

# Defiant Trajectories: Mapping out Slavic Women Writers Routes

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Women  
Writers  
Route

# Defiant Trajectories

*Mapping out Slavic  
Women Writers Routes*

Edited by

Katja Mihurko Poniž  
Biljana Dojčinović  
Maša Grdešić



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FORUM  
OF SLAVIC  
CULTURES



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# Introduction

In a seminal work in the history of feminist thought, in the essay *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Virginia Woolf writes that at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a change came about that was of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses, and that change was that a woman from the middle class started writing. If we were to develop this idea further, we could say that another similarly important change took place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – that is when a middle-class woman, if she had enough financial resources, began to travel quite freely. Both turning points changed the course of life for many women in the Western world. The middle-class writer, as Nancy Armstrong in her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction. A Political history of the Novel* has shown, has created a special type of novel. Domestic fiction, as Armstrong convincingly argues, “mapped out a new domain of discourse as it invested common forms of social behaviour with the emotional values of women”.

Many middle-class women then realized that they could make a living by writing and that there was a world, albeit in the realm of domesticity, in which a woman was the one who set the rules. However, their lives were based on whether they decided to get married or whether they remained single.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, women began to look for alternatives to such trajectories. If, for married middle-class women until then, migration to other places was largely the consequence of their husband's career, in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they began to discover new spaces of freedom – both literally and figuratively. Compared to the trajectories of contemporaries who chose the expected trajectories, theirs defied the expectations of society. They began to map out the routes by themselves.

It is therefore no coincidence that the Women Writers Cultural Route project focuses not only on

tracking stations on the life trajectories of the women writers we want to mark on a cultural route but also on the very act of discovering new spaces. Papers in the volume, which are extended research papers presented at the Women Writers Route conference in Ljubljana in April 2019, are connected by a common thread of crossing actual and symbolic boundaries. Croatian writers Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić Mažuranić, as presented by Maša Grdešić, each sought spaces of freedom in their own way. While Zagorka, as a single woman (after bravely escaping from a marriage of convenience), crossed the boundaries set by her gender at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and aroused the indignation of the guardians of tradition, Ivana Brlić Mažuranić felt most free when she retired to the world of imagination and created literary texts.

The Montenegrin intellectual, physician and translator Divna Veković, presented by Ksenija Rakočević in this volume, sought freedom in a different way. The path led her from Montenegro to Paris, where she successfully completed her medical studies. During the Great War, she was a doctor on the Salonika front, and the Second World War found her in Yugoslavia, where she had come to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Towards the end of the war, when it was clear that the political regime would change, she

wanted to return to France, but her last journeys remain a mystery, and so does her death.

In Polish literature, the most cosmopolitan writer of her time is Maria Konopnicka, presented in this volume by Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokolowska, and Emilia Kolinko. On the threshold of the fifth decade of her life, Konopnicka decided to leave her homeland and then lived for ten years in France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. She went on holiday to the Adriatic Sea several times. Her postcards draw her itinerary to family and friends. Maria Konopnicka was esteemed both in the Polish homeland and across its borders, and during her lifetime she was translated into various Slavic languages. Thus, her literary texts also drew their own itinerary.

The varied political history of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries led to the migration of Russian and Soviet writers, who, if history had taken place differently, would probably not have chosen such trajectories themselves. Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva and Zinaida Gippius, as Ekaterina Artemyuk shows, lived in different parts of Europe. The age in which they lived had a particularly strong impact on their trajectories. But it was not only their lives but also their literary writings that were influenced by ground-breaking historical events.

The Serbian writer Jelena J. Dimitrijević is undoubtedly the greatest traveller among the women writers we present in this volume as she has travelled seven seas and three oceans, as the title of one of her travelogues says. From the beginning of her writing career, she paid particular attention to the position of women. As a woman who showed an interest in Islamic culture and fluently spoke Turkish, she was able to cross thresholds that others could not. As the author of the article about her, Biljana Dojčinović, points out in America, her distance from the European homeland also enabled her to have a different view of the old continent. Jelena J. Dimitrijević developed many friendships during her travels in different foreign countries, but she also had many compatriots in Yugoslavia whom she appreciated and corresponded with.

Among them was a Slovenian-born multicultural author Zofka Kveder. Katja Mihurko Poniž follows Kveder's itinerary but also the traces she left in her relationships with other people – many intellectuals at the time saw her as a role model, a kind of cultural and feminist icon of Central and Southern Europe. Mihurko Poniž also explores how Kveder's life and works were interpreted in obituaries.

In many Slavic literatures (the exceptions in this volume are Polish and Russian literatures), wom-

en writers did not enter the cultural field until the second half of the 19th century, thus these two women were pioneers in discovering new paths. Many times, they had to clear their way on their own as no one before them had done so. The more numerous they were, the more paths there were. Therefore, mapping the paths of women writers is not only creating maps, which we then follow and by doing so enrich and deepen our knowledge of female literary authorship, but what is more, by following their footsteps we celebrate women's strength, innovation, and creativity.

# The Gender of Croatian Modernity: Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić



Marija Jurić Zagorka



Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić

Over the course of the past ten to fifteen years, we have seen a surge of academic interest in women writers among Croatian literary scholars, due largely to the growing influence of feminist theory and cultural studies. This seems especially to be the case with early 20<sup>th</sup>-century women writers who were previously marginalized or largely invisible in the Croatian literary canon, which was the result of an attempt to conform to the Western canon privileges of modernist writing and “high” art over popular literature, as well as of male over female authors (Grgić 2009, 18).

Two women writers currently attracting the most academic attention are Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić. Although regularly read and loved by a wide audience, they have largely remained relegated to the fringes of the literary canon – Zagorka as a writer of popular historical romances and Brlić-Mažuranić as an author of children’s literature.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century or since the Croatian literary revival, so-called “newer” Croatian literature was characterized by a strong social and political function. This changed somewhat at the turn of the twentieth century, but mostly in theory, because in practice Croatian aestheticism was still firmly tied to realism and a duty to social critique. This is especially true in the case of the novel, which became more modern far more slowly than did poetry or the short story. According to Krešimir Nemeč’s complete history of the Croatian novel, the most productive novelists in the period of aestheticism were actually authors of popular novels (1998, 8). At the time, modernist and avant-garde tendencies in the novel were rare, weak or modest, a belief in the utilitarian function of literature was strongly upheld, and clear communication with the reader was also still seen as crucial (44).

Even though most of the novels written up until the end of the First World War were either popular or realist, and attempts at avant-garde aesthetic radicalism were modest in all genres, Croatian literary history, always striving to establish parallels with European and Western literature, focused on literary texts demonstrating at least some modernist characteristics and therefore disregarded the majority of novels written in that period. This process came under scrutiny only recently, when Croatian literary historians such as Krešimir Nemec (1998) and Zoran Kravar (2005) became interested in modernism as a historical and cultural era, finally examining literary works beyond the limits of the modernist canon. Kristina Grgić, employing Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the literary field and drawing on Astradur Eysteinnsson's constructivist approach to the concept of modernism in her analysis of Marija Jurić Zagorka's position in Croatian literary history, explains that literary modernism should be understood as the dominant but by no means the only literary paradigm within the wider historical and cultural era (2009, 20). Grgić goes on to say that the dominant understanding of modernist literature, both in the Western and the Croatian literary canon, is the result of literary criticism's privileging of certain literary forms and techniques typical of "high" literature (20). In this way, other forms of literary production,

which were less interesting to literary historians concerned with "high" literature, were therefore omitted from the prevailing image of literary modernism, specifically popular and children's literature, as well as literary works continuing the realist and naturalist tradition (Grgić 2009, 20).

Only a complete history of Croatian literature or the Croatian novel, such as Krešimir Nemec's, which endeavours to explore literary styles and texts beyond the official narrative of modernism's dominance in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Croatian literature, can reveal the fact that Zagorka's popular historical romances were not an exception or a relic of an abandoned literary past, but were actually at the forefront of a very lively and widespread literary trend (1998, 13). According to Nemec, popular historical novels flourished both in *fin de siècle* literature (66) and in the period 1914–1945 (86). The latter period is also defined by the emergence of an increasing number of published women authors, most of which are only now being (re)discovered (87).

\*

Again, Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić are the most widely researched women writers within contemporary Croatian literary criticism, particularly owing to their respective positions in Croatian literary history, and their

differing but equally interesting attitudes towards women's creativity and the woman's place in culture and society.

Zagorka's literary texts, mostly novels but also plays, were regularly disparaged by her contemporary male critics, not only because they were popular and therefore inconsistent with the proclaimed cultural values of aestheticism and modernism, but also because they openly displayed their feminist politics (Jakobović Fribec 2008, 24). On the other hand, Brlić-Mažuranić's fairy tales were universally acclaimed (Zima 2019, 7-8), but these seemingly opposing attitudes towards the two writers were in fact the effect and result of the same dominant ideas of the feminine and femininity (Felski 1995).

