



The Slovene trilogy *Alice in Crazyland* by Evald Flisar

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Abstract

The British writer Lewis Carroll exerted influence upon Slovene authors writing for young readers with his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). Contemporary Slovene writer Evald Flisar wrote his trilogy about Alice as a fantasy tale (*Alice in Crazyland*, 2008), a play (*Alice in Crazyland: an ecological farce*, 2010) and as a comic strip or graphic novel (*Alice in Potteroonia*, 2013, illustrated by P. Kovačič). His trilogy, particularly *Alice in Crazyland* (2008), reflects the philosophy of the Slovene theoretician Slavoj Žižek in his *Pathological Narcissus as a Socially Mandatory Form of Subjectivity* (1985).

Keywords: Lewis Carroll, Evald Flisar, Slavoj Žižek, *Alice in Crazyland*.

1. Lewis Carroll in Slovenia

The first books written by the British author Lewis Carroll (1832-1898) were available in Slovenia in the original in 1900: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), *The Hunting of the Shark* (1876), as well as his collected prose *The Complete works of Lewis Carroll, Introduction by Alexander Woolcott* (1900). Carroll's *Alice* was translated into Slovene three times, but a number of trivial adaptations of the text (W. Disney) were published as well.

The first Slovene translation of *Alice in Wonderland* (illustrated by John Tenniel; 1820-1914) and entitled *Alica v Deveti deželi* (1951) was done by Bogo Pregelj. *Through the Looking-Glass*, translated as *Skozi zrcalo*, was not published at the time. The second Slovene translation of *Alice in Wonderland* (*Alica v čudežni deželi*, 1969), illustrated by Arthur Rackham, was reprinted three times (1978, 1983, 1990). The translator Gitica Jakopin created a



modernized version of the original. The third Slovene translation by Miha Mohor (illustrated by John Tenniel) was published in 1999.

Lewis Carroll's letters *What He wrote to His Alices (Le kaj je pisal svojim Alicam)*, translated by Branko Gradišnik, were published in 2007. *Alice* often appeared in Slovene stage adaptations as well (*Alica v čudežni deželi* by Vito Taufer, 1986; *Alica, Alica* by Draga Potočnjak 2000, 2010; *Alica*, 2005), in adaptations for Slovene puppet theatres (*Alica iz dveh čudežnih dežel* by Petra Vidali, 2013), radio plays (*Alica v čudežni deželi: a radio play for children* by Pavel Lužan, 1992, 2000), in a number of picture books etc.

Lewis Carroll was not only translated into Slovene; he also influenced Slovene authors writing for young readers who created Slovene varieties of the original *Alice*, e.g. Milan Dekleva with his *Alice in the Computer (Alica v računalniku, 2000)* used poetry in order to present Wonderland and the Looking-Glass Land. In his poem *Alice* (1991), Boris A. Novak introduced the acrostic *Alice Pleasance Liddell*. The Slovene Writer and scholar Barbara Simoniti researched nonsense in the works of Edvard Lear and Lewis Carroll (*Nonsens*, 1997).

2. Evald Flisar

Evald Flisar (1945, Gerlinci, Slovenia), world-renowned Slovene playwright and novelist, studied English language and literature at Chiswick Polytechnic (West London Institute of Higher Education) in London, where he spent 17 years (1975–1990). Soon after his return to Slovenia he was elected president of the Slovene Writers' Association (1995–2002); since 1998 he has been editor of the *Contemporary Review (Sodobnost)*, an eminent Slovene literary magazine.¹ Evald Flisar is one of the most acknowledged and most often translated Slovene authors. In his mature creative period he began writing books for children (*Pikpokec postane svetovni prvak / Spotts Becomes a World Champion*, 2007) and young adults (*Alica v nori deželi / Alice in Crazyland*, 2008), yet a number of his books are intended for dual addressees (Beckett 1999: xii).

¹ [1] <http://www.sodobnost.com/>



3. Slavoj Žižek

Slavoj Žižek (1949, Ljubljana, Slovenia), world-renowned Slovene philosopher, discusses ideology in a number of his papers, e.g. in his famous article entitled *Pathological Narcissus as a Socially Mandatory Form of Subjectivity* (1985). Furthermore, Žižek discusses ideology as one of the central themes in his book *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (2009), concluding that global capitalism is drawing to a close due to four of its characteristics: the world ecology crisis, the unbalanced economic system, the genetic revolution, and exploding social differences. In his book *Big Ideas, Small Books (Velike ideje, male knjige)*, 2008) he discusses three kinds of violence: (1) subjective violence; (2) objective violence (discrimination, racism, hostile speech); and (3) systemic violence (the catastrophic consequences of economic and political systems).

