

# Children's literature as an opportunity to learn about love through life situations



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### Abstract

Children's literature offers many opportunities for the education of young readers, if they are approached warmly, unobtrusively and as equals. Literature is considered one of the most effective ways to educate young generations, so we can say that the collection of short stories "Winter Ice Cream" by Vasil Tocinovski is a work that nurtures positive values, such as tolerance, understanding, upbringing, attention to others, as well as the role of the elderly (parents, grandparents) in fostering these values. In this collection, the author talks about many thematically different events and situations, but what is their common denominator is - love. Love is described in many forms: youthful love between two young people, first love, love for animals, for birds, caring for them, sibling love, parental love, love between parents and children and vice versa, as well as love between grandfathers/ grandmothers and their grandchildren and vice versa. Tocinovski writes about friendship, about the weight of the word, about how we treat others and about many other different and interesting things that affect every person, especially the young man, the child or the teenager, who is always rushing somewhere forward, usually rushing with his words and actions, wanting to fly through time and grow up, the author clarifies many dilemmas for young readers. It teaches them that time certainly and inevitably passes, bringing inevitable changes in the lives of people, especially children and young people. At the same time, words and actions have their own weight. The point for young readers is that in comings and goings there is a perfect order that leads a constant struggle with our desires and expectations and every moment is unique and unrepeatable, and the most sublime is the one shared with your loved ones.

### Key words:

children's literature, ethical values, respect, tolerance.

### Introduction

The subject of this article is the book "Winter Ice Cream" by the famous Macedonian author Vasil Tocinovski. This book is just one small piece of his literary work, of his prolific writing activity.

In his works, Tocinovski, through an interesting observation of the daily activities of young people, shows the dilemmas they face in the modern hectic life. A significant place is also occupied by the daily social and economic movements in the society, which have repercussions on the family and emotional life of young people. The author covers current events from everyday life and the reflections of all those events on people, especially families (Денкова, 2015, p. 1143).

It shows incidents or events in which the characters/protagonists show positive values in their relationships with other people. Through such characters and works, children and young people should be helped to build relationships in accordance with their family values, help them understand the meaning of support in the family, and recognize how these family values that should be nurtured by early childhood will help them overcome certain obstacles or challenges they will encounter in later life (Денкова, 2019).

### **Idea-aesthetic analysis of the book**

If we analyze this collection of his stories, it will be easy to see that the author has identified several thematic areas, which are found in the stories from the collection "Winter Ice Cream". The author begins the depiction of childhood from the basic and primary environment in which the child grows and develops - the family. According to Tocinovski, the family is the "sacred" place where the child receives love and warmth, but also learns about family and general human values. The family is the place where the child/adolescent receives unequivocal support. Family and family environment is the first in which an infant takes birth and start learning, responding, and acting. All the functions performed by a family revolve around values. Every aspect including ideas, thoughts, habits, traits, behavioural depictions taken from the family are those to which an individual gives importance or value. For example, in the short story "Everyone on his own" (Тоциновски, 2021), the author Tocinovski masterfully and very successfully imposes the theme of alienation in the modern family, of the weak or non-existent communication between its members. He speaks about the lack of time and even more attention on the part of parents for their children. By conveying to us the image of one ordinary family, the author teaches in a very simple way how it should not be. The family is the basic cell and pillar of our society, and children are certainly ours and the future of that society. That is why it is necessary to appreciate and convey to them family values, such as respect, love, and understanding and teach them to preserve those values. Unconditional love and attention are what children need most. Therefore, in this modern and fast-paced everyday life, parents should make an effort to always be available to their children, putting them where they deserve - in the foreground and in the first place. And not everyone alone, but all together as a complex and functional family.

The author Tocinovski portrays situations and relationships between children and adults with great lyricism, especially between parents and children. In the story after which the book is named "Winter Ice Cream", the father's love for his little daughter Rosica is evident. While the snow paralyzes life, he does the only thing that can make the child happy at that moment - he takes her for ice cream: "My dad, my dad! You are a truly great hero! My hero!" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 51).

