

# Jaroslav Foglar for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Educational and literary legacy of the Czech author of literature for children and youth

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**ABSTRACT:** Jaroslav Foglar (1907-1999), a Czech children's author, renowned for boys' literature, is relatively unknown internationally. His adventure fiction, targeting preadolescents, serves educational and pedagogical purposes. The paper explores Foglar's persuasive literary approach, emphasizing potential reader transformation through examples of motivational and emotion-based effects. The author employs a clear ethical foundation, natural and urban imagery, and a compelling plot. A survey of 1174 readers highlights the appreciation for strong adventures, moral dimensions, and a call to social solidarity. Notably, 83% believe Foglar's literature has positively impacted their lives, at-

testing to the enduring and transformative influence of his narratives on readers' personal development and worldview.

EET/TEE KEYWORDS: Children's literature; Jaroslav Foglar; Czechoslovakia; Education; 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### *Introduction*

In accordance with the aims of the journal, the study intends to describe and interpret the literary work of the Czech writer Jaroslav Foglar (1907-1999), who is one of the best known and most popular representatives of children's literature in the Czech Republic, but who is almost unknown abroad. The aim is to answer the question why Foglar's extensive work has influenced hundreds of thousands of readers and has also had a significant impact on the development of leisure-based education, especially in the development of the methodology of scouting. It will focus on the educational potential of this work and on the author's strategies that still influence children and adolescents in terms of values, with a great deal of overlap into the lifestyles of male and female readers. The paper begins with a description of the context of the author's work, followed by a focus on several essential biographical characteristics of the author and a look at historical events and the socio-political situation, then using a selected example of several works to explain the essence of Foglar's literary work, and concludes with a brief interpretation of the data from a research survey to determine the impact of Foglar's work on the real lives of the respondents.

#### 1. *Contexts and genre definition*

The dominant position in the wide genre spectrum of Foglar's work, which includes novels, short story collections, handbooks for youth work, cartoon series texts, newspaper journalism, a play and a film script, is held by adventurous prose from the setting of boys' troops and clubs. This genre can be defined as the so-called boys' novel, which is perceived – in analogy to the girls' novel – as a distinct intentional literary unit for children and young people. This means a type of adventure prose that is primarily intended for boy readers and which also features a boy protagonist<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> D. Kroča, *Fyzicky handicapovaný hrdina v české chlapecké próze*, in N. Siegllová, J. Zítková (edd.), *Otázky komunikace a téma handicapu se zřetelem k žákům se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami*, Brno, Masarykova univerzita, 2012, pp. 155-162.

A conservative form of the genre is represented in Czech literature by prose works with a story line consisting of boy groups' detective search for the causes of mysterious or criminal events, expeditions to mysterious and dangerous natural and urban places, or adventurous stories happening during holidays. Such novels were written in Czechoslovakia in the first half of the 20th century by a number of authors, including Jan Karel Čemus (1895-1969), Miloš Kocourek (1904-1984) and Miloš Kosina (1905-1966). A specific subgenre consists of boys' novels about the activities of Boy Scout troops, culminating with summer tent camps. Jaroslav Novák's (1894-1965) *Skautská srdce*, the debut of the author of adventure novels and Boy Scout handbooks, is considered the first Czech Scout novel, in which the author portrayed two months of life at a forest camp of Czech Boy Scouts<sup>2</sup>. Although Novák's novel did not avoid some sentimental features, it contributed significantly to the constitution of the Czech boys' novel, which was linked to the values of scouting and openly declared educational and motivational goals<sup>3</sup>. The defining figure of this type of prose, however, was Jaroslav Foglar in the 1930s and 1940s.

His work draws mainly on the work of Canadian writer Ernest Thompson Seton (1860–1946), but also reflects the pedagogical programme of the Scout Movement. Foglar was able to use and develop the ideas of the founder of the World Scout Movement. Although it was Robert Baden-Powell (1857–1941) who first came up with the concept of so-called patrols, essentially small social groups of peers, Foglar took the patrol system to practical perfection. Without having any psychological training, he realized that small groups of no more than ten people work best thanks to the principles of social dynamics (cohesion, interaction, communication, motivation, etc.). Such groups are part of troops, but they are also reflected, in a specific form, in the so-called reading clubs, which he methodically guided through the magazines he edited. His novels motivate readers to individual work and to organize their own leisure activities in these small social groups, most often patrols or boys' clubs.

