

## LOVE FOR THE DOG AND DRAMA OF SEPARATION IN THE NOVEL *LISSIE COME-HOME* BY ERICH KNIGHT

UDC

Danijela Mišić

Pedagogical Faculty in Vranje, University in Niš, Vranje, Serbia

ORCID iD: Danijela Mišić

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4116-3474>

**Abstract.** *In this paper, the author aims to highlight the values of the novel *Lissie Come-Home* by Eric Knight, which appeals not only to young readers but to adults as well. The recipients, in accordance with their abilities and previously acquired knowledge discover the meaning of the text and its humanistic dimension. We shall emphasize the importance of this literary work in the process of its reception, interpretation and understanding - limited to the extent that the recipients' intellect allows. In this example of a literary work about animals that personify human thoughts and emotions, readers are presented with an opportunity for reflection that can be considered a form of new creation. Besides animals, we also find descriptions of people in the novel and their communication with the dog named Lissie. The esthetic component of the language in translation is emphasized, as are the characters who carry out the novel's action, the writer's attitude and his attention to significant peculiarities of the space and environment in which the story unfolds. By analyzing the plot, characters, action, emotional world of main characters, dramatic journey and the psychology of the lost creature who non-verbally expresses love and the need for bonding with humankind, we come to the conclusion that the novel *Lissie Come-Home* is a true masterpiece of literature. It expresses universal moral, ethical and emotional values and principles that are everlasting and found in both animals and humans. These universal values give meaning to life.*

**Key words:** *dog, hero, journey, comeback, language.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The events in the novel *Lissie Come-Home* helped the writer, Eric Knight, to highlight various possibilities of finding one's place in the world. By discovering and using his artistic abilities and literary skills in narration, he establishes a line of reconciliation between animals

---

Received April 3, 2025 / Revised May 5, 2025 / Accepted May 6, 2025

**Corresponding author:** Danijela Mišić

University of Niš, Pedagogical Faculty in Vranje, Partizanska 14, 17500 Vranje, Serbia

E-mail: [misicvranje@gmail.com](mailto:misicvranje@gmail.com)

and humans. The humanistic dimension - an invisible thread that opens and closes paths - leads the writer to recognize the characteristics of humans, animals, and events that allude to the social order. His perceptive scope is broad, as the action unfolds on the road, at sea, and in unfamiliar places. He describes the adventures of a boy and the successful search for the path that Lassie, the main character, follows on her journey home, to her master. Through vivid imagery and scenes, dialogue, and portraits of both people and animals, readers expand their understanding of different places and create imaginative worlds. "By reading such texts in English language, students shall transform the outer world into their own inner world. In this way they become the creators of written essays and oral presentations in the course of the teaching process and during their free time activities" (Mišić, 2010, p. 99).

Although the novel was published in 1940, contemporary readers interpret the text in their own ways from the perspective of the social context, finding meanings that have had their changes and interpretations over time. While writing the novel, the author aimed to create aesthetic communication through a dual narrative structure: the first level focuses on love for a dog and the drama of separation from her master - a boy named Joe; the second centers on the dog's loyalty and her escape so that she can come back home. The text of the novel, as a written medium itself, effectively portrays people and animals, and through their sacrifices, expresses multiple ethical values and principles. By comparing human and animal dilemmas, and through the descriptions of events and landscapes, the spirit of the dog Lassie is skillfully psychologized and personified. The following excerpt from the novel supports this observation: "The afternoon deepened, and Lassie began to stir. There was some impulse warning her faintly. It was indistinct, indefinable, perhaps as when an alarm clock rings to disturb but dimly a still-sleeping human being." (Retrieved from: <https://www.fadedpage.com/showbook.php?pid=20181239>, p. 33).

As the action of the novel develops, its wide imaginative scope does not close narrative paths, but instead reveals subtle and profound ideas conceived in the author's intention to illuminate the mysterious inner worlds of the characters and the emotional drama of separation. By using description, stylistic devices, and narration, a series of new metaphorical images tied to spiritual search is revealed. In this way, aesthetic communication is achieved and reflected in the messages the writer conveys to his readers, inviting a personal response to the text. A unique form of dialogue - verbal on one hand, and non-verbal on the other - emerges between the boy named Joe and the dog called Lassie: "Ye're a come-home dog, aren't ye, Lassie?" he crooned. 'Aye, that ye are. And ye brought us luck. 'Cause ye're a come-homer. Ye're my Come-home. Lassie Come-home. That's thy name! Lassie Come-home" (Retrieved from: <https://www.fadedpage.com/showbook.php?pid=20181239>, p. 144). The boy's speech influences the dynamics of the narrative, these are not merely words expressing both suffering and joy, but a kind of elusive power that comes to the surface in these moments of connection. Lassie's spiritual journey enables her to overcome real, physical, spatial and temporal barriers. By facing and overcoming many obstacles, Lassie's strength and will grow, and she instinctively finds her way back home. The boy's words bring her back to life - his warm and gentle voice becomes a symbol of shelter and safety for her. Her non-verbal communication - reflected in her shivering body, sparkling eyes, and the instinctive urge to connect - demonstrates the author's effort to psychologize and personify the brave dog. Facing and resolving problems, just like all characters in fairy-tales do, Lassie "on her way, struggling for her life, for freedom and the right to choose her own friends, she overcame a number of obstacles and surprises, experienced different temptations, met many evil and good people, got away from the enraged hunters, suffered serious wounds and injuries, survived hunger, in order to come back to her old friends" (Milinković, 2006, p. 417).

