

HOME AND LANDSCAPE IN JURAJ KUNIAK'S POETRY: SEEKING AND FORMING PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THE AUTHOR'S POEMS AND POETIC TEXTS

Anna Slatinská

Abstract: The primary goal of this paper is to elucidate the attachment to place (topophilia) throughout the poetry of Juraj Kuniak - the Slovak contemporary poet. Our aim is to focus on the most significant aspects of his poetic discourse pertaining to home, landscape, and identity. The origin of the phenomena is also explored as well as how it affected Juraj Kuniak and his writing process. From his poetry, we exemplify concepts such as rootedness, birthplace bond, and devotion to native land. The research-based evidence consists of decoding allusions and intertextual meanings which are incorporated in the selected collections of poems. Our analysis reveals the diversity of author's poetic discourse and his interest in global issues. The paper concludes that Juraj Kuniak's poetry could be used effectively in terms of cultivating our inner selves, love for landscape, homeland, national culture and language alongside the cultivation of key life values.

Anna Slatinská graduated from her doctoral study in 2015 defending her dissertation thesis titled *Irish Language as part of Cultural Identity of the Irish*. She realized her PhD program at the Faculty of Arts which is part of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. Currently, she is a member of Department of English and American Studies team. She is in charge of Irish studies and Irish language teaching within MBU. The project started in 2016 and continues till present. Besides, she is also a member of Erasmus+ project (Cherished) and KEGA project dealing with global skills. She teaches ELT Practice, English Syntax and Morphology, Cultural Heritage and its Implementation in Schools, Teaching English to Different Age Groups, Global Skills, ESP. Anna Slatinská has published a variety of articles and monographs individually as well as in cooperation with other colleagues. E-mail: anna.slatinska@umb.sk.

Introduction

Poetry operates as a dynamic visual reflection of the world outside and inside, being part of an author's innermost identity (Liashuk, 2019). Furthermore, thanks to translation, poetry can be described as an effective tool for dialogue between cultures and nations. When reading Juraj Kuniak's poems, we have the opportunity to communicate with the author through his work and to tackle the issues connected with the concepts of home, landscape, identity, language, culture, everyday human existence, past and future, emphasizing cultivation of life-supporting values such as tolerance, love towards others, respect and empathy in the context of the 21st century. Juraj Kuniak belongs to one particular poetic group, i.e. *the work of lay spiritual poets* (J. Kuniak, R. Jurolek, E. J. Groch, M. Milčák, V. Kupka, P. Milčák, J. Gavura, J. Palaščák) which reveals *the weakening of the historically strong tradition of "symbolic" tendency in favour of "(post)avantguard" approaches* (Juhásová, 2016: 143).

Aim of the article

The primary aim of this article is to reveal the poetic semantics of the selected author, his opinions, values and beliefs concerning home, landscape and place attachment alongside references to historical and cultural, local and global issues which are deemed as crucial for our interpretation. The proposed analysis reveals the poet's linguistic mechanisms, common to his poetic discourse, creating implied and sometimes explicit messages to its readers.

While exploring the phenomena present in Juraj Kuniak's poetry and identifying the sample material, we will be driven by the idea of designating cultural and social interactions located in his works.

The cardinal premise of this paper is interlinked with the view that the poems of Kuniak generate space for fostering national cultural identity, bond towards landscape, and appreciation of home in the context of the 21st century.

Our exploration of Juraj Kuniak's poems takes place in a context which needs to be uncovered. Reading comprehension requires a range of skills to be applied in order to make the most of intertextual and extratextual

information as well as our previous knowledge. The act of interpreting the poems makes them more comprehensible to the reader. Moreover, many of Juraj Kuniak's poems have been translated to English (as well as Belarusian, Serbian, and other languages) thus making them available internationally.

Research Methods

Referring to Kuniak's poetic discourse, we take into consideration not only what is expressed explicitly but also what is or might be implied through the power of figurative devices. One of the article's goals is therefore to interpret and reconstruct allusions and implicit intertextual meanings which are incorporated within the text. This amalgam of lexically articulated meanings provides a challenge to author-interpreter. Although certain lines within poems require an experienced reader who is capable of recognizing the context, subtext, and references, generally, the majority of Kuniak's poems are capable of capturing the attention of anyone who (accidentally or otherwise) encounters his poetry. In short, his poems are appropriate for the wider public due to their versatility and varied topics. Therefore, they became part and parcel of many contemporary Slovak poetically-oriented journals.

In our interpretative approach we have tried to look for the most frequent topics recurring in the poems and poetic texts of Juraj Kuniak and to explore the artistic subtleties as presented in his works like topicality, motifs, themes, repetitive elements, significant historical and cultural events, etc., regarding the concept of home, landscape, and identity.

We have applied the principle of hermeneutic interpretation as part of a qualitative research strategy, giving us the possibility to understand the author.

Analysis of Juraj Kuniak's Poems and Poetic texts

The following section explores in detail particular motifs, themes, allusions, and references, as used by the poet in his poems and poetic texts. Any interpretations included here are based on the particular excerpted line or verse which underwent a process of analysis of selected collections of poems and poetic texts, namely: *Pilgrimage to the Self* (2003), *Rock Rose*

(2004), *A Bit of the World's Space* (2006), *Cor Cordi* (2007), *Private Open-Air Museum – Etudes on Ethnic* (1993), *Landscape in Me* (2015), *Amonit* (2019), *Out past town* (2015), *Lamium Album* (2012), *Rosa Mystica* (2016), *7 poems series* (2017), *POEMS OF THE WORLD No. 3.* (2015), *POEMS OF THE WORLD No. 4.* (2015).