Žižek's article on philosophy is the critical presentation of a pathological Narcissus as an individual well-suited to the permissive society as the cause of any catastrophic outcome, and as such it is relevant since it defines and classifies the character of the pathological Narcissus. Žižek is interested in the characteristics of the traditional Slovene ideology. Both Slovene intellectuals, Flisar in literature, Žižek in philosophy, discuss Slovene imagery, even though the findings of both authors surpass the Slovene chronotope, which makes their findings relevant in a broader context.

3. Alice, a trilogy

Alice as a trilogy met with success in Slovenia, while the graphic novel *Alice in Potteroonia (Alica v Potteruniji)* was listed as one of 200 best books for children and young adults in *The White Raven International Catalogue*², 2014, and exhibited at the Bologna and Frankfurt book fairs.

²[2] <http://www.ijb.de/spezialbibliothek/white-ravens-2014/single/article/slovenian-slovenia/163.html>

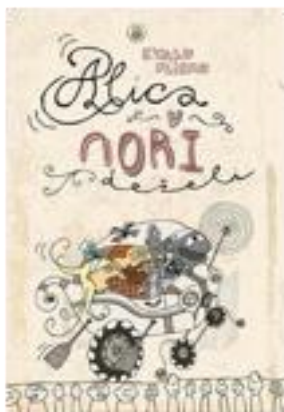


Table 1: *Alice in Crazyland / Alica v nori deželi*, 2008 (novel)

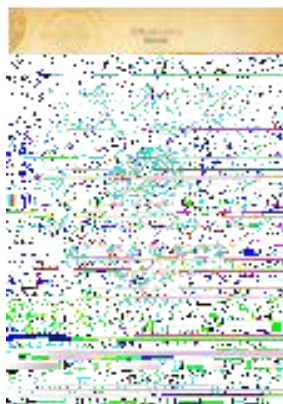


Table 2: *Alice in Crazyland: An Ecological Farce / Alica v nori deželi: ekološka farsa*, 2010 (play)



Table 1: *Alice in Potteroonia / Alica v Poteruniji*, 2013 (comic)

4. Alice in Crazyland (2008)

Alice in Crazyland (*Alica v nori deželi*, 2008) is a fantasy tale (112 pages) made up of twenty chapters. The book is intended for young readers, even though the text itself is intended for children and the context for grown-ups (Seifert 2006: 45). The heroine and title character is the 12-year-old Alice Jumper, a girl with three bachelor degrees who wants to get her doctor's degree before she's 15. The main grown-up character is the girl's uncle, Professor Dr. Ljubo Jumper. The characters in the secondary chronotope, i.e. the island state of Potteroonia with its capital Pottington, are as follows: Potter Pots, Potterola, Potterspot, Potteroonko, Pottiela, Pottpot, Pottsy-Wottsy and the Potteroonians, the citizens of Potteroonia as a collective character. There are two additional characters in the secondary chronotope, the Red Officer and the Blue Officer, who continue to climb up the army hierarchy all through the story. Alice, who is 12, and her uncle Jumper from the primary time and place (Lake Valley, Slovenia, Mt. Triglav) drop into a Bermuda triangle whirlpool, suddenly landing in the secondary chronotope, in a country called Potteroonia. They arrive there *in medias res*, at a time when two presidents, Potterspot and Potter Potts, change places. Their closest advisers are developing conspiracy theories (Pottiela, Potteroonko, Pottpot and others). The army is in favour of government changes (the Blue Officer and the Red Officer). The president with his detonator and his crazy ideas, favoured by the Potteroonians, goes from systematically silencing his citizens by breaking clay pots (pottis) on their heads to destroying the country in a film-like ending. The many conspiracy theories force all the officials to get their own detonators, thus contributing to



the Apocalypse. Alice and Uncle Jumper are the only survivors: they exit the secondary chronotope, using a prefabricated lifebelt. The island of Potteroonia meets with the same end as Atlantis. In the end, after the catastrophe, the two survivors deliberate on a possible trip to Ljubljana or some other such place. Alice realizes that Potteroonia seems to have been the worst catastrophe among her many adventures (reference to Carroll's books). Uncle Jumper tells her that the catastrophe was her fault because she is a grown-up person with three bachelor degrees, but first of all because she is too old to listen to fairy tales.

Alice (Jumper), aged 12, is a typical subversive heroine: she is not bashful or sweet but rather a ready-witted brave explorer, assistant to Professor Jumper. She is critical of everybody around her, including the grown-ups.

