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A Picture Book About War as a Cultural Artifact With a Political Potential. Case Study

Książka obrazkowa o wojnie jako kulturowy artefakt
o politycznym potencjale. Analiza przypadku

KEYWORDS

picture book, war
in Ukraine, critical
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postcolonialism.

ABSTRACT

In the article, using the method of critical content analysis, I provide a case study of a book for children written and drawn by Ukrainian artists: Romana Romanyshyn and Andriy Lesiv entitled *How War Changed Rondo*, originally published in 2015 in Lviv as an artistic reply to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. The book, which is placed within a larger social-historical-cultural-political context, is what I consider to be a cultural text (artifact) with political significance and voice in the information warfare. What is analysed is not only the book itself, but also numerous epitexts related to it (interviews with artists, blogs, reviews and opinions) that have been published in the internet. Historicism and postcolonialism (in Mykola Riabchuk's version) are the theoretical perspectives for the investigation and interpretation of meanings generated by the book in a multimodal manner (by means of image and text, and the interaction between them) and of the data that has been used in a secondary manner. The research reveals that, in the imperial discourse, this picture book (and its assumption) is a vivid example of the ambivalence between the voice of Ukrainian freedom from Russian cultural control and, at the same time, the inclusion into Western universalism.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

książka obrazkowa,
wojna w Ukrainie,
krytyczna
analiza treści,
postkolonializm

W artykule, wykorzystując metodę krytycznej analizy treści (*critical content analysis*), dokonuję studium przypadku książki obrazkowej dla dzieci *Wojna, która zmieniła Rondo* autorstwa ukraińskich artystów Romany Romanyszyn i Andrija Łesiwa wydanej w oryginale w 2015 roku we Lwowie jako artystyczną odpowiedź na inwazję Rosji na Ukrainę i aneksję Krymu. Książkę postrzegam jako tekst kulturowy (artefakt) o politycznym znaczeniu (element wojny informacyjnej), osadzony w szerszym społeczno-historyczno-kulturowo-politycznym kontekście. Analizowany jest nie tylko sam utwór, ale także liczne epitetki wytworzone wokół niego (zamieszczone w internecie wywiady z artystami, blogi, recenzje i opinie). Perspektywą teoretyczną analiz i interpretacji znaczeń wytwarzanych multimodalnie w samym utworze (za pomocą obrazu i tekstu oraz relacji między nimi) oraz wykorzystanych danych wtórnych jest historycyzm i postkolonializm (w wersji używanej przez Mykołę Riabczuka). Analiza pokazuje, że w dyskursie imperialnym utwór (i jego założenie) jest egzemplifikacją ambiwalencji pomiędzy głosem emancypacji Ukraińców z rosyjskiej hegemonii kulturowej i jednocześnie włączania się w nurt uniwersalizmu zachodniego.

Introduction and Research Task

Contemporary social crises resulting from the world's ongoing wars and increasingly tangible effects of climatic catastrophe are topics of ubiquitous public debates, also involving increasingly younger members of societies. In recent years, one can notice numerous representations of these problems in children's books, especially in artistic picturebooks, which, in content and form, take up challenges related to the themes of time, places and cultures of their creation, as well as the age and position of their audience, which Sandra L. Beckett (2013) describes as *crossover picturebooks*. It is possible that their presence in the public space is an expression of adult concern for the consciousness and well-being of children who have to live, share and experience fears and tragedies in the 'here and now', which could constitute an educational discourse: informational-pedagogical-therapeutic one. It is also possible that they are a certain strategy of helpless adults in the face of the real problems of the world; an expression of their hope and expectation of a solution in the future by means of a "powerful child" who has power over the adult, if we look at the time yet to come (Beauvais, 2015). On the one hand, a picturebook may be used as a tool (of power) for adults who take children hostage for a "better tomorrow" (Szkudlarek, 2012, p. 337). It is also possible that so-called *challenging picturebooks* are produced (and given to the child) as a gesture of a political act, allowing them to be cultural texts (artifacts) with

political potential, produced as a voice in social discourse and a representation of a narrative embedded in a broader, social-historical-cultural-political context.

