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THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED OR PHYSICALLY DISABLED OTHER — CONFLICTING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CROATIAN AND GERMAN NOVEL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

This paper examines the issues of otherness, social exclusion and disability and the connection between these phenomena in literature for children and adolescents. Common reactions of the majority toward outsiders and individuals with disability are described as well as the negative effects those have on the affected individuals. Out of these prejudice, caused by the lack of knowledge and understanding, conflicts emerge. Hence we discuss common literary depictions of the issues otherness, outsiders and disability with special regard to the portrayal of conflicting situations in that context. Finally analyses of selected Croatian and German novels illustrate the discussed phenomena, showing differences with regard to the participation and manifestation of the conflict, as well as the conflict solution. The literary examples teach young readers understanding and critical thinking and offer examples ready to be transferred to real life situations.

Key words: otherness, outsiders, disability, conflict, prejudice, mentally challenged individuals, children's literature, adolescents' literature.

INTRODUCTION

The “other” represents a certain classification that always exists only in relation to one's own, familiar and normal. The literary portrayal of otherness is as old as literature itself, providing the readers with the presentation of a consciousness that is different from their own and enabling the experience and understanding of another's feelings and thoughts. In literature for children and young adults the other takes on a variety of forms, like another race, a different culture, language, circle of friends, abilities, sexual orientation etc. Although encounters with the other present the basic human experiences, reactions to the other are often uncertainty, distrust, fear, rejection and even hostility, all of which makes otherness a field with great conflict potential [Büker, Kammler 2003].

In children's literature the other is often manifested in characters that are stigmatized and shunned by the majority, or who exclude themselves because of the existing difference to the dominant social norm. Hence Büker and Kammler (2003) emphasize the need for appropriate, individualized presentations of the other in literature for children and adolescents, because literature for the young recipients fosters the development of the social competence of because literature understanding the other, by contributing to learning appropriate responses and developing an adequate relationship to the other, making conflicts less likely to occur in real life encounters with otherness.

This paper examines selected Croatian and German novels for children and youth that deal with the other that is either mentally challenged or physically disabled and with the conflicts that arise from that type of otherness. At the core of the relationship of the "normal" majority and the other burdened with an intellectual or physical disability is a conflict that seeks to be resolved. We chose several novels with the issues outsiders and disability at the centre of the story and analyzed the novels with special regard to causes, participants, conflict manifestations and proposed conflict solutions.

"OTHERNESS", OUTSIDERS AND DISABILITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The phenomena "otherness" and "outsiders" belong "to the earliest and most painful experiences of children" (Scheiner as cited in [Kurpjuhn 2000]), where children are actors, victims and witnesses of social exclusion. One reason of conflicts regarding exclusion is often the inconsiderate acceptance of adults' behavior and attitudes, often simply prejudice. An early childhood experience of exclusion due to otherness is e.g. the entering of a pre-established group, when coming to a new school, a new town, followed by fear of rejection (examples of which can be found in two of our analyzed works).

The motif of the other is common and popular in children's literature. Dahrendorf (as cited in Büker and [Kammler 2003]) explains it corresponds with the basic human need for admiration of something or someone that exists outside of the self on the one hand, and the need to underestimate someone or something on the other. Accordingly we can distinguish between "positive" outsiders¹ (Dahrendorf as cited in Büker and [Kammler 2003]) and "existential" outsiders (Mayer as cited in Büker and [Kammler 2003]). "Positive" or "intentional"² outsiders respond to the need of the young readers to break the rules and

norms in the process of trying out new pathways, while “existential” outsiders, whose position outside the majority was forced upon them by that majority, manifest a projection surface for the subconscious foreign within oneself and a possibility of identification for readers who are outsiders themselves.

