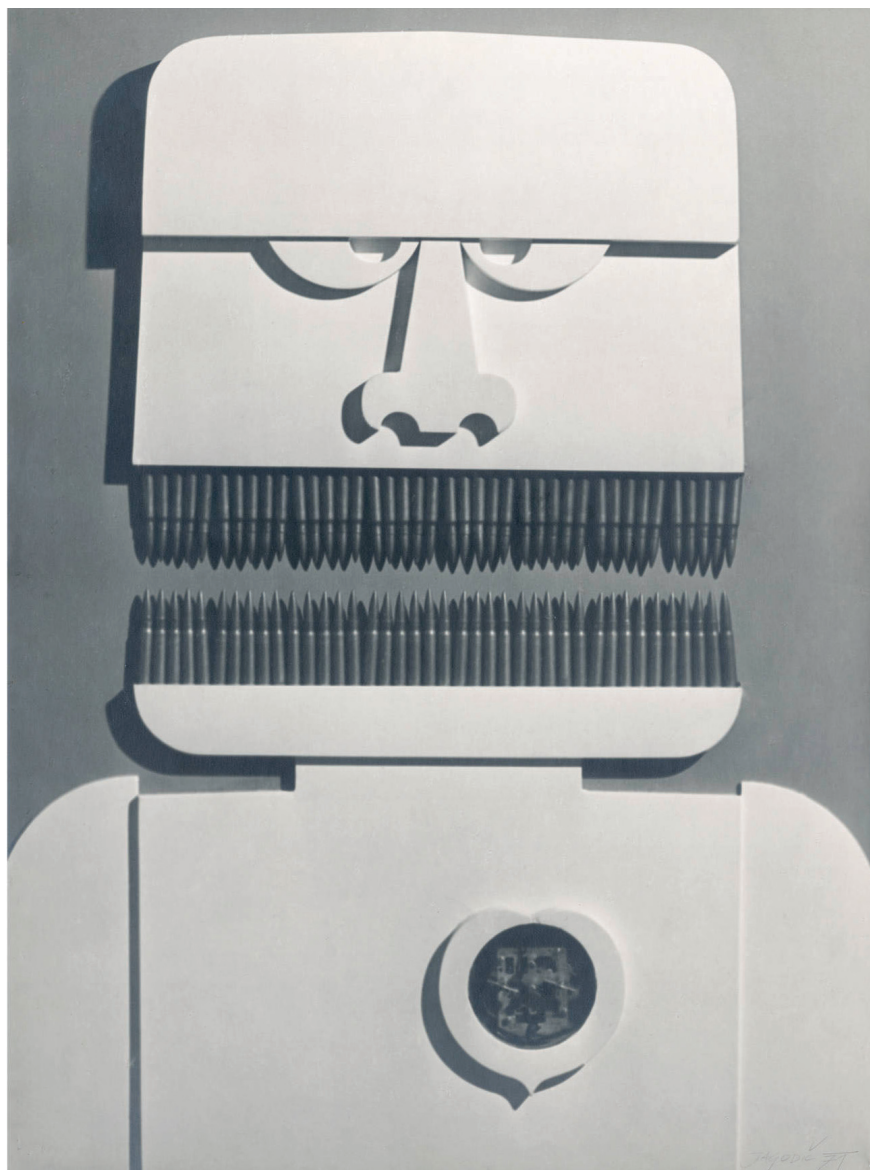


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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UNCONDITIONAL!



Institute for Recent History of Serbia
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in Yugoslavia and Beyond

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Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