In this article, I will attempt to look at an exemplification of the last of the above-mentioned possibilities by analysing the picture book *How War Changed Rondo* (Війна, щозмінила рондо) by the Ukrainian couple of artists: Romana Romanyshyn and Andriy Lesiv (published by Art Studio Agrafka, Wydawnictwo Starego Lwa 2015, Ukraine, in Poland, by Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2016¹). It is one of a growing number of children's books in which war is the main theme, challenging both young and adult audiences (including the researcher) with a clear, political stance on an up-to-date social problem (here, the war is perceived not only locally). The book has received very good opinions of reviewers, having been awarded the 2015 Bologna Ragazzi Award in the New Horizons category. So far, it has been published in France, China, South Korea, Slovakia and the USA, and it has been included in the 'white raven' list of the International Youth Library in Munich. As of 2021, it is available in global online shops in English.

The following case study concerns the indicated book seen by me as a cultural artifact which appears in a specific time and place as a certain political act in a specific discourse. The aim of the study is to critically analyse and interpret the multimodally (verbally and visually) constructed meanings in the book and to identify the represented discourses in its content and epitextual specifications.

Research Method

The perspective of cultural studies, adopted in the study, allows for the use of both the methodology of critical content analysis (CCA) (Johnson et al., 2016, 2019) in its qualitative variant, as well as picturebook studies (and related theories) (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006), multimodal discourse analyses (Painter et al., 2015; Painter, 2018), in combination with elements of selected literary studies concepts, i. e. structuralism and narratology (Genette, 1987). A picturebook produces meanings multimodally (mainly through text and image, and in intersemiotic relationships between them), which means that the discourses I analyse have their representations in both of these semiotic forms (modalities) and are, therefore, not dominated solely by text (language) (see Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Moerdisuroso, 2014; Johnson et al., 2019).

The unit of analysis is a conceptually and narratively comprehensive iconotext comprising 17 compositionally complete double-pages, front cover, cover, and title

1 Interestingly, it was published on 9 May.

and editorial pages with paratexts. I also used the very numerous epitexts related to the book (online interviews with artists, blogs, reviews and opinions related to the work) as data for secondary analysis. I encoded the ambiguity of this research material mainly qualitatively in multiple, hermeneutic readings based on readings of theoretical texts and broad contextual analyses. The theoretical perspective that offers the possibility of critically understanding it and reading its meanings in the context of its development and emergence, along with the discourses it represents, includes historicism and postcolonialism. Historicism allows for the study of processes of change and the ways in which particular periods or cultures produce meanings through which they can define and understand themselves: what systems of power and morality they produce; which values they promote in a given historical context, etc., which requires from the researcher to be aware of their findings according to contextual conditions (Malpas, 2013, pp. 63–65). Through the critical lens of postcolonialism used to analyse post-communism (Moore, 2001; Riabchuk, 2015), I will refer to the discourses of ambivalent (between East and West) emancipation of modern Ukrainian society, and I will try to analyse their work within the cultural text under study. I will refer to the collection of essays by Mykola Riabchuk, an Ukrainian researcher and literary scholar, entitled *Ukraine. The Postcolonial Syndrome*. It provides a broader cultural-political analysis of an *insider* who carries it out in the language of postcolonialism and historicism and describes the identity problems of Ukrainians, as well as Russian-Ukrainian relationships, in a way that is going beyond the present tense, which helps to better understand the context that is interesting to us. I attempt to conduct the study of the present with the awareness of the risk of interpretative and ethical abuses. It seems that in the situation of the ongoing war, involving dramatic outcomes, a critical examination of children's narratives about the war, especially those authored by people from the community affected by the tragedy, is the only safe strategy that does not raise ethical issues of the magnitude of the study of the victims (including children) of the war.

I would like to further define my position as a researcher of the issue, to whom the critical key is closest in educational research (Freire, 1970; Szkudlarek, 1993), as in the study of the content (of children's books), especially when they are mythologised as neutral and innocent cultural texts (see McCallum & Stephens, 2011, p. 359; Nodelman, 2008). I believe (as do Kim & Short, 2019; Short, 2019) that only critical readings of children's books that look deeper and expose, demystify and denaturalise the discourses represented in them, offer an opportunity for researchers, students, and teachers working with students, to grasp their potential, to recognise their ideologies, and to understand their meanings.

Content Analysis and Attempted Interpretation

Context and Idea of the Book

An analysis of the context (as the CCA methodology would require), even limiting itself here to a description of the war currently taking place in Ukraine as a result of the Russian Federation's invasion (this is the only narrative I accept) and the associated macro-, meso- and micro-discourses, would clearly exceed the scope of the article. Reading contemporary Ukraine through Riabchuk's (2015, 2022) analyses provides the satisfaction of understanding it. I assume that, if only by virtue of territorial proximity, Polish readers interested in social and political life are aware of its genesis, course and consequences, and, as of 24 February 2022, may, as it were, legitimately feel personally, including emotionally, involved in it, so I assume they know the context relatively well.

