

TENDENCIES OF HUNGARIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN 2020 AND OTTÓ KISS'S CHILDREN'S MONOLOGUE TITLED *A BÁTÝÁM ÖCCSE* [THE LITTLE BROTHER OF MY BIG BROTHER]

^aL. PATRIK, BAKA

J. Selye University, Bratislavská cesta 3322, 945 01 Komárno, Slovakia
email: "bakap@uj.sk

The present paper was written within the framework of the Erasmus+ project titled *Romani Digital Knowledge Area: Innovative Romani-Hungarian digital educational-cultural competence development and producing side material package applying regional models (2020-1-HU01-KA226-SCH-094146)*, funded by the European Commission. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.¹

Abstract: The present study discusses Hungarian children's literature of 2020 with a focus on its decisive works. We analyze works whose authors were nominated for or won the Author of the Children's Book of the Year prize in the under 12 years age category. Within the corpus of the investigated works two strong genre-based tendencies prevail: tale novel and children's monologue. We will be discussing how the position of lyric poetry gets re-positioned and becomes the marker of the mystical based on the analyzed works. From a poetics perspective, we will discuss the effects postmodern text-creation strategies have on children's literature, the lyric self of certain works / role-play of narrators, but we also touch upon the question of which works can be connected to active illustrations. Lastly, we shed light upon what solutions these works have for inspiring the reader to become co-resolvers and co-creators. We will analyze Mari Takács's *Bingaminga és a babkák* [Bingaminga and the Babkas], Erzsébet Kertész's *Éjszakai Kert* [Night Garden], Borbála Szabó's *A János vitéz-kód* [The John the Valiant Code], Edina Kertész's *Lajhár, a sztár* [Sloth, the Star], András Dániel's *Nincs itt semmi látnivaló* [Nothing Here to Be Seen] as well as the prize-winning *A bátyám öccse* [The Little Brother of My Big Brother] written by Ottó Kiss.

Keywords: Hungarian children's literature 2020, contemporary tale novel, children's monologue, narrator role-play, partner-creation, intermediality

1 Introduction

Our paper focuses on Hungarian children's literature of 2020. In order to at least partially suspend our subjective judgement, as a filter we use the under 12 years age category of the Author of the Children's Book of the Year prize (Hubby 2021a; 2021b). For this reason, we are going to analyze the awarded, Ottó Kiss's children's monologue titled *A bátyám öccse* [The Little Brother of My Big Brother], however, first we touch upon those works which had a good chance for being recognized, thus they determined Hungarian children's literature of 2020.

Based on the selected corpus, two decisive tendencies arise. One of them takes form around the edges of the keywords of prose, novel and fantasy. In numbers, this one is the more dominant, and the works of this category can be further organized based on whether their world is an unreferenced magic world (such is Mari Takács's *Bingaminga és a babkák* [Bingaminga and the Babkas] and Erzsébet Kertész's *Éjszakai Kert* [Night Garden]), or the entering of fantasy into the thread of reality appears as a challenge, as an astounding event in the novel (we see this in Borbála Szabó's *A János vitéz-kód* [The John the Valiant Code] and in Edina Kertész's *Lajhár, a sztár* [Sloth, the Star]). The other tendency can be triangulated by the key words of lyric poetry, children's monologue and the realist viewpoint. Besides András Dániel's graphic book titled *Nincs itt semmi látnivaló* [Nothing Here to Be Seen], this is where Ottó Kiss's work can be categorized as well.

The applied poetics, however, created such varied textual worlds that in order to describe them, one needs more than some orientational points. Their investigation calls for a much greater adventure...

2 Tale Novel Form Variations

¹ The goal of the paper is to unfold the substantive tendencies of contemporary Hungarian children's literature, and tangentially to formulate recommendations which align with the educational methodology of the given corpus. All this, and getting familiar with the heart of the problem are indispensable background materials for the demonstration of the connections between the Romani and Hungarian texts, as well as for their intercultural education, since the project also directs its attention to the challenges of the present.

The tale novels of fantasy traditionally constitute the essential tendency of children's literature. With her book titled *Bingaminga és a babkák* Mari Takács did not align her writing to the innovative contemporary endeavors, but rather to the early traditions of modern tale novels (Lovász 2007, 99). Since she only uses a negative character or a questionable deed with the omen of unambiguity, her work can be considered as a return to the ethical basic principles (Lovász 2015, 33).

Many a friendly race of the realm of Melantola are busy with the preparations of a ceremony. They are preparing mud faces to multiply the cheering, they are writing welcome speeches, and they are also composing a poem whose every single line becomes alive after it is recited. The world is interwoven with play and happiness and since the elements of reality and the surreal organically supplement each other, one can say that we are surrounded by an unreferenced tale world (Lovász 2007, 5; 13). Our three child heroes, the serious Valter with the junk-patterned t-shirt, the tiny Jinga representing childlike curiosity, and the brewmaster Biloba who communicates with word bubbles, they all become friends due to the ceremony. Together they wait for the greatest wizard of the world, Bingaminga to arrive in order to celebrate his three hundred and sixty-fifth birthday. However, a turmoil arises at the end of the celebration: the world is hit with earthquakes, Bingaminga feels (just like Benjamin Button) that suddenly he is getting younger, and what is even worse, the smiling, pink, rounded babkas become visible. "The babka is the pretty thought itself. The good idea. A nice heartbeat. This all together. [...] And if they don't reach their destinations in time, it can upset the balance. There will be more doubt, dark thought, [...] and] this way, in a visible manner, they can become easy targets of curiosity and greediness" (Takács 2020, 34–35). Thus the goal is given: seek out and repair the babka-maker machine and collect the babkas. This is why the three friends set off together with Bingaminga.