Perhaps one of the most touching stories that praises motherly love is the story "Mother's Cookies" in which we see the pain and shame of the boy Jovan, who lives in a boarding school. That shame even turns into physical pain at the moment of waiting for the package that is supposed to come from home, when he has to "be ashamed" of his classmates because of the poor package. And Jovan will suffer, before the worries of conscience because he will hide his mother's cookies: "... kneaded with black flour, filled with homemade apricot jam and sprinkled with powdered sugar"

(Тоциновски, 2021, p. 85). The shame will follow him all his life, but this time the shame because he was ashamed of his mother's cookies, soaked in her tears. The pain will not leave him, even when he becomes the dean of the Faculty of Architecture: "Some things are never forgotten, even though the ones we love most have forgiven us long ago" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 85). The short story "Golden Butterflies" underlines even more the importance of mutual love and respect within the family, between the oldest and the youngest members, between grandchildren and their grandparents. The story shows the love and respect of the granddaughter for her grandmother, who, due to her poor eyesight, sees the yellowed leaves that fall from the trees and resemble golden butterflies.

It is evident that in the book, as the most frequent companions of the children, we encounter grandparents, who are the main propagators of family values, and at the same time transferors of cultural values. A striking example of this is the story entitled "About Grandma's Brother", in which the grandmother transmits her traditional values through respect for her older brother, for whom she will cook the traditional dishes of their childhood, which does not go unnoticed by her granddaughter. The girl Grozdanka, childishly naive, but also munificent, will remark to her grandmother: "You know, grandma, I have to tell you this. When Grandpa Konstantin, your brother, comes, you cook the most delicious jajchanik, turli-tava and aravania, right?" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 23). Talking about the role of elders as educators, Muhammed Yusuf emphasizes their role as educators for physical health, but also about the cultural and mental health of grandchildren. Namely, through communication with the children who realize them through the narration of stories, on the one hand they can help the children learn, and on the other hand they get to know them with their ancestors, culture and religion. In this educational mission, the older ones seem to overcome the negative experiences, because they are in the last stage of life, so they can protect their grandchildren from bad influences and behavior, to contribute to the development of their social skills with leisure activities. Of course, one should not neglect the fact that they own domestic skills, which young people (parents of children or children themselves) do not have (Yusuf, 2014: 337-342). Taking care of the young generation contributes to long-term harmonious family relations, and on the other hand, they transmit cultural heritage to younger (Beland, Mills, 2001). Studies have shown that grandchildren can draw many positive benefits not only from observing direct communication with the elderly, but also from the stories and memories shared by their grandparents. This includes, of course, other knowledge that children acquire and which are crucial in life, such as family models, about the important role of a woman in the family (though usually secondary and passive), for building family and social relationships, for friendship and joint recreational activities (playing cards, visiting a wrestling match in which the grandson participates, etc.) (Goodsell, Bates & Behnke 2011:134-154).

In the book "Winter Ice Cream", we are shown in a harmonious way the relationships between siblings, or rather between children within the family. Sometimes, the difference between them is greater, so the older brothers or sisters are the main advisors to the younger ones, as in the story "Forgiveness is not a sin" where the older sister, the student Margarita, advises her younger brother Aleksandar how to behave when a conflict situation occurs at school: "My friend Tashko stepped on me during the big break, looked at me angrily and then pushed me to the ground with all his strength... There was no reason for his behavior like that. I was embarrassed in front of my friends and I wanted to cry, but I didn't give in. Especially not in front of the girls." The older sister's advice is especially valuable because it teaches the child understanding, mutual tolerance and forgiveness: "My dear, forgiveness doesn't change the past and what happened, but don't forget that only in this way can we move forward into the future" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 52-

53). According to many studies, children may benefit directly from the learning, company and affection that siblings can provide each other. Siblings may be social, emotional, language and cognitive assets from a child's point of view (de La Rochebrochard & Joshi, 2013, p. 276-287). Research on kindergarten children showed that children having at least one sibling display higher social skills (Downey, Condon, 2004). Children with no siblings may have low behavioural and social skills (self-centred, less cooperative), perhaps because doting parents bring them up to be "little emperors" as suggested in the case of China's One-Child policy (Cameron, Erkal, Gangadharan & Meng, 2013). Younger siblings could benefit from their older siblings as better agents of cognitive development than immediate age-peers (Azmitia & Hesser, 1993). In return, older siblings could benefit from these teaching interactions, which are considered as an important promoter of verbal intellectual development for the "instructor" child (Smith, 1993).