In children’s literature the other is manifested in a variety of forms, most often portrayed through characters, children aged like the implicit reader, animals or fantasy beings that intrude the “normal world” of the child or adolescent³. The type of the outsider is manifest in characters that are stigmatized or shunned, or who seclude themselves because of the existing difference to the social norm. Norms and criteria according to which every individual is measured exist in every society, and individuals who look differently or have different/less abilities are viewed as outsiders by the “normal” majority of the society, because their bodily constitutions or their health do not fit the criteria and the general conceptions of what is “normal” [Kurpjuhn 2000]. Hence characters with disabilities belong to the type of the outsider. Nickel (2002) and Neumann (2004) identify several patterns, typical literary presentation forms of children with disabilities, some of which will be referred to in our analyses. The use of a recurring pattern is not necessarily a negative statement about the quality of a book, however authors should beware of simplified or exaggerated depictions [Neumann 2004]. Similar patterns appear in the results of Prater’s (2003) and Roth Leon’s (1997) studies, who further revealed typical conflicting situations in fiction featuring characters with specific types of disabilities. The conclusions they draw and the examples they extract as typical can just as well be applied to characters with other types of disabilities, as other studies (e.g. Sotro & Ball 2006) and the German and Croatian novels analyzed here show, which speaks of a universal view of social exclusion and the unjust treatment of individuals with disabilities.

Literature about outsiders mostly aims to encourage the readers to think about mechanisms of social exclusion. Among the most commonly used topics is precisely the process of integration of a marginalized group into the so-called “ingroup”, which often leads to conflicts. The authors intend to raise awareness within their young readers and enable the identification with characters in the subjugated position so the readers develop an understanding of the outsider’s position (Büker and Kammler 2003).

The characterization and function of characters with disabilities has been changing through time and genres. In Croatian children’s literature

characters with disabilities appear sporadically and intellectual disability is an especially rare occurrence. In German literature characters with disabilities entered the literary scene more realistically with the advance of problem-oriented children's literature in the 1970's. Problem-oriented children's literature is always about conflicts and taboos. Children are the protagonists and the issues are viewed from their perspective and according to their capacities to grasp a problem. Authors portray those problems that children can understand and relate to. Problem-oriented realistic literature had an important role in conveying taboo topics like divorce, unemployment, death, disability, outsiders, war, violence and others to young readers. The aim is to help children deal with the problems in real life. Affected children can find comfort, hope and courage to face life's problems and they are encouraged to try to change their situation. A problem of literature dealing with these difficult issues is that it cannot really attract young readers to choose such literary works on their own, because they rather read purely entertaining fiction that does not necessarily have to do with real life. Hence problem-oriented literature is procured by teachers and parents [Kurpjuhn 2000]⁴.

CONFLICT IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ABOUT DISABILITIES

Unarguably inclusion in the sense of truly living with each other is a desirable model, but it is also precisely the space where the conflict occurs, at the point of collision of the norm and the outsiders, in this case the typically developing children and the children with disabilities. According to socio-scientific theory, conflict is a social phenomenon that occurs in interpersonal relationships while embedded in the social sphere [Hasselmann 2011]. Conflict can however be understood as a way of dealing with an issue with the aim of approaching another's needs or viewpoint, whereas the problem arises only when this process of approaching the other fails to take place. Accordingly conflict must not be negative per se, but it can even have a useful function, namely signaling problems that call for action and resolution of the same, presenting a practicing field for developing a sense of appreciation of another's needs and approaching them, which can result in mutual understanding and compromise between one's own and the other's needs. The conflict solutions in the analyzed works reflect this view, as will be shown. Literature depicting children with disabilities focuses the attention on conflicting relationships and the social isolation of those children. Reactions of the majority to otherness that differs from the accepted

norms and criteria are unfortunately most often negative and the result of prejudice⁵. Since prejudice, as Neumann (2004) emphasizes, contain the three aspects, cognitive, affective and behavioral, all of these together influence an individual's or group's reactions. Prejudice is rarely rationally questioned and critically investigated; instead prejudice leads to reactions and behavior that are the result of assumed knowledge where real attributes of an individual's personality are masked by the perception of the prejudice only. Sometimes the affective aspect is too strong preventing that the prejudice is overcome by rationale. The other is shunned, denied access to common activities, termed negatively, ignored or worse attacked verbally or even physically. The mechanisms of group dynamics also offer an explanation for these negative reactions; when members of a group concur in their prejudiced opinions about an outsider it strengthens their feeling of togetherness and functions as an orientation point and steering mechanism [Neumann 2004].