The characters of tale novels are literary archetypes (Mark – Pearson 2001) who either fit the roles of folk tales (Propp 1995, 37–78), or partially offset them. We have not one, but three explorer heroes. The wizard Bingaminga is the one who sends-off as well as a helper. As the enemy we can refer to the once friend but later traitor Morfió. Zenka and Zeneka, the machine-operators of the babka factory, who are the archetypes of the creator and the carer, are in the role of the gift giver, since they supply our heroes with various magical objects (Nagy 2020). The most exciting race of the world-building are definitely the babkas, who are the incarnations of kindness and ideas, and the peppuas, who communicate with word bubbles. Besides all this, the tale novel connects with scores of cross-references to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* universe (Gandalf and Bingaminga, the wayfarer's path, the Melantolian minyon and the lembas, Morfió's name and the darkening sky on the basis of the language of Mordor, etc.), due to which it can rightly be considered the hypertext of the fore-work (Genette 1997, 5).

Mari Takács's creation can be classified as a didactic (Petres Csizmadia 2015, 154) and real (Bárdos 2013, 73) tale novel as it is confirmed by many places of the text: it considers teaching its task. An excellent example of this is when our heroes are learning the craft of transforming matter into various states. The work discusses these in detail, and it also verifies them visually. Another example for teaching is the part detailing communication with bubbles, which actually uses linguistic terminology. In a self-reflexive way, emphasizing knowledge multiple times through the journey refers to the didactic nature of the work as well, since it turns out that the real function of wayfaring is the learning along the way.

Most of the text has a narrative nature, there are no unexpected solutions in the plot, the most important recognitions are the statements of the narrator. The style of the narration is permeated

by the tones of beauty and kindness. It is slightly “adulty”, it is not afraid of superlatives and sometimes it is circumstantial. Dialogues are rather decorative elements and they do not really contribute to the reader’s ability to distinguish the characters, and the characters themselves can even be called paper-characters. The simplifying solution of the work is provided by the sudden idea of one of the characters, which resolves the herding of the babkas home without the characters changing positions.

From a poetic perspective the most exciting solution of the novel is the way wizardry works in it, since beside faith and trust (Nagy 2020) it also stands on linguistic and communal foundations. Almost all spells are light and brief nursery rhymes and children’s poems. Most of them rhyme (line, twin, half and recurring rhymes) and they use beat tone verse form, the rest applies nonsense verse form (Ortutay 1979, 2000). The effect of the communal magic poems is even more pronounced and the content of the texts becomes alive. Such is the poem composed for welcoming Bingaminga, too, which is an exciting example also, because even though it was not created by a wizard, due to its communal reciting it still comes true. This way not only the mage, but everyone else can be treated as a wizard. The phenomenon can also be read as self-reflection, since it puts the world-creating and imaginative function of language into perspective, because language does not distinguish between reality and fiction. The “pardon” term (and chapter title) is of key importance as well, which not only reverses any kind of a spell, but due to its meaning it also emphasizes the significance of apology. The simple forms which were intentionally aligned for the child receiver motivate the reader for co-creation, just like the fact that Bingaminga created some of his spells, the nonsense ones, by himself. “*This peculiar language wasn’t known by anyone else other than him, since it was his own childhood invention*” (Takács 2020, 44). By learning Bingaminga’s spells with the three heroes we learn how to create new ones on our own.

While in the case of *Bingaminga és a babkák* we can talk about the poem, the magic of creative language, Erzsi Kertész’s tale novel titled *Éjszakai Kert* is interested in the demolition of the expectations held against the text, the establishment of a private mythology, and the presentation of the latent, interconnective web determining the world order.

When at the beginning of the work Senora Cupapanas (“Csupapanasz” [‘csupa’ – Only; ‘panasz’ – complain]) walks through the Tisztasor street to ask the two best detectives of the city, Miss Spontán Teóriát [Spontaneous Theory] and Mr. Korrekt Tódor [Correct Theodor] to expose the perpetrators of a robbery, two things seem obvious. On the one hand, that the (telling, meaningful) names get a key role in the work, and on the other hand, that we can expect a children’s crime story. However, the work regularly goes against the genre expectations of crime stories. In the beginning it does so with the fact that instead of one, it operates with two master detectives who are each other’s rivals. Later by informing the reader that, quite absurdly, it was the ornamental pound that was stolen from the Senora. And lastly, by the fact that in the Night Garden the reader is introduced not so much to the process of the investigation, but rather to an entirely new world.

Tódor and Teória are opposites of each other in almost everything. Teória has prolific greenery on her balcony, while on Tódor’s only the chrome glitters. Teória is driven by intuition and childlike curiosity, while Tódor uses the “adulty” iron logic (Kaiser 2021), which manifests on the linguistic level as well. The language use of the girl is sparkly and open, the man’s is formal and reserved. Besides their passion for their work and their reluctance towards the Night Garden there seems to be nothing they have in common which connects them.

However, the tracks lead them there and in the gates of the Garden another cardinal actor awaits and then welcomes them. He is called Noxnoktisz, who seems to be a hybrid of a scarecrow, a mage and a vagabond. The man calls himself the

garden master, becomes their travel guide and at the same time turns into the central narrator and storyteller of the following parts. He becomes the root, which is also signaled by the fact that after stepping into the garden, his lyric and visually rich speech style becomes dominant in the text. What is more, even the style of the narrator seems to align to the garden master’s, and in many places of the text one is unable to decide which of them is talking. “*You know, [...] time in this strange Garden does not seem to hurry anywhere. It is comfortably ambling along, sometimes it sits down on a mossy rock, if walking with leaded legs becomes difficult. Sometimes even the spiders stop threading their webs, the birds stop chirping, and the leaves stop falling and float midair*” (Kertész Erzsi 2020, 36–38). Noxnoktisz’s lyric language is only suspended by the dialogue he has with the detectives, the relaxed style of the girl and the serious one of the man. These three styles are, at the same time, the poetic code of the text as well. The garden master is surrounded by the transcendent through his world-guiding role and wisdom throughout the text (Pompör 2012). This is also amplified by the Latin aspect of his name, which by the “nox noctis” we could translate as *night of the nights*. The latter, however, can also mean *daytime*: light during or after the night (Pataki 2021). If Noxnoktisz can be seen as the godlike occurrence, then his garden can be identified with Paradise, which is something that is referred to on multiple places in the closure part of the text.