A researcher must not ignore the perfect opportunity to explore the social rituals of an unknown and almost unbelievable civilization; she may be able to use the material for her doctor's thesis which she is set upon completing before she is fifteen.

(Flisar 2008: 55)

Flisar's Alice keeps growing while Uncle Jumper, Prof. Ljubo Jumper, doctor of economy and world-renowned economic advisor, keeps shrinking.

Namely, he has attained that special advanced age when the discs between human vertebrae start to thin and human heads get closer and closer to the soles.

(Flisar 2008: 3)

Primary and secondary chronotopes

The primary world is the real world (Lake Valley, Congressional Square, Ljubljana, Rožnik, Mt. Triglav), even if it is a little remote (the Caribbeans, the Sahara, Tobago, Trinidad); the transition between the real world and the fantasy world is represented by two main characters falling into a submarine passage in the Bermuda Triangle. The secondary world of Potteroonia, an island state with its capital Pottington and its citizens, the Potteroonians, ultimately ends the same way as the mythical Atlantis. Alice, the girl, is always denoted by her name, while her uncle is denoted by his last name Jumper and by other attributes (professor, uncle; also, Potteroonian minister of economy). The boundary between the primary and secondary world resembles Alice's fall into a rabbit hole in Carroll's book, the difference stressed by the fact that Alice and Uncle Jumper fall into a submarine abyss:



"Uncle," said Alice when she and the professor were left alone, "I believe we have fallen into a submarine abyss in the Bermuda Triangle. We fell into a world so unreal that it seems not to exist at all!"

(Flisar 2008: 25)

The secondary world where Alice and Uncle Jumper end up is an island, or better, a crazy land called Potteroonia that exists in isolation, parallel to the real world. All the citizens of Potteroonia have similar names prefixed by *pot-*. There are only two characters, the Red Officer and the Blue Officer, that have functional names, which symbolizes the function of the army in society and the impersonal quality of individual people:

"The Potterroonians, so to say, have no life worth living. In the morning, off they go to the Potterplant with its conveyor belts where potti products are assembled, then to the stores where they buy new potti products, then they proceed to the shattershop where they break potti products; thereupon they sit in front of TV sets and listen to the reports on the shortage of potshards for supporting pillars, and such reports are always followed by a speech by the senile Potterspot trying to convince his citizens that everything is as it should be. Every day it's the same story all over again! The Potterroonians lack something pretty. Dreams. Freshness. Poetry. A nice story."

"And you are going to see to that," asked Prof. Jumper in an affirmative way.

"That's exactly it," was Potter Potts's excited reply.

(Flisar 2008: 45)

5. Evald Flisar and Slavoj Žižek

The country of Potteroonia is the symbol of Slovenia with its citizenship of two million, and/or possibly for any undemocratic regime where society is ruled by a pathological Narcissus (Žižek 1989: 105).

"Sir, do you realize that your obstinacy is about to cause the downfall of two million innocent Potterroonians?"

(Flisar 2008: 81)

The text introduces a special type of politician: being neither the former president (Potterspot) nor the future one (Potter Potts), they are both the same because they identify themselves with the laws of society (Žižek 1985: 107). Pathological narcissism has acquired an independent "theoretical consistency", first in president Potterspot, then in Potter Potts with his "obsessive symbols". He rationalizes them by breaking potti silencers, i.e. clay pots, on the heads of his citizens in order to silence them.



The pathological president is willing to sacrifice anything to satisfy his ego; when his popularity declines, he even uses Alice, presenting her to the media as his "daughter lost and found again", supposedly the fruit of love between Potter Potts and the younger sister of Prof. Jumper, future Potteroonian minister of economy.

"A daughter lost and found again!" said Potter Potts excitedly, stretching his arms so far that he was barely able to pull them back. "She was brought to the Potteroonian coast by the tide."

(Flisar 2008: 45)

The text is intended for a dual addressee and serves as social criticism of the president Potter Potts' paranoiac idea that he is a "victim of conspiracy" (Žižek 1985: 108).

The two presidents of Potteroonia, Potterspot, followed by Potter Potts, are in fact two sides of the same coin. Both men are typical pathological Narcissi. Because of them and their single-mindedness, Potteroonia is on a fast track to catastrophe, quickly turning into a post-catastrophic society. The two presidents, both of them completely alike, are incapable of feeling empathy. The citizens of Potteroonia belong to three categories (Žižek 1985: 118):

1. the ideal others who function as additional parts of one's own ego and are expected to corroborate his narcissism:

"There's something else I propose. Let's call a referendum on the renaming of the republic. Potteroonia must become a monarchy. When we have to go into exile, which could be as soon as tomorrow, most countries will be more inclined to accept a king than a president. Kings are few. As for presidents, even societies for the protection of animals have them. Who's in favour of my suggestion?" Everybody raised their hands.

