

TANJA MASTNAK

Local practices of slovenie illustrations in global world of children's literature



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(born in 1962 in Ljubljana, Slovenia). In 1987 she finished her studies of art history at University in Ljubljana. She continued her studies in Prague, Budapest and Paris. In her works she dedicated to interaction of arts and politics, what brought her to genre issues study, especially in the field of art history and visual perception. At present she lectures at Art College in Ljubljana. In the field of illustration she was a jury member of the Slovenian prize „Levstikova nagrada“ for several times, for the best illustrator that is awarded every second year. She has been writing about contemporary illustration works and taking part at international congresses on illustration. She is also involved in teaching process as a mentor or co-mentor of several student's work on illustration.

Children's literature and illustrations have major importance in the development of child's perception of cultural context in which he or she is growing up and forming his or her awareness of him/herself as culturally determined human being. As Maria Novikova stressed several times in her writings, the interaction between text and illustration can be strongly affected by cultural context, particularly in case of translations of literary work illustrated by local author.

The interplay between diverse cultural contexts can be shown on the example of two authors from Slovenia: Marlenka Stupica (1927) and Lilijana Praprotnik Zupančič – Lila Prap (1955). Both authors are internationally well known and their work received several rewards. Difference between them is first of all generational. Marlenka Stupica started to publish her illustrations already in the fifties and soon became the leading author of Slovenian illustrators. Lila Prap started to publish illustrations in the nineties and gained international recognition very soon. Marlenka Stupica illustrates children's books for diverse generations, mostly for children between five and twelve years, and Lila Prap is specialized for very young children, from one to five years old. Children at very young age are not so culturally determined yet, but it is very important in which way we present them their own cultural environment. Authors of illustrations must communicate with parents, so it is even harder for them when they try to challenge, change or improve established cultural patterns, values and beliefs. In my opinion Lila Prap found very subtle and successful way how to present themes of cultural diversity to very young children and their significant adults. A contemporary approach to a global world in which we live today.

But first we should examine how society changed from the fifties by looking at work of Marlenka Stupica. Among her grand opus of illustrations I choose to present her interpretation of Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren. I choose this example because Pippi is well known character and everybody recognizes her. On this example we can clearly see how illustrations (and also the translation to the certain extent) serve the needs of culturally specific environment.

This is Slovenian version of Pippi Longstocking by Marlenka Stupica. The illustration was made in 1955, ten years after first edition of Lindgren's book in Sweden (illustrated by Ingrid Nyman). It was first published in magazine for children *Pionir*. Pippi was presented chapter by chapter in each issue of the magazine. The editor (Kristina Brenk, who was also the translator of the text) decided to employ Slovenian illustrator Marlenka Stupica to interpret Lindgren's text and not to use Nyman's famous pictures. It is very interesting that also the translation by Kristina Brenkova is adapted to specific cultural context – some of the changes were influenced by political situation – it was socialist time, p.ex. Christmas is changed into Sylvester night, but other changes are much more interesting. The translator changed Pippi's outfit completely. Instead of blue dress she wears "nice yellow dress", and instead of brown and black stockings, she wears blue underwear with white spots. The illustrator followed the description from translation.



Astrid Lindgren: *Pippi Longstocking*
Illustration: Marlenka Stupica



Astrid Lindgren: *Pippi Longstocking*
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Comparing the famous Nyman's Pippi with Stupica's Pippi we can see obvious differences. The Slovenian translation is not the only one changing the Lindgren's text. French edition even changed horse into pony, with explanation that it is not advisable to confuse children with such impossible ideas as girl lifting the horse.¹

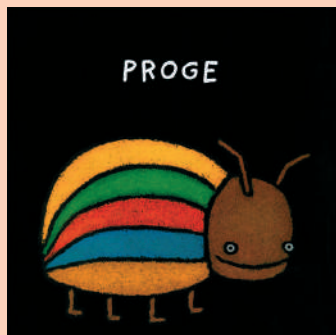
Slovene Pippi is much calmer and sweeter than Nyman's. The most illuminating is the last chapter of the trilogy of Pippi Longstocking. Each illustrator chooses part of the text that he or she considers the most relevant. In the last chapter of Pippi, the three children celebrate Christmas (or Sylvester) with delay (not on the right date) and they decide that they do not want to grow up, they refuse to become adults, so they eat magic balls which will assure them to remain eternal children. After the magic ritual (to the power of which they are all a bit

skeptical, the magic balls might have lost their power because they are a bit old – by Pippi’s words) Tomi and Anika return home and observe sadly through the window how lonesome Pippi is, all alone at her home.

It is very interesting how Stupica interpreted that chapter. The moment when children decide that they want to stay children for ever is crucial for the whole novel, but Stupica did not illustrate that event. Instead she presented the moment at Christmas tree, the warm family feeling and lonesome Pippi sitting at her window. For Stupica and for Slovenian readers who bought 15 editions of the book with this illustrations, this melancholic moment of loneliness and yearning for familiar security was more crucial than Pippi’s power to remain eternal child. Obviously the Slavonic melancholy and tradition of “yearning” is so strong in Slovenia that it was welcome to “soften” the wild, revolutionary, feminist, uprising text of Lindgren’s.