Portraying these issues authors also show the reactions of the outsiders to their marginalized social status. These can basically be acceptance of the exclusion or struggle against it. Sometimes acceptance of the majority's prejudice can reach the extent, that the excluded individual believes the prejudice that others label him with. Thus the exclusion affects the development of an individual's personality negatively. The prejudice becomes self-fulfilling prophecy. The outsider encounters the majority with distrust, suspiciousness, passivity or other socially undesirable behavioral patterns. If an outsider fights the prejudice and exclusion and becomes the agitator showing offensive, destructive behavior, it is yet again a futile struggle, for the majority sees in this aggressive behavior only the confirmation of the prejudice. Worst of all, the marginalization of mentally challenged individuals causes damage to their personality, the lack of social communication and interaction impairs their social competencies and the rejection of the society influences their self-perception negatively. A child suffers even more under the consequences of social exclusion than under his disability [Kurpjuhn 2000].

Authors most often work with one of the two conflict solutions, as part of the recurring patterns: either the outsider changes and adapts to the group in which he wishes to be integrated⁶ or, more often, the group changes its' attitude toward the outsider and accepts him for what he is. In both cases the process of integration is a successful consequence of a transformation in attitudes. The conflict solutions presented in the literary works are possibilities that can be thought over, accepted, discarded or changed. As a result upcoming social conflicts can be avoided because

the readers learn to develop understanding, appraise the situation, improve their behavior and maybe correct that of others. If there is no concrete solution, it should at least be indicated, so that the readers can hope for it and feel optimistic and content at the end of reading. Most authors comply with this need of their young readers. Where there is no happy ending, the line is blurred between children's and adolescents' literature. In that case the ending is most often left open, so that the readers are encouraged to find a solution themselves, to develop critical thinking and come up with possible results for the problems depicted. In that manner problem-oriented literature contributes to the experience of conflicts, to conflict solutions and the development of sensitivity, solidarity, responsibility and activism [Kurpjuhn 2000].

ANALYSES

Our analyses focus on conflicting situations featuring characters with physical or mental disabilities. The novels are examined with regard to the following questions: what is the cause of the conflict and who causes it? In order to establish the type of relationship toward characters with disabilities, we will inspect the nature of their involvement in the conflicting situations. With regard to the functions of children's literature a final factor of analysis will be the question: what is the suggested solution to the conflict, if any?

1. Conflicts caused by prejudice with no direct participation of individuals with disabilities

The Forgotten Son, or the Angel from Omorina (1989) by Miro Gavran is a novel for young adults written in the form of a diary, the subject of the diary and the narrator being the mentally challenged young man Mislav, an "existential" outsider. Turning 20 years of age, he returns from the urban surroundings, where he spent most of his life in a mental institution, to his family living in a rural area. Mislav is not a conflicting personality but his return home causes many conflicts within the family. Conflict initially occurs because Mislav's existence was concealed from his younger brother and sister. The mother as a representative of petit bourgeois, narrow minded mentality and her fear of the reactions of her provincial surroundings is the main reason why she placed her son in an institution and kept silent about his existence. She wanted to protect her "normal" children and ensure a "normal" life for them. With Mislav's return the parents enter into conflict with the younger children who cannot understand the parents' actions, but the brother and sister also encounter conflicting situations with their peers because of their

brother suffering from intellectual disability. Hence problems are also caused by the environment in which prejudice prevails to the extent that Mislav's return stigmatizes the family.

The relationship with the mentally challenged "other" in this novel can be read as lack of understanding, misconceptions, underestimation, and occasionally scorn [Mayer, Živković Zebec, 2013]. This behavior can be observed inside the family and in the rural milieu that Mislav enters. The cause of the conflict is prejudice toward mentally challenged individuals and their assumed uselessness for the society. The lack of knowledge and the resulting prejudice are directed toward mentally challenged individuals in general, not toward Mislav personally, but they leave marks on his psyche and he feels unhappy.