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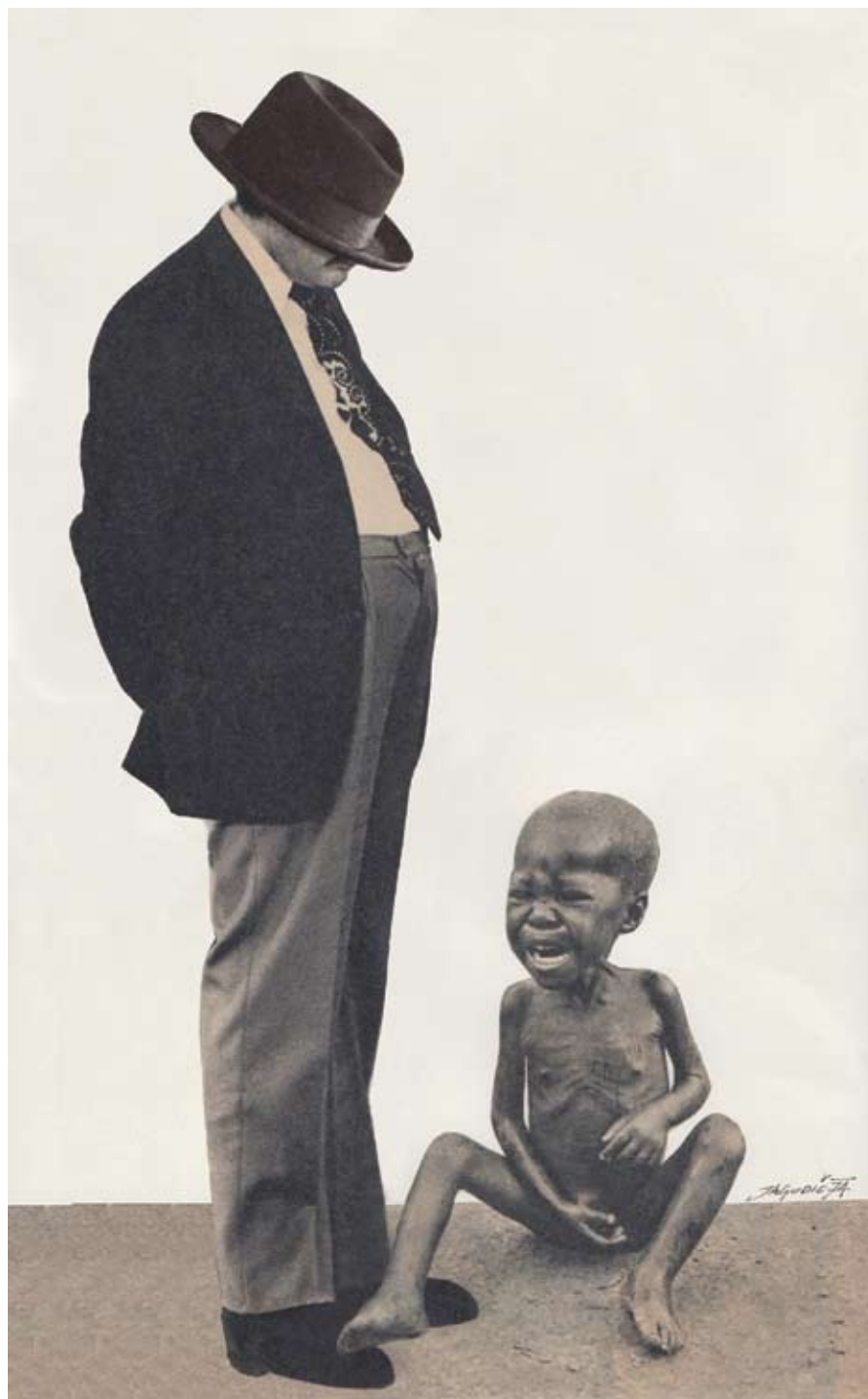
Pictures of War, Pictures for Peace: Memory of the People's Liberation Struggle in Yugoslav Children's Literature**

Abstract Based on the stories *Ko si bil majhen* [When You Were Little] by Slovenian author of children's literature Kristina Brenk and the debates on representations of war at the children's festival *Kurirček* [Courier], the chapter explores Yugoslav socialist children's war literature and the question of Yugoslav socialist memory politics regarding the Second World War with particular emphasis on the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB, 1941–1945). It contextualises the stories within the socialist Yugoslav memory politics of war and applies narratological and multimodal analysis to reveal the Yugoslav socialist memory politics of war for children as a productive and dialogical process.

Keywords children's war literature, socialist Yugoslavia, memory of war, NOB, Kristina Brenk, festival *Kurirček*, counter-archive

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Stane Jagodič, *Please, help me!*, photomontage, 1974

The subject of war is pressing and becoming ever more pressing. In a way, it is so ubiquitous that there is not a single page in the newspapers today that does not talk about war. And if there is already so much talk about war in the press, those of us who deal with literature must also deal with this topic.¹

These are the words of Dragan Lukić (1928–2006), poet and children's author, editor of the children's literary magazine *Zmaj* (1954–1992) and long-time editor of the children's programme on Radio Belgrade. In 1966, Lukić addressed the question of the representation of war in children's literature at the plenary session of the IV. *Kurirček* [Courier] festival, which focussed on questions of memory of the Second World War and, in particular, on the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB, 1941–1945) in children's literature and culture. Even if Lukić in his literary work seldom thematised war, which he had experienced personally as a child (cf. his later novels *Cvetkovci* from the year 1981 and *Prugasti 1946* from the year 1982), as a professional working with children's literature, he was a regular guest at the children's festival *Kurirček*. The *Kurirček* festival, based in Maribor, Slovenia, with its diverse activities in various parts of Yugoslavia, was dedicated to the memory of the NOB with the objective of strengthening peace.² Since its inception in 1963, the festival, like the period's children's literature and culture in general, addressed children who had no first-hand experience of war. In terms of the memory of the war, the 1960s signalled the period of the so-called "floating gap", in which "living memory" and "histoire" or "tradition" overlapped.³ It was the beginning of a period in which the memories of contemporary witnesses of the war began to overlap significantly with the mediated representations of war: a time of synchronicity between two different modes of memory. While, in the proposal of Jan Assmann, which the chapter follows, the so-called communicative memory is based on social interaction, the mode of cultural memory is much more defined and structured in terms of content, forms, media and participation structure.⁴ Hence, since the 1960s at the latest, when children who had not experienced war grew up, in the memory culture, the role of the representations and mediatisation of war in the transmission and homogenisation of memory significantly grew. At that time, literature and printed media were central elements of children's media, bound also to curricula, and thus the portrayals of war in children's literature were important pillars of memory politics of war.