(Flisar 2008: 97)

I won't let myself be scolded by the nation whose history I've been making for so many years," said Potterspot.

(Flisar 2008: 102)

"In return for the promise made by this liar that he would marry me and make me the first lady of Potteroonia, I spent two weeks with the old cripple Potterspot to get out of him details about his election campaign for the Know-nothing Potts so he could come up with a better one."

(Flisar 2008: 78)



2. enemies or conspirators threatening his affirmation, namely Alice and Uncle Jumper:

Professor Jumper took a step closer, saying almost in confidence: "Let's forget for a second that you're a president, Mr. President."

(Flisar 2008: 91)

Everybody raised their hands, including Alice who had realized a long time ago that while waiting for a chance to run away the best idea was to pretend that running away was the last thing on her mind.

(Flisar 2008: 97)

3. everybody else: dummies, the masses, simpletons whose only purpose in Potteroonia is to be put to profitable use by the president and then cast off. Two million citizens of Potteroonia function as dummies. The madness of the Potteroonian presidential candidate constantly increases and his three flatterers resemble Pottsy-Wottsies more and more (unless that's what they were to begin with). Besides, Potter Pot uses exorbitant interest rates in order to change his human society into a post-human one:

"I've decided that you'll become the prototype of a new animal species. It's not good that Potteroonia has no beasts any more; the activities of the hunting association have had to be abandoned altogether. We're going to genetically develop you into something between a monkey and a rat, a new type of a hairy animal that will laugh stupidly all the time; we'll call it pottsy-wotsy. Congratulations, dear friend, you're going to become a pioneer of the new stage in the evolution of living creatures. You are getting your first shot today."

(Flisar 2008: 88)

"I'm not going to lend money for free. Three hundred per cent is the lowest interest rate for the victims of natural disasters in Potteroonia."

(Flisar 2008: 100)

Flisar also criticizes the Potteroonians who function like dummies, a mob, a bunch of simpletons who react in exactly the same way to the appearance of each new presidential candidate, but society remains "silenced", it practically disappears. In the end, in the post-catastrophic period, there is a third presidential candidate named Pottsy-Wotsy who offers the mob the same things as his predecessor:

"Greetings, ladies and gentlemen of Potteroonia! Your president Pottsy-Wotsy is inviting you to a symposium on the plans for reconstructing the country. If you have any ideas, just send them to me. You don't? Okay, we'll just live without ideas. Which is not a bad idea at all! What joy!"

(Flisar 2008: 111)



Even when the president of Potteroonia, a pathological Narcissus, gets attached to another human being, his wife Pottiela, their bond is not particularly strong and it is easily broken, turning into its opposite: the idealized other is disappointing, not meeting President Potter's expectations; she consequently loses her ideal position and is degraded to the rank of a simpleton in the "mob". The president of Potteroonia proclaims his yesterday idols to be his enemies of today or tomorrow because he does not see other people as subjects (Žižek 1985: 111). He treats his family and the citizens of Potteroonia ruthlessly, using them exclusively for his personal narcissist pleasure. Žižek infers that the main problem of a permissive consumer society is not that it creates fictitious needs; on the contrary, it keeps flooding people with ever new consumer products, thus closing out any real wish, masking the empty space that stimulates wishes, constituting a field of saturation where an impossible wish cannot be articulated any longer (Žižek 1985: 125):

In consumer society, one has to consume. The more you consume, the more you need to produce; the more people have jobs, the more people have wages to survive. And more people can consume more," he explained rather learnedly. "The more Poteroonians run low on the last resource they still haven't exhausted, the greater the need for supporting the Earth's crust with pillars to prevent its collapse. In short, to speed up the destruction of what they're capable of producing, and to speed up the production of what they need to destroy."

(Flisar 2008: 58)

Flisar uses his fantasy tale about how to save our civilization and our world as an illustration of a pathological Narcissus on the level of words and actions. He discusses a modern form of addiction – the president's addiction to public attention, recognition, success. All President Potter Potts cares about is how to use the other in order to gain narcissist profit from a narcissist perspective that is threatening his civilization with ruin. As Potteroonia is drawing closer to a cataclysm, when everything is crumbling, literally and metaphorically, it is but an attack on his narcissism.

"A ground-to-air missile, isn't it? Or rather a heavy mortar. No, it's a pair of nuclear torpedoes for sinking submarines!"