Juraj Kuniak in his *Cor Cordi* collection of poems mentions Milan Rúfus profoundly.² He was a famous Slovak poet, a national bard whose poems have been translated to many languages (died in 2009). Throughout Kuniak's works we can trace the line of memories through the outstanding oeuvre of Milan Rúfus, the most translated poet in Slovakia, whose poems have influenced immensely the poetic work of Juraj Kuniak: *Seven crossings / dear Mr. Rúfus: / the 7 times blessed poetry / of your life / Your Valley / of Violets / high above the Danube* (*Cor Cordi*, *Greeting* 2007: 9). Here Juraj Kuniak mentions the national river, the Danube, which is symbolic and has been used as a literary motif in many literary works for centuries. The Valley of Violets is a district in Bratislava where Milan Rúfus lived. In his recollections of Milan Rúfus, Kuniak mentions Gerlach Vale which is a landscape feature of symbolic value to Slovak people and is a typical region in which chamois are found (*Cor Cordi*, "From the Seclusion of *Kordíky*", 2007:59).

In another line within the poem *Greeting* he pays tribute to Milan Rúfus, again writing ... *the lark... / Oh please / sing to my Rúfus / the greeting I have in my heart* (*Cor Cordi*, *Greeting* 2007: 17). For Kuniak, Milan Rúfus is a true national bard, one who has not been surpassed yet. The poet is begging the lark to sing a greeting to Rúfus, which Kuniak alone is not able to express. It is evident that home is not only about landscape but also about people who helped to create, remodel, and sustain it during difficult times. Throughout his life, Milan Rúfus subtly opposed the Communist regime, fighting cautiously through the medium of word.

In his next extended poem called *From the Seclusion of Kordíky*, Kuniak describes his new home and reveals to Milan Rúfus his true feelings for the place: *In our new "nest" / under the mountain / almost everything seems /*

² Note: These are two poetic epistles. Epistles as a specific genre are letters addressed to someone. Juraj Kuniak used a poetic form for his epistles and dedicated them to his much-loved **mentor** Milan Rúfus for his 70th birthday.

more genuine than before / When there's a blizzard here / it's the real thing (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky, 2007: 23).

Kuniak's poems belonging to Cor Cordi³ intertwine the personality of Milan Rúfus with particular places in Slovakia. Juraj Kuniak often mentions Kordíky in his poems. It is the place where he lives and writes. The title of the book Cor Cordi represents intergenerational emotional interconnection between two hearts (the heart of Milan Rúfus and the heart of Juraj Kuniak), hence its origin which is, phonetically, composed of two words, i.e. Cor Cordi. They create a root declination (nominative and dative) in the village's title Kordíky. He also mentions the original inhabitants who devoted their lives to woodcutting and making tables from wood. They are described as plain people who did not care for material things and did not overindulge in a consumption-oriented way of life, enjoying every minute of life, being mindful: *People are scarce – not a feverish mass / But wood-cutters are near... / And makers of tables...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 25).

The next insightful piece deals with the typical winter weather conditions in Kordíky. Indeed, one of the main reasons for Kuniak's love of this district is its bleakness, wildness, and seclusion... *Winter is grim in Kordíky / Five months we are snowed under...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 29). The district of Kordíky near Banská Bystrica seems an ideal home for the poet regardless the fact that the landscape here is quite rough: *... The metro does not run in Kordíky / as you know / To get down there and back / can be a superhuman labour...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 41).

Except for his remarks concerning Slovakia, he also gives his poems global perspective when mentioning and sharing his thoughts and opinions about the current situation and direction of the world's civilization, he feels that *... The world is getting rundown / It needs to strengthen heart / And arms, / legs, / back... / Instead it propagates Viagra / for what's not muscle at all...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 31-33). Kuniak also admits his doubts about life in the 21st century: *... I know that I'm afraid / Who is without fear?...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 33). This goes hand in hand with the memory of his deceased father and other relatives mentioned throughout all his works.

³ Cor cordi = heart to heart (Latin)

The issue of the world's future has also been raised by him, giving prominence to questions about people's unreasonable actions: *The world is playing its match / To judge by the current score / it does not seem / likely to win the tie / No wonder too / when it evokes the footballer / who throws a kick at the ball / and only then lifts his head / to see / who he's been beaten by...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 35). Here Kuniak gives us an example of indifference, vanity, a desire for fame and popularity, which often rule people's decisions: *... But popularity / is a strange patron indeed / Shooting to the heights / she'll change to an ogre / suddenly malign...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 37).

Kuniak's poems could be used effectively in reminding people about true life's values which are worth following *... To appreciate pure things... / Know how to pick them out... / ... Someone makes mainly money / He's worm-eaten inside / outside he wins acceptance...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 45). Here he points towards an overindulgent way of life which can cause numbness of the human soul and can hinder intrapersonal, interpersonal as well as intercultural communication, being a hindrance to life competencies development (the ability to think critically, to be creative and genuinely cooperative). These negative human attributes are seen by Kuniak as *... The latest forms of evil... / Tasty on the tongue / and tantalizingly ruddy...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 45-47).

The poet also accentuates man's personal identity interlinked often with confusion and despair over one's life: *... Just that no one knows if he is / What he's cooked in his head / how he's knotted himself up / why actually he lives...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 49) referring to immense possibilities that people are given. Furthermore, he underlines the idea of occasionally reminding people living in Slovakia about the gift they have been given in the form of an ordinary, plain, war-free (if only once also wifi-free) way of life.

His poems could be used when teaching the youth (secondary school students and university students) about the advantages and disadvantages of internet epoch and bringing to the fore the importance of home in the turbulent 21st century. *... We are flooded with information /... One needs to have a straw stuck over the surface / and not to forget that there's air / and*

independence / and privacy and human happiness / the home... (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 51). Many of Kuniak's poems were translated by John Minahane, an Irish translator. We suppose that English poetry could challenge and motivate students of different ages to engage in discussions about their beliefs, likes, dislikes, interests, etc., enhancing their creativity as well as their ability to think critically and to coherently articulate their thoughts and feelings, thus fostering their self-confidence and willingness to share their opinions with others.