The Croatian National Revival in the nineteenth century had enlisted the help of women in the fight to establish a national language and culture. Nevertheless, as Dunja Detoni Dujmić points out in her important book on women writers in Croatia, *Ljepša polovica književnosti* [The Lovelier Half of Literature], it soon became clear that women were only needed as patronesses of male artists and educators of children, and that this cooperation was largely pragmatic in nature and short-lived (1998, 16). Most women writers active at the beginning of the twentieth century alternated between teaching, humanitarian work, and writing.

According to Detoni Dujmić, they were torn between literature and pedagogy, between their demanding daily jobs as teachers (or wives and mothers) and their creative ambitions (22). They were encouraged to write didactic stories in the Croatian language for children and other women for the purpose of countering or overshadowing popular German-language novels, but were then – like Zagorka – undermined for doing so (Nemec 1998, 75). Didactic, popular, and children's literature were the only areas of the literary field women were welcomed into, precisely because these were not perceived as true art or as competition to works written by men.

Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić were contemporaries (Dujčić 2011, 94), writing popular and children's literature in an era that was "historically complex and abounding in events, historiographically polyvalent, ideologically divergent, divided by class and gender, and multi-poetic in terms of culture and literature" (Zima 2019, 13). Although it might be easier to focus on the differences between the two authors and the contrasting reception of their work among contemporary critics and later literary historians, there are also many similarities between Zagorka and Brlić-Mažuranić (Dujčić 2011, 101).

Most of the biographical information on Marija Jurić Zagorka

has been gleaned from her own autobiographical texts as well as from her novel *Kamen na cesti* [A Stone in the Road], which is frequently read as based on her own life (Jakobović-Fribec 2008, 30). Only recently, Zagorka scholars such as Slavica Jakobović-Fribec and the team behind Marija Jurić Zagorka's Memorial Apartment in Zagreb have more strongly relied on historiographical research in an attempt to answer the remaining questions about Zagorka's life. One such question is the date of Zagorka's birth, which had been erroneously cited for decades until Jakobović-Fribec discovered and published the correct date, which was 2 March 1873 (2008, 16).

Zagorka was born into a middle-class family, and her father worked as a foreman at the estate of count Ivan Erdödy.<sup>1</sup> Her family soon moved to Baron Geza Rauch's estate, where she began her education. Later, she went to school in Varaždin and Zagreb. While in Zagreb, she started a school paper, wrote stories and a school play. When she was 17, her parents forced her to marry an older Hungarian railway clerk. Five years later she escaped the oppressive

marriage and returned to Zagreb.

In 1896, she succeeded in publishing her first political article in *Obzor* [The Horizon], a leading Croatian newspaper. Most of her early articles are pro-Croatian and anti-Hungarian in tone. She faced many hardships while working at *Obzor*, such as gender discrimination, contempt from colleagues, accusations of immoral behaviour, political persecution, and meagre wages, but through hard work and incredible persistence Zagorka became the first woman journalist in Croatia. She was also a feminist and a labour rights activist. She organized the first Croatian women workers union in 1897.

In 1903, during the period of people's revolt against the Hungarian ban Khuen Héderváry, Zagorka single-handedly edited *Obzor* for five months while her male colleagues were in jail, and even spent ten days in jail herself. She also organized a women's protest against ban Khuen.

Slavica Jakobović-Fribec interprets Zagorka's intense pride in ending up behind bars as a "feminist demand for equal political acknowledgement, even in criminal prosecution" (2008, 22). Zagorka's time in jail was seen as a "scandalous slipping out of gender roles" (Jakobović-Fribec 2008, 23). She gained international fame as a foreign correspondent reporting from the Croatian-Hungarian Par-

1 Zagorka's biography can be compiled from many different sources, but the most recent and up-to-date information is available at <http://zagorka.net/biografija/>, the official website of Marija Jurić Zagorka's Memorial Apartment in Zagreb, which also houses Croatia's Centre for Women's Studies. If not otherwise indicated, the data on Zagorka's life are taken from this valuable source.

liament in Budapest in 1906. A year later, her articles were published in a book called *Razvrgnute zaruke* [Broken Engagements]. In 1909, she also reported from Vienna on the so-called Friedjung Process.

Even though she had already written two social novels and many plays, mostly satirical or historical, she started writing popular fiction in 1910. This is the year she published the first Croatian crime novel, *Kneginja iz Petrinjske ulice* [The Countess of Petrinjska Street]. Her first popular historical romance, *Tajna Krvavog mosta* [Secret of the Bloody Bridge], was published in 1911 and would later become part of her most famous novel in seven volumes, *Grička vještica* [The Witch of Grič]. Zagorka was also the author of the first Croatian science fiction novel, *Crveni ocean* [The Red Ocean], published in 1918.

As a journalist and author of fiction, Zagorka consistently championed Croatian political independence, fought against German and Hungarian imperialism, advocated women's and workers' rights and promoted social justice (Nemec 1998, 77). Her popular historical fiction was, as Ivo Hergešić described it, "a great school of activism" (quoted in Nemec 1998, 66), but unlike the majority of popular novels in the first half of the twentieth century, Zagorka's romances were not moralistic and pious, but were politically subversive. This is accomplished through the construc-

tion of active heroines, who participate not only in the romance plot but in significant historical events as well. The public activity of her heroines transforms the popular love story into a feminist narrative – largely utopian, of course – about the active role of women in Croatian history (Grdešić 2008, 372).

Zagorka's novels also represent a formal departure from other popular fiction published in Croatia at the same time. Stanko Lasić, in his 1986 monograph on Zagorka, was the first to point out that Zagorka abandoned the traditional, realist nineteenth-century model of historical fiction, and replaced it with what he calls the "freedom principle", which manifests itself in the radical infinity of the narrative structure of her popular novels (1986, 93). A case in point is her novel *Gordana*, comprising 12 volumes and almost 9,000 pages. It is the longest novel written in the Croatian language and one of the longest in the world.

Zagorka also continued pursuing a journalistic career. She was the founder and editor of two of Croatia's earliest women's magazines, *Ženski list* [Woman's Paper, 1925-1938] and *Hrvatica* [Croatian Woman, 1938-1941]. Finally, she published her significant overtly feminist novel *Kamen na cesti* [A Stone in the Road, 1932-1934], about a woman trying to live and work independently in the patriarchal society, as well as several

autobiographical essays cataloguing the many prejudices and injustices she was forced to endure as a woman in the public realm. Marija Jurić Zagorka died in 1957. According to Nemeč, she remains the most popular Croatian writer (1998, 74).

At first glance, it seems Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's life story could not be more different than Zagorka's.<sup>2</sup> Her upper middle-class family was one of the most respected in Croatia. Her grandfather was Ivan Mažuranić, Croatia's first "ban commoner", her father Vladimir was a lawyer and politician, and her grandmother Aleksandra was the sister of the poet Dimitrija Demeter (Zima 2001, 13-15). She was born in 1874 in Ogulin, but her family moved to Zagreb in 1882. She mostly had private tutors and started writing poetry in Croatian and French very early, as well as keeping a diary (15-17).

Respecting her family's wishes, she married Vatroslav Brlić, a lawyer from another renowned Croatian intellectual family, when she was 18 years old (17). She moved

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2 Dubravka Zima is the most prominent Croatian expert on the life and work of Brlić-Mažuranić. Her books *Ivana Brlić Mažuranić* and *Praksa svijeta. Biografija Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić* [The Practice of the World. A Biography of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić] should be used as principal references in all discussions on Brlić-Mažuranić. The website of the museum in Ogulin dedicated to Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's fairy tales, Ivana's House of Fairy Tales, is also a valuable source of information: <http://baza.ivaninakucabajke.hr/hr/o-bajkama>.

to the countryside, to Slavonski Brod, with her husband and they had six children in ten years, two of whom died (19). Fifteen years later, she gave birth to another daughter (25). She struggled with postpartum depression and depression for most of her life, and in the end committed suicide at the age of 64 (Zima 2019, 375).

She took up writing again after her children were born. Her most famous works are the children's novel *Čudnovate zgode šegrta Hlapića* [The Marvelous Adventures of Hlapić the Apprentice] and *Priče iz davnina* [Croatian Tales of Long Ago] a collection of original fairy tales inspired by Slavic mythology and informed by a Christian worldview, which was first published in 1916 and translated into English as early as 1924 (Zima 2001, 22-25). The *Tales* were translated into ten languages in the 1920s and 1930s and earned their author the nickname of "the Croatian Hans Christian Andersen" (25-27).

