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## ***The Place and Significance of the Avant-Garde in the Modern Literature Teaching and Learning***

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### **Extended summary**

Given that understanding the literary theory contributes to the acknowledgement not only of the overall social, historical and cultural, but also pedagogical significance of literature, the marginalization, even total exclusion of the avant-garde stylistic formation from the primary school curricula is quite surprising, to say the least.

Namely, when analysing, for example, the syllabus for teaching Serbian language and literature, primarily in the lower primary grades, the absence of the authors nurturing the avant-garde literary expression in the literature for children or for adults becomes strikingly obvious. The absence is surprising, considering the great significance of the avant-garde stylistic formation in art, and, consequently, the 20th century literature, the significance which is reflected on the contemporary 21st century art as well.

It can be concluded with great certainty that the avant-garde rebellion defined the key features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art. Given this fact, the aim of this paper is to emphasise the necessity of (re)including the key authors of Serbian literature for children, such as Aleksandar Vučo, in the curricula, and, by using the literary works of this author as an example, to show the importance of studying the works written between the two world wars which fall into category of the avant-garde literature.

If the works of Aleksandar Vučo, as well as the works of other authors who wrote in the similar manner, are left out from the primary school curricula, in other words, if the avant-garde is overlooked as if it had never existed, the process of learning and acquiring the subject content does not occur in a linear manner, but haphazardly and partially.

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It remains questionable, quite justifiably, why a literary expression formed in the period of the avant-garde should be given attention in the modern-day literature instruction. First, because it was in this period that a new concept of poetry for children was born, the concept based on the need to abandon the practice of mere didacticism and presumed pedagogical intentionality. Nurturing the oniric fantasy, a new type of fairy-tale imagery, a new image of the world, a stronger presence of the city space, the theme of children rebelling against the adults and children's self-upbringing, the principle of play, humor, irony, parody, free verse, jargon and plays on words, the other media – all these are only some of the characteristics of the concept of the poems for children that emerged in the avant-garde period and has been nurtured ever since. In addition, it should be noted that all these characteristics are fully represented in Aleksandar Vučo's works for children: a thin line between dreams and reality in his poem *San i java hrabrog Koče*, as well as the oniric fantasy, the principle of play, and free verse; parody and grotesque in the poem *Podvizi družine "Pet Petlića"*, including jargon words, plays on words, children's rebellion against the adults and the self-upbringing of boys, discovering the city space, as well as a new type of fantasy – all these elements are present in this poem.

The avant-garde period in the context of the development of Serbian poetry for children cannot be left out because, among other things, the avant-garde stylistic formation had a considerable impact on the poetry for children. This impact can be traced back from the surrealist elements in the modern poetry for children, up to the poetry for children which is being written as we speak. The correlation between the avant-garde/surrealism and the contemporary poetry for children is also evident in the quest for illogical connections, type of humour, infantile sensibility, the relationship between a dreamlike state and freedom, parody-like twists and, maybe even in the incomplete expression of the author himself which leaves room for freedom and creativity of the little recipients of poetry. Furthermore, the avant-garde turning point in the development of our poetry for children is of vital importance because it represents a potentially permanent abandonment of the over-emphasised didactical component.

The avant-garde artistic expression should be included more comprehensively in the contemporary literature school curricula. There are many reasons for this requirement and some are thoroughly explored in this paper, including: a more in-depth study of Serbian poetry, the necessity of understanding the canonical poetical phenomena which definitely must have their place in the curricula, and as well as the need for offering an adequate interpretation of the contemporary literature for children which, hopefully, will be more and better represented in the curricula. If the above-mentioned requirement is fulfilled, links will be established between literature and children's nature, enabling, among other things, the development of empathy and improvement of children's reading skills. Cultivating good literary taste and enabling better understanding of the contemporary art and the world we live in are also important reasons for the inclusion of the avant-garde texts in the literature curricula for either lower or higher primary school grades.

**Key words:** avant-garde stylistic formation, literature for children, Aleksandar Vučo, curricula, modern teaching and learning.

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