The creators of the book (sensitive artists who are in their thirties, but also their friends, courageous owners of a publishing house), in response to the armed attack by Russia in 2014, in interviews mentioned their determination to publish it the following year. They said: "We were not sure if the Ukrainian population was ready to talk about the war. We didn't want to hurt anyone" (VIII International..., n.d.). It was natural for the artists to have to take care of the youngest members of their society, who, from that moment on, were involved in it; who, full of genuine fear, did not understand why they had to hide in a shelter, or why and where their parents were suddenly going. In order to support the children and their loved ones (parents, grandparents, siblings) in talking about what war is, the artists decided to introduce clear content forms in the book; they used a fairy tale convention with an ultimately positive resolution and the rescue of the brave, though at first glance seemingly weak, characters. The authors chose a graspable language of symbols and visual analogies (flowers, tanks, blackness) with a clear definition of good and evil, light and darkness (Lesiv & Romanyshyn, 2015). Thus, one can consider this artistic activity as a sign of concern for traumatised potential readers, but, as we shall see, the content of the book indicates a personal, deep involvement in the war under the banner of anti-war and anti-Russian ideology, and is thus a certain defensive strategy in the hybrid war. Naturally, then, the book has become a kind of cultural and political artifact; an element of information warfare.

Rondo and the War

The title of the book: *How War Changed Rondo* announces its content. It is the story of the city of Rondo (an almost perfect round city, resembling a number plate, with one small protrusion at the bottom (like the Crimean peninsula) where the inhabitants live in utopian space-time harmony, full of love, peace and adoration for art². This is the case until the moment when WAR unexpectedly enters with tanks and rockets (WAR is written in capital letters already on the cover; repeated as a significant word on the title page and inside the book in powerful typeface), arousing fear and chaos, and causing destruction. It destroys the harmony of the spatial order, the magnificent, classical buildings and the blossoming, colourful, singing flowers with human faces in the unique greenhouse, which used to be the greatest pride of the city (in which the flowers sang the city's anthem dedicated to the sun every day, and occasionally they performed Mozart's *Rondo alla Turca*). The War turns the city into a dark, dystopian place: it spreads black, dead weeds, and brings darkness and death. This archetypical encounter between evident good and evident evil is embodied in the graphic design: the harmonious Rondo and its protagonists are depicted on five colourful double-pages, while War, with its greyish-black look³, occupies as many as ten double-pages. With its appearance, the world literally collapses, which can be felt as a strong disharmony due to the presence of many opposing diagonal lines, also in the arrangement of the slanted blocks of text. The post-war, once again colourful landscape of the resilient city, returns on the last two double-pages.

Just as Rondo has a character, so too is War anthropomorphised (the use of the capital letter would indicate personification), although visually she seems polymorphous (she is hybrid like the ongoing war). She has no face (but her tanks with eyes are like masks that allow her to watch her surroundings); she is a huge doll (a puppet steered from outside) whose massive male hand drives a huge missile into the city (it is visible in the central part of the double-page). She moves by means of noisy and frightening air machines and tanks, and she has no heart (as the text mentions). Visually, it is a combination of conventional weapons known from the history of recent world wars and currently used by Russia in its attacks on Ukraine. Therefore, it is closer to reality than to any fiction. It seems that nobody knows where the War is coming from or who is controlling her. However, given the importance of the open

2 Such individualistic characteristics with an emphasis on linguistic distinctiveness are typical of Ukrainians themselves (Riabchuk, 2015, 2022).

3 The cultural connotations of colour in the graphic concept in this book are highlighted by the philosopher of education Gregory Maughn who claims that the valuing of black (the War is black and scary), dark and grey colours customarily associated with fear, sadness, immorality (especially in the context of light colours) can influence how we unconsciously think about human skin. He, therefore, makes readers sensitive to this aspect of the book in metatextual and philosophical conversations with children (Maughn, 2022).