The rural setting is significant as a representative of narrow minded views however young people belonging to that rural milieu show a greater acceptance of a person with intellectual disabilities than the older ones. As time passes Mislav is accepted in a group of young people and even enters a romantic relationship, but conflict arises between Mislav's girlfriend and her parents and she is forced by her father to leave the village. On her way to the "exile" she dies in a car accident. The tragic ending of the novel implies that prejudice and fear of the "other" can lead to great dangers. At the same time such an ending shows the avoidance of a conflict resolution, the characters literally try to escape the conflict. A certain hopelessness and disappointment with the society might as well be implied.

There are two examples of a recurring pattern featuring families with one disabled child and one typically developing child, where the typically developing sibling is caught up in a conflicting situation due to disability and becomes an outsider intentionally or is outcast by the majority [Kurpjuhn 2000].

The first example is *Drachenflügel* by Renate Welsh (1st ed. 1988, translated into English in 1993 as *A different kind of brother*). The story is about the eleven-year-old girl Anne, whose older brother Jakob suffers from severe physical and mental disability. The story focuses on Anne and her intentional isolation as a result of her experiencing other people's negative reactions to her brother's disability like sympathy, pity („Pity, disgusting, sticky pity“ [p. 47]), curiosity showing in stares or abhorrence showing in strained looking away, from which she concludes that everybody feels this way about him. The experience of the family in encounters with extended family members, neighbors, foreigners, from which her mother also shies away, only teach Anne that disability

equals exclusion. In defiance Anne believes she needs nobody, but she increasingly suffers from the self-inflicted ostracism. „The whole room was full of loneliness, it consumed all the air and left none for her to breathe“ [p. 83]. The conflict is carried out on the internal level in her thoughts. If somebody asks about Jakob, Anne gets offensive and provocative. The reactions of others to disability have shaped her personality in a negative way [cf. Kurpjuhn 2000] so Anne reacts to others with distrust and a (passive) aggressive behavior. She is the prejudiced one and as a consequence of that she enters into a conflict with the girl Lea, automatically ascribing her negative attitudes toward disability. The conflict is manifested only as Anne’s inner conflict from which she suffers, unable to handle the situation.

The end of the story presents the culmination of the conflict and its resolution when Anne and Lea finally talk it over. Lea tries to show Anne that people do not know how to react and that their attitudes must not be negative. “You do not want them to stare and you do not want them to look away. You do not want them to ask and you do not want them to keep silent. What do you want? — Anne shrugged... — They should simply behave normally. — Lea nodded — But normal is also to look and to ask” [p. 101]. Hence the real problem, the cause of the conflict is the lack of communication on both sides and prejudice that arises as a consequence of it. The solution is a suggestion: one must speak about disability so that reactions can reach the level of normality that Anne wishes for. The “normal world” should develop appropriate reactions and the “outsider world” should give them a chance. An exchange of thoughts and feelings could ideally lead to satisfaction on both sides.

Another literary example following the pattern of a sibling of a disabled person is Stefan Gemmel’s *Rolf’s Geheimnis* (4th ed. 2008). The first-person narrator Sebastian, a 12-year-old boy becomes a helper-figure for the social outcast Rolf, whose younger brother Thomas suffers from physical and mental disability. The conflict arises between Sebastian, who steps up for Rolf, and three other children from the class. The reason of the conflict superficially appears to be having an opinion that differs from that of the group. The outsider, Rolf, avoids conflict, he accepts his outsider position very passively, though he is sad about it. “I’m already used to it” [p. 22]. Sebastian engages in the conflict which even escalates to the point of physical confrontation. Not only does Sebastian exonerate Rolf of social isolation by becoming his friend, he also makes the matter “public” by taking Thomas to school so that everybody can get to know him and develop understanding for Rolf. The children in the class, upon

meeting Thomas, ask questions that show their inexperience with disability, but they quickly accept Thomas. Neumann refers to sources from the late 1980s and early 1990s saying that for many children literature presents the first encounter with disability. Apparently this is also what the author Gemmel had in mind, for the story reflects this attitude through the instantly working conflict solution where integration is the consequence. A pedagogue, the teacher, is the mediator in this encounter, which reflects a common pattern. Their role is to help change the attitude of the excluding group and to bring about integration with the help of conversations and critical revision of attitudes and prejudice [Kurpjuhn 2000]. The solution is, similarly to the one proposed in *Drachenflügel*, an open conversation and the provision of information about disability to prevent unfounded prejudice. It works on the level of the plot, however transferred into the real world, the solution is too smooth and integration reached too easily, so the level of realism is a weakness of this story.