"Come on, shoot me straight in the heart."

(Flisar 2008: 103)



Flisar painted a picturesque portrait of the three presidents of Potteroonia, Potterspot, Potter Potts and Pottsy-Wottsy, presenting them as pathological Narcissi who turn inner emptiness into outer emptiness, which motivates them for frenetic activity (Žižek 1985: 112) and gives them ideas about how to "improve mutual relationships" in Potteroonia:

1. slapping ("Ministers! Slaps! Five apiece!" (Flisar 2008: 85);
2. breaking silencers on people's heads ("Potti silencers have become a mere social ritual, like a cup of tea." (Flisar 2008: 90);
3. destructible lifebelts ("Lifebelts must deflate at the slightest stab of an awl. The entire stock of impenetrable ones should be destroyed instantly.") (Flisar 2008: 90).

Alice and Jumper are the only ones who manage to escape from Potteroonia, just as her uncle planned, anticipated and therefore hung on to two indestructible lifebelts. Meanwhile, the crazy president of the crazy land swapped all the durable lifebelts for punctured ones.

"These lifebelts that helped Potts to steal my power are nonsense. When it starts to thunder and rock, the wrecks will bury everyone, including their lifebelts."

(Flisar 2008: 43)

8. The sublime and profane subjects of ideology

President Potter Potts hits people who do not support him over the head with "potti silencers" and that makes them shut up, join the mob, and later he changes them into supporting pillars of Potteroonia. Just as Venice is a town supported by tree trunks, so is Potteroonia a country supported by pillars. Flisar's criticism of society is omnipresent (Žižek 1985: 119):

1. growing bureaucracy

"Fill out these ten forms and sign each of them twenty-one times. In your own handwriting."

(Flisar 2008: 17);

2. egotism of the president as an institute of authority which stimulates the development of the cruel side of universal law that the president identifies with (Žižek 1985: 129):

"The breakers are awarded monthly prizes for social responsibility by the Ministry of the Production of Shards."

(Flisar 2008: 34)



3. a castigating and self-destructive society:

"Whenever you wreck a car, the police must immediately furnish you with a new one.
That is the law."

(Flisar 2008: 29)

"In such cases, you are subject to the rule of filling out the forms with three pens at once
and signing them by writing your name and surname simultaneously with both the capital
and small letters."

(Flisar 2008: 17)

4. taking interest in art can only be decreed by the state and in the service of the state
administration:

"Mr. Potteroonko, Mrs. Potterola," said the President, "you'll compile the lists according to
my instructions. In addition, you'll inspect the support pillars under the residence of the
Minister of Economy, who will also need a loan, won't he? Ha-ha! You two, Generals, will
devise a plan on how the chosen support pillars can be destroyed."

(Flisar 2008: 41)

5. Prof. Jumper and Alice, his assistant, possess mature egos, a sense of reality and realistic
notions on Potteroonia. Žižek would say they were:

"... using a depersonalized moral instance of the Ideal–Ego, the inner law, and when
successful, it sublimates primitive instincts. In this case we can speak of 'normal
narcissism', the legitimate investment of the libidinal energy into one's Ego, the narcissist
satisfaction with one's own personality which is not of a 'pathological nature'."

(Žižek 1985: 114)

Flisar goes on to write:

When all the crunching, falling, rustling and lapping stopped, Alice and Uncle Jumper
realized they were floating on the smooth surface of an endless sea, still wearing their
lifebelts. The island had sunk to the bottom; Potteroonia met with the same fate as
Atlantis.

"I didn't know you were saving two lifebelts," said Alice.

"Just in case. Two real ones. These won't be punctured by any awl."

(Flisar 2008: 111)

9. First as tragedy, then as farce

Potteroonia functions as a false image. Žižek quotes two examples of deceptive images
in the cases of two Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parrasios. The first one painted "realistic fruit"
that real birds wanted to eat, and the second one painted a curtain on a wall that seemed to
cover it, so his friends asked him to draw the curtain aside and show them the painting behind it.



Žižek's quoted examples and Potteroonia are characterized by the parallelism of appearance and truth. The president of Potteroonia or the modern attention addict has dismantled the social state ("Three hundred per cent is the lowest interest rate"), swapping culture with pop culture. Potteroonia does not cover up "the thing itself" but rather the fact that it is not covering up anything ("Potts put away his revolver, the two officers lowered their pottiguns. 'Whenever neither reason nor threats help, the only solution is politics,' said the president.") (Flisar 2008: 89).