compositions on the three double-pages showing the War, it is situated in a movement from the left margins⁴ (mainly the top, but also the bottom one), through the centre, towards the right side, which, following the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 197), may be interpreted as an idea symbolizing an abstract concept of something inevitable. What is on the bottom, in turn, may be interpreted as real data, something that constantly exists, something strongly rooted, something that has always been known. This “something” seems to be Russia’s territorial claim to Ukraine, explicit in the views of Russian conservatives, e. g. Solzhenitsyn, and present today in Putin’s statements that Lenin is the creator of Ukraine (Riabchuk, 2015; Krzemiń, 2022). The War’s task is to destroy what is depicted at the bottom right – the greenhouse (the heart and soul of the city – the culture of a sovereign country). The analysis of the discourse of the origin of the War and its status is even more extended by the next double-page, where, on the bottom left margin (where the real data is located), in place of the illustration of the road on which the tank moves along the anxiety-inducing diagonal lines (towards the centre), there is an intra-iconic text written in cascading verse: “WORLD IN TOTAL WAR”, and on the wings of one of the three protagonists depicted here in the upper left-hand corner – the wounded Star made of newsprint – the following words are written: “ПРАВДА” and “AT WAR”. The introduction of an intra-iconic text, in a sense alternative in a picturebook (here additionally in global English and Russian) is metafictional in nature, it is outside the main narrative, and its function is to interject and enter into a dialogue with it (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 235). This interjection seems to be a manifestation of the presence of a discourse of real war around the world, a war between West and East. The word “Truth” should be connoted with the famous daily newspaper as a weapon of Russian propaganda. Rondo (like Ukraine) is an ambivalent borderland here (see Riabchuk, 2015, pp. 13–33).

Heroes. Hail to the Heroes!

This “War has touched everyone” (which is written in an expressive typeface); it has changed everything; but it has also provoked a harsh reaction from the main characters of the story. They are three friends who are activists (in this story the inhabitants

4 It is debatable whether the Western left-to-right narrative repeatedly analysed by Kress and van Leeuwen was so strongly at work in the creation of this composition, and how could it be read if the movement was opposite? It is possible that the artists did not intend to introduce the image of the movement of the Russian troops too literally.

of Rondo are mostly humanoid, zoomorphic figures⁵, but the most important ones are personified objects): Danek is a glowing, transparent bulb with an exposed “hot” heart (scientist, artistic soul, tender guardian of the local flowers); Fabian – a balloon-like, delicate dog with a medallion holding him to the ground (detective with excellent senses); and Star⁶ – an origami paper bird (flying traveller, cartoonist). The origin of the protagonists, which the artists themselves consider important and explain in a radio interview (Lesiv & Romanyshyn, 2015), giving each of them a specific meaning, is also significant when we look at the intra-national Ukrainian struggle of identity and emancipation discourses, manifested in, among other things, pro-Western identifications and neo-colonial enslavement (see Riabchuk, 2015, pp. 147–200).

Danek – presented in the story as the first one, who (as the only one of the three) occupies a whole page. According to the artists, he is like a biological robot (biodesign effect). In my opinion, he symbolizes the meeting of art, science and modern technology⁷; an artist-scientist, a leader, an optimist in the full sense of the word. He is supposed to and does bring light (enlightenment) and future.

Fabian – he is created in the image of a popular children’s toy made by hand, very easily, *ad hoc*, from a long, inflated balloon. It is also an allusion to the iconic, very expensive pop-culture sculpture by the American artist Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog* (1994), created in enormous size from stainless steel coated in shiny chrome, giving a visual impression of lightness, and then reproduced as a series of metal-covered miniatures made of Limoges enamel. In the story of Rondo, Fabian is a living being, and as Jeff Koons has said of his sculptures: “I have always liked balloon animals because they are similar to us. We are balloons. You take a breath and inhale, it’s optimistic. Exhaling is kind of a symbol of death” (see Taggart, 2020).

The Paper Star (Zirka) – in the form of a crane symbolising faith and hope for a long life in Eastern culture – is the most popular origami model in the world because of a legend according to which a person who folds a thousand of such cranes can make a single wish that is sure to come true. She was chosen by the artists precisely as a sign of hope for peace, because they found significant the story of a Japanese girl, Sadako Sasaki (born in 1943) suffering from leukaemia due to radiation sickness as a result of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, who made such an attempt to save herself (Lewkowa, 2015). Sadako died in the middle of her task; her friends completed the rest, transforming the cranes and her desire to live into an anti-war message.

5 In the Polish translation, the inhabitants are called people; in the original, also in the English version, there is no such term. I consider this a certain mistake of the translator.

6 As in the previous footnote – only in the Polish translation does the heroine change her name. In the original it is Зірка (Zirka), in Ukrainian: “star”. In other languages it remains Zirka.

7 See, for example, the exhibitions of mainly Western artists presented as part of the Art+Science Meeting project fulfilled since 2011 by the ŁAŻNIA Contemporary Art Centre in Gdańsk.