Throughout the socialist Yugoslav temporality, representations and memories of the Second World War, especially of the NOB, were among the most highlighted themes in Yugoslav socialist children's literature and culture.⁵ However, due to the all-encompassing ruptures and profound changes brought about by the bloody dissolution of the country in the context of the global collapse of socialism, the triumph of globalised neoliberal capitalism and identity politics, the history of Yugoslav socialist children's literature underwent major rewrites and canon revisions, leaving out the majority of the works for children on the topic of war and especially NOB. Along with the works, the accompanying critical and academic discourses that reflected on the literary production were also marginalised.⁶ As in other areas, including the academic context, recent revision processes have often been based on arguments of objectivity, resenting socialist Yugoslav children's war literature and the accompanying academic and professional discourse of the time, schematic, simplified representations of war and the NOB and the glorification of an "unnatural", active position of children in war depictions.⁷

Acknowledging that Yugoslav socialist children's war literature presented children as subjects with agency even in the midst of violent war events, resolutely upholding anti-fascism and, crucially, class solidarity and that these values formed the core of its moral universalism, in the following chapter, I revisit some of the discussions and representations of NOB. My aim is to supplement the contemporary dominant picture of Yugoslav socialist children's war literature and its memory politics. In addition to the goal of historical accuracy, a nuanced image of Yugoslav socialist children's war literature could help us in the search for answers to a persistent question: *How to approach children with the subject of war in times of permanent wars, so that peace may reign?*

The two editions of Kristina Brenk's stories *Ko si bil majhen* [When You Were Little] from 1962/63 and 1964 and the critical discussions at the *Kurirček* festival in 1966, on which I draw in the present chapter, both reveal the Yugoslav socialist memory politics of war for children as a productive and dialogical process.⁸ They open up the corpus of Yugoslav children's war literature to a "counter-archive" which, in the proposal put forth by Gal Kirn, articulates a surplus for rethinking "the conditions of expected protocols to commemorate the past" for envisioning "a different future".⁹ Against the background

1 Dragan Lukić, "Dragan Lukić – književnik. Beograd", in *IV. Festival Kurirček Maribor 1966. Referati in razprave na delovnem plenumu v Kragujevcu 16. in 17. decembra 1966*, edited by Festival Kurirček (Maribor: Festival Kurirček, 1967), 49. All the translations in the chapter are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

2 *IV. Festival Kurirček Maribor 1966. Referati in razprave na delovnem plenumu v Kragujevcu 16. in 17. decembra 1966*, edited by Festival Kurirček (Maribor: Festival Kurirček, 1967), s.p.

3 Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2008), 112, 113.

4 *Ibid.*, 117.

5 *Rat iz dečje perspektive*, edited by Nada Bobičić (Belgrade: Udruženje Radnik, 2018); Dubravka Zima, "Hrvatska dječja književnost o ratu," *Polemos* 4, no. 2 (2001): 81–122.

6 The *Kurirček* festival was one of the organisations that until 1992, when the festival was shut down, provided a platform for both the promotion of and reflection on children's culture (literary, musical and visual) on the topic of war and the NOB.

7 For an analysis of contemporary academic reception of Yugoslav children's war literature cf. Dara Šljukić, "Savremena recepcija romana za decu koji tematizuju NOB," in *Rat iz dečje perspektive*, edited by Nada Bobičić (Belgrade: Udruženje Radnik, 2018), 63–75.

8 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 19.

9 Gal Kirn, *The Partisan Counter-Archive. Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Memory in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 58.

of recent scholarship on Yugoslav socialist children's war literature, the chapter provides insights into the historical debates on representations of war in content intended for children. Secondly, the chapter delves into the two editions of Kristina Brenk's stories, illustrated by Ančka Gošnik Godec (1927–2025) and Lidija Osterc (1928–2006), respectively. Using narratological and multimodal analysis, the chapter contextualises these stories within the Yugoslav socialist memory politics of war for children.

What is war to children who haven't experienced it?

The introduction to the proceedings of the symposium of the *IV. Kurirček* festival positioned the memory of war and the NOB as crucial for the politics of peace, freedom and agency:

Our greatest value is humankind; all the efforts we make, all the goods we create, are for them. But they will be able to participate fully in material and spiritual culture when they are able to raise their level of consciousness to the point where they can value and measure their own freedom within the boundaries of the wider community, within the framework of free humanity. The struggle of our peoples for freedom was paid with the blood of those who fell on the battlefields and died as hostages, in prisons and camps. The price was too high for us to ever pass by without pausing with pride at these great deeds of our half-past history. Everything is too vivid and the deeds too great. The young generations coming up after the war accept this great heritage as the tradition of their parents, as a guide for their young lives. In a free homeland, there are generations who know persecution and violence only from books or from the stories of their elders, generations who are called to build a new world in a free homeland, a world without hatred, a world of peaceful coexistence. The young generation will be able to fulfil this mission if they can truly grow up in freedom, which means that they must form their personality by learning not only the rights but also the duties of free citizens. And it is here that the positive values of the revolution will be valuable knowledge with which the young generation will be able to thrive, be educated and mould their moral character.¹⁰

The reason why the introduction is quoted here at such length is that the excerpt condenses the main ideological features of the politics of memory of the war and the NOB for children: 1) the central value is the singularity of life; 2) a human being is a free and self-responsible but a collectively and globally embedded subject (of history); 3) the moral responsibility of

the newcomers towards the people who participated in the NOB and suffered war violence to live in accordance with points 1 and 2; and 4) the aim of memory politics on the NOB should be to support the descendants in the agency to implement point 3: to live in accordance with the values articulated in points 1 and 2: a human being is free, self-responsible, but collectively and globally embedded subject who values singularity of life.