Another story, titled "To Ask the Heart", depicts the relationship between two brothers and their close bond while playing sports, or rather while running. In this, the older one is the one who advises the younger one and gives him valuable lessons about first love, but also about life: "My beautiful and intelligent brother, these are the dilemmas that need to be overcome and for them you only need to ask your heart. All your answers are hidden in it" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 77). The study of sibling influence in dating and romantic relationships is growing. Recently, Doughty and colleagues (2013) found significant associations among sibling and romantic relationship qualities and revealed the importance of examining sibling gender and gender constellation. For instance, there was a negative association between sibling conflict in adolescence and romantic relationship intimacy in late adolescence for girls, but not boys. Additionally, mixed-gender siblings reported greater intimacy with romantic partners than did same-gender siblings. From these findings, we see that siblings are important in romantic relationship development and more research needs to be done to discern the role of siblings (Killoren & Roach, 2014, 243).

First love is an inevitable theme in any work, whether it is about children, teenagers or adolescents. It appears suddenly, causing a storm of emotions and an inevitable change in their behavior. Such changes are discussed in the story "First Love", in which Lenche confesses to her mother that she is very upset and trembling all over. She simply does not know what is happening to her, but she feels that she is not the same girl as before. A feeling has taken possession of her heart, which she cannot explain. With open eyes she sees the same face, and with closed eyes she dreams of it. Her mother has the right answer to that, and it is - Lenche's first love: "Oh, dear child, that's more than just a first crush. You have true wealth. You have your first love" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 47).

The author did not fail to cover the period of the covid pandemic in several short stories. The short story "What the Heart Feels" is very impressive, in which the author shows us life during the covid pandemic and the difficult changes that are happening in people's lives: "Suddenly the world showed how small and powerless it is. The pandemic subdued it and made it its most obedient servant. It made it smaller than a poppy seed" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 68).

The covid brings fear into people's souls, worms into thoughts, restlessness into longings and dreams. Covid is also a theme in the short story "Time of Diseases and Epidemics", through everyday situations among children with special needs from the Home for Social Concerns for its main characters. They are confused and taken aback, because they have to face many prohibitions and new rules for mutual communication. All that was natural for them to do, now they must not. They suddenly have to pay attention to many things, to protect themselves and others. They must not hug each other, play next to each other, and be careful before taking the toy from their friend.

They have to wash their hands often, keep their distance, be careful how they cough and sneeze and a bunch of other things that are difficult and confusing for them to understand: "Suddenly they had to be careful about many things, to protect themselves and thus take care of the health of others. They were not allowed to play next to each other and were careful before taking a toy from a friend. Everywhere around them they could hear "keep your distance" and "wash your hands" (Тоциновски, 2021, p. 12).

How difficult it is for the children, you can see from the end of the story, when the child Nikola stands up in front of everyone, sneezes into his sleeve (because he should) and spreads his arms towards their beloved aunt Dose, saying that he has had enough of flu and corona and asking to hug her tightly. Honestly, this story is deeply moving, precisely because in the time of the corona virus, most of all, people missed hugs. And when joy is shared or sadness is shared, it is done with a touch, with a hug, and that, more than anything, was mostly missing in the time described in the story.

## **Conclusion**

"Winter Ice Cream" is a collection of short stories in which the author describes in a simple, understandable and witty way many interesting incidents from the everyday life of big and small people, i.e. children. The book consists of fifty-seven short stories spread over one hundred and twenty pages. Their theme is the child and childhood located in an urban space and dynamic time, which in themselves create, that is, form an interesting and intriguing reading. Each story has its own characters-heroes, time and space. The stories are written simply and clearly, wittily, with tenderness and warmth as the thought and meaning of the child and his world.

The author describes many thematically different events and incidents in this work of his. Love is described in many forms. Youthful love between two young people, first love, love for animals, for birds, caring for them, brotherly love, parental love, love between parents and children and vice versa, as well as love between grandparents and their grandchildren and vice versa. The author Tocinovski also writes about camaraderie, friendship, the weight of words, behavior with others and many other different and interesting things that affect every person, especially a young person, child or teenager, who is always rushing somewhere forward, most often rushing with his words and actions, wanting to fly through time and grow up. Time certainly and inevitably passes, bringing inevitable changes in the lives of people, especially children and young people. Words and actions have their own weight. Finally, we can conclude through the words of the author that in the comings and goings there reigns a perfect order that waged a constant battle with our desires and expectations, and every moment is unique and unrepeatable, and the most sublime is the one that is shared with our loved ones.

This book by Vasil Tocinovski shows and proves in the best way that literature is valued only according to aesthetic values. The author gave the readers a book that offers interesting insights and interpretations about man and word, time and space with the pivotal aesthetic dignity of the text as the supreme literary rule.

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