The mystical and sacral aspect of the Garden is signaled by the modification of the illustrations as well, as soon as the detectives step through its gates. The previously vivid images are taken over by monochrome figures, colors are substituted by iterative shapes and patterns (Papp 2021). All this can be evaluated as the sign of a sphere-shift, which is analogous to the text becoming more lyrical (Pataki 2021).

By Noxnoktisz’s tale string the private mythology and the myriad of symbols expands gradually (Pataki 2021). Reality is substituted by fantasy and action by stills. We get to know special groups of people, characters and a multitude of fates. We are introduced to Those Singing to the Buds, who bring the spring and freedom, as well as Those Comforting the Crows, who soothe the messengers of winter, since they know the names of all crows. We are familiarized with the Cat with the Frozen Look, who sees everything in the garden, even the reader, since during the night its eyes glitter glossily on the cover, which is the concept of the latter, and even the introduction of the cat evokes the Mona Lisa (Boldog 2021, Gajdó 2021). The animal is the key figure of many intertextual connections whose web leads us as far as Chuangtűz butterfly: “*Its eyes radiate such strength that I wouldn’t even be surprised to find out that it’s only imagining, dreaming the whole Garden*” (Kertész Erzsi 2020, 44–46). Based on the latter, the cat could be identified as the narrator. And of course, there is The Girl Whose Lies Make the Clouds Fall Off the Sky, literally, or The One, Who Stands on His Head, so as to see the world differently. It turns out that many of them got to the Garden from the outside world and by being transformed there, they found their true life purpose (Kertész Erzsi 2020, 72; 83). Erzsi Kertész’s name giving strategy evokes both Oscar Wilde’s and István Csukás’s solutions. According to these, names have a predestinative effect. Our fate and our role are coded into our name and we need a big effort to confront it.

However, there are not many occasions for actual investigation. Mainly there is proliferating world-building happening throughout the whole time. It seems that the biggest discovery is the perception of the interdependence of it all. To provide an answer for such “accidents”, the text uses the transcendent. But it does so not by its deus ex machina-like, direct operation, but by the subtle, light effect of the Garden (Gaia, the Earth, the World) and of the gardener (the forces working in him), which often promotes the goal by building seemingly circumstantial background connections. From the point of view of the endgame, in case of Tódor and Teória, the work does this in order for them to realize: what they were looking for was right in front of their eyes from the beginning. The help of the

transcendent does not mean, however, that in order to achieve change, we do not need the individual will of the elements making up the universe (the characters, the readers). Primarily this is exactly what is needed to provide help to achieve something in the first place. The Girl Whose Lies Make the Clouds Fall Off the Sky can only leave her predestinative name behind by actually wanting to do so and doing something about it as well.

Even though the stories of the work have a sorrowful atmosphere, they do not make us sad, since in the heart of every tale the sparkle of hope is retained. “[The] *ghostliness becomes friendly*” (Kaiser 2021), and the child reader will not fear, but admire the night (Papp 2021). This is what the humor of the text contributes to as well, which manifests itself in the chapter and subsection titles, in wordplays, in images and in the archaic solutions mixed with contemporary anglicisms. Besides this, the tales organize themselves into a complex, scale-independent network (Barabási 2022), since the element emerging in one of them blooms into an independent story in the other one.

Certain characters and their challenges are the metaphoric mappings of types of people and life’s difficulties, which make the text possible to relate to such classics as *The Little Prince*. Thus, it can be classified not only as mythological, but as philosophical (Petres Csizmadia 2015, 155), too, and from a formal point of view, it falls into the category of the tale novel revolving around a single plot thread (Bárdos 2013, 73).

However, miracles are not the natural elements of all worlds within the works of children’s literature. Sometimes they only linger in the background, or they are present as a consequence of some elements. And some other times it is our reality which breaks into the fantasy universe, such as we will see in the following.

3 On the Border of Worlds

Sándor Petőfi’s *John the Valiant* is an unevadable piece of the meaning-canon of Hungarian literature (H. Nagy 2016, 78). It is a naïve hero story and a poetic tale, a key work of romantic idealism and folk literature. Besides this, it is an eternal compulsory reading which makes its era-alieness even more visible, since both in its form and worldview aspects there is a huge gap between it and the literary-social tendencies of our present (Mészáros 2021). This is verified by Borbála Szabó’s math genius team in her novel titled *A János vitéz-kód*. The quartet can solve any exact problem, but literature, where “*the meaning of words is not a constant*” (Szabó 2020, 18) is alien to them. They rather create a reading diary generator computer program than to go through a few lines of poetry. Their aversion prevails until Berti, their self-appointed team captain transcodes the narrative poem into a sequence of numbers. His boredom-defying game opens a dimensional gate between reality and fiction, and he then falls over into the universe of the Petőfi work, by which he disrupts the flow of both worlds. One world due to his absence and the other due to the ballast. This is an adventure tale novel (Petres Csizmadia 2015, 154) which applies the patterns of portal fantasy (Mendlesohn 2008, 1), and thus “*its truly curious aspect is that the protagonist goes over into a world which was created by another text*” (Fenyő D. 2021, 95).

