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## ***Between a Fable and a Bildungsroman – The Secret of Leposava the Hen and The Ballade of Poverty by Milovan Danajlić***

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### **Extended summary**

The aim of this paper is to offer new readings of Danajlić's works *The Secret of Leposava the Hen* and *The Ballade of Poverty*. Despite the fact that Danajlić has been present in Serbian literature for the last six decades and that his opus is comprised of various literary forms, while his readership includes the readers of different age groups, it is interesting that this author is not included in the curricula for both the higher primary school grades of elementary school and the high school curricula. The latter fact is beyond comprehension, given that the central theme of his lyrical prose is the phenomenon of difficult growing up of young people and the process of finding their place in the social context, along with all traumas that this rite of passage involves. The author's intention was to emphasise in his works the intellectual and spiritual development of young people who are bound to go through many ups and downs in the process of building up their personality. The allegorical images of the world presented in the story *The Secret of Leposava the Hen* and in the novel *The Ballade of Poverty* confirm the new concept of the traditional novel on education which "presents the spiritual development of the main characters through learning and life experience, from childhood until the age when their personality is capable of fulfilling moral obligations towards themselves and the society". This prose is a valuable contribution to the school system, especially with regard to the sensibility of modern generations.

Strictly speaking, *The Secret of Leposava the Hen* can be defined as *a story about animals*, mostly because of its animistic perception of the nature which is very close to the world of childhood. On the other hand, based on the manner in which the animal is used in this short story, primarily as *a substitute for the human character*, the story can be defined as a modern

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*fable*, especially because this is a story strongly grounded in allegory from which the author's didactical "morals" discretely emanate. The narrative framework, however, deviates from the traditional model of fable in many segments. First, in the characterisation of the main character – Leposava the Hen, whose nature is revealed through the multi-layered psychological nuances, which is contrary to the expected one-sided and emblematic connection between the dominant human characteristics and the typical animal traits. The remarkable character of the hen is indicated in the introductory sentence of the story: "Leposava was not like other hens." The type pattern of the mentioned animal is reflected in the character trait contrary to the one in the introductory sentence, namely, in the easily recognisable framework of an animal "not bestowed with any special intelligence", which the narrator additionally supports by offering the opinion of "authority" – Leposava is different from her environment in many aspects: contrary to her friends' "great fearfulness", tendency towards "gossip and blabbering", blind obedience and instinctive existential needs, Leposava is shrewd, decisive, and brave, which makes her seek solitude and inclined to think thoroughly about everything. Based on the ancestral experience of traditional fables, the concluding points in this story are formed without common knowledge, rather as very personal messages for *clever children*: they should cultivate their own individuality which is based on togetherness, expand their spiritual horizons, defend independence and freedom, and incorporate these virtues in their future actions.

**Key words:** Danojlić, fable, allegory, growing up, initiation, education, upbringing, Bildungsroman.

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