mechanism of cultural and social inclusion in society. This is evidenced by the history of the early Lithuanian book (starting with Mažvydas) and the Lithuanian didactic prose of the 19th century (Valančius

and other authors, translators, and followers of catechisms, primers, and secular books). The didactic children's literature of the 19th century contributed to overcoming children's illiteracy and helped to create and unite the readership community in the making. In a sense, children's literature also contributed to the formation of the written common Lithuanian language. The Lithuanian children's book served to promote the idea of primary and further education and various cultural dissemination.

Different aspects of inclusion (and there are more of them than mentioned in this paper) can also be found in modern children's literature. A book dedicated to the child or young person helps to survive social seclusion and isolation and shows the ways and means of overcoming them. Finally, children's literature adjusts to the social environment, participates in society modelling, change, and establishes itself as an integral part of an inclusive society.

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