At the very end of his poem *From the Seclusion of Kordíky*, Kuniak offers some suggestions on how to live responsibly, not waste life on material things, focusing on the need to be and creation of the nest as he did in his beloved district of Kordíky. Nest is an equivalent of home in his poems. He deduces that without it (nest) ... *there's no privacy / and home is not upheld...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 53).

There are also passages where he mentions roots and the situation in which a man finds himself when he loses his home (in case of war, ethnical conflicts, natural disasters, nomad way of life). This can lead to feelings of uprootedness ... *a tree when it is flattened / shows its roots only then...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 55).

The final verses seem truly prophetic, holistic, accentuating the importance of roots in human life. He especially highlights those who are the most vulnerable and he wishes them all the goodness in the world and the ability to find their own anchor in life ... *That you / children / may have roots / deep / deeper / deepest / and each of you be a tree / that the wind cannot level... / Everyone can do something / Yes and everyone can do more / I think / if we don't waste life in the grind...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 57). The author believes in the power of young people to overcome burdens and obstacles they meet while growing up.

Kuniak's collection of poems *Cor Cordi* ends by expressing his best wishes to Milan Rúfus and a positive look into the future expressing hope for new beginnings. He also takes into consideration the fact that human fate is unpredictable and peace can vanish in a minute if we do not cultivate it in our lives : ... *I look forward to the future / just ahead / with one foot home... / For we know the future smiles / But one small vacillation / and it'll push us to the wall...* (Cor Cordi, From the Seclusion of Kordíky 2007: 67).

To conclude, in *Cor Cordi* as a collection of poems-as-letter and letters-as-poem, the author defines his spiritual home located in poetry as well as his family roots interweaving with place and landscape attachment (Cor Cordi 2007). In his *Cor Cordi* we are exposed to his self-reflections, descriptions of home in Kordíky (the mountain village near district city Banská Bystrica) which is viewed as a secluded place, a family base, a shelter for the poet's world. In his poems-as-letter *From the Seclusion of Kordíky* one learns a great deal about his family, communication with children during their academic year in America, and about the harsh weather conditions in the region, which reminds the poet of how easily we can become uprooted.

Furthermore, Juraj Kuniak contributed to the collection of poems and stories called *Landscape in Me* (Biarinec et al. 2015). Thus, landscape as part of identity dominates his poetic pieces and prosaic reflections. The poet compares a poem to the landscape located in his soul which intertwines with the outer environment, landscape outside soul. He admits that he cannot imagine a poem without landscape nor himself without a poem. The author mentions that he has already chosen his home together with his wife. He finds it important to have a fixed place within the country and to know that this place is the right place to live (Biarinec et al. 2015: 103). Juraj Kuniak is one of the most significant poets who draws inspiration from topics such as: home, attachment to place, country, family, faith, etc.

Landscape as a symbol for fostering identity dominates his descriptions: ... *Landscape is a wide, deep, full and spacious concept. Landscape falls to sleep. Landscape rises in the morning. Landscape talks to me. Landscape opens to me. Landscape opens me up. I am rooted in her. I grow up in her. It animates me. Landscape is diverse. Diversity is Divine. Disunity is Diabolic⁴* (Landscape in Me 2015: 116-117). The concept of roots is a recurring one throughout his poetry, interlinked with home and landscape, reminiscing about previous generations of parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. In one of his reflections, he mentions his grandmother: ... *My grandma, Mrs. Kaliariková used to talk to me about Feng – shui and that our home is also like a living being, therefore it is important to locate it in a right way in terms of the points of the compass...* ⁵(Landscape in Me

⁴ From Slovak script translated by Anna Slatinská.

⁵ From Slovak script translated by Anna Slatinská.

2015: 119). The author himself could not believe that his grandmother was familiar with concepts that became popular only in the late 20th century in Slovakia; ideas about where to locate one's house and how to organise one's rooms, etc. in order to most enjoy the dwelling. As it is evident when reading Kuniak's poetry, he is thankful for what his grandparents taught him and how this knowledge has been transmitted successfully across the generations.

Juraj Kuniak has had a chance to explore the landscape of his home by foot, and other means. Being an experienced mountaineer, the poet's vision has been broadened by taking part in various walks, hiking tours, trips and expeditions in Slovakia and abroad. That is why there is a multitude of geographical places and references found in his poems and lyrical prose. The poet frequently mentions amazing winters in Kordíky (his home) caused by a lot of sunny days due to inversion as it was indicated in the same-titled poem (Inversion) : *From this point of view, inversion is time for being happy / a reason to take a breath and relax / water vapors slither down the valleys / swallowing up civilization...*⁶ (Landscape in Me 2015: 122-123).

In 2019, Juraj Kuniak published *Amonit*; a collection of poems written between 2008 and 2016. *Amonit* is a bilingual book which intertwines Belarussian with Slovak, Kuniak's first-native language. Viktoria Liashuk translated the texts (Liashuk, 2019). We have found many poetic devices in his poems related to his family, spirituality, honesty, landscape, idea of one's mortality, intergenerational proximity of relatives, sadness, etc., all through the eyes of a 21st century writer living and creating in today's turbulent times. Kuniak reaffirms repeatedly the existence of God as Creator of humanity and calls for the protection of relationships we establish during our life. The poet provides us with descriptions of landscapes in different seasons, memories of his birthplace, memories of his childhood, his parents, the role of mother and father, the raising of a child, the Virgin Mary, the meaning of life, etc.