The style of portrayal of the characters (small, “childlike”, smiling, e. g. Danek with his big head, gazing at the viewer with his hand raised in a gesture of greeting and his heart exposed) is a means of making the reader like them from the first glance. It is to create a sense of closeness and familiarity with these characters (see Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006; Painter et al., 2015). The protagonists are all romantically constructed characters; they are little, fragile creatures, vulnerable to all kinds of injury, and they are also attributes of childhood. Just as the artists’ intention was to create universal characters who have their history located in the domain of childhood, they were also keen to create beings from the world of fiction, non-humans with whom children could identify (Levkova, 2015), and assigned them fairy-tale powers to fight evil, to defeat the enemy and save their world. The relevance and purpose of such a concept of heroic and fantastic characters in children’s literature depicting fictional combat is confirmed by Kirsten Miller’s analyses in which she demonstrates (following Graham Greene’s idea) that it helps readers think constructively about (perhaps even get excited about) the destruction of the world, rather than offering an escape from violence and, I would add, the horrors of reality (Miller, 2009, p. 273). Rondo’s small, powerful characters are fighting not just one battle against a particular War, but an ongoing archetypal battle between good and evil. The problem is that, as reviewers of children’s literature note, the defeat of evil, the hope for a better world and the happy ending are “a form of noble lie” in the didactic discourse of children’s books (Beauvais, 2015, pp. 46–49). The end of the armed conflict in Ukraine will also not resolve the issue of peace – neither here nor in any other place in the world.

Struggle, Victory and Scars

The clash between Rondo’s characters and the War occurs in several stages. First, the characters take defensive action: they attempt a peaceful dialogue, but after being severely injured, which might actually take away their ability to continue fighting (Danek was hit on the breast while defending the flowers in the greenhouse with his frail body; Star’s wings were burned, and Fabian’s paw was injured by a weed), they respond to the War with her own language, i. e. throwing stones and nails at her. The scene in which angry Danek throws stones at the War (on the double-page Danek is in the centre, but his figure is tiny as compared to the weeds surrounding him) shows the drama of what is impossible but expected of such a fragile being in the face of an evil force (David versus Goliath?). According to the authors, it is a kind of photographic reminder of the many casualties among the protesting citizens in the numerous clashes with the armed Berkut police equipped with flamethrowers on Maidan (Lesiv & Romanyshyn, 2015). The conversational strategies they undertake

and the use of violence for self-defense prove ineffective – the War “ruins their fragile world”, the inhabitants die or go into hiding, Rondo is getting empty (the double-page with a dark grey background shows the plan of the city again; now it is grey, abandoned and destroyed, the burnt borders and ruined buildings are visible). The inhabitants disappear, but not the protagonists. Danek – the inventor and unyielding guardian of the flowers – finds possible ways to save them. His favourite bicycle with a small lamp, which he directs at the plants, helps him generate the light necessary to save the last flowers. He pedals with all his might until the flowers miraculously come to life and take up the city’s anthem he has intoned⁸. The power is reborn. Danek’s knowledge and invention become a breakthrough in the fight against the War who was accidentally touched by the reflection of the light produced and the power of the community song, under the influence of which she became stunned for a moment, and frightened, because, as the narrator confirms, “even the faintest ray of light overcomes the darkness”. It became clear that “[t]o stop the War, all the townspeople must build a great machine of Light to dispel the darkness and save the singing flowers!”. In the city’s main square, all the inhabitants, led by Danko, began the construction (the entire double-page is filled with the sight of many energetic beings working like ants, rolling the circular cogs of the machine). The context of Euromaidan and the power of social protests, recalled earlier, is significantly represented in this part of the book: the inhabitants of Rondo, in a social uprising, are building an anti-war machine (they are rolling round cogs like Ukrainians rolling tyres in Kiev’s Independence Square), led by activists – the main characters of the story (above all Danek). The layout of the double-page is open, which means that what we see is just a frame beyond which we can imagine hundreds of thousands of inhabitants (like the protesters on Maidan). The exceptional competences of the protagonists helped to gather information about enemy camps (shown as points accurately represented on the Star’s spread wings) and find proper parts for the machine (due to the competence of Fabian, the tracker). The finished machine, driven by the power of all the inhabitants moving thousands of bicycles, created a light which, together with the intensity of the power of the communally resounding hymn, annihilated the War and dispelled all darkness⁹. “And it was VICTORY!”.