Other authors followed Foglar's principles of the boys' novel in the second half of the 20th century, although the genre stagnated in Czechoslovakia, especially in the politically unstable 1950s and during the so-called normalization (1970s and 1980s). It is only since the 1990s that the range of Foglar's successors, who try to develop the principles of his boys' novels<sup>4</sup>, or transpose them to the present and update their message in different social conditions<sup>5</sup>, has expanded significantly. In addition to new boys' prose, also comic stories

<sup>2</sup> J. Novák, *Skautská srdce*, Praha, J.R. Vilímek, 1921.

<sup>3</sup> D. Kroča, *Příběh zrání a proměny, Nad románovým debutem Jaroslava Nováka*, «Bohemica litteraria», vol. 17, n. 2, 2014, pp. 86-99.

<sup>4</sup> J. Velinský, *Poslední tajemství Jana T.*, Druhé vydání, Praha, Miloš Uhlíř – Baset, 2013; J. Červinka, *Poselství ze Stínadel*, Praha, Albatros, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hogan, *Meč Vontů*, Praha, Leprez, 1999; S. Hrnčíř, *Poklad Uctívačů ginga: Tajemství neviditelného srubu*, Praha, Ostrov, 2000; S. Hrnčíř, *Maják Uctívačů ginga: Bratrstvo ztrac-*

that follow the Foglar tradition are published in the Czech Republic. For example, the celebration of the 80th anniversary of Foglar's comic series about the legendary boys' club *Rychlé šípy*<sup>6</sup> was joined by a number of creators of the contemporary Czech comics scene with a collection of diverse sequels and intertextual links<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. Biographical characteristics

As is evident from the above, the corpus of Jaroslav Foglar's literary works as a whole cannot be clearly and simply characterized in terms of genre. The effort to label them collectively has led literary critics to compare artistic and pedagogical aspects, resulting in such assessments as consumer literature, adventure fiction, educational and guidance literature, camping and instructional literature, pedagogical poems, world of myth, and many others<sup>8</sup>. It is characteristic of Foglar's work as a whole that it is educational fiction that subordinates literary and linguistic means to pedagogical goals and ethical purposes. A few key moments that most influenced Foglar's approach to the world and his reflection on it through his literary work can be excerpted here from both autobiographical<sup>9</sup> and rich secondary literature<sup>10</sup>.

His father died when he was four years old, which influenced the future writer in several ways throughout his life, imprinting on his work. He was emotionally very dependent on his mother, from whom he was never able to detach and start his own family. Paradoxically, this allowed him to devote all his energy and time to literary work and work with youth. The second personality trait originating from his childhood was the experience of poverty, which was reflected in his thriftiness as well as his strong appreciation of work and diligence. The writer was socially sensitive to other people in need. The third moment was his relationship to creative activities on standard paper, especially drawing and writing, which he had succumbed to before even starting school. Although he was one of the top students in his early years of school attend-

*ného talisman*, Praha, Ostrov, 2005; S. Hrnčíř, *Ostrov Uctívačů ginga: Po stopách neznámých příběhů Rychlých šípů*, Praha, Ostrov, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> J. Foglar, *Rychlé šípy*, Praha, Olympia, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> T. Prokúpek, *Rychlé šípy a jejich úžasná nová dobrodružství*, Praha, Filip Tomáš – Akropolis, 2018; P. Čech, *O Červenáčkovi*, Havlíčkův Brod, Petrkov, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> I. Jirásek, *Prototyp zážitkového pedagoga*, in Id. (ed.), *Fenomén Foglar*, Praha, Prázdni-nová škola Lipnice, 2007, pp. 25-83.

<sup>9</sup> J. Foglar, *Život v poklusu*, Praha, Olympia, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> M. Zapletal, *Záhady a tajemství Jaroslava Foglara*, Praha, Euromedia Group – Knižní klub, 2007; J. Zachariáš, *Stoletý hoch od Bobří řeky: Dobrodružství života a metod Jaroslava Foglara – legendy dětské zájmové činnosti*, Praha, Ostrov, 2007; S. Sohr, *Zase zní píseň úplňku: vyprávění o Jaroslavu Foglarovi*, Ostrava, Puls, 1968.

ance, he more or less resigned to any intellectual interests in his later years and did not receive any significant formal education (he graduated only from a two-year business school without a school leaving certificate).