Szabó’s creation remains a novel with a flowing momentum and with bafflingly vivid and varied humor while still activating a myriad of postmodern text-organizational strategies. The work contains significant passages from Petőfi’s *John the Valiant*, but only in cases where one of the characters is reading the narrative poem. Berti’s arrival, however, changes *only* its plot, not its form. The beat tone verse, four beat halving twelve with the pair rhyme framework remains, but it is filled with new content. Some of the line pairs and verses of the old text are replaced by new ones. The original, however, does not get rewritten entirely: its text fragments wander around into new sections, sometimes they even get built into entirely different chapters (Fenyő D. 2021, 96). For example, Johnny’s monologue of the original, which he delivers after defeating the outlaws, becomes a

dialogue, since his newly found partner, Berti, answers every sentence of Johnny, thus disrupting their purity: “*»Maybe there are bloodstains stuck on every piece / And I should be happy and rich with such treasure?« / »No problem, we wash it off! Money does not stink. / (This is my father’s favorite sentence, too.)«*” (Szabó 2020, 145). We experience the continuous alternation, competition and blending of new and old. Via Berti the contemporary student slang, the soft vulgarisms, the technical innovations (he takes his smartphone with him) as well as the snappy style, appear as the counterpoints of the original text, gradually suggesting how alien they are to each other. The latter is also an important source of humor: the appearance of contemporary language and worldview parodizes the elevated nature and ideas of the original (László 2020). Thus the poetic pole of Borbála Szabó’s work is a hypertext, rewriting, true palimpsest – since considering its chronology, it is written over the original –, and is also a palinode, that is, a poetical recantation. Berti’s presence at first only supplements the original happenings, however, the boy’s pragmatism gradually defeats Johnny Corn’s idealism. The valiant does not return to his abandoned sweetheart in order to let the fabulous continuation of the original text unfold. Instead, he marries the rescued French princess and becomes a despotic ruler under the name of Jean le Maïs with the support of his scrounging treasurer, Berti. The masterly preserved form and continued writing by Borbála Szabó marks the narrative’s dimensional shifts as well. The poetic sections inform us about the happenings of the fantastic world of John the Valiant, and the prosaic ones tell us about the realist novel world.

However, Berti’s disappearance and the transformation of *John the Valiant* has a retroactive effect on the boy’s world, too, and it upsets its social order, whether we look at the universities, politics, law enforcement, or the families of the math-genius friends. Szabó moves numerous characters and when she introduces them, she uses marked solutions of caricature (László 2020). The *A János vitéz-kód*, due to its satiric and social-critical analogies can rightly be considered a double-edged novel, since it is intended as much for adults as to their children. Nevertheless, in the light of Hungarian children’s literature, its most marked victory over taboos is the opening of political questions (Borbás 2020; Mészáros 2021) via potential analogies in the spirit of critical thinking and without a hardened ideological stance.

The stake of the work will not only be how the friends could help Berti get back to his own world, but also prevent it from turning gloomy. The reason why this could happen is that by John the valiant not performing his wonderful deeds, the bogies of the tale world infiltrate the novel’s reality, and via a grey “epidemic”, whose symptoms are indifference, oblivion and nightmares, they thrust the entire country into disillusionment. From this point of view, even though Petőfi’s ideas and values might be alien to our era, had they not been lingering in the background as romantic values, maybe our reality would be shaken as a consequence (Fenyő D. 2021, 95, 98–99). It is not accidental that at first the process of rewriting is characterized by the original text, but after recognizing the gap, the new text turns into the reconstruction of the old one.

Another of Szabó’s memorable solutions is the identifying of the narrator’s role with herself, that is, her approximation to the included author (Booth 1961, 157–159; Lapis-Lovas 2021, 90), as well as that in her case, we do not only have an omniscient, but an omnipotent narrator. Besides seeing into all characters’ everyday lives and secrets, she acknowledges that as a writer, she could give them the sourest of fates. Meanwhile she is also present as a character in the book. The work’s narrator, therefore, has a status that is beyond dimensions, and belongs to multiple world levels at the same time, which can be evaluated as another postmodern solution (Bedő J. 2020).

By the end of *A János vitéz-kód* our heroes realize not only that literature and mathematics are related – since rhyming is determined by exact mathematic rules which one should observe –, but also that both fields are full of puzzles. According to the

experiences of the work, there are not only gaps between words and numbers, art and logic, popular and classical literature, but they are also connected by bridges (Karafiáth 2020). The code in the title mimics not only *The Da Vinci Code* type of texts, but also invites the reader to a decoding adventure together with the characters: be it the math problems of the national mathematics competition, the solution of such literary codes as the acrostics and chronograms, or the identification of the rewriting patterns which fundamentally define the work. However, the latter truly works only if they read the old and the new side by side, the same way as the characters do it. “Yes, all news were about you, on the internet and in the TV, too! You abused the great work of Hungarians, but there were people who thought this was good” (Szabó 2020, 294) – said his friends to Berti when he returned. Their words are valid self-reflections for the entire *John the Valiant Code*, since a successful rewriting assures at least as much attention to the original text as big of a benefit it draws from the original’s reputation. It is none other than a mutually advantageous blood rejuvenation.

Nevertheless, often there is no need for an entire fantasy world to be able to analyze our own face in its reflection. Sometimes a single element of it is enough to do this. In Edina Kertész’s tale novel titled *Lajhár, a sztár* the experience of our own alienness is present in parallel with the most important dilemmas of popularity. Our protagonist, Lona, and her family, who are living among humble circumstances, are anthropomorphized sloths. Their favorite activities include napping and watching TV while sipping leaf-shake. Lona struggles with the everyday problems of ten-year-old girls. She is a little insolent with her parents, regularly makes resolutions which she is unable to keep (“never, never ever again”), but first and foremost she wishes to become slimmer, more popular, and she wants to become friends with the school’s girl-trio. This is why, by summoning all her courage, she says hi to them, sits next to them in the canteen, lets her nails get painted, and also this is why she makes a seemingly cool selfie. Yet, she achieves the opposite effect: not only sit they away from her, not only do they mock her with a series of comments, but they also create a fake profile for her under the name of Undipofi [disgusting jowl] where they could continue insulting her. Lona’s desire to please everyone brings her not only numerous forms of cyberbullying (Domonkos 2014; Huber 2015), but also that the community discovers her sloth nature. Thus, the latter becomes a metaphor for alienness and Lona would do everything, including denying her previous life and herself, too, to change this situation. However, since we do not have a predetermined exclusion, the work also lets us know, that anyone can become a sloth, should they be put into the center of attention. The most severe instance of ostracism is an Insta-comment in which Lola is sent the following message: “Go back to the jungle where you came from!” (Kertész Edina 2020, 74). However, the sloth-girl was raised in the same place as the other kids, and about her roots she is only aware of the fact that her parents immigrated from Costa Rica. Henceforth “slothness” becomes the signifier of ethnic and social otherness and exclusion. Finally, uncle Pedro pops into the lives of Lona and her family also from Costa Rica, who via his love for life and inexhaustive stories becomes the most important motivation for the characters to recognize: the notion of otherness can not only be substituted with alienness, but also with peculiarity. And the exaggerated desire to please people threatens with the danger of giving ourselves up (Papp 2020). From this perspective it is a positive ending note that, at the end of the volume, the previously mocked ribbon can be seen in Lona’s hair again.