As Marlenka Stupica put it herself: “In fairytales it is not the story itself that arises my interest, but its psychological background which is hidden behind the context and gives everyone possibility to (doživeti) live it through freely as compensation in specific personal troubles and insecurities of each individual separately.”²

In the year 1955, in the same year as first edition of Pippi Longstocking was printed, Lila Prap was born in Celje. She started to work for children when her son was born. Before she worked as an architect and avant-garde artist using very radical approaches towards art. Her understanding of the world is very different from the one presented by Stupica. Marlenka Stupica is interested in tradition, family, conserving the continuity because it gives us security. She is sensible to “yearning” as most distinguished feature of Slovene character, expressed in art in so many different ways. But Lila Prap is different. She is not interested in closing inside the well know world of the known. She wants to be as open as possible. She likes contrasts and diversities, she likes challenges and taking risks. She does not communicate with our hidden fears but with our hidden courage. They both arouse our phantasies, but very different ones. If Mar-



Lila Prap: *I Like Colors*

lenka Stupica is an author who changes global themes as Pippi Longstocking within the local context, so it becomes more familiar for the local public and brings closer some features of the character which are particularly interesting for local (Slovene) public, on the other side Lila Prap is the local author who understands the world globally and she shares that with her community. They are both very well recognized outside Slovenia, Stupica because of her incredible sensitivity which makes her interpretations so unique and Lila Prap because of her power which can communicate with children all over the world.

Here we can see an illustration from one of her books: *I like colors*.

She exposes contrasts both with text, forms and colors. Her way of putting things tends to be simplistic, in a pop artistic way, very flat, with strong contours and separated colors in tradition of modernist/postmodernist style.

Among many projects by Lila Prap I have chosen her book *International animal's dictionary* which, according to my opinion, is the best example of her ever present intention to join differences, to make people understand at very early age the beauty and power of diversity. Differences do not separate us, but make our life more interesting, more creative, more beautiful and rich. Here are some examples of her work.

In her "animal's dictionary" the colors are not so contrasting any more and she introduces very interesting theme: the diversity of human language when we try to imitate animal's voices.

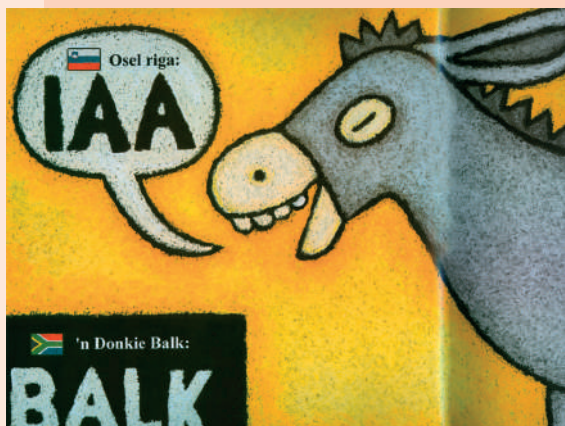
Lila Prap's pictures are more like signs for particular significance (signifiers) and the visual language is confronted to written language. In her work the difference between writing and drawing (or painting) is seriously challenged. Drawing with strong contours is as symbolic as letters. Especially letters of simple sounds of animal language. And particularly when we confront it with pictorial alphabet (like Chinese). She even added the flags of the countries of the specific language in use. This solution is not so good from the visual point of view, but it adds to intensify the interplay of meanings and symbols.

For small children it is the easiest way to recognize a two dimensional symbol in a book if it is visually similar to a real object. Such connection between visual presentation and more complicated and complex expression by letters of the same symbol is the usual theme of picture books for very young children. Interesting difference made by Lila Prap is on one hand the simplification of the language form (instead of writing "sheep", as usual, there is just the voice sheep produce: "bee"). Usually children before using the real world like "dog" will show the animal and say: "how, how". With this simplification

author is coming half way to the child helping to understand their perceptions of the world. She is also challenging the "early learning" concept which suggests to parents to avoid simpler and more playful stages of child's expressions as unnecessary. And on the other hand she offers the diversity of voices from all over the world and introduces to a child the fun and creativity of diversity.



Lila Prap: *International Animal's Dictionary*



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Lila Prap communicates with child very intensely and on several different levels, but she also communicates with an adult reader at the same time in many positive ways. The inter pages include the real dictionary of animal voices in forty two languages from all over the world. This could hardly be interesting for very young children, but for adults it is the source of intense fun and curiosity. Also the flag as the symbol of the symbols reminds especially the adult reader of the role of symbolic ways of expression.

On the example of work by two Slovenian authors we were able to compare the differences in presenting the cultural context caused by generational, thematic and artistic reasons.

The two artists were working in a very different political and social environment and it reflects in their perception of the world. Their choice of stories is very different, depending on the age of children – younger are more opened to new experiences (also themes of global diversity), older children are already more culturally determined and the communication has to be more subtle and introducing the new themes is more delicate. And at last they are also very different personalities and it is expressed strongly in their work and that is also the reason why both of them arouse such an interest among young and less young readers.

Notes:

¹ Marjan Marinšek: *Astrid Lindgren, Karantanija, Velenje 1997*, p. 114

² Marlenka Stupica: *Album slovenskih ilustratorjev* (ed. Alenka Veler), Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 2005, p. 68.