Throughout his life, he longed to «remain a boy forever», to remain in that fleeting time of human life to which he committed his whole life<sup>11</sup>. He understood the boy's soul like few other teachers, let alone writers. His peculiar uniqueness consisted in the fact that he wrote as a thirteen-year-old boy would write if he could<sup>12</sup>. With his fantasy, dreaminess and desire for ideals, he created a coherent boys' world in his works, where there is no room for adults, where the psyche is not yet burdened with life's empiricism, where sensuality is not yet awakened by erotic passion<sup>13</sup>. Foglar's entire work is full of boys' fights, games, being in the countryside, camping and romanticism, but it shows an absence of the female element. The focus of the novels and comics is strongly gender imbalanced<sup>14</sup>, which the author justified by the fact that he had no personal experience with the girls' mentality and that he did not know how to create adventure stories about girls<sup>15</sup>.

Foglar was able to make the most of his interest in the boys' world and the way of experiencing it in Scout troops. In 1923, he joined the old-scout club Jestřábi, from where he transferred to a Scout troop in 1924 (where he got the nickname Jestřáb, which he later used as a pseudonym). From 1927, he was the leader of the 2nd Scout Troop in Prague, with which he connected almost his entire life and also a substantial part of his literary works<sup>16</sup>. In 1938, he joined the advertising department of the Melantrich publishing house, and began editing the youth weekly *Mladý hlasatel* in the same year, which was stopped by the Nazis in 1941. He attempted to build on this type of attractive periodical for youth in the magazines *Junák* (1946-1946) and *Vpřed* (1946-1948), in which he also revived his popular comic series from *Mladý hlasatel*, *Rychlé šípy*. After his forced departure from the editorial office of *Vpřed* until 1953, he devoted himself to writing, but without the possibility of publishing.

The complex social and political situation in the former Czechoslovakia

<sup>11</sup> J. Foglar, *Život v poklusu*, Praha, Olympia, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> J. Halas, ... *od plantážníka ze všech plantážníků nejplantážníkovatějšího...*, in J. Hojer, V. Černý (edd.), *Jestřábe, díky: Jaroslavu Foglarovi Hoši od Bobří řeky a přátelé*, Praha, Nakladatelství Ostrov, 2000, pp. 124-127.

<sup>13</sup> P. Sadecký, *Proč mlčí Jaroslav Foglar?*, «Zlatý máj», vol. 8, n. 3, 1964, pp. 105-108; V. Vacke, *Svět pouze pro chlapce?*, «Kmen», vol. 1, n. 40, 1988, pp. 1, 3; S. Sohr, *Zase zní píseň úplňku: vyprávění o Jaroslavu Foglarovi*, Ostrava, Puls, 1968.

<sup>14</sup> M. Fafejta, *Analýza role žen, dívek a Mirka Dušína v Rychlých šípech: obsahová analýza Rychlých šípů*, in I. Jirásek (ed.), *Fenomén Foglar*, Praha, Prázdňinová škola Lipnice, 2007, pp. 161-168.

<sup>15</sup> P. Maurer, *Ježek v kleci: Dosud nepublikovaný rozhovor Paula Maurera s Jaroslavem Foglarem 1982-1985*, Praha, MauMau, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> D. Kroča, *Jaroslav Foglar*, in M. Šubrťová (ed.) *Slovník autorů literatury pro děti a mládež 2., Čeští spisovatelé*, Praha, Libri, 2012, pp. 133-135.

during the 20th century had a significant influence on Foglar's further works. His books could not be published at all not only in 1949-1964, but also in 1972-1985. Especially in the 1950s, Foglar became a target of attack not from a literary, but from a purely ideological perspective, when his work was described as «a kitsch-like instrument of fake American romanticism», «irritating blandness», «ancient schemes of poor taste»<sup>17</sup>. It was not until the 1990s that the author returned to unrestricted writing, though from 1995 until his death, it was only under permanent hospitalization. The author gained appreciation in the free times especially for his style, which points, beyond the primary dimension of the stories, to the archetypal symbolic drama of initiation, which refers to Jungian analytical psychology, creating a myth world in the form of autonomous literature for adolescents<sup>18</sup>. His evocative linguistic style, e.g. original works with proper names characterized by unusual poetics and a touch of romantic charm, also deserved the attention of the professional public<sup>19</sup>.