2. Conflicts caused by prejudice with the participation of individuals with disabilities

The next example shows defiance on the side of the author to comply with common expectations of books in terms of happy endings. *Eine wunderbare Liebe* (1996) enables the protagonist, the 9-year-old Mona, a preliminary outsider, being the new kid on the block and in school, to experience otherness in form of disability. It is an experience which she enters naively, with childish innocence to discover a friendship. It's summer break and the only one Mona gets to know in her new neighborhood is Marlon, who is in eighth grade already. Mona notices peculiarities about him, most of all his clumsiness and his capriciousness and increasingly begins to notice that he does not understand some things, like her reactions to his strange behavior or that he seems to forget about their falling out. It becomes an inner conflict for her: "First she has to figure something out. Only she does not know what exactly" [p. 34]. His mental disability is invisible for her. The conflicting situations between them arise due to his incapability to grasp some things and behave like typically developing children. At the same time this otherness, difference from "normal" boys his age is also his strength and what Mona likes about him. The gaps of her understanding the reasons for his behavior she fills with wishful thinking and attributes him positive qualities, like an understanding, forgiving character and good-naturedness. But when Mona encounters Marlon in company of her new friends, "she gets the answer, she maybe knew all along": "Oh God, there's the idiot!.. He is crackbrained.... He takes the short bus to school". And "Mona

feels something collapse within her” [p. 70]. Is it disappointment? Is it sadness, for him, for their friendship? She does not defend him, instead she assumes the behavior of everybody else due to peer pressure, group dynamics and the unwritten laws of our societies. If she did otherwise, she would become the outsider along with him, so out of self-preservation she chooses the position of the majority.

We can infer from his aggressiveness on hearing the trigger word “idiot” that Marlon is aware of his status as outsider. When other children are hostile toward him, calling him names, ignoring and fearing him, in his defense he gets aggressive. That is how the hostility toward his disability shapes his personality in a negative manner. The conflict between him and the society becomes the conflict between him and Mona. And it remains existent, no solution is offered. Mona and Marlon had a chance, but the reality crushed it. Precisely the afterword, an imaginary conversation between the author and a young reader who complains about the sad ending, addresses the issue of the realism in children’s books and also the effect they have on readers. The author argues that books must correspond to reality, whereas the young reader wishes for a happy ending, admitting at the same time that it would not be realistic. So we find a realistic, if probably pessimistic conclusion, but one that challenges the young readers to critically revise their attitudes and perhaps come up with a solution.

In the novel by Nada Iveljić *Želiš li vidjeti bijele labudove?* (1998) the other is manifest in the young man Luka wounded in the homeland war and the girl Dunja who lost one leg because of a tumor. Though both find themselves in similar situations and have the same physical disability, they do not accept their disability the same way. Luka cannot reconcile with his situation and his otherness can be termed intra-subjective. The conflict is within him with regard to the difficult situation he must cope with, as well as in his relationships with his environment. By perceiving himself as “the other” he secludes himself from society and avoids contact with everyone in his vicinity. Some people try to help him but they approach him with pity which does not help him overcome his problem because he will not take on the identity of a victim.

The disability of the girl Dunja is invisible at the beginning. Her disability causes no conflict nor does she engage in conflicting situations with others. She is the only person that establishes a connection to Luka and she shows no pity for him. Only she appears honest and does not fear Luka’s “otherness” because she is “the other” herself. When Luka finds out about Dunja’s disability he begins to perceive her as “the other”,

i.e. look upon her with compassion. With the help of a doctor he realizes that his perception of Dunja's situation is precisely the reaction of his environment toward him, which he was annoyed by. Luka resolves the conflict within himself with the help of Dunja, hence she functions as a helper-figure in the novel contributing to the conflict resolution. Her positive behavior and optimism in spite of her severe illness teach Luka to accept himself as he is and abandon the position of "the other".