During the 1930s, she was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times (Zima 2019, 349). She was also the first woman to become a corresponding member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1937 (351-52).

The reactions of Zagorka's and Brlić-Mažuranić's contemporaries to their work, and consequently their respective positions in Croatian literary history, could not

have been more different. During her lifetime, Zagorka endured many hateful and violent attacks from her male critics, who called her writing “*Schundliteratur* [trash] for peasant women” (Lasić 1986, 101), and also from her political enemies, who labelled her a “disgusting man-woman” because of her non-conforming appearance and attitude in terms of gender (76). Conversely, but originating from the same patriarchal ideal of femininity, Brlić-Mažuranić was described by Ulderiko Donadini as “a true Croatian aristocrat – a mother, an honourable lady”, and her writing an expression of “such heartfelt, feminine charm and elegance; a soul that one senses as a silk handkerchief in the breeze” (quoted in Detoni Dujmić 1998, 39), precisely because she seemed to conform to the same gender expectations. According to Dubravka Zima, Brlić-Mažuranić seemed to “accept, symbolically and explicitly, the class and representational expectations of 19<sup>th</sup>-century public and private gender politics” (2019, 8). Zagorka, on the other hand, is nowadays seen as the “petite Amazon of Croatian feminism” (Sklevicky, 1996). Brlić-Mažuranić’s class position, higher social standing, acceptance of the role of wife and mother, but also the projection of her maternal duties onto her writing, all help explain her stronger and more stable place (compared to Zagorka) in the Croatian literary canon.

Dunja Detoni Dujmić describes Brlić-Mažuranić’s feminism as “mystical-utopian” and contrasts it with Zagorka’s brand of increasingly politically committed feminism (1998, 209). But even though their concepts of feminism and activism diverge, what connects these two superbly talented women writers is the way their will to write was suppressed as inappropriate for a woman: it was proclaimed unnatural and monstrous in Zagorka’s case (Jakobović-Fribec 2008, 24), and in Ivana’s case interpreted as an extension of her maternal duties (Zima 2019, 249). It is for this reason that Zagorka consistently claimed that she had made no significant contribution to Croatian literature. Her feminine “anxiety of authorship”, as Gilbert and Gubar termed this condition (2000, 7), manifested itself in publicly downplaying her literary accomplishments. For instance, she writes in one of her autobiographies: “I have told my audience from the stage that I am not and never will be a writer, nor have I tried to be one. My profession is journalism. I have written novels only as propaganda against German novels” (Jurić Zagorka 1997, 487).

On the other hand, as Dubravka Zima explains, Ivana’s upbringing instilled in her an “essentialist understanding of a woman’s social and personal duty”, which led her to “neglect and subvert the need to write” (2019, 249). Zima regards Ivana’s firm belief in “women’s du-

ties" and her strong Christian morality epitomized in humility and modesty as two key reasons for suppressing her own will to write (250). In her 1916 autobiography, simply called *Autobiografija*, Brlić-Mažuranić writes:

My great wish that anything I wrote would sometime be published was repressed from a young age by another strong feeling: early in life my reasoning led me to the conclusion that writing did not agree with the duties of a woman. Until fifteen years ago, this struggle between a strong desire to write and this (right or wrong) feeling of duty had completely contained my public literary work. (Brlić-Mažuranić 1997, 524)

According to Zima, "Ivana decided to publish her work only after she recognized it as part of her duties as a mother, i.e. when she wanted to provide her children with suitable literature" (Zima 2013). However, it is interesting to note that in her autobiography she states that her favourite work up until 1916 was *Slike* [Images], a collection of poems for adults. Zima interprets this as a "departure from [...] principle" and an "admission that her desire to write overpowers the guilt caused by her dismissal of 'women's duties'" (2013). It seems that Brlić-Mažuranić found herself in a contradictory position typical for women artists in the modern era, torn between her feminine

social role and her own creative impulses, always thinking of her maternal duty, strongly believing it "brings peace to the soul" (Zima 2019, 373), while at the same time realizing that it "was impossible to attain or hold onto this peace believing in the same ideas she had acquainted herself with in the bygone 1880s" (375).

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Contemporary academic research reveals that the life and work of both Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić is a great deal more complex and contradictory than dated stereotypes of femininity suggest. In recent years, many academic papers and a number of books and edited volumes have been published on both writers, and both authors now have museums dedicated to preserving their legacy: the museum dedicated to Zagorka is located in her Zagreb apartment, and also houses the Croatian Centre for Women's Studies; Brlić-Mažuranić's work is celebrated in Ivana's House of Fairy Tales in Ogulin.

This new research has certainly led to Zagorka's and Brlić-Mažuranić's more central position in the Croatian literary canon; however, these changes have also raised more general questions about the place of women writers in the canon. In writing her (already mentioned) book on Croatian women authors, Dunja Detoni

Dujmić aims to establish their contribution to Croatian literature as a whole and does not mean to separate and segregate their work. But it still remains to be seen whether this list of women authors will create a distinct “feminine canon”, or whether it will simply be added to the existing masculine canon as a kind of “appendix”, as Lada Čale Feldman described it (1999, 151), or whether it will actually be integrated into the history of Croatian literature.

The crucial question now seems to be: is it even possible to integrate women writers into the Croatian literary canon without reforming it or doing away with it altogether? And if the value system underlying the canon is annulled, is the concept of the canon still sustainable? Every national literature has authors, both male and female, who cannot be conveniently included in a specific literary period. Indeed, when it comes to Croatian literature, this seems to be the case with the majority of authors since the nineteenth century. Due to specific social, political, and aesthetic reasons, “newer” Croatian literature is continually out of step with European literature. The problem becomes even more complex when we attempt to bring women authors into the fold because, as Gilbert and Gubar have claimed, the chronology of women authors “is not always quite the same as men’s” (2000, xxix), and the similarities between texts

by women writers “cross national as well as temporal boundaries” (xxi). Finally, the question whether the canon can be expanded to accommodate popular literature and children’s literature, which often do not follow the aesthetic tendencies of “high” literature at all, brings us to a standstill. As Kristina Grgić states, simply adding Zagorka’s name to the modernist literary canon would not significantly change her marginal position in Croatian literary history (2009, 32). On the other hand, precisely because of their marginality, her texts have the potential to encourage a critical rethinking of prevailing ideas of modernism and the canon (32).

Although the canon can still be a useful and practical tool, it is necessary to challenge the aesthetic and ideological values underlying its formation and transformation. Rita Felski does precisely this in her seminal book *The Gender of Modernity* when she analyses the different myths of modernity. She tries to see what would happen to our conventional understanding of modernity if we looked at it from the perspective of women writers and women readers, and if we focused on texts by women and about women. Now “those dimensions of culture either ignored, trivialized, or seen as regressive rather than authentically modern – feelings, romantic novels, shopping, motherhood, fashion – gain dramatically in importance”, she

claims (1995, 22). Felski maintains that the “equation of masculinity with modernity and femininity with tradition is only one of various possible stories about the nature and meaning of the modern era” (2).

In the same way, a different story about the gender of Croatian modernity can be told if we choose to highlight popular and children’s authors like Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić. We might even come to realize that Croatian modern literature is dominantly popular and feminine.

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Ksenija Rakočević

# Divna Veković – Our Heroine



Divna Veković

Montenegrin culture originated on tribal grounds, and it is known that the tribe has powerful defence mechanisms by which it overcomes, subjugates or eliminates disobedient individuals. Thus, the traditional arrangement of Montenegrin culture maintains its existence in the firm grip of tribal culture, whose strict rules everyone must obey. That is to say, tribal culture functions as a solid and resistant network into which the memory of collective and social values is deposited, forming a stable axiological system with a cult at its centre (in the case of Montenegrin culture, it is a cult of honour and valour), according to and against whose rigorous parameters the behaviour of an individual is measured. The relationship between man and the spatial appearance of the world is no less complicated. On the one hand, that appearance is created by a man, and on the other, it actively forms a man who is immersed in it (Gezeman 2003, 17).

Montenegrin culture clearly recognizes models of behaviour that are acceptable and desirable, and, as the main rule of survival in a rugged and poor, largely infertile land, constantly exposed to the dangers of powerful external forces, the principle of the animal kingdom is imposed – in the form of the stronger one's oppression, which recognizes the physical as the only authoritative force. Given that Montenegrin history is full of frequent wars in which mostly men served, misogyny has become (and remains) one of the most prominent elements of Montenegrin society. Until two decades ago, Montenegrin reality was permeated by constant wars, struggles, and other forms of militant activity which, by the logic of things (and physical strength), involved greater participation of men and served as fertile ground on which to impose the "pater familias" model. (Gezeman 2003, 17)

Freedom, to which everything is subordinated, is striven for in all ways. This implies that culture was instrumentalized and often abused, among other things, with the aim of elevating the Montenegrin man to the pedestal. The warrior tradition is deeply woven into Montenegrin national existence and inhumane living conditions have contributed to discriminating against and marginalizing women on the basis of physical strength. In such tribal systems, invariant units such as ancestral cults and glorious pasts, a stable axiology and tribal-patriarchal patterns of behaviour influence the organizational principles of the life of community members.