Currently, his work is of interest not only to literary studies and literary critics<sup>20</sup>, but also to a number of other related disciplines, including comics studies<sup>21</sup> religious studies<sup>22</sup> and pedagogy, especially outdoor education<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> V. Stejskal, *Moderní česká literatura pro děti*, Praha, Státní nakladatelství dětské knihy, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> M. Hybler, *Preadolescentní mentalita*, «Host», vol. 15, n. 6, 1999, pp. 42-45; J. Lopatka, *Sláva a úskalí amatérismu*, in J. Lopatka (edd.), *Předpoklady tvorby*, Praha, Československý spisovatel, 1991, pp. 174-182; V. Nezkusil, *Rozpory Foglarova světa: k prvnímu soubornému vydání "stínadelských" příběhů*, «Zlatý máj», vol. 15, n. 6, 1991, pp. 157-163.

<sup>19</sup> A. Mikulášek, *K tematice a poetice Foglarovy Chaty v Jezerní kotlině*, in R. Hamanová, D. Lábusová (edd.), *K fenoménu Jaroslav Foglar*, Praha, Památník národního písemnictví, 2008 pp. 45-66; K. Komárek, *K jazyku a poetice Foglarových próz*, in R. Hamanová, D. Lábusová (edd.), *K fenoménu Jaroslav Foglar*, Praha, Památník národního písemnictví, 2008, pp. 67-74; E. Hurych, *Sakralita pohybu v díle Jaroslava Foglara*, in P. Hošek (edd.), *Duchovní rozměr fenoménu Foglar*, Praha, Dingir, 2018, pp. 89-142.

<sup>20</sup> M. Dvorský, *Mýtus zvaný Stínadla: Rychlé šípy, Vontové a hlavolam – realita versus fikce*, Praha, Zdeněk Bauer, 2011; T. Vučka, *Cesta za modrým světlem: Meditace nad texty Jaroslava Foglara*, Příbram, Pistorius & Olšanská, 2015; D. Kroča, *Z fikčního světa Jaroslava Foglara: Zkáza Jezerní kotliny*, «Bohemica litteraria», vol. 25, n. 1, 2022, pp. 43-54.

<sup>21</sup> J. Alaniz, *Where the White Clouds Sail... (100 Years since the Birth of Jaroslav Foglar)*, «International Journal of Comic Art», vol. 10, n. 1, 2008, pp. 583-586; T. Prokůpek, P. Kořínek, M. Foret, M. Jareš. *Dějiny československého komiksu 20. století*, Praha, Akropolis, 2014; I. Jirásek. *Holistic Leisure Education through the Czech Rapid Arrows Comics*, «Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics», vol. 12, n. 5, 2021, pp. 750-764.

<sup>22</sup> P. Hošek, *Evangelium podle Jaroslava Foglara*, Brno, Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2017; I. Jirásek, *Rychlé šípy, mundus imaginalis a implicitní náboženství*, in P. Hošek (ed.), *Duchovní rozměr fenoménu Foglar*, Praha, Dingir, 2018, pp. 143-197; I. Jirásek, J. Němec, R. Macků, *Implicitně náboženské aspekty dětské literatury Jaroslava Foglara*, «Religio: revue pro religionistiku», vol. 29, n. 1, 2021, pp. 33-55.

<sup>23</sup> I. Jirásek, J. Němec, R. Macků, *'Come with Me where the Sky is High and Blue...': the Influence of Literature by Jaroslav Foglar on Readers and Their Environmental and Outdoor Experience*, «Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning», 2021, pp. 1-21; I.

### 3. *Basic strategy of literary work*

As noted above, the core of Foglar's extensive and genre-diverse output for children and young people consists mainly of boys' novels. Their adventurous plot is mostly made up of boys' stories about active leisure, about challenges to overcome and personal development, about role models worthy of following, but also about specific instructions for games, competitions and interesting activities. It is an example of the ideal activity of a troop, club or group, guided by an ethos of moral action, self-finding of one's own identity and peer comparison. It is all infused with a great deal of humour and wit, with a strong legend, romanticism and mystery.