## 2. AESTHETIC IN THE LANGUAGE OF TRANSLATION

With his artistic imagination, the writer Erich Knight describes events, heroes, and scenery. “Natural language of animals manifests in the way, as Čalenić points out, so that ‘the narrator translates their inarticulate screams and movements into human language, trying hard to make that speech fit the nature of certain animals’” (Čalenić, 1977, p. 61).

Readers travel with his characters, taking part in events and actions, where the parallel organization of sound and meaning is of great help, especially onomatopoeia. Sincere loyalty to a dog and vice versa has roots in the writer’s childhood. Only the free-spirited soul of a boy can make such communication with the dog or with the living environment. Behind these adventures which are described by magnificent images, there remains unspoken sadness rising from the miserable life of the poor class in England in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Selling the dog and not being able to accept her leaving him, is manifested in the boy’s loud scream, which clearly pictures his state of mind, the troubled life and the incoming misfortune. Describing the society of England and Scotland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, having respect for the visual principle present in descriptions and permeated with lyric elements, through the sophisticated feelings of the characters, the writer succeeded in creating interesting scenes and turnovers in the course of action. We shall point to the lyric elements in the chosen extract from the novel: “He kept her living in his mind. He would sit at his desk at school and dream of her. He would think that perhaps someday—someday—like a dream come true, he would come out of school, and there she would be, sitting at the gate. He could see her just as if she were there, the sable and white of her coat gleaming in the sun, her eyes bright, her tipped ears thrust forward toward him so that she could hear the sound of a voice that tells a dog its master is near much sooner than its poor eyesight can. Her tail would move in welcome, and her mouth would be drawn back in the happy “laugh” of a dog. Then they would race home—home—home—running through the village together, running gladly together. So Joe dreamed. If he could not talk of his dog, he would never stop dreaming of her and hoping that some day ...”

(Retrieved from: <https://www.fadedpage.com/showbook.php?pid=20181239>, p. 42-43).

Our hero Joe does not take life childishly and naively, he acts in accordance with his common sense. Although he feels weak and helpless, he carries within him some invisible and unfailing energy, symbolized in his action to save the dog. Being alone, without his friends and people he knows, being away from his community, he creates his own new parallel world, more beautiful and much better than the real one. In these moments his thoughts are directed towards Lassie and they travel through the ether to reach his friend. The writer succeeded in incorporating creative spirit into the boy’s portrait, and in the portrait of Lassie, he embedded the warmth of a being who communicates by sign language and overcomes a number of challenges in order to learn that life struggle never ends. “Her tired legs drove with the beat, her forefeet pumped steadily. The south bank moved past her, but she seemed to be getting no nearer. Weakness numbed her, and her beat grew slower. Her outstretched head came under the water. As if this wakened her from a sleep, she began threshing wildly. Her head went straight up, and her forefeet sent a splashing foam before her. She was a swimmer in panic. But her head cleared again, and once more she settled down to the steady drive forward.” (Retrieved from: <https://www.fadedpage.com/showbook.php?pid=20181239>, p. 100).

The images that the writer created and modeled literarily carry universal values. Signs recognized in the course of the analysis of the novel, especially the characters, united as a whole, point to a timeless message which does not refer only to language and

geographic location, but to friendship and love, defining these as ethical values. This novel is an anthem to friendship between human and animal and to victory, it is a testimony to the beauty that literature, as a universal art carries and passes on to readers.

### **2.1. Characters and their eternal struggle for individuality and freedom**

The function of a certain character is considered in relation to other characters by means of various forms of communication. Characters in this novel are overwhelmed by secrets, unpredictable obstacles and mysteries, although they mainly belong to the animal world. They are persuasive to the extent the writer allows them, depending on the community - environment where they withhold. In struggling with temptation on their way to freedom or the goal, they are dynamic, they transform themselves and adjust to the conditions in order to survive. Depending on their ability, they tend to 'speak out' the problems they are facing and think of possible solutions. Besides, they use a special form of communication, not by using language, but an onomatopoeic one, by using mime, by screaming and howling. In that way, the writer expresses a deeper background of the existing world, of societies disappeared or still existing, times of which a contemporary reader can only assume in his/her imagination in order to create the image of the existing and the hidden within the frame of overall life connection. Undoubtedly, this kind of writer's attitude helps his inner energy to pass on to both characters and readers. As far as characters are concerned, in the most difficult moments of their survival, their inner and outer worlds interfere very often. Their restlessness testifies to the fact that nothing is permanent in life, and unfailing actions, from a seemingly invisible life vortex, do not disrupt the way of nature.