The various papers that followed this programmatic introduction analysed the children's war literature of the time from different perspectives, following the premises summarised in the introduction quoted above. Slobodan Ž. Marković (1928–2015), an influential and internationally awarded professor and promoter of children's literature, developed a typology of post-war Yugoslav socialist children's war-themed novels. After positioning children's war novels in Yugoslav literary history and defining them as a subgenre of the historical novel, Marković articulated the common features of this body of literature as usually featuring nationally and socially predefined characters in war events.¹¹ In his typology, Marković focused mainly on the position of the main characters (typically children) in the depicted war events. In the first group, he saw children's characters directly taking part in war events within the framework of military formations.¹² In the second group, he identified works that depicted war events beyond immediate armed battles, in which the main characters (gradually) actively supported the NOB and the revolution in other ways.¹³ He also identified a third group, to which he largely denied artistic quality, which portrayed characters in and before war events, but in such a way that the characters did not take sides and were portrayed as passive bystanders.¹⁴ In his analysis, Marković also pointed to the depiction of the opponents (Nazis, fascist occupiers and their collaborators) as "crippled, physically and spiritually impoverished", noting that some works took this to an absurd extreme.¹⁵ In addition, Marković also noted that the plots of children's war novels, especially in the first group, often recounted an adventure, while in the works of the second group, the characters underwent a development, mostly in terms of growing

11 Slobodan Ž. Marković, "Ratna tema i junaci u romanima za decu koji govore o narodnojoslobodilačkoj borbi," in *IV. Festival Kurirček Maribor 1966*, 22.

12 Marković mentions the following authors; their main works, to which Marković probably referred to, are: Tone Seliškar's *Tovariši: Povest partizanske zvestobe* and *Zmagali bomo! reportaže s pohodov 18. Divizije*, both from 1946, *Mule* (1949) and *Liščki* (1950); Branko Čopić's *Patroladžija čiča Bora*, which Čopić wrote and published during the war, *Priče partizanke* (1946) and *Pionirska trilogija* (1964) with the works *Orlovi rano lete*, *Slavno vojevanje* and *Bitka u zlatmoh planini* and Dušan Kostić's *Gluha pećina* (1956) and *Sutjeska* (1958). Slobodan Ž. Marković, "Ratna tema i junaci u romanima za decu koji govore o narodnojoslobodilačkoj borbi," 25.

13 Here he mentions *Modri prozori* by Danko Oblak (1958); *Dečaci sa trouglastog trga* (1946) by Mirko Petrović and *Volšebnost samrče* (1952) by Vančo Nikoleski. Slobodan Ž. Marković, "Ratna tema i junaci u romanima za decu koji govore o narodnojoslobodilačkoj borbi," 25.

14 As an example of such a work, albeit with certain caveats, he points out *Na času istorije* (1963) by the controversial Ljubiša Manojlović, editor-in-chief of the satirical newspaper *Jež*, who reaped criticism and was excluded from the Communist Party in 1968 due to writings in *Knjževne novine*, the journal of the Serbian Writers' Association. Slobodan Ž. Marković, "Ratna tema i junaci u romanima za decu koji govore o narodnojoslobodilačkoj borbi," 26.

15 *Ibid.*, 27.

10 *IV. Festival Kurirček Maribor 1966*, s.p. [introduction].

agency (and actively joining the resistance).¹⁶ Marković's observations continue to resonate in more recent literature, even if no direct reference has been made to his work.

In her comparative study of children's war literature in Croatia, Dubravka Zima turns to two bodies of literature from the history of Croatian children's literature: works on the NOB (1941–1945) and on the post-Yugoslav war in Croatia (1991–1995), one of the wars that brutally completed the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. In the introduction, Zima points out a common feature of the two corpora: "[...] in Croatian children's literature, war is (for the most part) not understood as a social phenomenon, but as a series of terrible events and as an all-encompassing, unwanted evil, as a reality in children's lives that is difficult to understand, cruel, merciless [...]"¹⁷ The question of the perspective of war, of presenting it "as a social phenomenon" or "as an all-encompassing, unwanted evil", is necessarily a question of the position from which war is experienced and depicted. Thus, Zima pays particular attention to narrative instances¹⁸ and develops a twofold typology of the corpora: works of the first type depict war from the point of view of children, focusing on the inner life of the child character and "[...] the tendency to transform the incomprehensible into at least partially comprehensible [...]"¹⁹ Zima observes that in these works, it is mainly the depiction of children's everyday life during the war that makes the children's characters come of age.²⁰ She also notes in these narratives "[...] the absence or at least the weakening of self-censorship [...]"²¹ The works in the second group present war from the adult point of view, as a constituted, stylised and schematised narrative space for "war as an adventure", in which child characters are constituted according to their functions in the plot, in which they play an active role.²² In these works, Zima sees an "[...] ideologised discourse [...]" and notes that "these two types of narrative instances are usually combined".²³