The voice of the work’s omniscient narrator can be identified with that of an adult who knows what is right and what is wrong, and with her occasional phrases as if she was trying to adjust to parental expectations. Her language is characterized more by situational than linguistic humor. An example is the repeated “storming out” of the sloths, to which she reacts as follows: “(Well, maybe she was not actually storming. Rather trudging. And this made the whole thing even more awkward, because it is impossible to retain our dignity while slowly trudging along, just try it once!)” (Kertész Edina 2020, 34). Although the side characters’ telling names are creative (the angular character,

Square, is the math teacher, Anthony Suspicious is the detective), the characters’ type aligns towards the black and white poles. For example, the trio responsible for the ostracization of Lona goes through a full transformation after the principal, who normally is against punishment, scolds them. The most memorable character is definitely Dragée, who not only calls Lona’s attention to the fact that one does not have to and cannot always please everyone, but via her animal protection and donation collecting activities she assures the green dimension of the work, orienting towards the intensifying tendencies of children’s literature (Zólya 2020; 2021).

The artwork of the text actually tells the same story via the apparatus of another art form. The visual dimension is sometimes parallel with the text, but some other times it looks ahead or mediates extra contents. When Lona locks herself in the girls’ toilet, the body of the text is surrounded by the scribbles written and drawn on the booth’s walls, and on another occasion, we see the smaller version of the poster made by the characters. All this repeatedly connects the novel to children’s culture (Petres Csizmadia 2015, 11), but it is also a self-reflection on the Instagram platform. There we also let others know about ourselves through images, and with some keywords, that is, hashtags we capture the essence of the visual material. Kertész’s novel in a way also uses hashtags, since the body of the text emphasizes the most important pieces of information typographically, and some font types even align with the key characters. Thus, the text allows multiple orientations and searches for the recipient, while it blends the medial peculiarities of novels and social platforms together. These solutions of the *Lajhár, a sztár* reflect on certain steps of the teaching of reading strategies (Almasi 2003; Steklács 2013, 52–60), such as getting the gist and the possibilities for connecting text and imagery. Besides this, at certain points the text even counts with the creative work of the recipient: it expects predictions from the reader regarding the development of the plot (ticking the box), on another occasion it lists the questions of a self-awareness test, where we can provide our own answers on the dotted lines after seeing the answers of the characters, and also there is a place in the book where it gives the reader a coloring task. In any case, we run out of the interactive tasks at about one third of the volume, which makes the initial strategy feel a bit laid aside.

Instagram provides an important dimension for the novel: its icon appears immediately as an accessory of the title, and the lilac images and letters of the volume also align with its color code. Although the narrator repeatedly refers to the meaninglessness of the social platform, what is more, at the end of the book she even suggests quitting it – and by her recurring criticism of techno-culture she exposes the generational alienness of the adult narration –, she does not provide a verdict about it after all. “The only thing that made her moody sometimes was when she only received one hundred and eighty-three likes, but then after half an hour she posted a better photo which received one hundred and ninety-eight likes, and then everything was all right again” (Kertész Edina 2020, 103). Therefore, the number of responses received for the shared content functions as a status symbol among the teenager community. Although the platform provides a space for bullying and ostracism, the work signals that as an Insta-star and influencer one can move a mass of people in the interest of a good cause as well. It is up to us how we utilize the platform. Thus, the work is, simultaneously a praise for and a criticism of Instagram, social platforms and popularity, and due to its many teachings, it can be classified among the didactic (Petres Csizmadia 2015, 154) tale novels threaded around a single plot string (Bárdos 2013, 73).

4 It Unfolds Inside Us

The other significant stroking direction of 2020’s children’s literature is provided by contemporary children’s monologue, which draws attention to itself either with its psychological depth or its intermedial extendedness.

András Dániel's unconventional picture book titled *Nincs itt semmi látnivaló!* [Nothing Here to Be Seen] belongs to those works whose plot can be summarized in a single sentence. It is a monologue of a child who wishes to sleep but his thoughts do not allow it. The setting medium of the work is a multidimensional confine. From a thematic point of view, it stands in-between dream and wakefulness, referentially it is between reality and imagination, medially it is in-between literature and art, and from a depth point of view, it stands on the border between children's speech and ontological-epistemological dissertation. Its framework is framelessness: from the light switch turning the sun off, it goes to the infinite.

The work is an intermedial creation, in which the visual dimension is not merely the illustration of prose, but while aligning to the best solutions of contemporary picture books (Lovász 2015, 13–16), they supplement each other and together they build the world (Várnai 2017, 392). This game is particularly exciting in the sense that the work embarks upon not only the visualization and textualization of objects and events, but also abstract notions, thoughts and sensations as well (Boldog 2020). The volume, while adjusting to the medium of insomnia, "is unconventional in the sense of both the color scheme and style that can be »expected« from children's books" (Lapis 2020, 13). The vivid colors belong to the external effects (light stripe under the door, the lights of cars passing in front of the window) refracting the dark setting of the room, or to the thoughts and memories related to the objects and scenery of the daylight world. On the contrary, the shaded colors lead to imaginary, fantastic and transcendent provinces, they visualize the elements of these domains. Thus, the color code places the elements of the associative spiral into various levels.