Among the former republics of Yugoslavia, the position of women in Montenegro was the most endangered. The creation and survival of every nation is based on a vicious and dangerous base of myths. One of the central myths Montenegrin culture is based on is the myth of man as a superior being, which is closely related to the dominant Christian (monotheistic and monocentric) tradition, and one built on the postulate of the holy (male) trinity: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Blehova Čelabić 2002, 129)

Small and economically disorganized Montenegro, even within the former Yugoslavia, lagged in terms of enlightenment and education. Barren rock and difficult liv-

ing conditions contributed to Montenegro's lack of progress. What develops inside this framework, in accordance with the oral tradition, is discursive rather than situational power, so notions of heroism and the constant need to fight for and maintain a sense of freedom are passed from generation to generation and woven deeply into Montenegrin national life. Under such conditions, the idea of human rights develops more slowly than in more economically developed communities.

Women in Montenegro enjoyed their most favourable position following the Second World War, thanks to the activities of the AFŽ (the Women's Antifascist Front), after which Montenegrin women along with women in other parts of Yugoslavia gained the right to vote.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Party took care of women in a way that allowed them to work and have families, while their children stayed in state-funded kindergartens. For the first time in history, women would be paid the same as men, and in addition, obligatory celibacy, which was previously associat-

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1 In the first Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ) after the Second World War, dated 31 January 1946, Article 24 states: "Women are equal to men in all areas of state, economic and socio-political life." Until 1946, women in Montenegro did not have the right to vote. The first elections for the National Assembly of Montenegro were held on 27 November (O. S. 14 November) 1905, and women could not participate in the elections.

ed with occupations such as teaching, would be abolished.

In Montenegro, between the two world wars, and especially after the Second World War, something happened in terms of the position of women that was characteristic of a large number of European countries. In other words, what happened was the particular irony that the biggest wars – which decimated the secular population, employed new battle technologies and the use of hitherto unseen weapons – brought both considerable rights and relief to the position of women in society. Up until then, women had been tied exclusively to the space of the home and/or the estate; but when there were no longer enough men to serve the war effort, women were transferred from such spaces to the battlefield. By proving that they were capable of carrying rifles and fighting, after the Second War they finally got what they had been denied for centuries.

The position of women in old Montenegro is well illustrated by the fact that public beatings were prohibited only by the Code of King Nikola (1860-1918) and up until then women had not been allowed to sit at the same table with men; and even if the men concerned were boys, they even had the advantage of being the first to cross the street. The difficult position of women is well documented in the writings of Gerhard Gesemann as

presented in his book *Crnogorski čovjek* [*Montenegrin Man*] which records various harsh customs such as the fact that all jobs that involved bending spine were done by women, because it was considered humiliating for a man to bend, or for a man to cry when a woman died (Seferović 2014, 47).

### **The Institutionalization of Women's Education in Montenegro**

Bearing in mind that in Montenegro there was more war than peace, and that the tribal order and popular widespread traditions modelled the axiological system, it is hardly surprising that there was a marked lag in terms of education, especially when it came to women. The beginning of education and schooling of women in Montenegro is closely connected with the name of Jelena Vicković, who gathered and educated girls in Cetinje in a non-institutional but organized form. The first private school for female children opened in Cetinje in 1872, while two more were soon opened in Podgorica (1888) and Bar (1901). By the same token, however, all this time the education of female children was neither obligatory nor legally prescribed, but depended solely on the will of their parents. Particularly important for the education of women in Montenegro was the founding of the Girls' Institute in Cetinje, in 1869, under the auspices of Russian Empress

Maria. The launch of the Institute, which provided free education to talented female children from Montenegro and elsewhere, testified to King Nikola's progressive ideas and his desire and aspiration to improve the position of women. (During his reign, many previously permitted discriminatory acts, such as the public beating of women and the rule that a man always had the right to cross the street first were abolished). During his stay in Russia, King Nikola (Njeguši 1841-Antibes 1921) had the opportunity to meet educated women and he had the idea that there should be a place in Montenegro where women could get education and nurture the ideological values on which the organization of Montenegrin society rested.<sup>2</sup>

The Girls' Institute in Cetinje was the first women's high school in Montenegro. The enrolment documents reveal a plan to admit 24 students, but the first generation of women students saw only 12 admitted, which testifies to the parents' lack of interest in educating female children, but also to the strongly rooted patriarchy in place. The youngest of the 12 students was just 9 years old; however, none of those enrolled were literate and the Institute, although conceived as a secondary school, operated as an institution for primary education. At the beginning,

the Institute operated together with the Theological Seminary, which was attended by boys, and which was located in Billiards; later a new building was built specifically for the needs of this educational institution.

The compulsory subjects studied were Serbian, French, Russian, mathematics, geography, history, women's handicrafts, housekeeping, drawing, singing, gymnastics, psychology, logic, and the science of education. It is important to mention that the Institute emphasized the preparation of girls for family life and care for family values, while in the background was the possibility of continuing education and participating in the community to which they belonged. Those who came from wealthier families often opted to go into teaching. However, most of the students finished their education upon leaving the Institute.

Although conceived as an institution that would contribute to the education of local girls, most of the girls enrolled at the Institute were foreigners, and of the 450 students who passed through the Institute only 205 were from Montenegro.

Different views of the Institute's activities surfaced in 1904 when the Government of Montenegro sent a request to the Russian court to reform the curriculum with the hope that it would pay more attention to issues important to Mon-

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.muzejzena.me/kalendar.45.kalendar.html>

tenegro in the schooling of young girls; but the request was not met favourably on the part of the Russian court, and the Institute was shut down.

### **A Culturally Divided Montenegro**

If we look at the history of Montenegro through the lens of today's borders, the difference and imbalance between the south (specifically the area of Boka) and the north is particularly apparent. Such a situation is not at all surprising, bearing in mind that in different parts of today's Montenegro different invaders operated and exerted their influence, ultimately having a lasting impact on the culture and way of life assumed by the local population. This situation also affects the position of women, which is reflected in her position in society, in family relations, and in the possibilities of gaining education and achieving a certain degree of independence.

The centuries-old colonial or semi-colonial framework in which different parts of today's Montenegro found themselves led to an emphasis on two dominant influences: the Austro-Hungarian in Boka, and the Turkish in the north of Montenegro. Therefore, it should be mentioned that the area of today's Kotor, i.e. Boka, was far more progressive compared to the rest of the country. It is important to point out that Boka did not fall

under Ottoman rule. However, it should be noted that women were being educated in the area of today's Kotor centuries ago, that is, in Kotor there was a private educational institution for women (in the form of a monastery) as early as 1500, and in 1550 the city had a free educational institution for women. It is also interesting that, during that time, at these monasteries, attention was paid to literature, and women enjoyed a high level of financial independence (the dowry they would receive at marriage belonged exclusively to them, and only they could decide on and dispose of it, while in the event of a divorce the dowry was indivisible).<sup>3</sup>

In a way, the fact that this city venerates the cult of the Mother of God far more than it honours the cult of Jesus speaks of the privileged position of women in medieval Kotor. A similarly high status of veneration is given to Blessed Osanna, the patroness of the city of Kotor, about whom plenty of material exists in the Archives of Kotor, as well as in the Library of the Maritime Museum and the Museum of the City of Perast, which

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<sup>3</sup> Records on the existence of women's education in the Bay of Kotor (part of Montenegro) since the 16th century can be found in the Church of St. Nicholas, among which are the records of Don Niko Luković, who described in detail the life of Blessed Osanna and the origin of Prčanj. In addition, Don Luković writes about the institutional education of women in Kotor during the 16th century.

testifies to the reputation that this, originally rural, person enjoyed among the people of Kotor.