We have excerpted several passages related to the concept of landscape which is viewed as part of his identity: *I see how the landscape, I was born into, has changed / The trees are on retreat and withering away / woodcutters have destroyed nests of herons / there are tree stools in a row, once*

⁶ From Slovak script translated by Anna Slatinská.

*they were poplars / roads lined with crosses built after fatal accidents...*⁷ (Cliff, Amonit, 2019: 12). As exemplified in this poem, the author is a sensitive, lyrical hero, empathising with the country, in which sadness and sorrows become prominent because of uncontrolled passions and desires. Beside his doubts about nature's survival and human indifference, he refuses to cultivate negative emotions connected with fighting, conflict, war, and raiding: *... growing up in this state where sincerity towards oneself is a weakness and the only / acceptable way of life / seems to be conflict, deceit and fighting*⁸ (Illness of the Immature Tribe, Amonit 2019: 20), he decides not to take part in them.

Juraj Kuniak represents an attentive observer of seasons describing the nuances of weather conditions: *... Frost is after the water / Horizon resembles flat line / rosehips are like drops of blood... Exhausted body of country / Let snow cover it all!*⁹ (Compassion, Amonit 2019: 14). *Winter hasn't said its last word yet. / In the hollow the water has frozen, within it a flower / deceived by the heat of preceding days / and a ladybird deceived by the flower. / ... the freeze will paint your eyebrows, eyelashes – smile*¹⁰ (Lateran Basilica, Amonit 2019: 98).

The previous examples of seasons are intertwined with his childhood memories related to his birthplace in the Čutkovská valley region in the area of Ružomberok: *A breeze arose, I recognised it well, / with that same hand it cooled my brow in childhood; / the wood began to rustle, the water mirror / rippled, and I lost and found myself*¹¹ (In Čutkovská dolina, Amonit 2019: 58).

The author often mentions his relatives, his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents who created his past and present home: *... lines on the wall at my grandparents' reveals truth about / how I grew up...*¹² (Amonit, Proglas 2012: 43). The people who looked after him from his early years

⁷ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

⁸ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

⁹ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

¹⁰ Translation: John Minahane (Juraj Kuniak & Ján Kudlička: Rosa mystica 2016)

¹¹ In Cutkovska dolina / Juraj Kuniak ; translated by John Minahane – In: POEMS OF THE WORLD. – ISSN 1092-0897. – Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer 2015), s. 22. – Palatine, Illinois (USA) : International Poetry Press.

¹² Translated by Anna Slatinská.

are recurrently used alongside metaphors in his other poems: *Mother's love is at work in me, my spirit / has its origin there, a string well-strung, / cultivation of mercy in the self, / expansion of green, disturbance of limits*¹³ (Consciousness, Amonit 2019: 100).

Moreover, his parents laid the basis for the author's faith in God: ... *Mother said, it's simple: / to take one's place in the smallest magnitude, / receive the child into oneself, / open one's inner eyes and silently / utter: welcome!*¹⁴ (Imagination, Amonit 2019: 102). Many of his poems reveal lines of gratitude to his mother whom he views as one of the most valuable people in his life: ... *mother was then far away, / now farther still: always she wanted, and taught him too, / to do something sensitively and exactly, one might say / with a scalpel to cut a drop of dew*¹⁵ (Dewdrop, Amonit 2019: 96), stressing that there is someone who guides his steps: ... *there is a never-ending feeling that someone up there / from where the grass gains energy to grow... / is looking after me / and I retreat to meet him*¹⁶ (Direction, Amonit 2019: 38).

Madonna or the Holy Virgin are symbols expressing his faith: *Oh, Madonna, / in all languages only a thrown away word / if it doesn't leave the lips as a small cloud...*¹⁷ (Rosa Mystica, Amonit 2019: 104). Referring to family members who influenced his spirituality, Kuniak writes... *The eyes look ahead, only behind / is everything clear. My parents, grand and great grandparents / come from a devout country...*¹⁸ (Lamium Album, Amonit 2019: 86).

¹³ Translation: John Minahane (Juraj Kuniak, Ján Kudlička: Rosa mystica, s. 61, Skalná ruža 2016)

¹⁴ Translation: John Minahane (Juraj Kuniak, Ján Kudlička: Rosa mystica, s. 62, Skalná ruža, 2016)

¹⁵ Dewdrop / Juraj Kuniak ; translated by John Minahane. – In: POEMS OF THE WORLD. – ISSN 1092-0897. – Vol. 21, No. 4 (Summer 2017), s. 18. – Palatine, Illinois (USA) : International Poetry Press.

¹⁶ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

¹⁷ Translation: John Minahane (Juraj Kuniak, Ján Kudlička: Rosa mystica, s. 63, Skalná ruža 2016)

¹⁸ Translation: Viera and James Sutherland Smith (Juraj Kuniak, Ján Kudlička: Lamium album, s. 46, Skalná ruža 2012)

Kuniak pays homage to his parents depicting them as “*two sources / issuing one beside the other: / Olga and Matúš*”¹⁹ (To my Parents, Amonit 2019: 54) who symbolize his youth and childhood home. He imagines the home of two people who love and respect each other as: ... *Fixed Points / they are two / one for each of us / you for me and me for you / Your face, lit by talking / Memories can see us*²⁰ (Fixed Points, Amonit 2019: 46). His poetry is interspersed with references to his father who used to instruct him in art: *Try to paint it / my father used to encourage me to sit over the white drawing paper / and he added as if to himself: / The sky is like an open dome / the warble of lark is a line*²¹ (Father, Amonit 2019: 22).