The cut out black hole on the volume's hard cover is shaped like a darkened human eye. The title gets a place in this, referring to the fact that the work is similarly searching in the dark. And by having the eye's nerve fiber continue on the first pages, it also indicates that what is *inside*, is behind the closed eyes, that is, it takes place inside consciousness.

If Carroll's *Alice*-duology was organized by dream-logic, in case of Dániel's work we can talk about associative logic. The center, creator and focal point of the evolving world is the narrator, who remains name and genderless (Nagy 2020). The only thing that is certain is that it is a child, since the (generally opposing) opinions of the parents and adults remains a referential point for it throughout the whole book. "Nothing here to be seen! Stop looking around, sweetheart, just sleep! – as mother used to say [...] But that is exactly the problem, that there is always something to be seen inside my head." (Dániel 2020). The sensitivity of the narrator towards art, mainly towards visual culture, appears in many places of the text (Pataky 2021), which can dynamize the work's intermedial solutions. With his thoughts, the narrator is always striving to fill in the gap which it is surrounded by. From a calm setting, the narrator's associations lead it to popular film culture, the game of the shadows direct it to the shadow theater and the anthropomorphization of the surrounding objects, and darkness guides it towards imitations of flamboyant graphic art. Although it is not able to recollect the artists' names, only how those sounded like – "enni van hol" (Andy Warhol) and "olyan mijd" (Jean Miró) –, its thoughts and the volume's visual material evokes their styles. Other times it is talking about the coloring of furniture contours, to which the picture responds by leaving vivid and colorful paintbrush marks on them. The animation of the flying childish imagination in András Dániel's picture book is enabled by art, which by certain classmates of the narrator/associator is considered "stupidity", according to it there is also "Stupidity that is good!" (Dániel 2020). It is a nice reinterpretation of l'art pour l'art.

The work's textual pole is a children's monologue, which is written from a frog perspective through the entire work. It is playful, in some places inaccurate ("tényleg-e [really-so], bigyós [dingus], izéke [thingy]" etc.) and uses taboo-free children's language (variations of defecation). Poetically, the text is short and simple, however, it is built up of sentences summoning

significant depths. From the simplest moments of life, through the discussion of sensations and materials learnt in school, to theological truths, it investigates the world while remaining mindful and open. The world-building aspect, both from the conceptual and visual point of view, is based on the associative and spiral-like connection web. The gradually scattered elements gain more and more weight by regularly recurring in different contexts. As a matter of fact, this is how the clicking of the switch, the counting of the black cows, the flying imagination as film screening, and the wizard capable of vivifying and removing its medium become key motives. In a certain sense, the narrator itself is a wizard. It is a mage of imagination, and its associations are the results of the creative work of its brain. As it confesses it with respect to the shadows of the branches projected on the curtains: "There are all kinds of creatures living in this forest. I know because once I had imagined them. They are there ever since" (Dániel 2020). When it discusses the relationship between the language of the Frankas and the Kripps, its words clearly reflect the topical school curriculum. However, going forward in the text, it often refutes its previous statements and imagined creatures, sometimes precisely with the argument that they are imaginations. All this makes the world-building increasingly open, thus it operates with the reality of multiple possible readings, truths, and opinions.

Yet, this is how the world remains unified. The lack of light blurs out the contours and makes the differences disappear, since "in darkness, all cows are black" (Dániel 2020). Similarly to how the tombstones bearing the symbols of different faiths can exist peacefully next to each other in the cemetery, father's atheism, mother's Buddhist and granny's Christian faith fit seamlessly into the thread of the universe (Pataky 2021). The narrator tries to raise bridges one after the other between its classmates and the imagination of a beetle, too. And there is the bridge in the endgame, bending over Chuang Tzū's butterfly and demolishing borders between words, which is built on the line of: "It occurs to me that", and it ends with two black pages. Thus, openness endures here as well. The narrative steps into the dreams and provides space for creative continuation at the same time. An excellent solution!

However, beside imagination, the relationship between siblings also hides sensitive depths, whose unfolding is also well enabled by children's monologue.

The latter text group has its foundations standing on reality, thus signaling that in these poems the child, instead of the fabled world, is faced with reality with its dark side as well (Petres Csizmadia 2015, 70–71). Ottó Kiss exchanges the Swedish standard, the sentence-oriented, variable unit-based solutions of children's monologue with coherent background stories which operate with references pointing both forward and backward. These accounts are developed along the life-story fragments of the characters living inside the poems (Gombos, 2013, 57). In his volumes titled *A Csillagszedő Mária* [Mario the Star-Picker], *az Emese almája* [Emese's Apple] and *A nagypapa távcsöve* [Grandfather's Binoculars] (Kiss 2002, 2006, 2011) he focuses on the relationship between children and parents, grandparents as well as children and children. These philosophical trains of thought lead to acceptance, to the path leading to each other (Petres Csizmadia 2015, 74), and instead of the "I" and "they" stories, it aims at finding the "our" story (Pompor 2010).

Kiss's volume titled *A bátyám öccse* [The Little Brother of My Big Brother] further weaves the forming relation-web of the previous creations, this time putting the relationship of two brothers into the foreground. The central moving element of the work is the *versus*, the always timely conflict of the smaller child and the bigger one. This rivalry can be activated by anything, and is playfully autoletic and self-inducing, but at the same time, it always has the element of love lurking in it in parallel (Pagony 2020). In the volume, all this is accompanied by rich humor and situational comedy evoking the style of Éva Janikovszky (Uzseka 2021, Nagy 2022).