Among the most famous are the Scouting and hiking novels *Hoši od Bobří řeky*<sup>24</sup>, *Pod junáckou vlajkou*<sup>25</sup>, *Poklad Černého delfína*<sup>26</sup> and *Devadesátka pokračuje*<sup>27</sup>. Their plot evokes hope in the readers that they can also experience adventurous situations themselves, especially in a troop and thanks to the bonds of friendship with their peers. The novels offer a leisure programme, most of the stories include exciting outdoor games and their thrilling plot culminates in events at a summer tent camp. In particular, *Hoši od Bobří řeky* masterfully combines these elements of literary construction to create a boys' novel that appeals to the reader. It is the story of twelve boys who, under the guidance of a university student named Rikitan, go on outdoor expeditions and later have an adventure together at a camp in the picturesque Sluneční zátoka (Sunny Bay) on Bobří řeka (Beaver River). The book is based on a motivational legend about the test of maturity (hunt for badges called *little beavers*). Like the backwoodsman Roy in Rikitan's motivational story, the troop members undertake an initiation journey to adulthood, gradually becoming honest, noble and hardworking young men.

Passages with a strong persuasive function are an essential part of the text. In these, the author strategically addresses the child reader and tries to provoke them to competitiveness and activity:

Don't you want to see if you can match Roy? Well – your quest begins here; prove what you are made of: hunt little beavers like the Boys from the Beaver River!<sup>28</sup>.

The author deliberately provokes the child reader with insistent questions and encourages them to explore their own abilities. According to literary theorists,

Jirásek, I. Turčová, *The Czech Approach to Outdoor Adventure and Experiential Education: the Influence of Jaroslav Foglar's Work*, «Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning», vol. 17, n. 4, 2017, pp. 321-337.

<sup>24</sup> J. Foglar, *Hoši od Bobří řeky*, Praha, Kobes, 1937.

<sup>25</sup> Id., *Pod junáckou vlajkou*, Praha, Kobes, 1940.

<sup>26</sup> Id., *Poklad Černého delfína*, Brno, Blok, 1966.

<sup>27</sup> Id., *Devadesátka pokračuje*, Praha, Olympia, 1969.

<sup>28</sup> J. Foglar, *Hoši od Bobří řeky*, Praha, Albatros, 2019, p. 80.

the persuasive function is an essential element of Foglar's boys' novels, even in those cases when it is not explicitly formulated by appealing to the reader, but remains hidden behind fictional situations and implicit in the adventurous plots<sup>29</sup>.

Experts on Foglar's work further state that the secret of the success of his boys' novels lies in their ability to combine educational and emotional influence. Adolescents' feelings are particularly influenced by poetic depictions of the landscape, the thematization of distant places and mysteries, and strong friendships with peers<sup>30</sup>. Unconventional friendship relationships in a problematic school classroom environment are explored in the novels *Boj o první místo*<sup>31</sup> and *Když Duben přichází*<sup>32</sup>. The metaphorical naming in the title of the latter novel is particularly noteworthy, as it refers to the period of adolescence ("the April of life", assuming that life means the calendar year). The author succeeded in describing and reflecting the crucial moments of this period, in which the ethical principles and attitudes of young people towards others are formed. He also formulated his project of an ideal teacher in the form of teacher Kovář, who is able to motivate his pupils to develop physical and mental fitness and perceives school as an environment of friendly relationships and joyful experiences that pupils will remember throughout their lives.

The motif of a strong boyhood friendship, which develops during the characters' time together in an almost forgotten corner of the picturesque countryside, comes to the fore in the prose works *Chata v Jezerní kotlině*<sup>33</sup>, *Dobrodružství v Zemi nikoho*<sup>34</sup> and *Modrá rokle*<sup>35</sup>. The above characteristics are concentrated especially in the prose *Chata v Jezerní kotlině*. The inseparable friendship of two boys develops during activities in an inaccessible basin with a small lake, where they both find a place to realize their dreams and a hidden refuge from the seductions of their bad peers. The lake basin becomes a place where it is possible to think, to create, but also just to silently gaze into the red sky and be dazzled by the glow of the setting sun:

That evening, the sunset was particularly blood-red, a heart wrenching beauty of the glow of molten gold in the west. [...] They did not speak and kept their eyes steadily fixed on the blood-red sunset. Their minds were filled with memories of every single day of the holidays, of every event and story<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> V. Brožová, *Persvazivní strategie návodné literatury Jaroslava Foglara a Miloše Zapletala*, in R. Hamanová, D. Lábusová (edd.), *K fenoménu Jaroslav Foglar*, Praha, Památník národního písemnictví, 2008, pp. 141-160.