Considering Žižek's theory we can clearly say that the president of Potteroonia is the mask hiding behind his social role; he is artificial, the product of an indifferent social environment, and he is playing "genuineness" even though he's wearing the social mask of being president. (Žižek 1985: 128)

It is interesting to note that Flisar named the ministries so that they correspond to the title of Žižek's book *First as tragedy, then as farce*:

1. The Ministry of the Interior and All Sorts of Other Affairs;
2. The Ministry of the Production of Shards;
3. The Ministry of the Curdled Brain – three ministers;
4. The Ministry for Detecting the Weakness of the Earth's Crust.

The leading characters in the new country, Pottsy-Wottsy, Pottpot, Potterola and Potteroonko, drink gin, break things, throw one another through the window, but they "materialize" their adversaries so that they become material for the supporting pillars of Potteroonia, both literally and metaphorically.

"Perhaps we've fallen into the future—a world the way it's going to be in one hundred, two hundred years. There is nowhere to run. Foreign airplanes haven't landed on the island for ages and the few boats the locals have are only used for fishing. They are completely cut off from the rest of the world. If there still *is* such a thing as the rest of the world. Perhaps this is all that's left of it. But it may be a good thing that we cannot go anywhere. Now we can stop asking ourselves what it would be like if it wasn't the way it is, and dedicate all the best in us to the Potteroonian economic miracle. Or better, to our efforts to make it last a little longer."

(Flisar 2008: 59)

Flisar is implicitly and explicitly critical of politicians, presidents and autocrats, so he writes:

"In case we ever return to Ljubljana, we could perhaps pull the strings in order to secure an important job for him in the Slovene government."



Potterola got up and pulled a face." Theoretically, it's not a bad idea, but there are two million Potteroonians. Who will manufacture such a number of lifebelts?"

(Flisar 2008: 94)

Alice, a girl of twelve with three bachelor degrees, is represented as the "mature ego"; she has a feeling for reality and realistic conceptions of things, she is a personalized superego (Žižek 1985: 114) with a depersonalized ethical instance of the ideal ego, the inner law. Žižek calls such people "normal Narcissi". Alice is a typical subversive heroine (active, talkative, inquisitive), she is aware of herself and convinced that she is capable of saving Potteroonia.

Alice appears as the "real ego", for she has assumed a symbolic mission. Žižek analyzes the Slovene national identity, an instance of maternal law that charges the subject, in this case Alice, with a symbolic mission and burdens her internally, in contrast to all the other Slovene heroines who are forced into masochistic sacrificing.

Alice as a twelve-year-old is not the traditional Slovene mother type, for she is: (1) a girl; (2) subversive; and regarding the context of subversive youth literature, the author gives her the position of a subject. Alice is a modern, rather than a traditional Slovene (young readers') heroine who has no feeling of guilt concerning the crazy president Potter Potts who – after getting tired of slapping the skeptics in his party – opened a factory of silencers and thus silenced them.

However, after that things were only going downhill. Alice had an inkling that this would happen, for experience had taught her that a person never deludes himself more than when he is convinced that the worst is behind him.

(Flisar 2008: 76)

Pottpot the sceptic had a suggestion:

"I've got a very good idea. The city should gradually be moved underground. This way, the Earth's crust will rest on factory chimneys and the walls of the highest buildings. Then we can restart building because the new buildings will no longer be a burden, but additional support."

(Flisar 2008: 94)

The president's closest collaborators or "flatterers" keep stirring up conspiracies (Pottsy-Wottsy, Potteroonko, Pottpot, Potterola), hoping to swap the president for a new one or become presidents themselves; they are hypocrites and "they know no shame", realizes Alice.



For the sake of comparison we can apply Žižek's hypothesis which illustrates the difference between Potter Potts, president of Potteroonia, who subjects his needs to his wishes and is therefore "much more unethical than he thinks":

With childish mirth he pressed the button on the detonator he unexpectedly took from his pocket. This time, an explosion was heard close by, there was the sound of buildings crumbling and then of water gurgling.

(Flisar 2008: 110)

And between Uncle Jumper who "is much more ethical than he realizes". (Žižek 1985: 133)

"I have sacrificed my life in order to save Potteroonia. If I save this island I can save the world. And if I cannot do it, it is my duty to sink together with it."

(Flisar 2008: 109)

10. Dystopia – Potteroonia and Atlantis

Flisar stresses the difference between the primary world presented as a utopia (Lake Valley, Mt. Triglav, etc.) and the secondary world (the island of Potteroonia), the dystopia presented as an urban environment (chimneys, the city, pavements, pillars, a factory, shops and the like):

"What are you thinking about?"