8 There is no space here to describe the importance of the national anthem uniting a nation, especially one attacked by the enemy. It is worth recalling the important role played by the anthem (*Shchynemverla Ukrainajina i slawa, i wola*) in 2022 and how it made this nation famous.

9 I am tempted to associate this project with the strategic goal of the internet of things (especially given the materiality of Danko’s and his friends’ origins) – here coupled for change (of life), to overcome another great structure by the jointly generated power. Rondo is a peculiar exemplification of Foucault’s educational device, the effect of which is a society motivated to change its position, to act collectively according to a vision of the city (state) of culture/a nation of culture and science, and a vision of a strategic light weapon (enlightenment project) ensuring its permanence (see Chutorański, 2015).

To illustrate the spectacular victory of the inhabitants of Rondo, the compositional trick of the illustration on two consecutive double-pages was applied: the first one depicts, as it were, the anatomy of the machine that produces light and sound (the fact that the inhabitants are singing can be seen by their wide-open mouths), while the entire right-hand margin is filled with rays of light whose devastating impact on the War can be seen when the page is turned – on the verso of the next double-page. In the picturebook theory, such a dynamic design procedure is referred to as a *pageturner* and it is usually intended to escalate the viewer's degree of involvement with the space-time in the narrative (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 152). In this case, it also demonstrates how great the power of connected things must arise to create the power of light (it takes up an entire double-page) and to defeat the enemy (depicted on one page, looking like an imploding, capitulating colossus, with his hand raised in the air in a gesture of surrender).

Life slowly returned to Rondo. In the place of the black thorns, red poppies sprang up, in the greenhouse the singing flowers blossomed again. The double-page with the plan of the city, which allows for a comparison with previous scenes, shows the traces left by the War, but it is dominated by representations of merging, re-construction (sewing on), re-colouring, flowering anew. The protagonists have triumphed, survived and won, but, like other inhabitants of the city, they nevertheless bear visible (bruises, burnt holes, bandages) and hidden wounds caused by the War that “changed Rondo forever”.

Conclusion

A footnote appears on the last double-page explaining the significance of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance for those who died in the First World War. It is worth mentioning here that, in Ukraine, the red poppy is also a symbol of remembrance of the Victory Day over Nazism in the Second World War, established in 2015 in place of the Victory Day (9 May) celebrated by Russians. In the footnote, the artists deliberately emphasized the 100th anniversary of the Great War from a century ago with reference to the date of the Russian invasion, to show how history can repeat itself (Lesiv & Romanyshyn, 2015). This is the only paratext in the book that explains the meaning of a cultural sign among many other signs that fill the entire book. Showing poppies in the book in such abundance (in the same composition, already on the cover this is the first, important message to the viewer) also seems to embody and empower the discourse of the decommunization and de-Sovietisation of Ukraine, especially when considering the second of the indicated symbols of this flower.

Moreover, as it was already mentioned (Ukraine as the prototype of the city of Rondo; the social movement of Euromaidan), Lesiv and Romanyshyn in their interviews still speak of an intentional reference to the Ukrainian artist Mariya Prymachenko – her naive but engaged art (in colourful flowers, black weeds and an anti-war message) and the greenhouse building the prototype of which is located in the botanical garden in Lviv, the authors' city of residence. These features clearly indicate the individualism of the citizens of Rondo (Ukraine), the love of their own language (art, the liberating power of the anthem), significant places (institutions), and finally, the most important: the original city of Rondo (the state) – necessary for the success of the idea of an independent Ukraine from which the War will be chased away.

One may ask what such a created cultural artifact can offer to children and adults audience. What does an essentially fictional picturebook want from the real world in which its readers live? Typically, children's picturebooks about war exemplify an ideology embedded in a discourse about how war divides people and how peaceful understanding can come about through getting to know each other, through dialogue, through understanding the way that leads to the other. In Romanyshyn and Lesiv's work, dialogue is not an option. War is a struggle against an empire of evil. They say that, in their Rondo, it is more about a certain nation becoming a martyr in the struggle against a great evil (Lesiv & Romanyshyn, 2015; Levkova, 2015). In imperial discourse, this book may be a provocative voice for the liberation of Ukrainians from Russian identifications and cultural hegemony and (political) (post)dependence; for the defeat of evil. Using the metaphor of a great Ukrainian intellectual (see Riabchuk 2015, p. 91), it is a gesture of emancipation of Friday from Robinson. However, the universalism anchored in the book's content is also an exemplification of a certain ambivalence, a discourse of striving to join the current of Western subordination.

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