Symbolic-metaphorical scenes and parts of the novel, non-verbal forms of sharing experiences, conflicts and transformations, all these outstand the initial identity the writer gives to his characters, eliminating oral language, and referring instead to elements of sound, gestures and other pantomimic signs. Visual and audio perception contained in the signs of nature and its phenomena has the goal to convey everything that can be seen or heard, with the intention of understanding the joining of cosmic and earthly balance. That is why, while reading the novel, we come across a number of original descriptions of events from Lassie's journey, where a mysterious power of struggle reposes. Besides the text, extra textual contents are also very important which relate to the characters, and can be revealed through logic. Previous statements can be supported by Pablo Picasso's thought: "A painter (writer) does not only paint what he sees, but what he knows exists."

## **3. CONCLUSION**

Some researchers and scholars who study English literature and literature written in the English language claim that the writer Eric Knight incorporated his love for animals in his novels. "He pictures their intentions and passions in the way they express them by barking, through movements, actions, eventually with their eyes" (Crnković, 1986, p. 176). By analyzing the novel, we noticed interesting images and characters who, with the power of the author's emotions and imagination, created a range of portraits, among which the most outstanding is the portrait of Lassie.

This is where her characteristics stand out: she is very calm, and she knows how to love someone and to forgive. "She makes sacrifices for her friends and defends them

even if it costs her life” (Milinković, 2006, p. 419). The character of Lassie is so delicately described - her character is full of love, commitment and connection with the community and people. One of the universal values of the novel is the message of humanity and the struggle for individuality. Although we analyzed this novel in translation into the Serbian language, readers are delighted with the descriptions of nature, dialogues and monologues, and the joy of the little boy Joe.

According to Lešić, the German poet Novalis concluded at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that “a novel represents human life in the form of a book” (Lešić, 2008, p. 362). The wider context of the culture presented in the novel, along with the presence of lyrical elements, the precise articulation of the writer’s linguistic and literary segments, and the striving for new forms of expression that we discussed - all these represent different and universal values of our existence.

#### REFERENCES

- Crnković, M. (1966). *Literature for children*. Zagreb: Vjesnik
- Knight, E. (2018). *Lassie Come-Home*. <https://www.fadedpage.com/showbook.php?pid=20181239>. Faded page.com. Retrieved March 15, 2025.
- Lešić, Z. (2008). *Theory of literature*. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik
- Milinković, M. (2006). *Foreign writers for children and young people*. Čačak: Legenda (Legend)
- Mišić, D. (2010). English oral and written language development and the function of school libraries. Vranje: Teacher training faculty
- Night, E. (2024). *Lassie Come-Home* ( D. Živanović, Trans.). Belgrade: Kreativni centar (Creative centre)
- Čalenić, M. (1977). *Literature for children*. Belgrade: Nolit

### **LJUBAV PREMA PSU I DRAMATIKA ODVAJANJA U ROMANU *LESI SE VRAĆA KUĆI* ERIKA NAJTA**

U ovom radu autor nastoji da ukaže na vrednosti romana *Lesi se vraća kući* Erika Najta koji je u središtu pažnje ne samo mlađih čitalaca, već i odraslih. Recipijenti, u skladu sa svojim sposobnostima prethodno stečenih znanja otkrivaju značenje teksta i njegovu humanističku dimenziju. Ukazujemo na značaj dela pri recepciji, na tumačenje i razumevanje dela onoliko koliko njihova intelektualna svest dozvoljava. U primeru dela o životinjama koje personifikuju ljudsku misao i svest, čitaocima se ostavlja mogućnost za razmišljanje koje se može nazvati i novim stvaranjem. Osim životinja, u romanu su prikazani i ljudi i njihova komunikacija sa psom Lesi. Ukazano je na estetsku komponentu jezika u prevodu, na likove koji nose radnju kao i na stav pisca i njegovo zapažanje značajnih pojedinosti prostora i prirode u kojoj se radnja odvija. Analizom zapleta, likova, toka radnje, emocionalnog sveta glavnih junaka, dramatike putovanja i psihologije izgubljenog bića koje neverbalno izražava ljubav i potrebu za vezivanjem sa ljudskim rodom, dolazimo do zaključka da je roman *Lesi se vraća kući* istinsko remek delo književnosti koje iskazuje univerzalne moralne, etičke, emocionalne vrednosti i principe prisutnih i kod životinja i kod ljudi. Te univerzalne vrednosti daju smisao životu.

Ključne reči: pas, junak, put, povratak, jezik.