<sup>30</sup> M. Zapletal, *Záhady a tajemství Jaroslava Foglara*, Praha, Euromedia Group – Knižní klub, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> J. Foglar, *Boj o první místo*, Praha, Kobes, 1936.

<sup>32</sup> Id., *Když Duben přichází*, Praha, Kobes, 1944.

<sup>33</sup> Id., *Chata v Jezerní kotlině*, Praha, Kobes, 1939.

<sup>34</sup> Id., *Dobrodružství v Zemi nikoho*, Praha, Olympia, 1969.

<sup>35</sup> Id., *Modrá rokle*, Praha, Olympia, 1994, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Id., *Chata v Jezerní kotlině*, Praha, Albatros, 2018, p. 175.

The author's ability to evoke magical natural scenery is, according to many, the reason for the success of the novel, which is referred to in Czech literature as «one of the most impressive books about boyhood friendship ever written»<sup>37</sup>. Foglar's boys' novels are able to draw the reader into a thrilling plot and offer a story full of adventurous situations in the midst of picturesque scenery. It is precisely these areas that readers appreciate most about his work: this is at least clear from the results of the quantitative research, which will be discussed in more detail below.

However, a strong story and plot that draws the reader into the action applies not only to novels set in the countryside, but also to prose that thematises the uncanny urban space. Mysterious corners of the city are the main setting of the prose novels *Přístav volá*<sup>38</sup> and *Tajemná Řásnovka*<sup>39</sup>, in which the boy protagonist explores a mysterious quarter (Port District, Řásnovka), which is characterized by its historical peculiarities, but above all offers the opportunity to experience adventurous situations in a community of peers. The space of the story is deliberately mythicized and relativized, it becomes a world of an alternative, parallel reality<sup>40</sup>.

The space of such an alternative fictional world is significantly developed in Foglar's so-called Stínadla trilogy, which includes the novels *Záhada hlavolamu*<sup>41</sup>, *Stínadla se bouří*<sup>42</sup> and *Tajemství Velkého Vonta*<sup>43</sup>. It follows the legendary boys' club, Rychlé šípy, as they search for the so-called Hedgehog in the Cage, a symbol of boy power in the city's ancient district of Stínadla. The mysterious space-time setting deliberately gives the child reader the impression that they actually know Stínadla, because the old district filled with narrow streets and quiet little squares can be found in almost all big cities:

Grown-up people may not know about it, or they don't remember it anymore, but every proper boy and almost every girl who lives in a big city knows that there are some evenings when everything in the streets is strangely mysterious and almost spooky, and when the air is filled with some unknown adventure<sup>44</sup>.

Just as the poetic depictions of the landscape have a similar effect on the emotions of adolescent readers, Foglar teaches them to perceive the charm of the city, especially its oldest parts. This charm is heightened by the fact

<sup>37</sup> V. Nosek-Windy, *Jestřábí perutě*, Praha, Olympia, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> J. Foglar, *Přístav volá*, Praha, Melantrich, 1934.

<sup>39</sup> Id., *Tajemná Řásnovka*, Brno, Blok, 1965.

<sup>40</sup> L. Nováková, *Stínadelská trilogie – ke koncepci Foglarova fiktivního světa*, in R. Hamanová, D. Lábusová (edd.), *K fenoménu Jaroslav Foglar*, Praha, Památník národního písemnictví, 2008, pp. 37-44.

<sup>41</sup> J. Foglar, *Záhada hlavolavu*, Praha, Kobes, 1941.

<sup>42</sup> Id., *Stínadla se bouří*, Praha, Olympia, 1970.

<sup>43</sup> Id., *Tajemství Velkého Vonta*, Praha, Olympia, 1992.

<sup>44</sup> Id., *Stínadla se bouří*, Praha, Albatros, 2022, p. 7.

that the mysterious place in his novels is associated with signs of something «strange, unusual, bizarre, whether it is a thing, a custom or a tradition»<sup>45</sup>. Yet it is always true that the stories of his novels take place in a world that is analogous to the world in which children actually live and which they know intimately. The heroes of the novels tend to be boys between the ages of ten and fifteen, an age the writer understands and can empathize with. His prose also answers many of the questions that child readers ask themselves during adolescence and which have an impact on their future lives. To what extent and in which thematic areas this is the case is evident from the results of the reception research, the main outlines of which will now be presented.

