

The article deals with the puppet play by the painter Alenka Gerlovič (1919–2010), entitled *Jurček in trije razbojniki* (*Jurček (George/Georgie) and the Three Thieves*). The play premièred at the Partisan Puppet Theater in 1944 and was published in 1950, with pictures from the puppet show. It is an expression of the author's ethical attitude towards Fascism and Nazism and the horrors of war. As the analysis shows, Alenka Gerlovič's play places her among the world's leading youth writers who have commented on the events of the war. Alenka Gerlovič uses *Jurček* to create an "imaginary screen" that allowed the audience to maintain a distance from the atrocities in the wartime situation and at the same time to be part of the anti-fascist struggle, also as a symbolic weapon and ethical act.

Keywords: Alenka Gerlovič, World War II, puppet play, subversiveness, 1944

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Subversive Children's Literature - a Puppet Play *Georgie and the Three Thieves* by Alenka Gerlovič in the Context

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In the field of children's literature, a few authors have dealt critically with World War II. The most representative creators are the Finnish-Swedish illustrator and author Tove Jansson, the Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren (cf. Surmatz), who worked as a censor at the *Stockholm Post* during World War II, and the illustrator with more than a thousand illustrations who criticised fascism and Nazism at the same time, Dr Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel), etc.

Slovenian children's book authors were also critical during World War II. The article deals with the puppet play by painter Alenka Gerlovič (1919–2010) entitled *Jurček in trije razbojniki* (Jurček (Georgie/George) and the Three Thieves). The play premiered in 1944 and was published in 1950. In 2015, Ljubljana's Mini Teater presented a reconstruction of the play. Gerlovič was a co-founder of the Partisan Puppet Theatre within the Sokol movement based on the Czech model (1939). She participated as a director, puppet actor and set designer.

In the text *Jurček and the Three Thieves*, twelve literary characters or three groups of three characters appear. First, the boy Jurček (George/Georgie) and his father and mother, then the individualised collective anti-heroes – the Three Villains (the Home Guard member Janez (John), the fascist Benito and Hitler's Fric), the Three Partisans (Commander Matjaž (Matthew), Jošt (Jo[b]st) and Grega (Georgie)), then Pavliha (a Slovenian variant of the puppet character as Kasperle, Punch, Petrushka, Pulcinella, Punch, etc.), Franca (Francis) and the animal Mula (Mule).

The puppet show contains elements of carnival or folk culture (Bakhtin), such as celebration and laughter. At the end of the puppet show, Pavliha sings a song about "golden freedom". Here we find a connection to Guntis Schmidchens's hypothesis,

which he presents in his book *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (2014). Schmidchens states that the “singing revolution” and the “power of song” are also present in the puppet theatre, as all three characters sing songs, which gives them power.

Jack Zipes has written repeatedly about the subversive power of fairy tales (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 1983, 2006; *The Irresistible Fairy Tales*, 2012; *Workers' Tales*, 2018; *The Castle of Truth and Other Revolutionary Tales*, 2020). He argues that we find the most important cultural and social events in fairy tales (Zipes, *Fairy 1*). In the introduction to J. L. Mickenberg and P. Neil's book *Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature*. Zipes mentions that all literature is ideological or political; it is impossible to separate education and entertainment from politics.

Gerlovič's play reflects intertextuality with the archetypal figure of the boy or apprentice (Thumbelina) in the character of the boy Jurček, which can be related to the article by J. Zipes, “From Ulysses to Tom Thumb and Other Cunning Heroes”. Zipes writes about the fairy tale figure of the dwarf, who is the figure of the simpleton of low (economic and social) origin or the small or young individual (Jurček/Georgie) threatened by the archetype of the giant (Home Army, Fascism, Nazism). Still, the giant is also the archetype of the foolish giant, which is related to the figure of the three bandits in Gerlovič's puppet show. Zipes connects the figure of the dwarf with that of Odysseus and the giant with Polyphemus. Polyphemus was stronger and taller but was defeated by Odysseus or escaped from the cave.

The puppet show is also multilingual. Gerlovič uses folk words, expressive meaning, Italian and German languages. The puppet play *Jurček and the Three Thieves* is like a space of freedom, which is characterised by the fact that the text is for children and the context is for adults (Seifert 45).

Based on an examination of the text *Jurček and the Three Thieves* (1944) as well as the context, it becomes clear that with this puppet show, Gerlovič also belongs to the context of the criticism of fascism and Nazism, expressed by youth authors and/or illustrators such as T. Jansson, A. Lindgren, Dr Seuss, etc.

Although youth literature is on the periphery of the adult literary system, it is also a space of freedom. Especially in the context of World War II, the puppetry play, which is basically about good and evil, is an ethical act in time and against the “banality of evil” (Žižek 62). To summarise, we can paraphrase Žižek's thought that in the context of World War II, Gerlovič and other writers used puppetry and humour to maintain a distance from the atrocities. Puppetry as an “imaginary screen” (Ibid.) enabled the Slovenian partisan puppet theatre during World War II to distance itself from the atrocities and at the same time be part of the anti-fascist struggle, also as a symbolic weapon and ethical act (Komelj 985).