The active participation of child characters in the depicted war events, in the sense of "coming of age" or "war as an adventure", is one of the objections of recent scholarship on Yugoslav socialist children's war literature. Dara Šljukić, who has analysed the recent academic reception of children's literature on the NOB, suggests that such readings employ

a certain epistemic gesture of distancing from a specific period of history – socialism – and its characteristic politics of childhood, contrasted to the post-socialist rise of romanticised ideas of childhood.²⁴

The question of (children's) agency in times of war was also addressed by Danko Oblak (1921–1998), an acclaimed children's author, editor and Partisan, at the aforementioned *Kurirček* festival in 1966. Based on the observation that children are particularly curious about "war as an adventure", he posed the question of how to present the war to children beyond "black and white" representations: "[...] should the NOB in the eyes of children be a true story, or a testimony to heroism, or perhaps a simplified history?"²⁵ He illustrated his dilemma with a story about his friendship with a young man of Slavic origin whom he had met in Vienna. He met the "soft-hearted anti-fascist forced into a fascist uniform" again as a prisoner of war, captured by the Partisans on the Srem front, where Oblak served as a translator. In this difficult situation, the prisoner, who recognised the translator as his friend, didn't reveal their acquaintance to keep the translator out of trouble at the cost of his own life.

After all, haven't we reduced our revolution to battles, little couriers, heroes, war tricks? In other words, to a "dry" war. But the revolution, as we know, was not just a war; it was the creation of something new, the first forms of people's government were created in it, and not everyone was "white" or "black" in it, a revolution (and, after all, every war) is a very complex process of events and human destinies, not everyone who is with us is absolutely "good" and all the others are absolutely (as individuals) evil.

In the historical entity, it is clear that the enemy is evil because it is in the service of reaction, but this does not mean that every individual on the enemy's side is a hardened fascist and murderer... It is a strange combination of fates, and for the writer, I think, the historical truth is not true enough, simply because he is not writing history but fiction, which should be "subtle" and sensitive to the problems and details of life.²⁶

Oblak concluded that children's war literature, regardless of the importance of respecting the role of "couriers", lacks the representation of a variety of people who were involved in the revolution (from "serious fighters, peasant women and shepherdesses", "heroic

¹⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁷ Dubravka Zima, "Hrvatska dječja književnost o ratu," 84.

¹⁸ Dubravka Zima discusses narrative instances as a juncture between who sees and experiences (narrative perspective or focalisation), who speaks and when (narrator and time of narration). Here, Dubravka Zima observes two different approaches, with the narrative instance being located in children at war or in adults. For the narrations where narrative instances are located in children, Zima notes the tendency of bringing closer something which is incomprehensible, the focus on everyday life and how war affects children's lives. In the narrations where the narrative instance is located in adults, Zima observes the trend of "[...] ideologisation of discourse, schematism, [and] children's characters with function". Dubravka Zima, "Hrvatska dječja književnost o ratu," 84.

¹⁹ Ibid., 84.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Dara Šljukić, "Savremena recepcija romana za decu koji tematizuju NOB," in *Rat iz dečje perspective*, edited by Nada Bobičić (Belgrade: Udruženje Radnik, 2018), 63, 64, 67, 68. Cf. also Liljana, Burcar, *Novi val nedolžnosti v otroški literaturi* (Ljubljana: Sophia, 2007).

²⁵ Danko Oblak, "Danko Oblak – književnik. Zagreb," in *IV. Festival Kurirček Maribor 1966*, 35.

²⁶ Ibid.

commanders as well as political thinkers”).²⁷ Oblak’s arguments received support from his fellow writer, the abovementioned Dragan Lukić, who described the festival *Kurirček*, even if its main aim was keeping the memory of war alive, as an “anti-war manifestation”.²⁸ Lukić appealed to producers to look for a “third dimension”, for people “pushed into war”.²⁹ Lukić admitted that younger children probably wouldn’t understand the complicated relationship between necessity and agency in war, but stressed the responsibility of handing over this position to older children, as the only responsible position towards war, and concluded by voicing his wish for the festival’s symposia to become more professional and active in terms of canonisation processes.³⁰

“What was it like when I was little?”

*I will tell you stories, but I will never be able to tell you everything.
Human language is too poor to paint the sea of evil and the magical
power of hope that nourished us.*³¹

Kristina Brenk’s collection of stories, *Ko si bil majhen* [When You Were Little], opens the “third dimension” in the depiction of war that Danko Oblak and Dragan Lukić called for. The stories were written in 1950 but were not published until 1962/63 and 1964, respectively. Kristina Brenk (1911–2009) was a children’s author and an influential editor for many years at the central children’s publishing house in Slovenia, Mladinska knjiga.³² The reasons why the stories waited more than a decade to be published may have lain in the changing memory politics on the NOB.