When mentioning home, the author cannot exclude the political past of the Slovak nation, especially the year 1969 when it was occupied by the armies of the Warsaw Pact, recalling “*the dark times when even our teachers / pulled blinds down their faces in 1969*”²² (Amonit, Amonit 2019: 110). Kuniak also mentions our present time(s). He is a proponent of peace, tolerance, respect, and love towards others, disillusioned by what is happening, not only at home but worldwide: *The same burns, frostbites / the same insensitivity of the world / new forbidden words (father; mother) / another newborn in the drop box for the unwanted...*²³ (The second Advent Sunday, Out past town 2015: 27). In the following lines, the author has brought to the fore several topics that have not yet been solved, lamenting (some) current habits. On the one hand, Kuniak is not afraid to talk about sensitive topics with a great deal of subjectivity, corresponding to his embodiment as a literary hero subject.

¹⁹ Translation: John Minahane (To my Parents / Juraj Kuniak ; translated by John Minahane. – In: POEMS OF THE WORLD. – ISSN 1092-0897. – Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring 2015), s. 28. – Palatine, Illinois (USA) : International Poetry Press.)

²⁰ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

²¹ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

²² Translated by Anna Slatinská.

²³ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

On the other hand, he proposes the idea of mindfulness to be fostered in these insecure times, instructing the reader how to start living, by using a good deal of positive thinking: *Try to recall / anything if small, / no ogre in your imaginations / do not call them into life / an apple-tree petal / in your mind / is more powerful / than the bear behind the hill*²⁴ (Abreaction, Out past town 2015: 25).

At the same time the poet reflects on his own mortality and seems emotionally balanced with the fact that there will come a day (probably unbeknownst to him) which will be his last.: The universe *glitters in deep peace / I can die the next morning*²⁵ (Proximity, Out past town 2015: 22).

Rock rose poems seem to be reflections of home, love, and relationships, as described by the poet himself: *Only on your own / roots / can you lean / says a tree / And a man? / And a rock rose?*²⁶ (Rock Rose, Rock Rose 2004: 97), giving philosophical questions and assumptions: *For what currency / can love be had today?* (Gilded Banknote, A Bit of the World's Space 2004: 16), describing his desires not to walk alone in life: *...so that my hand will not clasp / forever / only its own / lifeline*²⁷ (The Depth of a Plunge, Rock Rose 2004: 74). He is also not indifferent to his roots: *Where have I come from and where am I bound?*²⁸ (Situation, Rock rose 2004: 69).

Pilgrimage to the Self (Púť k sebe 2003) is the penultimate collection of poetical-prosaic stories (prosaic text interspersed with poetry) that we have analysed. It is documentary in character, based on memories of Kuniak's travels in Russia and Australia, and also describes moments in his family's history such as the Černová massacre of 1907; also known as the Černová tragedy.

²⁴ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

²⁵ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

²⁶ Translation: John Minahane. In: A Bit of the World's Space, p. 37, Slovak PEN Centre 2006

²⁷ Translation: John Minahane. In: A Bit of the World's Space, p. 17, Slovak PEN Centre 2006

²⁸ Translation: John Minahane. In: A Bit of the World's Space, p. 15, Slovak PEN Centre 2006

It was part of the Slovak Nation's oppression by Hungarian troops who shot dead 15 Černová villagers who wanted the village's first Catholic church to be consecrated not by Martin Pazurik but by Andrej Hlinka, a local priest who first proposed the building of the church and raised money for its construction. A well-known Norwegian writer, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, reacted fiercely against this act of suppressing the free will of villagers in Černová. Thanks to him the message about the national oppression of Slovaks by Hungary spread quickly across the whole world at a time when the Slovak nation existed only within the Austro-Hungarian empire, without independent status.

In his poetic texts Juraj Kuniak sees his roots in the village of Černová. Kuniak also mentions his genealogy, the cemetery where his relatives are buried, the Kriváň mountain as a national symbol, the heritage of his ancestors, and the country and landscape. He also refers to the idea of language, stressing that "*Language is the base. Only there will you build / house and temple, / feeling and thought, / life*"²⁹ (Pilgrimage to the Self 2003: 139). The poet describes the cemetery as a place which makes him realize that his role in life is not finished yet, reminiscing about his father who is the author of the painting called *Tragedy in Černová*. The poem is dedicated to this specific work of art. The depiction of the Černová tragedy went down in history. It can still be seen hanging on the wall in the Černová House of Culture. Moreover, the painting entered the school history-books in Slovakia.

Simultaneously, he ponders reflects upon the message of his dead relatives, figuratively describing his way of life, which is influenced by his predecessors. Juraj Kuniak represents a mindful hero aware of his life, past and present while anticipating the future step by step: *The cemetery is a place where I am reborn/reawakened. Every dead body reminds me of the fact that their acting on stage has finished and mine lasts still*³⁰ (Pilgrimage to the Self 2003: 140). The author hopes that he will be able to carry on the familial heritage and contribute to it with his own activities, praising unique places in the life of man. Juraj Kuniak has found his second home in the village of Kordíky near Banská Bystrica (Pilgrimage to the Self 2003: 141-143).³¹

²⁹ Translated by John Minahane.

³⁰ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

³¹ Translated by Anna Slatinská.

The author has frequently travelled around the world. In his *Arbat 1989* poetical report, he describes his stay in Russia. Arbat is the name of a significant street in the center of Moscow, which was the place for artists and revolting youth in the period of Perestroika. Many of his accounts and descriptions of this place supertemporal character, speaking to sensitive (and) experienced readers in the 21st century. He describes one moment during his travels around Arbat when he met a man in the Poet's Corner who was reciting poetry about some of the Soviet Union's social tragedies such as overcrowded orphanages, children fleeing from homes, people infected with AIDS, dysfunctional relationships, and spiritual loss, all as antonyms to sensibility, clear conscience, justice, etc.. (*Pilgrimage to the Self*, 2003: 19-20). Many of the topics explored by the author are hotly debated nowadays with no universally satisfactory solution reached.