#### 4. *From reader's reception to personality formation*

The key areas of the quantitative research were aimed at answering the question whether and to what extent the respondents' reading experiences had an impact on their future life. In 2020, an electronic questionnaire survey was used to reach a group of male and female readers of all ages who were expected to be familiar with Foglar's work. The structure of the questionnaire, especially its scaled questions, was based on a thorough content analysis of Foglar's entire work. The identified areas were transformed into survey items, and respondents were asked about the extent to which they experienced the area and the extent to which they perceived that they applied it to their daily lifestyle. A seven-point, i.e., odd-numbered scale was chosen, which allows for a neutral choice (0) and overall ranges from (+3) definitely yes to (-3) definitely no.

In total, the data from 1,174 respondents (686 men, 484 women, four respondents did not specify gender) were analysed. The average age of the respondents was 41 years, with the largest number of respondents in the age range of 30–50 years, representing a total of 647 participants (approximately 55%). A significant characteristic of the participants is the representation of respondents with university education (704, i.e. 60%); when including respondents with postgraduate education or scientific training (162, i.e. approx. 14%), a total of 74% of respondents had such education. Respondents who have completed secondary education or vocational school with a school leaving certificate, or graduates of colleges (21%) were also a significant group. The remaining 5% were respondents with primary education or vocational training.

The aspects of Foglar's literary work that are most appreciated by readers will now be discussed in more detail. Given the limited scope of the text,

<sup>45</sup> M. Zapletal, *Záhady a tajemství Jaroslava Foglara*, Praha, Euromedia Group – Knižní klub, 2007, p. 102.

only the most frequently represented categories are selected and the results are presented through the mode, i.e. the most frequently represented part of the scale. The most appreciated areas are those that are connected with the story, the plot and the stay in the countryside. Both categories have an average rating greater than 2, with the extreme scale (+3) represented 668 times (57%) for 'story and plot', and similarly for 'countryside', where the mode is represented 629 times (54%). The following three areas are rated similarly by respondents and form a somewhat homogeneous group of subjects related to the incentive to act morally (+3, 43%), which is closely linked to the actions and patterns of the main characters in the work (+3, 42%). Readers of Foglar's work appreciate what could generally be included in the ethical sphere: moral (honest) conduct and an emphasis on the good, which finds practical realization especially in the life of peer groups – reading clubs and troops (+3, 39%). The medium-rated area relates to the value of being hardworking and helping others (+3, 29%) and the adventurous environment consisting of city streets and romantic corners of city yards (+3, 34%), with the triad being concluded by the area encouraging active behaviour (+3, 30%). The next two survey items, which still exceed an average of 1 (still on the positive spectrum), are related to the importance of healthy lifestyle, which includes in particular the rejection of alcohol and smoking, together with the appreciation of physical activity and an active lifestyle. The extreme rating for this item (+3) is close to 24% in these cases.

It can be seen from the above that the areas (items) described essentially cluster into four areas rated very positively by respondents, with the most highly valued being 1) a strong story linked to adventure, often set in the countryside, followed by a category underlining 2) the moral dimension of the characters' actions, which take shape in the inspiring, stimulating environment of the reference social groups. The third area appreciates 3) the values of diligence and helping others combined with an appeal to follow these in real life and also 4) to an active and healthy lifestyle.

In analogy to the set of items used to determine how readers perceived the work, readers were also asked whether they reflected the identified areas in their daily lives. This part of the survey also gives priority to the item related to staying in the countryside and camping (+3, 46%). The second most important area is ethical principles related to upholding justice, fairness and helping closest people (+3, 39%). The third area is the emotional perception of nature (+3, 33%), followed by the similarly rated area of peer relationships (+3, 29%). The value of hard work and helping others is also relatively strongly appreciated (+2, 29%). The items that readers valued in the work were also subjected to a correlation analysis with the areas they transfer to real life. What was surprising in case of these items was the relatively strong positive relation. The correlation coefficient ranged from 0.5 to 0.7. This shows that the areas that are strongly perceived by the reader in the work can also be applied to real