Brenk, who had a doctorate in education and psychology, worked as a journalist and children’s author before the war. During the war, she joined the resistance organisation Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda (Liberation Front of the Slovene Nation), founded

in 1941, where she acted as a courier for the influential pre-war communist, Comintern member and writer Lovro Kuhar, alias Prežihov Voranc (1893–1950).³³ After Kuhar was betrayed, arrested and sent to a concentration camp (Sachsenhausen and later Mauthausen), Kristina Brenk was imprisoned. In prison, Brenk gave birth to her first son, Klas, whom she raised herself during the war and whom she addresses in her autobiographical stories, *Ko si bil majhen*.



Illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec for “Ko si bil majhen” by Kristina Brenk, *Ciciban* 18, no. 1 (1962/63): 20.

The stories first appeared in the form of 10 illustrated (and sometimes edited) flash fiction stories [črtica], aimed at younger children, in the central Slovenian children’s magazine *Ciciban* in 1962/63. A year later, in 1964, the stories were published again, now as an integral illustrated version of 35 stories, by the Borec publishing house in the children’s edition of *Kurirčkova knjižica*, which specialised in works on NOB. In the integral version,

27 Danko Oblak, “Danko Oblak – književnik. Zagreb,” 38, 39. Seventeen years later, at the symposium of the XX Kurirček festival, Oblak again lamented the predominance of the courier figure, as well as that children, when writing on NOB, idealised the pre-war time of peace as a time of freedom and couldn’t grasp the revolutionary and class dimension of the NOB and its achievements. Danko Oblak, “Preteklost: iluzije ali zmote?,” in *Sledovi revolucije v umetnosti za otroke in mladino. 20 let festivala Kurirček* (Maribor: Festival Kurirček, 1983), 60.

28 Dragan Lukić, “Dragan Lukić – književnik. Beograd,” 49.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 50.

31 Kristina Brenk, *Ko si bil majhen* (Ljubljana: Borec, 1964), 9.

32 Mladinska knjiga was founded by the agitprop of Zveza komunistične mladine Slovenije [League of the Communist Youth in Slovenia] in June 1945, and Kristina Brenk was a member of the founding committee. Cf. Katja Kobolt, “Confronting (Post-)War Precariousness and Precarity: Socialist Yugoslav Literature for Children,” *International Research in Children’s Literature*, 17(3)/2024, 306–320.

33 *Draga Kristina*, edited by Andrej Ilc (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2021).

the stories on NOB are embedded in a background story on the storytelling event, where a son asks his mother to tell him about different facts of life, ranging from why water runs, how mountains grow and where he comes from, indicating an extradiegetic level.

Ko si bil majhen – Ciciban

The first of the 10 stories published in the *Ciciban* magazine is set during the NOB. In a homodiegetic narrative voice, it tells of a mother smuggling revolvers to the Partisans in a pram under her young son: “When you were little ... you also helped the Partisans”.³⁴ The boy’s excitement over a “real gun” that his mother smuggled to the Partisans with his help is reinforced by the mother’s precise narration of the real names of the streets in Ljubljana they walked through, creating a proximity between the narrated and the narrative time-space on the one hand and the level of implied readership – children in Slovenia – on the other. The boy’s excitement and the beauty of the spring in which the event takes place are contrasted with the mother’s distress over the event:

It was spring, and the acacias were glowing as they had done in the days of freedom. It was spring, and in me, who carried the revolver under your pillow, there was a plea:

– That no living man should ever kill another man again.

My hands trembled as I unwrapped the nappy and handed over the cold, cold, deadly barrel.³⁵

However, in Ančka Gošnik Godec’s realistic black-and-white ink drawing, the mother’s face reflects no distress. The portrait of the mother shows her as a cunning agent, looking around suspiciously. The illustration obviously reflects the boy’s emotional perspective of the events as an adventure. Yet, the perspective of “war as an adventure” is, on the textual level only, broken by the mother’s distress: it is a killing war, and she has no other (moral) option but to support the killing.

This story is followed (in both editions) by the story of how a street in Ljubljana, Ulica talcev [Hostage Street], got its name. In this street, on 13 October 1942, 24 civilian hostages were shot by the fascists.³⁶ The mother explains how “the blood flowed down the

street like a trickle. The warm, red blood of living people”.³⁷ The story juxtaposes the horror of the event, the unease the narrator has felt ever since, knowing that one day she will have to tell her son about the terrible event, with the image of the baby-son, content in his pram. This time, the illustration by Ančka Gošnik Godec gives a perspective in line with the whole narrative: the boy’s face is highlighted, smiling happily from the pram towards the implied observer, while the mother, pushing the pram, looks thoughtfully in front of her. It could be a picture of any sad mother and happy child, anywhere, anytime. There are no clues in the picture that there is a war going on and that a mother is walking her child down a street where people have just been killed. The vagueness of the image underlines the horror of the event.

The third story in the *Ciciban* series shows the background of the narrative event: the narrative and narrated time are synchronised in the indefinite present of the narrative, in which the mother asks her son to stop asking what it was like when he was a child. The mother contrasts her wish that “there will never be another war like the one when you were little” with her son’s wishes for a bicycle, a ball, chocolate...³⁸ The perspective of the event in the black-and-white ink illustration, this time by Lidija Osterc, corresponds to the perspective of the homodiegetic narrator. The distraught mother is holding her happy child in front of a fractured, cubist landscape of hills, a stylised street and a bicycle with a balloon, a chocolate and a ball.