The work is written from a singular horizon, in our case, it is the inferior position of the smaller sibling, while the voice of the big brother also appears in form of reported speech. The latter is an exciting self-reflection, since it is typical for children's monologue to exclude the voice of the adult, thus they appear as incomplete discourses. However, the big brother is not an adult, yet, but stands somewhere in between the little brother and the adults. Mediating his answers and utterances via reported speech strengthens this intermediate status poetically as well. The style of the text, which is mimicking the voice of a child authentically, has the nature of live language, it is compressive, puritan and sometimes childishly bumpy. Slang expressions and soft vulgarisms appear in it as well.

There is a certain ping-pong going on in the work between the two brothers. A perpetual word-dual, whose only purpose is to annoy each other. "*Meanwhile Ottó Kiss does not moralize, but he illuminates the dynamic between the brothers through the glasses of a psychologist*" (P. Szabó 2021). The older one talks to his sibling from the higher position of the big brother, using a slightly disparaging voice: "*he can't go anywhere from me, / he has to be sacked out at home every afternoon, / but no problem, I will be surely sorry for this, / he will teach me a lesson*" (Kiss 2020, 24). He is the offensive one. Thus, the little brother speaks from a perpetual defense, however, he does so from a kind of *clever-clever little sibling* position. For example, when the big brother puts the "*NO ENTRANCE! INCLUDING SIBLINGS!*" board on his door, the little brother naturally "*draws his attention to the contradiction: / if no entrance applies, / how did he get in?*" (Kiss 2020, 8). Besides this, he wants to prove himself, especially that, even though he might be smaller and younger, he is not less clever than his big brother. And generally, he is successful in doing so.

The hierarchical basic stance of the two is coded into the title as well. Looking at it from the point of view of the voice speaking in the volume, the title simply means "I". Although, since the whole text is the train of thought of the little brother, we can also claim that it is he, who positions himself this way. Thus, he acknowledges the superiority of the big brother via the title, too. Meanwhile, he also longs for recognition from his brother, since the title indicates the alignment to the older one as well. The relationship of the two brothers is so significant that the self-determination of the lyric I is only possible in case of the big brother (Boldog 2021). The lack of names is also important. Only the status of the siblings is known, and it is determined only by the relation between the two. Both would lose their essence without the other. A little brother can only be that due to the big brother, the same way as the big brother owns his role thanks to his little brother. Without names and this status the two voices of the work would disappear.

A bátyám öccse can be divided into five thematic units (poems). The order of the first four is interchangeable, but not its verses. The sections are built up along the train of thought of the lyric I and the epic thread. The position of the last poem is more restricted, since in it the splinters and ideas of the previous ones merge and crystallize. The titles of the poems – (*LEGÓ* [LEGO]), (*KÓLA* [COLA]), (*KESZTYŰ* [GLOVES]), (*VONAT* [TRAIN]) and (*TÁRSAS* [BOARD GAME]) – function as historic orientational points. However, the parenthesis also indicates that it is actually something very different that is decisive, namely, the development of the relationship. András (b) Baranyai, who "*drew facial expressions with only a few lines, and the body illustrations in an angular way, gave the illustrations a Lego style*" (Boldog 2021), reflected on the Lego motives spanning across and connecting (building?) the texts.

The overture of (*LEGO*) determines the mood of the entire volume. "*My big brother has a little brother, / who unfortunately is actually me. // This alone is enough trouble, / but it is an even bigger one, / that this will always remain like this*" (Kiss 2020, 5). The superior pranking of the fifteen years old big brother manifests itself in such cosmological artifices, like: it does not matter that the ten years old little brother is growing, the universe is continually expanding, thus in reality he is always

getting smaller. In the meantime, the proving desire of the little brother could be verified by the numerous recurring of a variation of the "*as if I were completely stupid*" formula. And he manages to prove this successfully. For example, when he does not tell on his big brother about him bringing his girlfriend in: "*My Lego collection is getting bigger. // But what is even more important than this: / his collection is / decreasing!*" (Kiss 2020, 12). In this section the siblings' comradery is coupled with the "business is business" approach, while the growth competition is also equalized, since the increase in the number of Lego pieces becomes the counterbalance of being little. From a formal perspective, this is also reflected in the decrease of the syllables in the quoted, closing lines of the poem. The moral of (*KESZTYŰ*) also has a backlash on the big brother, since only his room is left out from the cleaning he forced onto his little brother, thus he is the one who gets reprimanded by the parents. And the prank of (*VONAT*) also backfires when he buys a one-way train ticket to a faraway place for his little brother on his name day in order to get rid of him for a while, but the ticket gets redeemed in time and the money is used to buy the desired toy train. In any case, the annoyances towards the big brother are ingenious, and in their own way, they have a teaching power, they develop intelligence and motivate for preparedness, which might come in useful "later in life". After all, ingenious offense can only be fought back by ingenious defense.

It is also true, however, that the David-like dexterity is often victorious over the big brother Goliath, in other sections, via certain remarks, the little brother manages to unveil his own childishness and lack of knowledge. The moment when one of the lenses falls out from his glasses at the overture of (*KÓLA*), and he cannot manage to put it back, is a metaphorical mapping of exactly this. His blindness is mostly visible in his relation to love and lust. Ottó Kiss's work uses hidden references to suggest this, since behind the closed doors the big brother and his girlfriend are "*moaning and laughing*" (Kiss 2020, 8), but the most amusing part is when the little brother insists that: "*I wasn't born yesterday, / I know what is going on, / I know that they are making love, / what is more, they might even be kissing*" (Kiss 2020, 52). However, making love in his vocabulary does not refer to sexuality, but the cuddling time the lovers spend together. This is unveiled by the escalation, according to which, for the lyric I, the kiss represents a higher level than lovemaking. This can be used to confirm that the little brother decodes and knows many things correctly, but not everything.