The fact that the women of Kotor took part in the defence of the City against the Ottoman fleet in the 16th century, during which they, as Don Niko Luković notes, took up arms, also speaks of the more active participation of women in issues of general importance. In addition, women were involved in finance, and it was not unusual for them to study and serve as pharmacists. (Luković 1965, 113)

Such an encouraging situation in the area of today's Montenegro is valid only for the area of Boka, and more specifically Kotor, even when it comes to much more recent, that is, more modern periods. As has already been mentioned, the institutionalized education of women only relates to the end of the 19th century, and documentary material on earlier periods related to the north and the rest of Montenegro is almost negligible. Women in this area are predominantly attached to the family home and the difficult, even dangerous, position of Montenegrin women is well documented by Gerhard Gesemann in his *Montenegrin Man*, where he records some of the Montenegrin patriarchal-misogynistic customs bordering on the bizarre. (Gezeman 2003, 171)

However, the bright spot in Montenegrin women's history is

certainly embodied in the work of Divna Veković from the Girls' Institute in Cetinje. Some 450 students graduated from the Girls' Institute, but the number of girls who came from today's north of Montenegro was negligible. The most notable among them, and certainly one of the institute's most important students in general, is Divna Veković, the first woman Doctor of Philosophy from Montenegro, who, unfortunately, has been researched or written about very little. The decades-long silence on the significance of this woman from Berane for Montenegrin history, which is already sadly lacking as regards women, represents an additional problem. Few university professors or historians in Montenegro have written about Divna Veković; and historical subjects on the period, taught in the History Study Program at the University of Montenegro, make no mention of her.

In accordance with the dominant, warrior-centred view of Montenegrin history, with wars and battles being taught in primary and secondary schools, Divna Veković is not given any space in history teaching (except in the 20% of the curriculum in which teachers are free to choose what is included in agreement with the local community and student-related bodies).

There is not a single document related to Divna Veković in the most important libraries in Montenegro, except in the National Li-

brary Đurađ Crnojević and in the library of the Eparchy of Budimlja-Nikšić (which includes the area of Berane near which Veković was born). We also consider the number of references to Divna Veković that we managed to find in library databases to be worryingly small, so few as could be counted on one hand.

Divna Veković was born in 1886 in Berane, in the village of Lužac, the youngest of seven children. She finished primary school in her hometown, at the Đurđevi Stupovi monastery, after which she went to Skopje for further education. As she produced enviable results during her schooling, she became a scholarship holder of the Girls' Institute in Cetinje, where she also excelled and became a holder of King Nikola's scholarship, which enabled her to continue her education in Amiens in France, after which she would go on to attend the Sorbonne. She graduated in 1917, from the two-year Dental School in Paris. During the First World War, she was engaged in collecting aid for the Serbian army, even though her place of permanent residence was Paris. She came to Yugoslavia in 1939 to celebrate the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Shortly after her return to Yugoslavia, a new war broke out and Veković failed to return to France, which is why she spent the occupation in Berane, working in the People's Administration of Montenegro as a part-time official at the Health Centre.

Divna Veković is the first Doctor of Philosophy from Montenegro, the first dentist, and the first translator of Petar II Petrović Njegoš's *Gorski vijenac* [*The Mountain Wreath*, 1847]. Veković completed the translation of Njegoš's text in 1915 in Paris, and two years later the translation was published. The foreword to the French edition of *The Mountain Wreath* was written by the French author Henri de Régnier, who had nothing but praise for the translation, stating that it was one of the most popular texts in Serbian literature. However, the translation of Divna Veković did not receive similar praise among domestic critics, with Luka Dotlić and Nikola Banašević playing roles in the criticism of Veković's translation.

The topics Njegoš deals with in his work are far from unknown to French readers, who are well familiar with heroic epic poems, but there are huge cultural differences between Montenegrin and French folklore and ritual. Due to the characteristic verse in which it is written, Veković opted for a prose translation of the poem, for which she offered explanations in the notes.

Because *The Mountain Wreath* is full of localisms and dialect-related details characteristic exclusively of Montenegrin culture, and because the tribal organization and opinions dictated the official hierarchical order in terms of axiological

characteristics (duke, serdar [field marshal], etc.), Divna Veković offered an explanation for all of this (Radanović 2012). Based on the adapted translation, it is obvious that Veković is well-acquainted with French poetry from the Renaissance through Romanticism and on to Symbolism. Bearing in mind that the central idea of *The Mountain Wreath* is the spread of libertarian thought, while the erotic and the aesthetic remain looming in the background, Veković's feeling for this particular layer of the text and her success in emphasizing it are interesting.

There are conflicting opinions among Francophonists about the translation by Veković. However, the fact that this young woman from Berane from a highly traditional environment was the first to translate a key work of the Montenegrin canon is certainly of great importance.

In addition to the translation of *The Mountain Wreath*, Divna Veković also translated Zmaj Jova Jovanović' poems, as well as the *Life and Customs of the Serbian People* and a collection of folk tales by Vuk Karadžić (1787-1864). Veković is also the author of two dictionaries of the French language and a French grammar book. She defended her doctoral dissertation in literature in 1926 in Belgrade.

## Conclusion

Divna Veković is one of those

historical figures of Montenegro who had the misfortune of being largely silenced, bearing in mind that "history is written by the winners". During the wars, Veković was engaged in civil military service and was dedicated to humanitarian and medical work. However, her ideology tied her to the monarchist system, and at the end of World War II she became a refugee. Her death remains unexplained, so a number of versions of it continue to this day – that she died before the end of the Second World War and also that she died at Zidani Most in eastern Slovenia.

After the monarchists were defeated, those who sympathized with or were close to them were slowly forgotten. As a result, Divna Veković was silenced for decades and she did not manage to gain a different position even after the change of the system. The fact that no documents exist that would help us learn more beyond her translations only serves to further complicate our work on Veković.

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Emilia Kolinko

# Maria Konopnicka: In Search of Individual Emancipation



Maria Konopnicka

Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910) is one of the most important Polish women writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, having lived at a time when the feminist political movement in Central and Eastern Europe was just beginning to take shape and was gathering momentum. Konopnicka was involved in campaigning for Polish liberation and the return of the Polish language to mainstream education during the time of the Polish partitions (after 123 years of absence from world maps, Poland returned to the world's maps following the end of World War I, eight years after Konopnicka's death), and supported school strike actions in 1905. She was active in campaigning for women to be given equal rights, but was not radical in her pronouncements and methods of working. In spite of certain diametrically opposed views of various factions within Polish politics of the time, she tried to set her own course as an artist through life, refusing to surrender to external pressures. Her life story is that of

an independent-minded individual struggling for independence and influence in a patriarchal society deeply divided between radical and conservative factions, both of which claimed ownership of her person and writing, and keen to have her act as a national soothsayer and sage, both presenting her work in their own image. This was a most awkward position to be put in, for Konopnicka thus became a sort of hostage for both ends of the political spectrum, as well as her own public image. Thus, not only does she become a victim of her own popularity as an individual, but the same also holds true of her remarkable yet still largely unknown works, which did not fit with the image of her as a defender of her nation and a vehement patriot.<sup>1</sup>

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1 See Lena Magnone, *Maria Konopnicka: Lustra i symptomy*, Gdańsk 2011. See also a review of Magnone's book: Katarzyna Nadana, *Marii Konopnickiej flirty z wolnością*, (about the book *Maria Konopnicka. Lustra i symptomy*, L. Magnone), "Teksty Drugie" 2011, no. 4, pp. 105–110.

Maria Konopnicka was born in Suwałki in 1842, in what is now north-east Poland, not far from the Lithuanian border. She was the daughter of Jozef (a lawyer) and Scholastyka (nee Turska) Wasilkowski, and when she was a few years old her family moved to Kalisz in the centre of the Polish Kingdom, which was at the time under Russian Imperial occupation. Her mother passed away in 1854, leaving Maria and her siblings solely in their father's care. Maria was first home schooled, and then attended a convent school run by the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament in Warsaw. At the age of 20, she married Jaroslaw Konopnicki and moved to his estate in Bronowo, and then Gusin (today's Lodz Voivodeship of Poland). In ten years of marriage, she gave birth eight times. In 1876, encouraged by positive reviews of her debut poetry, she took the unconventional step of moving with her children to Warsaw, which essentially amounted to marital separation. She decided to become a professional writer, teaching as a means of earning a living.

She published her first volume of poetry in 1881. Her poetic output, featuring themes of both patriotism and lyricism, styled as poetry of the people though not lacking in irony and sarcasm (Ławski 2010, 137), gained widespread popularity. Konopnicka lived in Warsaw until 1890, and then travelled to the West, a journey which – speaking metaphorically – aroused a sense

of “impatience” in her, which triggered a period of restless wandering that would last more than a decade.