"About a possible plan for saving our civilization," said the minister of economy dejectedly.

(Flisar 2008: 83)

"Have you forgotten that we are supposed to save the world?"

(Flisar 2008: 49)

And his conscience told him to try and find a way for saving all the Potteroonians, saving the country, the nation, their children and their future, and their children and their future after that. Turning his back on the enemy, withdrawing from the front line, not doing his duty – those were the things Uncle Jumper often dreamed about, wishing he was capable of making them come true. But he also knew that the captain is the last person allowed to abandon his ship, no matter how obnoxious his crew may be.

(Flisar 2008: 95-96)

Potteroonia is crumbling due to its destruction and self-destruction that Flisar describes in a film-like manner:



Alice is watching the city panorama disappearing; with the blueness of the sky shining in the background. Uncle Jumper throws her a lifebelt. Alice puts it on. She sees that Uncle has already put on his. Not a second too early because the ground starts to rock, the walls to crackle, the house starts to collapse, to be followed by the seemingly endless falling into the depths, all accompanied by the frightened screaming of President Potts, Potttela, Potterola, Pottpot, the Red and the Blue Officers and god knows how many Potteroonians of lesser importance.

(Flisar 2008: 111)

Alice in Crazyland (Alica v nori deželi, 2008) is a fantasy tale intended for dual audiences (Beckett 1999: xii), or better, a text open for multiple addressees:

"What is important about the crossover novel is not what it says about adults, but what it says to children – that the stories which matter to them matter to us as well."

(Falconer 2008: 23)

Flisar schematizes the beginning of the world or Potteroonia as a self-sufficient country made of grey clay:

Everything was made of grey clay: buildings, pavements, streets, traffic signs, and busses, clatter cars, rubbish bins, even shop signs. Grey were all the people with their gloomy faces, hurrying to and fro; grey were the police officers in unusually large numbers, removing shards of wrecked clatter cars caused by the so-called Potteroonians' national sport, crashing cars at every corner. They were also removing the remains of objects that occasionally flew out of top floor windows and crashed on the pavement: chairs, tables, cabinets, pots, anything you can imagine. "That's terrible," Alice said, "this town has come down with destructive fever."

(Flisar 2008: 31)

"We can all remember the days when potti was just filthy clay from which cheap pots and other junk were produced. Today, potti is the substance our civilisation rests on. The only problem we're being increasingly faced with is a consequence of our success: how to make our civilisation last a bit longer. Therefore, the multiple genius Professor Potts, with his sense of responsibility for the island's destiny, has announced his candidacy for the President of the State of Potteroonia. Only this position will enable him to carry out reforms that will shift the burden of seeking a long-term solution onto the shoulders of our descendants."

(Flisar 2008: 40)

The suggestions as to how to save Potteroonia are actually examples of Carrollian nonsense:

"I've thought of a system of gigantic balloons extending from one side of the island to the other, each balloon attached to the hook in the ground, all of them holding the Earth's crust up in the air. We would need no supporting material whatsoever!"

(Flisar 2008: 73)



"Because the balloons could lift the island and carry it across the sea!" triumphantly intervened Potterola.

(Flisar 2008: 74)

Pottpot: "Because kids could make holes in the balloons with their air guns!"

(Flisar 2008: 74)

Potteroonko: "Because the earth's crust is crumbly and it would be impossible to have enough balloons to keep every separate clod of earth in the air!"

(Flisar 2008: 74)

Uncle Jumper: "There is no way we can save Potteroonia. Things have gone too far for that. We must think about short-term measures. Namely, if we think about long-term solutions we shall all be dead in the short run."

"When the ground collapses, the island will disappear and the cave beneath us will be flooded by the sea. Ergo: We can only be saved by wearing lifebelts. Mostly those of us who cannot swim. I suggest that every citizen get his own lifebelt."

(Flisar 2008: 74)

In the end, the Potteroonians agree that in order to save Potteroonia two million lifebelts shall be made, and two more million spare ones, so they establish a Ministry of the Curdled Brain, with three ministers as directors. Later on, the President of Potteroonia orders to have all the lifebelts punctured so that nobody except him will get away alive.

11. Big ideas, small books

Alice in Crazyland (*Alica v nori deželi*, 2008) is Flisar's genuine sequel to *Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (*Alica v čudežni deželi*, 1865), where intertextuality is explicit:

The fantasy tale entitled *Alice in Crazyland* (*Alica v nori deželi*, 2008) is a postmodern novel that functions like a library because of its many intertextual links.

(Juvan 2000: 267)

1. The transfer of the textual world of Carroll's *Alice* to Flisar's *Alice* is an intertextual sequel with an open ending that announces possible further sequels.