While staying in Australia, the poet was inspired by the Writers' Walk in Sydney, describing the literary accomplishments of engraved authors and combining information about them with his reflections on home, his university study in Prague, specifically his parents, realizing the special qualities of his home: *Home is a very simple feeling, one of the most difficult... not carried on the tongue* (*Pilgrimage to the Self*, 2003: 60).³²

Kuniak's latest poems published in 2020 reveal a lot about his family history with direct references to past events concerning the procedure of creating and establishing cooperative farms and his grandfather's firm stance against the Communist regime: *He enjoyed himself / stubbornly against the time and fashion. In the village / where he lived, they could never launch a cooperative. // He was pedaling on his bike when he was hit / by the drunk driver of an allegorical wagon / in the First of May parade* (Binding, Sense 2020: 55).³³ In the last lines of the poem, the author adds more facts about his grandfather's likes, describing him as a man immensely connected with nature: *He loved apple tree and jasmine. / Me too: the autumn fruit, the fragrance of spring* (Binding, Sense, 2020: 55).³⁴

³² Translated by Anna Slatinská.

³³ Translated by John Minahane.

³⁴ Translated by John Minahane.

In the poem titled *Ignoramus et Ignorabimus* (Binding, Sense, 2020: 55)³⁵ he again refers to the idea of home: *Sometimes a thing is revealed only in an urgent echo. / For example, the word "home" spoken by extraterrestrial E. T. / sounds like snow glistening at night in the beam of a torch.*, playing with words, adding word by word to create an authentic description of things dear to him.

In the 2020 series of poems entitled *Omnia Mea Mecum Porto*, Kuniak's poem *Family History* documents another tragic event namely the death of his brother: *My brother was four months old when he died... My grandad's brother died in 1918 in the Lowlands (today's Hungary)... He was 20. He never came home, not even in the coffin... / I don't remember how I perceived the world at four / but when aged twenty I wished to marry* (*Family Anamnesis*, Sense, 2020: 56).³⁶

In his poems, Juraj Kuniak often ponders the meaning of life and the concept of a soul which are inseparable entities: *forming / the soul means nurturing imagination, and vice versa. ...Crossing by, never stopping over, behind the steering wheel / I stop in myself* (Waypoint, Sense, 2020: 56)³⁷. The series *Omnia Mea Mecum Porto* ends with a poem titled *Femme Fatale* (2020: 57) he poetically describes his relationship with his wife, saying *"My wife and I have grown together"*, emphasizing the importance of cultivating the family relationships. The reference to his wife occurs quite frequently in his poems and acts as a model of a sustainable marriage built on the principle of love, respect, and tolerance. Juraj Kuniak honors his spouse for the person she is, expressing his deep admiration and recognition of her. Thus, the line analyzed above symbolizes the unity of man and woman and their interconnection which was created in the process of sharing and cultivating a life together.

³⁵ Translated by John Minahane.

³⁶ Translated by John Minahane.

³⁷ Translated by John Minahane.

While reading, decoding, analyzing, and evaluating Kuniak's poems we encountered detailed descriptions of landscape, as is exemplified in the following: *Where the stream is now, there was a stream / long ago in my youth and in the childhood / of my great-grandfather – he used to tell / how he went down it to America* (Contact Point, VLNA 2018: 26-29).³⁸

The stones our grandchildren throw in, / the stream accepts them with the friendly splash / that's so important for the joy of the littlest / – I hold that jubilation in my hands! (Contact Point, VLNA 2018: 27).³⁹ In another place within the same cycle he returns to the landscape again: *Transcription of the landscape: snow / gives way to prevailing green... / No place. / No word, no memory. / Birds trill. To be there is unity* (Geography, VLNA 2018: 27).⁴⁰

In the last poem *Bewildered Nietzsche* he thinks deeply of the fate of man: *In the end / what remained was a bare nothing, / an emptied, hollow space with man, / as if he were in a cave and through an opening / gazed at the landscape, to see if something there / would move him: a swallow, the shine of grass / bent by the wind, anything to give life / to the image of God dying in himself* (7 poems series, 2018: 29).⁴¹

Moreover, Kuniak's *Private Open-air Museum* (Súkromný skanzen 1993) - subtitled *Études on Ethnic* - contains poetically tuned linguistically experimental prose based on village life. They are written in the dialect of Černová (in the vicinity of Ružomberok City). The act of using this regional vernacular contributed to the preservation and cultivation of the linguistic landscape of the given area. The stories written in this particular form are almost non-transferrable to any foreign language, thanks to their semantic nuances and variations posing a huge challenge for the future translators of historically based Slovak dialects.

³⁸ Translated by John Minahane.

³⁹ Translated by John Minahane.

⁴⁰ Translated by John Minahane.

⁴¹ Translated by John Minahane.

Results and Findings

The selected lines and verses extracted from Juraj Kuniak's poetry all converge in terms of being the intercultural metonymical substitutes for words like "home", "identity", and "landscape." Semantically, his poems are united around the above-mentioned core-meanings while explicating and naming different layers of home, identity, life, landscape, and future. Together they form an additional message for the spiritual welfare of society. We have discovered that the addressee of these messages can interpret them as reflections on home, landscape, place attachment, identity, family, roots, past, etc..

We have concluded that his poems contain many playful elements created by using figurative language, but recipients of his message stand to gain important insights from understanding Kuniak's poems and poetic texts as the poet intended them to be understood.