In Warsaw, Konopnicka was involved in civic initiatives and campaigns, but was also writing for various Warsaw journals. During the years 1884–1886, she edited the progressive women's magazine *Świt* [Dawn], while also writing for other Polish publications, worked with civic organisations across the three partitioned parts of Poland, and after a couple of years she also took part in an international protest against the Germanisation of Polish children. At the very outset of her creative career, she published in Vilnius a short drama entitled *Hypatia* (in the volume *Z przeszłości. Fragmenty dramatyczne* [From the Past. Dramatic Pieces, 1881]). In this work, Konopnicka pits the humanism of a female philosopher against the barbarism of Christianity and its followers. Christians detest her for her individuality and independence, as well as the influence she continues to have over the residents of Alexandria. This work resulted in a violent attack upon Konopnicka by the Polish clergy, forcing her to discredit the opinions presented in her work. It seems *Hypatia*, as presented in this piece, along with the courage with which she pronounces her convictions, may be key in helping us understand the writer's biography. Throughout her life, Konopnicka would share

Hypatia's view of the world – her protagonist liberates her slaves in order to save them from death just as Konopnicka herself always tried to defend the disadvantaged and those harmed by unjust laws and imperfect institutions.<sup>2</sup>

During her Warsaw period, Konopnicka fought this solitary campaign by creating the persona of a woman writer engaged in social causes. Meanwhile she experienced familial dramas in her personal life, directly and negatively affecting the lives of Konopnicka's daughters, who became their mother's victims, representing – as “Lacanesque symptoms”, a term coined by Lena Magnone who was an expert researcher on her writings – these aspects of Konopnicka's personality that she herself had to either sacrifice or preserve. One can see these struggles between the mother and the daughters as a clash of two generations: positivistic and modernistic (Magnone 2011). One of Konopnicka's daughters, Helena (the eldest), as “hysterical”, a “woman of dubious moral conduct” and a kleptomaniac to boot, was soon enough confined to a secure hospital for the psychologically unwell, where she spent the rest of her life, complete-

ly “forgotten” by her mother; the second, Laura Pytlinska, tried to extricate herself from a failed marriage to become an actress, the greatest hurdle proving to be her mother, who did not value her talents and feared for her daughter's morals and reputation.

## Departure

In 1890, Konopnicka left Warsaw and spent most of the ensuing years abroad in the company of her younger friend, painter and emancipation campaigner Maria Dułębianka. For ten years, she travelled around Europe, living in France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, while also visiting resorts by the Adriatic, including several visits to Opatija on the Istrian Peninsula. During this period, Konopnicka wrote novels, journal articles, and lyrical verses that were records of her experiences as an outsider: foreigner, woman, poet. This twenty-year period of movement can therefore be seen as a time of personal freedom – also possibly including a close union with another woman (the popular 19<sup>th</sup>-century model of romantic friendship between women could involve lesbian love, as well as deep friendship and cohabitation as an alternative to patriarchal marriage) (Faderman 1991). This freedom allowed Konopnicka to fully spread her creative wings, leading to the writing of her most remarkable works, such as the novels in the series *Na normandzkim brzegu* [On Norman-

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2 Her funeral in 1910 in Lviv was used as an excuse to stage a great, patriotic demonstration, but it took place without the official presence of the (very influential at the time) clergy, who took this opportunity to express their opposition to Konopnicka's ideological stance.

dy Shores, Kraków 1904]<sup>3</sup> and *Italia* [Italy, Warszawa 1901]. During this time, she was able to become independent in a way no other woman writer of the time had the courage to do, even though it was she who stayed as far away as she could from making any openly feminist declarations.

In the space of almost two decades, Konopnicka settled – for longer or shorter periods of time – in various towns. The postcards she sent with messages to her family trace a tangible, iconographic route of her journeys, at present stored in the University Library in Warsaw.<sup>4</sup> On one level, they represent an itinerary of formative journey-making going on since the 18<sup>th</sup> century – the so-called *grand tours*. Zurich, Milan, Naples, Rome, Capri, Genoa, Merano, Florence, Dresden, Lviv, Graz, Bielsk – these are just some of the places Konopnicka visited. Postcards represent a record of a woman's state of being, especially so for one constantly on the move – a cosmopolitan intel-

3 For the first time Konopnicka left the country in 1882. She set off on her travels accompanied by Aniela Trippin, a novelist, crossing Tyrolean villages, home to local highlanders, then on to northern Italy and finally reaching Venice at a time when the city was battling terrible flooding. This afforded her the opportunity of seeing the sea for the first time in her life.

4 The letters were reprinted in: Maria Konopnicka, *Listy do synów i córek*, ed. Lena Magnone, Warszawa 2010.

lectual, a writer, and an artist trying to turn temporary spaces into homes. *Grand tour*, which has on its map places of memory, historical spots, works of art, museums, are in Konopnicka's case only appearances, something evidenced by her Italian sonnets. This typically West European experience of journeying as a starting point connected with the learning of histories, with memories of key figures and events, represents for her an excuse to go beyond the community of this shared knowledge and to write up her own, artistic and existential, experiences. Delicately speaking, this direction of thinking – from a cultural community to individuality, immersed in nature – Konopnicka captured in the sonnet *U grobu Pergolesa* [At Pergolesi's Grave] as an example of the verses from the volume of poetry *Italia* (1901).

Konopnicka makes reference to the famous song of *Stabat Mater* by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century composer Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, whose gravestone is located in Pozzuoli Cathedral, a port town on the Tyrrhenian Sea. Natural rhythms, with waves flowing, cut into the lyrics of the “song of songs” sung by a weeping mother. The song of the sea demolishes the cultural topos made permanent, certain, unchangeable and aestheticised in music and literature, in the whiteness of marble such as *The Pietà* by Michelangelo. In the sonnet, we hear the words: “Oh, me, earth, mother labouring

— Morze gra... Pergolese, rzuć grobowe pleśnie!  
 Oto ogromne, godne twych hymnów organy!  
 Pójdź i z hukiem tej fali śpiewaj naprzemiany  
 Twe nieśmiertelne „Stabat”, twoją pieśń nad pieśnie.  
 „...O, ja ziemia, ja matka rodząca boleśnie!  
 Oto na krzyżu czasów jest ukrzyżowany  
 Syn mój, człowiek! Oto się krwawią jego rany!”  
 — Morze gra... Słyszę głosy dalekie... jak we śnie.  
 „...Oto od wschodniej zorzy po zachodnią zorzę  
 Łez mię gorzkich i słonych opłynęło morze...  
 Oto ślepego gniewu grzmi nade mną krater...  
 Oto w bólach zrodziłam ból, co się zwie życie...  
 O morze, o przepaści, o cichy błękanie,  
 Słuchajcie wy mojego jęku!... Eia Mater...” (Konopnicka 1956, 307)

Maria Konopnicka

— The sea sings... Pergolesi in all your grave throngs,  
 Here, your organs with all their mighty range!  
 Go with a great roar, on this wave sing for change  
 Your immortal Stabat, your song of songs.  
 “... Oh, me, earth, mother labouring in pain!  
 Here upon the cross of ages hangs crucified  
 My son, a man! Wounds bleeding till he died!”  
 — The sea sings... voices far off... in dreams remain.  
 “... So auroras from the west to the east be  
 My tears bitter and salty have birthed a sea...  
 And the blind violence done to me no matter...  
 Thus in pain I birthed pain that is called life...  
 Oh sea, oh abyss, oh sky blue strife,  
 You listen to my groans!... Eia Mater...”

Translated by Marek Kazmierski

in pain!". In the final triplet, Konopnicka abandons common sense – existential, Christian, humanistic, an order based on dying and giving birth, leaving alone the one who brings into the world life condemned to decaying: "Thus in pain I birthed pain that is called life... Oh sea, oh abyss, oh sky blue strife, / You listen to my groans!... Eia Mater...". The verb form of "stabat" tellingly vanishes, belonging as it does to the observer's narration, who in repeating "became" honours the tragic presence of a mother who looks upon her dying son. Again, tellingly, Konopnicka does not continue as in the Latin original: "Eia, Mater, fons amoris / me sentire vim doloris fac, / ut tecum lúgeam".<sup>5</sup> "Power of compassion", which in the original is asked of a Christian, is asked of no one in Konopnicka's sonnet, since in the latter work Mother/Earth/Mary is shown as sharing her pain with no human being, but only with the sea, the abyss, and blue skies.