Rico, Oskar und die Tieferschatten (1st ed. 2008, translated as *The Spaghetti Detectives*), written in 2008 by Andreas Steinhöfel is a crime story featuring a main character who is mentally challenged. The 10-year-old Rico is the narrator of this story, writing it down in his diary, actually a school assignment. In spite of his learning disabilities he namely has a talent for writing, as his teacher discovers. Rico befriends the younger intellectually gifted Oskar and the two boys find themselves in an adventurous story tracking down and exposing a child kidnapper.

Rico apparently suffers from a type of attention disorder and some learning disabilities. He describes his own disability referring to his brain as a barrel full of lottery balls bouncing about wildly when he cannot grasp something. Despite the humorous tone, the humor being achieved precisely through Rico's "otherness", i.e. his intellectual difficulties that affect a particularity of his speech and style, and the adventure story, there are occurrences of conflict in the novel. The conflicting situations portrayed in the novel are representations of realistic situations commonly encountered by children with disabilities and they follow the common patterns as established by [Kurzjahn 2000], [Nickel 2002], [Prater 2003] and [Leon 1997]. Rico, an "existential" outsider because of his otherness, has no friends and suffers from that circumstance. The gifted Oskar who becomes his friend is however also different, his giftedness making him an outsider, too. Steinhöfel lets the young readers realize that lack of abilities and too many of them, so to speak, amount to the same problem — they manifest the "other" of a "normal" majority. Reactions to otherness, such as exclusion, scorn and ridicule are familiar to both characters. The causes of the conflicts with the society are again prejudice and absence of awareness and understanding. As to participation in the conflict, we find inner conflict in Rico. Often he ponders on what others think of him, or he is embarrassed because he cannot understand something, even vis-à-vis his mother. Conflicts with others he rather avoids. His thoughtfulness and sensitivity on the one hand make him vulnerable to the injustice he faces from society, but on the other make him a keen empathic observer. Unlike Rico, Oskar tackles conflicts that

arise from other people's prejudice, so he is an active participant in conflict resolution, for being a "know-it-all", he is aware that knowledge and information have the power to dispel prejudice.

The novel ends using a common tool in literature featuring characters with disabilities, namely a notable achievement (exposing the kidnapper) for which both outsiders, Rico and Oskar, receive respect and recognition they were otherwise lacking [cf. Prater 2003]. Such an ending is considered questionable as means of conflict resolution and integration [cf. Kurpjuhn 2000], but since the author otherwise shows a high level of sensitivity in dealing with disability, we can assume that this ending was chosen as an exciting finale of a detective story. The strength and novelty of this novel is a protagonist who is mentally challenged, but with whom the readers can identify. The identification is enabled by the highly entertaining plot and style that has the power to absorb the readers and elicit an emotional response from them. Thus the learning effects are enhanced [cf. Schulz 2014].

3. Absence/Avoidance of conflict in a situation featuring an individual with disability

One of our analyzed novels also shows the absence or rather avoidance of conflict as a result of forgiveness of the potentially conflicting situation because the person involved suffers from a disability.

In Milivoj Matošec's novel *Tiki traži Neznanca* (1st ed. 1961) a pursuit for a stranger is at the centre of the story. The Stranger calls the boy Tiki and his father on the phone and reveals to the father what Tiki does during the day. This annoys Tiki because it uncovers him leaving the house while the parents are at work, so he decides to find The Stranger. The pursuit leads to various adventures but the moment of discovery is important with regard to conflict. The Stranger is a boy with a physical disability sitting in a wheelchair. He is lonely and eager for company, which is why he started calling Tiki with the aim of making friends. His calls went wrong when he started telling on Tiki. The moment of The Stranger's discovery is a potentially conflicting situation because The Stranger was disconcerting the whole family, but the conflict is avoided because of The Stranger's disability and outsider status. The outsider in this novel is a boy aware of his status and self-conscious about his disability, lonely and eager for friendship. His disability and the social difficulties arising from it, like fear of rejection, prevent him from fulfilling his wishes. He is annoyed by reactions of compassion that people in his environment show. His disability prevents him from participating in activities that other children do, and the only contacts to the world he establishes by gazing