The intertext created by Kuniak is apparent not only to himself but also to sensitive readers, who can decipher and understand his messages. Juraj Kuniak is a poet who does not authorize privilege to his poems, but instead address readers with a variety of topics. We stress the fact that Juraj is not the only one who knows all contexts but lends this experience to other readers so that that they can viscerally understand his message.

Juraj Kuniak's poetology is based on the use of lexical, stylistic, and visual devices, which are challenging for the translator. Almost all of his poems are titled. The title is the first clue to understanding the poem. Kuniak's eclectic choices of subject matter are bolstered by an intense intertextuality. Kuniak is a lyrical hero who describes many of life's moments, experiences and phenomena such as childhood memories and (religious) faith, which is of the utmost importance to him. Through the medium of rich lexical and syntactic devices, his work is molded into a coherent unit interlinked with many a spiritual message for mankind. His poems have a great capability and power to influence others in a positive, constructive, morality-based way.

Despite the fact that all his poems are peculiar in their nature and refer to several sources and may allow different interpretations, they converge to yield an intertextual poetic representation of the words "home, identity, landscape, family roots, relatives, and place attachment". Kuniak's poems

include topical issues like the future of humankind, inclusive love towards others, the importance of being respectful, tolerant, sensitive, empathetic, responsible, caring, willing (and able) both to break boundaries between people and to build nurturing relationships. His poems open space for discussions, fostering development of global and life skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, etc.). Juraj Kuniak succeeded in creating a coherent poetic story based on his own life experiences, beliefs, expectations, and good wishes for the future of all humankind.

Juraj Kuniak opens his heart to his readers and reveals his beliefs, ideas, and descriptions of his newly-built home, interlinking inner and outer dialogue and reflections of human subjects, reacting to today's existence and to unprecedented advances in technologies which can be a double-edged sword. In this way, his poems seem to be not only a form of his own self-reflection and autobiography, but it offers us much more in an intertextual way referring to the context, subtext, references and allusions. Those who either read or passively listen to Kuniak's poetry have a chance to take part in his intra- and inter-personal dialogue, transcending intersubjective borders, reaching for broader cultural spheres (Šabík 2007).

Kuniak's poetry is capable of healing human psychological wounds due its invigorating poetic power and energy. He frequently mentions Milan Rúfus, whom considered a master of poetic craft and a personal guru who help Kuniak to mature his own poetry. This is of interest since it could be applied within various spheres of society including education of the youth who are constantly searching for their own identity, which is not easy to find. In this way, we opine that the poetry of Juraj Kuniak could be used effectively for young people on the verge of maturity, looking for their place in society. Milan Rúfus, his idol, builds upon Slovak, Czech and European traditions, bringing his readers closer to our national heritage as well as global cultural heritage.

Moreover, he is constantly returning to his past childhood, youth, and maturity have found a profound place in his poetry. Last but not least, for Kuniak, home represents a society of people who are open, genuine, and positively tuned. Home can survive all storms if it is firm but peaceful. He confesses to the reader that home without love would have no meaning for him. Family and home are interlinked in Kuniak's poems. To be more precise, family is cardinal in his life: *I was brought up to cultivate a different*

set of values (that are opposed to today's consumerism which destroys all that is human, makes our feelings shallow and stops our natural agility) such as self-sacrifice, honesty, modesty, rich spirituality, emotionality, fostering creativity, sense for art, and desire for education. I support multiculturalism but only that version which is governed by sense and sensibility (Literárny týždenník, Literary Weekly Paper, 2015: 2).⁴² Juraj Kuniak sees poetry as a powerful tool to be able to bring remote cultures and civilizations closer while still remaining genuine to one's own culture.

Conclusion

Juraj Kuniak uses poetry as a way of intergenerational dialogue in which readers can encounter his memories and experience and become acquainted with several significant Slovak places (Černová, Ružomberok, Bratislava, Banská Bystrica) and personalities important in author's life. In his poems and poetic texts we encounter such names as Milan Rúfus (the Slovak national bard famous for his non-violent opposition against the Communist regime), Andrej Hlinka (a Slovak priest active in the period of Černová Massacre), his parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, poet's spouse, etc.. Kuniak's poetic discourse is highly diverse. The previously mentioned motifs and themes represent a proof of a great attachment-both psychological and physical-to home and to landscape.

The poems of Juraj Kuniak are about local and global issues. On a local level, the author appreciates a non-material, non-consumption-oriented way of life, and highlights that the original inhabitants of Kordíky (his second home where he settled down with his wife and family) were devoted to woodcutting, living in the moment, and being mindful. Taking the global perspective into account, he is not indifferent to the uncertainty of the 21st century and expresses his doubts and concerns about the fate of humanity. He is not reluctant to metaphorically criticize negative human qualities such as vanity, mediocrity, and desire for fame, money, and popularity, which often outweigh the positive human qualities such as respect, tolerance, honesty, etc..

All in all, Kuniak's poems could serve as a manual for living a better life (in which superciliousness, dishonesty, overindulgence, hatred, and evil do not have a place), simultaneously reminding the reader about the gift of

⁴² Translated by Anna Slatinská.

war-free life that we (the Slovaks) were given and the reasons why it is so important to build a nurturing. The poet reminds us of our roots and urges us to remember our predecessors and consider matters pertaining to our origins and future direction in life, emphasizing the fact that there are also people who have been uprooted.

Furthermore, the poet introduces the reader to a sample of cultural and geographic representations of Slovak culture when he mentions the capital city of Slovakia Bratislava, the river Danube, the Valley of Violets in Bratislava, the Gerlach Vale, Čutkovská valley in Ružomberok (the area where he was born), Kriváň mountain as a symbol of the Slovak nation, etc., redirecting the readers to the peculiarities of Slovak nature (which are often taken for granted), stressing the significance of our own local environment, and encouraging us to explore our country more profoundly than we tend to. The poetry of Juraj Kuniak is interwoven with a detailed description and elaborate observations of landscape during different seasons.