life. However, the correlation is reciprocal and the opposite may also be true. Activities related to holistic development (+3, 16%) and physical activities (+3, 14%) are less strongly applied to real life by the respondents. Interesting for interpretation is the area associated with the application of a healthy lifestyle without alcohol and smoking. The largest standard deviation suggests that respondents are stratified across the possible range of responses in this area. 16% chose the middle of the spectrum, 35% chose the negative part of the spectrum (i.e. NO), 48% chose the positive part of the spectrum (i.e. YES), and 16% chose the extreme choice (+3). Such a large variance was subjected to a more detailed analysis in order to establish the association between respondent groups and parts of the spectrum. Statistically significant is the group of teachers who apply a healthy lifestyle without alcohol and smoking, physical activity and active lifestyle, staying in the countryside and camping, as well as peer cohesion and holistic development (self-development) to real life. This raises a question for further research, namely whether readers – teachers are generally more sensitive to these topics than others. The data support this claim.

To return to the key question of our research excursion, the empirical data show that Foglar's work resonates strongly both in terms of its perception and as a kind of practical inspiration for the everyday life of readers. The questionnaire survey also explicitly inquired whether respondents felt their lives had been influenced by Foglar's work, using a four-point scale (definitely no – rather no – rather yes – definitely yes). The results are evident. 228 respondents, i.e. about 19%, chose 'definitely yes' and agreed with the statement that «they have undergone a personality change and try to live in the spirit of Jaroslav Foglar's work». 749 respondents, i.e. 64% of those surveyed, chose 'rather yes', stating that they have «realized the importance of Foglar's work and are trying to act better according to that model». In total, 83% of respondents feel definitely or rather influenced by Foglar's work. 167, i.e. 14% of the respondents, chose 'rather no', but they were inclined to the statement «I realized that I could have been inspired by the work, but it never happened, and if it did, then only marginally». 23 respondents, i.e. only 2% of the participants, chose 'definitely no' and identified with the statement that «the work had no influence on me».

### *Conclusion*

The extensive work of Jaroslav Foglar has so far been published not only in a total of 27 volumes of complete works published by the Olympia publishing house since the early 1990s, but is now also available to readers as an exceptionally high quality graphic and edited collection from the Czech publish-

ing house Albatros. The editorial board of this publishing house is currently cooperating with the Jaroslav Foglar Scout Foundation, which uses the estate bequeathed by the author's will and, in accordance with his life credo "to help youth", supports children's leisure and educational activities.

Most of the editions, however, are still aimed only at the Czech reader and are published in Czech. This circumstance may be the reason why, while Foglar's work is a phenomenon in the Czech Republic, it is not well known abroad. Only the author's most important works have been translated into foreign languages and published abroad. These include, in particular, the aforementioned novel *Hoši od Bobří řeky*, which, in addition to twenty Czech editions (the jubilee edition published by Albatros in 2019), has also been published in Polish (1958), Slovak (1967), Russian (1987), German (1991), Esperanto (1996), Braille (1998), and, in times of prohibition, also in Czech in Germany (1984), and even as a magazine serialization in Toronto, Canada (1970–1972). Similar success was achieved by Foglar's second most important novel, *Chata v Jezerní kotlině*, which has been published in Czech twelve times so far, in addition to Polish (1960), Slovak (1991) and Braille (1996).

The plot scheme of Foglar's boys' novels uses a relatively clear layout of characters, but what is always essential is the suspenseful and, in many ways, original story about boys who, under the influence of unusual experiences in a club, in a troop or through a strong friendship with a peer, improve themselves. In addition, the boys' prose conveys unquestionable moral messages as well as motivation for an active life. Foglar thus creates a very distinctive type of educational prose, where the boy protagonist is able to set high goals and work towards them even at the cost of renunciation.

These essential qualities of Foglar's work correspond with the results of a quantitative empirical research aimed at observing how contemporary readers perceive Foglar's work, how they appreciate it, and what they transfer from it to their actual lives. Respondents to the research most appreciated the strong narrative connected with adventure, which often takes place in the countryside, and the moral dimension of the acting characters, which is formed in the inspiring setting of the reference social groups. Particularly, the areas of the author's work that are transferred by the respondents into everyday real life include the stay in the countryside associated with camping and the perception of the ethical aspect of the works, including justice, morality, honesty and helping those in need. The results of the empirical research thus correspond to the literary analyses carried out and confirm the conviction that the work of Jaroslav Foglar belongs to the permanent values not only of Czech literature for children and youth.