through the window, observing with binoculars and the phone. By The Stranger's confession of his loneliness and awareness of his otherness on his encounter with Tiki the conflict is avoided and he is accepted by Tiki as a friend, despite of the trouble he had caused him. Upon the revelation of the mysterious caller Tiki's father also decides not to engage in conflict with The Stranger and his mother because of the calls and instead makes a positive turn of the situation, but he also feels compassion for the unlucky boy, which is typical for the depiction of characters with disabilities. Here a pattern is visible, as Kurpjuhn (2000) emphasizes: most often the conflicts are resolved, the ending is positive and there is integration of the outsider into the majority group. This corresponds with the young readers' need for harmony and conflict resolution. Hence in this novel a possibly conflicting situation is resolved by becoming aware of the position of persons with disabilities and of understanding their loneliness and wish for inclusion, as well as the imperative to treat them like "normal" individuals that must not be pitied and regarded as "the other". There is a happy ending to this novel because The Stranger becomes Tiki's friend and is thus integrated into society.

CONCLUSION

Literature for children and adolescents portraying children with disabilities is mostly about the relationships with otherness, and conflict can often be found at the very heart of almost every story, because conflict occurs naturally where differences collide. This is why the focus of such literature is directed toward the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the majority, their interrelations with "non-disabled" individuals and the presentation of the possibilities of choices in their lives [Dyches, Prater 2005].

Our analyses lead to the conclusion that conflicting situations can be manifested differently with regard to the direct participation of the individuals with disabilities, their withdrawal from society and inner conflict, and through indirect participation in a conflict where the individual with a disability is the inducement of conflict for persons in their environment, most often their family. The analyzed novels confirm a common pattern of conflict resolution used in novels with the topics of outsiders and disability, namely the integration of the other in the majority by the understanding and acceptance of his otherness, thus conveying a positive behavior model to the young readers. "It is not possible to undo the organic impairment of a disability, but the disablement caused by the society can be undone. This can only happen, when every individual

learns to accept children with disabilities as full-fledged members of the society” [Neumann 2004, p. 20]. We have however also shown examples when the conflict prevails, which concurs strongly with reality and challenges the readers to critical thinking and seeking of solutions, by evoking negative feelings over the injustice of social exclusion.

Early encounters of children with disabilities and typically developing peers, be it through literature, can contribute to the inclusion of children with disabilities into the image of a complete society. The affected disabled children would thus be fostered in their self-confidence [Neumann 2004]. Children’s literature with this topic helps create a more realistic image of the world and can help change the reality for the better.

References

- ¹ The most famous one being Pippi Longstocking.
- ² As Mayer (1981) also terms this category, because in opposition to “existential” outsiders their marginalized position is voluntary and self-inflicted, cf: [Kurpjuhn 2000].
- ³ For a typology of common types of otherness cf. Büker and Kammler (2003).
- ⁴ The studies of [Prater 2000, 2003; Stelle 1999, Prater, Dyches and Johnstun 2006] conducted on US literature and that provide important insight into literary patterns, show the similarity and universality of literary procedures with regard to literature featuring characters with disabilities.
- ⁵ A study of people’s attitudes toward disabled children by Helmut von Bracken from 1970/71 is still widely referred to in specialist literature, because no other such representative study was conducted later. In 1981/1990 a group of scientists (Böttger, Gipser and Laga) conducted a similar study on teachers. Comparing the results of the two surveys, the negative attitudes are declining and the positive rising. Still, the prejudice toward mental disability is the gravest. Most common responses are compassion, otherness, curiosity, insecurity, shock, denial, abhorrence and disgust.
- ⁶ J. Kurpjuhn warns that in the case of such an assimilation, all particularities and individual attributes of the other are abandoned, the self as it used to exist is abandoned, so that a new self is created, one that is in accord with the majority and the social values and criteria expected. This is a less desirable conflict outcome [Kurpjuhn 2000].

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