Among other topics, his poetry embraces religious elements which are connected with his faith and beliefs, too. Thus, the use of symbols like: Saint Mary, Virgin Mary, God, Church, Faith etc. accentuating the importance of inter-confessional peaceful dialogue and significance of respect and tolerance in communication of any kind.

Juraj Kuniak directs our attention to the way in which his life and the life of previous and current generation have been shaped by the 1907 Černová Massacre, the Communist regime, environmental issues, globalization, etc. Kuniak does not leave unmentioned the role of language and language cultivation. He is aware of Slovak history regarding the struggle for independence and freedom from the Austro-Hungarian empire and -in later years- the Communist regime.

Last but not least, we note that the author is not indifferent to the current political and cultural affairs in Slovakia. Experiencing the Communist regime and all it entailed, he has been a proponent of intercultural dialogue based on respect and tolerance, proposing the philosophy of mindfulness which he views as worth applying in these uncertain times.

In Kuniak's poetry, we have seen how the concept of home and landscape permeate his poems even when viewed through the lens of topics such as childhood, (birthplace), family roots and relationships, genealogy, history, politics, culture, etc.

In conclusion, there is a great deal that one can learn from the poetry of Juraj Kuniak. He is a sensitive observer, careful with words, and is determined to spread peace, respect, tolerance, and love throughout his homeland and the world via his poems and poetic texts.

Regarding the current life of Juraj Kuniak, he is the founding father of the Rock Rose Publishing House with the premises in Kordíky (near Banská Bystrica) which supports publication of Slovak (Mária Ferenčuhová, Dana Podracká, Anna Ondrejková, Marián Milčák, Mila Haugová, Ján Gavura as well as foreign authors (Knut Odegård, Walt Whitman, James Wright, Barbara Korun, Macuo Bašó, Czesław Miłosz, Tózsér Árpád, Octavio Paz, Louise Glück etc.). Evidently, the publishing house is not limited to one-nationality authors only, what is more, the published and translated poetic works of art create a sample of different cultures (Slovenian, Croatian, American, Slovak, Norwegian, Japanese, Polish, Hungarian, Mexican). Through the medium of translations realized by the Rock Rose Publishing House, Juraj Kuniak (a poet, translator, and publisher) contributes to the culturally rich mosaic of local and global poetry.

It is worth mentioning that Juraj Kuniak's poems and poetic texts transcend time and can be enjoyed by a diverse group of readers who find them to be stimulating and invigorating. As Juraj Kuniak himself said: "*Art becomes art when it cultivates, reawakens and softens values, so important in the turbulent 21st century*" (Literárny týždenník, Literary Weekly Paper, 2015: 2).

References**Books**

- Biarinec, R. et al. (2015). *Krajina vo mne (Landscape in Me)*. Ružomberok: VERBUM.
- Juhásová, J. (2016). *Od symbolu k latencii (From Symbol to Latency)*. Ružomberok: VERBUM.
- Kuniak, J. & Čech, J. (1993). *Súkromný skanzen - Etudy o etniku (Private Open-Air Museum – Etudes on Ethnicity)*. Martin: Matica slovenská.
- Kuniak, J. (2003). *Púť k sebe (Pilgrimage to the Self)*. Tajov: Rock Rose.
- Kuniak, J. (2004). *Skalná ruža (Rock Rose)*. Bratislava: Petrus.
- Kuniak, J. (2006). *A Bit of the World's Space*. Tajov: Rock Rose.
- Kuniak, J. (2007). *Cor Cordi*. Tajov: Rock Rose.
- Kuniak, J. (2012). *Amonit*. In Kolektív autorov, *Proglas. Preklady a básnické interpretácie*, pp. 41-45. Bratislava: LIC.
- Kuniak, J. (2015). *Za mestom (Out past town)*. Levoča: Modrý Peter.
- Kuniak, J. (2019). *Amonit*. Belarus: Mastackaja literatura.
- Kuniak, J. (2012). *Lamium Album*. Tajov: Rock Rose.
- Kuniak, J. (2015). *POEMS OF THE WORLD No. 3*. Translated by John Minahane. Palatine, Illinois (USA): International Poetry Press.
- Kuniak, J. (2015). *POEMS OF THE WORLD No. 4*. Translated by John Minahane. Palatine, Illinois (USA): International Poetry Press.
- Kuniak, J. (2017). *POEMS OF THE WORLD No. 4*. Translated by John Minahane. Palatine, Illinois (USA): International Poetry Press.
- Kuniak, J. & Kudlička, J. (2016). *Rosa Mystica*. Kordíky: Rock Rose.
- Kuniak, J. (2020). Poézia. In *Rozum (Sense)*. no. 3, pp. 54 – 57.
- Kuniak, J. (2018). 7 básní. 7 poems series. In *VLNA*. no. 77, pp. 26-29.

Articles (in book)

- Kuniak, J. (2015). *Krajinovnemy*. In Biarinec et al., *Krajina vo mne (Landscape in Me)*, pp.101-124. Ružomberok: VERBUM.
- Liashuk, V. (2019). Do hĺbky a do výšky. O básnikovi Jurajovi Kuniakovi a jeho poézii. In *Amonit*, pp. 125 – 132. Belarus: Mastackaja literatura.
- Šabík, V. (2007). With Heart and Brain. In *Cor Cordi*, pp. 87-97.

Article (in journal)

- Maršálek, J. (2015). Rozhovor s básnikom a spisovateľom Jurajom Kuniakom o tvorbe, životných hodnotách, cestovaní, horolezectve a zmysle umenia a kultúry. In *Literárny týždenník* pp. 1-2.