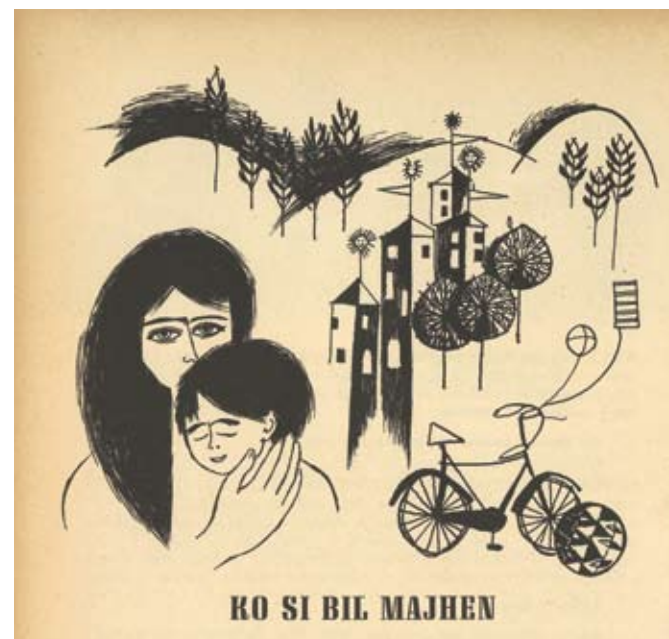


Illustration by Lidija Osterc for “Ko si bil majhen” by Kristina Brenk, *Ciciban* 18, no. 3 (1962/63), 76.

³⁴ Kristina Brenk, “Ko si bil majhen”, *Ciciban* 18, no. 1 (1962/63): 20.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The story mentions 30 killed hostages.

³⁷ Kristina Brenk, “Ko si bil majhen”, *Ciciban* 18, no. 2 (1962/63): 48.

³⁸ Ibid., 76.

The following story, the fourth in the series, goes back to the time of NOB. It deals with the otherness of wartime, when the mother could not sing lullabies to her young son because people were imprisoned and starved in camps and bombers flew over the city. The mother explains to her son what death camps were, where people were imprisoned and tortured. Lidija Osterc's cubist black-and-white illustration shows a town overflowed by bombers, grim and depersonalised, and a concentration camp with a watchtower. This is the only illustration in the series that does not feature a child, the character listening to the stories.

The stories that follow are about tired Partisans in the forest, the boy's grandmother, who was imprisoned for providing food to the Partisans, a father who defected from Italian captivity to the Partisans, retreats to the cellar during drum attacks, the end of the war and the return of the father the child had not known. Lidija Osterc's illustrations are linear and abstract, with the motif of a forest, which the artist repeated in the 1964 integral version she illustrated. The last, tenth story in the *Ciciban* series is about Prežihov Voranc's visit after his release from the concentration camp:

When you were little ...

The writer Prežihov Voranc returned from a German concentration camp. Dressed in a dark-blue worker's uniform, he halted between the doors when he came to visit us. I extended my hand in greeting and invited him to step over the threshold. He walked to the window, lifted you over the toys and pressed your flushed cheeks against his grey-white face. May you never know war, my son.

He fell silent, and in that silence, I was gripped by fear and doubt: What if all this misery was for nothing?

Prežih remained silent, his blue eyes fixed on the hills of Krim. In the room above us, his wish for all the people of the world lived on:

... never to know war, my son.³⁹

The story, quoted here in full, was again illustrated by Ančka Gošnik Godec, with a child sitting on the floor surrounded by toys and looking up at the character addressing him, Prežihov Voranc, an adult who has experienced the horrors of war.

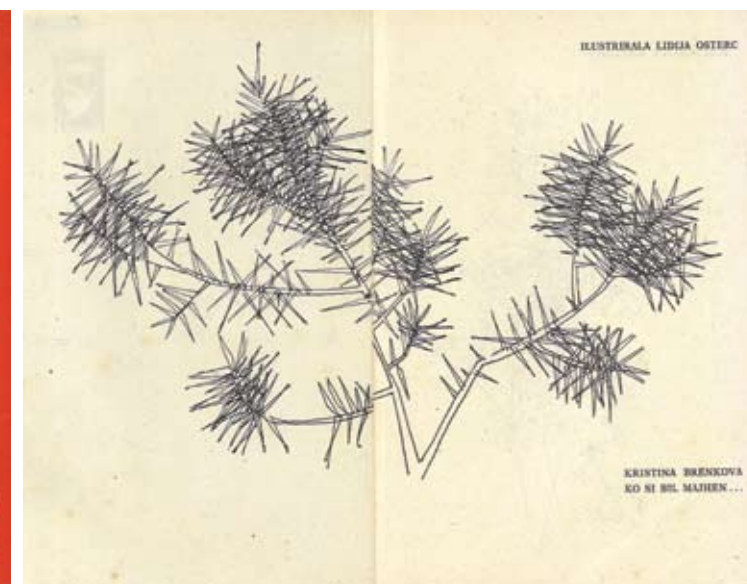
Ko si bil majhen – integral version

The red cover of the 1964 integral version of the stories *Ko si bil majhen*, printed as a small booklet with black-and-white ink illustrations, features a composition of line drawings of trees in a forest extending from the cover to the back. The endpaper features a drawing of a plant with a spiky structure, followed by various motifs of wildflowers and grasses. The spiky structure is repeated inside the book on a blank page and again as the final illustration.