The overture of the last poem of the volume titled (*TÁRSAS*) is a (child) philosophical rumination, which is about the meaninglessness, private aspect and importance of the found properties. "*Because they are valuable for me, indeed, / and their value lies in the time spent together*" (Kiss 2020, 42). In connection to the junk laying around on his own and his big brother's shelves, the lyric I notes that their value lies in the fact that there is a memory of an event connected to each of them. The fifth poem, via its structuring and in a self-reflective way, relates to the previous four in the same way, since it annexes them inside itself. The gloves, the train, the Legos, they all return and their value increases via the memories connected to them. Some of the objects gain their own importance later. For example, the cone-shaped hearing apparatus, since the little brother uses this device to overhear the big brother's discussion with his girlfriend, when his sibling "*whispered, / that these days he finds talking to me quite enjoyable, / that these days he can more often play / checkers and board games with me*" (Kiss 2020, 53). The latter is the biggest gift of the little brother, since these sentences enable him to grow up to the desired role of a sibling (which his big brother welcomes, too). And the fact that his big brother might have let him win in the board game suddenly gets revaluated from a lie to the sign of attention. By this, order is restored. The indignant voice and the annoying of each other opens up, and their hidden contents, one another's importance, takes over. At the end of the work, as a sort of framed solution, the disillusioning opening lines of the book get overwritten, and while reflecting on their own development, they get re-aligned, that is, "straightened out". One could say that they turn into clean lines. Because after all, "*It is a good feeling*

to have a big brother like this. // And it is also a good thing, that I'm his little brother. // But the best thing is, that this will remain like this forever" (Kiss 2020, 55).

5 Summary

If we only consider the experiences of the last two decades, tale novel has undoubtedly been the key genre of Hungarian children's literature. Through tale novels, and other tale books, the dominance of prose is significant in this age group as well, even if not as much as in case of young adult literature. Nevertheless, the year 2020 was also exciting due to how lyric poetry got re-positioned. Ottó Kiss's and András Dániel's works suggest that its position got strengthened. It is important to add, however, that both works are children's monologues, which is the genre that stands the closest to lyric poetry. The classical verse forms, rhyme and rhythm, appear in new roles. In case of Takács, they become tools of wizardry, Szabó and Erzszi Kertész use them (via lyric prose) as the signifiers of a fantasy medium or dimension. Looking at it from this perspective, the linguistically virtuoso lyric poetry gets mystified, and becomes the presentational form of the supernatural. It is true, however, that this change can be read in a way that it reflects reality-alienness.

The social-critical references appear in multiple works (the political issue and criticism of *A János vitéz-kód*, the obsession with pleasing everyone and cyberbullying of *Lajhár, a sztár*), but since the texts approach these questions in a subtle way, and they appear as the organic problems of the characters' lives, they strengthen the double-edged aspect of the works. The same is true for those (life) philosophical questions, which are asked by the lyric I of *Éjszakai kert* (transcendent, latent world order), *Nincs itt semmi látnivaló* (religious pluralism, creative imagination), and *A bátyám öccse* (the personal importance of found and private properties). The fact that the applied literary and didactic nature of the works are pushed into the background is in favor of the aesthetic, but the teaching aspect was not completely removed from all creations (it can be found in Takács's and Edina Kertész's works).

The effects of the postmodern text-creating strategies can be felt on the analyzed corpus as well. This is especially true for the book by Borbála Szabó, which manages Petőfi's *John the Valiant* not only as a hypertext (*Bingaminga és a babkák* is in such connection with *The Lord of the Rings*), but it is its palimpsest and palinode as well, that is, it is its loyally rewritten version and its anti-song at the same time. With this, the work proves that the most innovative literary text-games do have their place in children's literature – they only need to be applied properly.

From a poetic perspective, the varied humor of the work is exciting, together with the roleplay of the lyric I / narrator. Kiss's lyric I, even against all conflicts, is inseparable from the big brother, which is also signaled by the fact that the big brother's voice manifests itself in the little brother's mediation. Their anonymity does not only strengthen this dependence, but it also makes their roles applicable to all siblings. Dániel's lyric I tops this by genderlessness, which enables all readers to identify with it. Erzszi Kertész's narrator is elusive, sometimes seems to be closer to one of the characters, sometimes to the other, and Borbála Szabó's (as a good postmodern storyteller) is a character, identifies with the writer, and is not only omniscient, but also omnipotent. Thus the narrator of contemporary children's literature has a tendency to draw attention to itself at least by diverging from the classical heterodiegetic position.

Being true to children's literature, most analyzed works are illustrated creations, although we can talk about prominent and active illustrations only in case of the *Lajhár, a sztár* (the drawings created [also] with the formal elements of Instagram, which motivate creative work), the *Éjszakai Kert* (the tones and forms of the pictures reflect a dimension shift), and the *Nincs itt semmi látnivaló*. From this point of view, András Dániel's picture book is the most significant achievement of the corpus,

since here the textual and visual elements build the word of the work while supplementing, and not reflecting each other.

Another important characteristic of the analyzed books is that they activate the readers and they motivate co-creation. Mari Takács's rhymes and nonsense-like magical spells call for reciting, and Borbála Szabó's verses ask for multileveled decoding (from the solving of mathematical problems to the deciphering of the boundaries of blended and rewritten texts). Edina Kertész provides tasks for readers along the strategies of reading didactics, Erzszi Kertész, by using names that predestine, stimulates us to decode the meaning of our own names, and the works of András Dániel and Ottó Kiss motivate us for the fragmentation of our individual associations and sibling-adventures into a children's monologue. Thus, they can be excellent foundations of various creative writing, group building, communication and creativity developing tasks of experiential education (N. Tóth – Petres Csizmadia 2015, 297–322; Puskás 2019), which – supported by appropriate pedagogical communication (Horváthová – Szóköli 2016) – give us the basis of student-centered and problem-based learning (Tóth 2019, 83–100). In the same way as children's literature provides the basis of literature.

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