### Waves far from the motherland

In her travel journals and poems, Konopnicka often wrote about a sense of longing for her homeland, which is why she could be called a copyist of Romantic era poets who, after 1830, found themselves in exile, unable to re-

turn to their homeland. The truth is that Konopnicka was outside Poland's borders of her own free will, and could return to it any time she chose. And yet the question ought to be asked: what sort of homeland was she longing for? Reading her writing, especially on the subject of the Polish peasantry, children and folklore, we must begin to wonder where her homeland really was. Was it childhood? Or else some place in a folk song, featuring a golden age of some sort? The Romantics, in considering folklore, its musical tonality, as well as its textual aspects, saw in it traces of pre-Slavonic times (Rudaś-Grodzka 2013), instigating a search there for the real roots of the scattered Slavonic peoples. In the 1840s, Adam Mickiewicz in his *Paris Lectures* talked about items of heritage of Slavonic Czech, Russian and Serb origin, and used them to create the metaphysics of a Slavonic soul/Slav spirit. Is this the world Konopnicka longed for? There is no simple answer to this question. It seems that a new approach to religion and mythology as popularised by social anthropology was closer to her creative needs. In this time, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, following the publication of *The Golden Bough* by Frazer, comparative mythology begins to gain greater popularity, and a new understanding of folk culture resulted in Slavonic countries experiencing a renaissance of folk tales, Slav fables and legends, and

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5 "Love's sweet fountain, Mother tender / haste this hard heart, soft to render / make me sharer in Thy pain." *Stabat Mater*, transl. Beatrice E. Bullman, <https://www.stabatmater.info/english-translation/>.

an explosion in writing by women.

Konopnicka's longing is not directed solely at an undefined motherland, a golden age or her childhood. This state often takes on a more defined shape for a moment in order to instantly disperse and then return to forms that are less defined. We can find an exemplification of this in her novella *The Sea Departed*, part of the series of short stories entitled *On Normandy Shores*. This novella is a masterpiece that can be compared to Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) or Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* (1912). All of these works are connected by both maritime settings and a sense of longing for far-away places. Yvette, the protagonist of Konopnicka's novella, is a young woman who stands at the edge of the sea, staring into it as if it were the thing she loves, beautiful and good in her imagination, aspects that only she can see in foggy shapes and wavering sounds. She waits neither for her husband nor for her lover. Nothing can ease her sadness, which remains undefined. She sings a song of longing, one that is an answer to the siren song of the seas, seducing with ghostly shapes, a play of light, shade and colour. She does not know what it is she longs for, what it is she desires. Her gaze turns from reality and traces the receding sea waves, her soul leaving her body and running after that which is inaccessible, infinite and cavernous.

She is ill with a longing that has no home – and represents a source of new, modernist sensibility and imagination. For in the end, instead of a Platonic vision of ideal beauty and goodness, Yvette sinks into her own dark abyss. Konopnicka makes a modern transcription of the learning of Plato about love and madness as written by him in his *Phaedrus* dialogue. Socrates says that the soul – looking at the visible beauty of this world – can recall that which it saw before it entered a body. This type of *anamnesis* is a divine visitation, and to ordinary human eyes it is madness, insanity, sickness – seeing as the one who “sees something reminiscent of things there experiences a shock and loses their mind” (Plato 1996, 85).

Yvette is not faced with a brilliant world of ideals. She does not see goodness or justice, and remains on the shore with a sense of a different, distant world, one she has no access to, which only serves to intensify her melancholy and alienation. Lily Briscoe, a painter and visionary who spent many years trying to show on canvas the history of her love and longing for Mrs Ramsay and her family, is filled with longing for that which is ideal, and thus inaccessible and distant. She would like to become one with Mrs Ramsay, but closeness is also impossible (Woolf 2005, 58), seeing as Mrs Ramsay, absorbed in her own sadness, dreams of and longs for that which lies boundless inside

her, submerged in darkness (Woolf 2005, 71). Lily, just as Gustav von Aschenbach, believes that beauty is a path leading to the spirit via the senses. But this develops as a result of Eros's love, which represents a lack, a longing, a desire for that which is ideal. Mann in his *Death in Venice* dispels illusions relating to purity and sanctity in the arts.<sup>6</sup> He reveals the dark side of the madness of the senses, which Plato decidedly rejected, believing instead that sensory experiences stripped of wild instincts represent the first step to achieving ideals. Mann and Konopnicka know that this way leads to an abyss and the depths of ourselves, seeing as no one is capable of controlling the workings of their subconscious – not in life, and all the less so in art. The perfectly beautiful boy who is the object of Aschenbach's love, and who is the embodiment of Beauty itself, is also Hermes Psychopompos, leading him across a sea to another shore. Distance is here an interweaving of love and death, with the ultimate power to free oneself from life.

Konopnicka's prose seems (superficially!) typical of the Positivist epoch in Poland, though her later works are decidedly modernist in character. Konopnicka initially used the novella format to present the pressing social problems of the time – above all, the ex-

ploitation and poverty of the rural and urban proletariat. Her best known novellas (especially when it comes to school children) are *Dym* [The Smoke], Mendel Gdański and *Nasza szkapa* [Our Old Mare] from the collection entitled *Na drodze* [On the Road, Kraków 1893]. The formal complexity of certain works by Konopnicka has only recently begun to attract renewed interest. As an example, the novella *Nasza szkapa* not only takes children as protagonists but there is also a child narrator who, in spite of his age, is able to read both the literal and metaphorical meaning behind the tragic events that befall his family within just a short space of time. The apparently simple narrative of this work becomes, in the light of contemporary readings, quite extraordinary (Szczuka 2016, 468–74). The novella shows the ways in which three working-class children survive, or rather repress, the death of their mother. The titular *szkapa* (old mare) is an old horse much loved by the family, and which the father is forced to sell in order to pay his wife's medical bills, as she is dying of tuberculosis. Before this happens, however, the narrative develops in such a way that the line between the animal and the dying woman begins to blur. Two separate entities, one belonging to nature, and the second to the urban animal organism (the novella's protagonists belong to a proletarian community) begin to exchange

<sup>6</sup> See: *Thomas Mann, Śmierć w Wenecji / Death in Venice*, transl. Leopold Staff, Warszawa 1988.

and interchange their individual characteristics, without however losing their particular uniqueness in the process. In a way that is almost imperceptible, the horse begins to take on the mother's attributes – generosity, unconditional love – as the woman's condition demands that more has to be done to save her life, which means paying the bills by selling household items, with their home becoming emptier by the day. The woman “devours” her own home and family, right up until her end. The old mare, now the property of someone else, as yet another “household item” that has been sold off, returns on the day of the mother's funeral in order to pull the carriage carrying her coffin to the cemetery. The boys – in an exceptional gesture in defiance of death – dress the old mare in fresh branches. The horse's slim body is reminiscent of Ophelia, dressed in green leaves, yellow dandelions, poppies and larkspurs. It is an animal body turned into an epitome of life – the children “turn it into their own rite of spring by the might of the same performative gesture which allows them to suffer cold conditions and hunger in a merry fashion” (Szczuka 2016, 474).

In formal terms, Konopnicka's works also employ narratives featuring the histories / herstories of women and the relationships between them. This technique tends to take the form of conversation between two women, or of one wom-

an telling the story of another's life, an example of which is the series *Za kratą* [Behind bars, Warszawa 1898]. Also worthy of note are the portraits of working-class women suffering from mental disorders (*Anusia, Na rynku* [Anusia, On the Market Square]), which in some way echo Konopnicka's difficult relations with her daughter Helena. We find an attempt to tell a story of difficult relations and an unhappy, impossible love between mother and daughter in the novella *Panna Florentyna* [Miss Florentyna]. This and other novellas by Konopnicka, the epic *Pan Balcer w Brazylii* [Mr Balcer in Brazil] or the series of Italian Madonnas in the volume *Italia*, evidence the woman-centric sensitivity in Konopnicka's writing, something she never expressed in the form of feminist manifestos or anything similar (see Magnone 2011).

### Orphanhood

After more than ten years of travel, Konopnicka moved in 1903 into a manor house in Żarnowiec in the Pogórze Karpackie region, given to her by a “grateful nation” on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of her literary career. In 1908, she spoke at a women's gathering in Lviv – in her speech, she noted that this was the first time she had ever spoken out for equal rights in public. The rhetoric employed in her speech seems more complex than was called for at the event, which was simple and political in context.

Another decade would have to pass before Polish women would be given the right to vote. Meanwhile, Konopnicka saw the movement for women's emancipation as an opportunity for spiritual advancement, treating women's legal and civic repression as a motivating factor, her life *élan*, conditioned by the "collapse" and "decomposition" of the losing side (here she was thinking of women), which elevates people to more perfect forms of existence: "one rung higher towards the light, towards freedom, towards the truth." (*Marya* 1908, 480) The struggle for equality was in Konopnicka's opinion one of the many battles to be waged – "the struggle is permanently ongoing, and everything we are experiencing is a singularly defined moment" (*Marya* 1908, 480). Feminism as a social movement, which was indeed a fight focused at a certain point in history on equal rights, was something she allowed to become an ongoing part of human existence as such.