In the stories about Partisans on the Krim mountain, where the boy's father was a Partisan, the forest motif is repeated, and when the story is about Partisans in winter, the illustration depicts snowflakes.

On Krim, where there were Partisans and your father among them, the dusk was aglow, and I wished so much for you that you would never experience war again, that people in this world would be able to shape their short lives without unjust violence. And will your wish come true, mum?

One man's wish is too small to be fulfilled as it should be.⁴⁰



Book cover and an illustration by Lidija Osterc for "Ko si bil majhen" by Kristina Brenk (Ljubljana: Borec, 1964).

³⁹ Ibid., 272.

⁴⁰ Kristina Brenk, *Ko si bil majhen* (Ljubljana: Borec, 1964), 28.

Conclusion

Going back to *Kurirček's* premise that the NOB's memory politics should be centred on a "human being" and that children's war literature and culture should help children to "value and measure their own freedom within the boundaries of the wider community, within the framework of free humanity",⁴¹ Kristina Brenk's stories follow this postulate. In addition, the stories incorporate this postulate by insisting on what Dragan Lukić, alongside Danko Oblak, called the "third dimension" in representations of war.⁴² The *Ko si bil majhen* stories depict the boy's perception of war events as an adventure. However, the act of listening to his mother's war stories opens up the boy's perception of war as a horror that should never be repeated. Thus, it is listening to the war stories that allows the boy a certain "coming of age" in relation to war. If we apply Slobodan Ž. Marković's and Dubravka Zima's typologies of children's war novels to Brenk's collection, these stories turn out to be a synthetic genre combining both types: "war as an adventure" and "war as coming of age" of child characters.

In the stories published in *Ciciban*, the illustrations by Ančka Gošnik Godec and Lidija Osterc usually reflect the mother's perspective on the war. The illustrations in the integral version of the stories, published in 1964 and illustrated by Lidija Osterc, add a refined visual concept to the edition. The illustrations allude not only to the fact that peace is not given but must be fought for – the recurring leitmotif of the spinose structure – but also to the beauty and right of all life: the illustrations of wildflowers. The stories and illustrations in both editions of *Ko si bil majhen* do not present war and killing as an exciting adventure, but as an appeal to respect all life in its singularity. The methods of war (arrests, killing of civilians, death camps) are portrayed truthfully, and resistance to "the horrors that wretched tyrants inflict on the sane in order to wield their power" is presented as a moral obligation.⁴³

In the context of the discussions on the aims, objectives and methods of the past Yugoslav socialist memory politics of war in children's culture, the works analysed, as well as the historical professional discourses on children's memory politics of the war, show that Yugoslav socialist children's war literature and culture moved towards what Michael Rothberg calls multidirectional memory. The memory of the NOB in Yugoslav socialist children's war literature and culture functioned productively. It did not represent an "ideologised monolith" but was rather a dialogical process geared towards "unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity".⁴⁴ Moreover, Yugoslav socialist children's war literature,

41 IV. Festival *Kurirček Maribor 1966*, s.p. [introduction].

42 Dragan Lukić, "Dragan Lukić – književnik. Beograd," 49.

43 Kristina Brenk, *Ko si bil majhen* (Ljubljana: Borec, 1964), 25.

44 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 19.

together with other records of Partisan art and culture, which Gal Kirn proposed to conceptualise as a "counter-archive", should be regarded as a "surplus", as a "revolutionary reminder that, despite its singular past, the event still has effects and remains open to, or even opens the doors to, an emancipatory future".⁴⁵

Summary

The chapter focuses on the debates surrounding a central theme in Yugoslav socialist children's literature and culture – the Second World War and, in particular, the Peoples' Liberation Struggle (NOB, 1941–1945). It pays particular attention to the 1960s, or the period of the so-called "floating gap", when the memories of contemporary witnesses of the war began to overlap significantly with the mediated representations of the war. Against the background of the main ideological pillars of memory politics of war and the debates at the *Kurirček* festival (Maribor, Slovenia, 1963–1992), the chapter focuses on two collections of stories by the children's author and long-standing editor of children's literature Kristina Brenk *Ko si bil majhen* [When You Were Little], published in 1962/63 and 1964, respectively. Using narratological and multimodal analysis, the chapter contextualises these stories within the Yugoslav socialist memory politics of war. Both the critical debates and the stories analysed reveal the Yugoslav socialist memory politics of war for children as a productive and dialogical process and open up the corpus of Yugoslav children's war literature to a "counter-archive" which, as Gal Kirn suggests, articulates a surplus for rethinking "the conditions of the expected protocols of commemoration of the past" in order to imagine "a different future".⁴⁶

45 Gal Kirn, *The Partisan Counter-Archive*, 247.

46 Ibid., 58.

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