Professor Jumper had not seen his niece for quite a while. Actually, he hadn't seen her since she returned from Wonderland and in the meantime grew bigger.

(Flisar 2008: 7)



2. An imitation: there are similarities between the two Alices in the motives and plots (Alice, hole), but there are also differences (dystopia, pathological Narcissus, politics, Slovenia, uncle).

Though, remembering Alice's adventures in Wonderland, we must say that she was not an ordinary girl. Actually, let us stop mincing words and say that she was special.

(Flisar 2008: 8)

3. Description: Flisar explicitly summarizes Carroll's *Alice* in the passage where the president of Potteroonia wishes to boost his election campaign by announcing to the media that Alice is his lost and found daughter.

"Are you aware that she fell down a rabbit hole as a child and became famous all over the globe? Besides, two books were written about her, still being reprinted all over the world. At the age of twelve she graduated from three universities. In one of her MA theses, she tried to prove, without success, of course, but extremely boldly, that two moments can exist not only in succession, but also simultaneously. Are you aware that her friends are important and well-known personalities, such as Humpty-Dumpty, Snow Queen, Mad Hatter?"

(Flisar 2008:46)

Flisar as a true artist has an active (creative) and not passive relationship to Carroll's text (1865). (Golež Kaučič 2003: 50)

12. Conclusion

Flisar is critical of the island of Potteroonia, of its submissive citizens ruled by madmen who are holding the reins in their hands, ultimately causing the world to end. Flisar is critical of the alienated Potteroonians who work at conveyor belts; of the alienated consumer society that uses television in order to manage emotions to sedative ends; it is the leaders' way of comforting the citizens with "pretty stories, songs and dreams" and making them conformist. Flisar is critical of the sedative role of kitsch, i.e. "pretty stories" or soap operas.

In their article "*Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind*" (2013), Kidd and Castano prove empirically that reading fiction helps develop cognitive capabilities because literature makes us understand the mental condition of other people, which enables complex social relationships typical of our human society.



In its literary continuum of subversive literature intended for a dual addressee, Flisar's *Alice* plays an enlightening role, mostly by using various perspectives, both positive and negative ones, represented by the literary characters, the heroine Alice and Uncle Jumper, particularly the pathological Narcissus Potterspot, Potter Pots, Pottsy-Wottsy and the conformist ministers who destroy the island – the symbol of narrow-mindedness – with a labyrinth of conspiracy theories.

To young readers, Flisar's *Alice* opens up many hypothetical questions about the end of the world, post-human society, ecological catastrophes; however, it also stresses the role of an outstanding individual, male or female, the role of intellect during a hypothetical deliberation on a possible catastrophe or post-catastrophic conditions. The fantasy tale, in spite of its subject – i.e. the end of the world – also shows optimism, suggesting that children, in this case girls, as researchers are the initiators of progress.

In Aesop's fable, Prometheus made man from clay and since he ran out of water he completed his work by using tears instead. In Flisar's *Alice*, the citizens of Potteroonia use clay "silencers": they break them on the heads of their compatriots who have different opinions in order to create ideological single-mindedness. The closing analogy between Potteroonia and Atlantis is apocalyptic, based on Žižek's *The Plague of Fantasies (Kuga fantazme)*.

Flisar's *Alice* schematizes Potteroonia or consumer society in *First as tragedy (Naprej kot tragedija, ...: in Alice in Crazyland / Alica v nori deželi, 2008)*, then as farce (... *potem kot farsa in Alice in Crazyland: an ecological farce / Alica v nori deželi: ekološka farsa, 2010*). In the last part of the trilogy, the graphic novel *Alice in Potteroonia (Alica v Potteruniji, 2013)*, we find *Big ideas, small books (Velike ideje, majhne knjige, 2008)*, i.e. big ideas in a book intended for young readers.

With his Potteroonia, Flisar shows that global capitalism is doomed because of politicians who are pathological Narcissi; because of the unbalanced economic system; because of the genetic revolution and social differences. In his text *Big ideas, small books (Velike ideje, majhne knjige, 2008)*, Žižek discusses subjective, objective and systemic violence. Flisar carried the idea of subjective violence into effect in his small big book by introducing us to a pathological Narcissus; of objective violence (bringing citizen under control with "silencers") and systemic violence (the army supporting the Blue Officer and the Red Officer).



Flisar and Žižek write about the catastrophic consequences of an ideology through individualized universality – Flisar's Alice, Žižek's Slovenia, but in both cases their writing is relevant in a global context.

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