Konopnicka was not only widely renowned in Poland, but quickly gained popularity among other Slavonic audiences. Her works were published in Czech (177), Russian (95), Serbian and Croatian (47) journals.<sup>7</sup> Articles on Kono-

pnicka's writing were published in the Ljubljana-based periodical *Dom in svet, Ljubljanski zvon* (1902). The likes of Ivan Prijatelj (1901) and Vojeslav Mole (1907, 1910) wrote about her work. The 50-year anniversary of the start of Konopnicka's literary career was also widely noted in the Balkans, where she was mentioned by Mole and Živanović (1902 also marked the year Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić debuted in Zagreb, making this a key year in literary history) (Fidowicz, 2017). Women writers from Zagreb also joined in this celebration, honouring Konopnicka with a special album featuring dedications from local women writers; what happened to this gift remains unclear.

Towards the end of her life, Konopnicka tried to write a national epic dedicated to migrant workers leaving Poland in search of work, *Pan Balcer w Brazylii* [Mr Balcer in Brazil, Warszawa 1910]. The lyric quality of the work ties the narrative together, which was a common quality defining Konopnicka's poetry. The monotonous, syllabic rhythm found in her poems was widely considered the quintessential quality behind much of her verses. In this very lyricism we can find the foundations of her writing, as well as of her life, something common to and true of the whole

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7 Her translators included the Czech Pavla Maternová, the Russian Maria Tropovska, the Bulgarian Dora Gabe, the Serbian Radovan Košutić (Belgrade), and the Croatian Adolfo Veber Tkalčević. See: Anna Faber-Chojacka, Barbara Góra, *Przekłady utworów Ma-*

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*rii Konopnickiej za lata 1879–1979, in Maria Konopnicka – w siedemdziesięciolecie zgonu*, ed. Józef Zbigniew Biątek, Jerzy Jarowiecki, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, Kraków 1987, pp. 178–193.

community of Slavonic writers – the experience of orphanhood. We should take a broader look at this category, for this is not just a matter of social standing revolving around the absence of family, but above all a fragment of personal existence, of female experience, as well as the story of Slavonic nations in general. The act of being brought into the world, only to be afterwards rejected by it, together with the feelings of incompleteness and absence, is repressed within our consciousness, but these are the very aspects which, through the figure of the orphan, appear repeatedly in Konopnicka's poetry.

Unlike the Romantics and their inheritors, being orphaned did not have particularly negative connotations for Konopnicka. It was a state which forced one into action, a way towards freedom and a source of strength, as evidenced by the literary fairy tale she created in 1897, *O krasnoludkach i sierotce Marysi* [Of Dwarves and Orphan Mary]. This story, written for children, is almost entirely stripped of didactic tonality, with its persuasive power found in its distinctly lyrical qualities. Konopnicka was convinced that children's souls do not need discipline – they need melodiousness. In an 1892 letter to illustrator Piotr Stachiewicz, she wrote these telling words: "I do not come here to teach children or to entertain them. I come to sing with them [...]" (Kuliczowska 1981, 280).

This fable features elements of ancient Slavonic beliefs preserved in folklore traditions and their vision of the world, where what matters most is the bond between people (peasants) and the land, represented here in a number of ways through the Mother figure. The structure of the work is based on a cleaving of its female character. The titular orphan – comparable with numerous predecessors from tales by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, as well as stories by Charles Dickens, George Sand, Frances Burnett and Lucy Maud Montgomery – is a socially excluded child, an outsider who in specific ways is subject to exploitation and harm. After the geese she is tending to are eaten by a fox, the child is chased out of the family home. A dwarf she meets along the way advises the girl to go see Queen Tatra with a plea for help. The orphan and the dwarf set off on a common journey. In spite of her menacing aura, the queen goddess takes pity on the child, bringing the geese back to life and, having sent the child to sleep, transports her to the house of Piotr Skrobek. It is worth noting that the didactic aspect of the fairy tale does not relate to the child, but to the world of adults: thanks to Marysia and the help provided by the dwarves, Skrobek is transformed from his existence as a widower who has surrendered to apathy into a farmer willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his land. Putting the

required amount of energy into his labours, he brings a fallow piece of land back to life, ensuring his family have all they need – and the brood now once again includes Marysia.

In this story, Konopnicka creates an orphaned female protagonist who becomes emancipated, in spite of the way Polish stories typically presented orphans up until that time (Misiak 2016, 535). The fairy tale features another clearly defined female character: the woman goddess, the one Marysia sets off to meet. This all-powerful and fabulous Queen Tatra, presented as a goddess-mountain, echoes the myth of the Earth Mother. The Dwarves, which are associated with Queen Earth, emerging from ancient Slavonic lore, help our orphan heroine find her way back into society. The dominant symbol of the girl's rebirth, however, is Queen Tatra, her second mother, who facilitates the child's second birth, allowing the child to reintegrate into the world (Misiak 2016, 537). Just as in the novella *Nasza szkapa*, the characters representing nature take up the roles of characters from the world of culture – the girl's integration thus takes on a dual direction: her adopted mothers become nature and the Queen, her adopted father Skrobek the peasant. Marysia's orphanhood – linking it to the romantic creation of a philosopher orphan in the poetic writings by Teofil Lenartowicz – also serves to function in both a symbolic and metaphysical space. We can associ-

ate the girl with Kora/Persephone: “She is a character that balances the dichotomy between life and death, taking part in the transformation of ancient, sacrificial rituals into a rural farming ritual, a character who goes through a difficult process involving suffering, searching and discovery” (Misiak 2016, 539).

Faith in one's own capabilities allowed the poet to break free of unwanted bonds, to overcome limitations, to go her own way. Konopnicka abandoned her husband, her children, Poland, and chose instead to follow her own path. Her creative freedom, her personal liberation was her primary aim, and to the end of her days she was true to it. One might suspect that her attitude and thinking were also close to other Slavonic women writers at work between the Baltic and the Adriatic Seas.

*Translated by Marek Kazmierski*

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Ekaterina Artemyuk

The Life and Literary Work of  
Russian Women Writers  
of the Early 20th Century:  
Their Artistic Merit,  
Cultural Contribution,  
and Meaning for the Present



Anna Akhmatova



Marina Tsvetaeva



Zinaida Gippius

The Russian part of the project about Slavic women writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century cultural route stitches together the physical locations connected with three prominent Russian poets: Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Zinaida Gippius. This part of the project aims to shed light on the less-known facts of their lives, which can be found in museums, memorials, libraries, open public spaces, on monuments, in famous cafés and literary salons where new ideas were formed, and in the memorial houses where they were born, brought up, and wrote their first poems. The route also includes contemporary cultural organizations inspired by their work (contemporary cultural organizations are also concerned parties since, in their operation, they are inspired by the artistry and heritage of Russian women writers). Presenting the world outlook of these women writers is a no less important task, as it has transformed the way we live and is still

transforming the present-day reality through the promotion of basic concepts such as peace, love, life, self-development, motherhood, empathy and compassion.

Women writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period known as the Silver Age of poetry in Russia, expressed an affinity with such modern ideas as equal rights and opportunities, tolerance, emotional openness and sustainability.

Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva and Zinaida Gippius were those few first women whose names went down in the history of world literature.<sup>1</sup> Having to deal with gender discrimination and suffering official disfavour in their own country, they proved that in any circumstances a woman can

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1 The three women poets are not presented in chronological order, beginning with Gippius as the eldest and ending with Tsvetaeva as the youngest, but they are rather presented in the order of their literary (poetic) significance in Russia, beginning with Akhmatova and ending with Gippius.

stay true to herself and remain active, inventive and decisive, and equal to men in all respects. That is why we believe that our cultural route serves as encouragement to keep an open mind and avoid stereotyping, and to show how important it is to create conditions in which every person can discover their talent and potential, and which is at the heart of our society today.

### **Anna Akhmatova**

Anna Akhmatova (23 June 1889 – 5 March 1966) was a distinguished and influential poet, translator and literary critic short-listed for the Nobel Prize in 1965 and 1966. Long being in official disfavour, she was allowed to receive the Italian literary prize Etna Taormina in 1964 and an honorary degree from Oxford University in 1965. Her masterpiece “*Poema bez geroya*” [Poem without a Hero], which was not published until 1976, reflects the depicted period – the revolution, war and the repressions – so brightly and intensely that it remains as touching and thought-provoking today as it was for her contemporaries.

Akhmatova was born at Bolshoy Fontan, near the Black Sea port of Odessa. Her father, Andrey Gorenko, a naval engineer, and her mother, Inna Stogova, were both descended from Russian nobility.

She was the third child of six children in the family. There were few books in the house, but her mother knew many poems and recited them by heart. Sevastopol, where her grandfather lived, and where she spent much of her time, became a meaningful city for her childhood and youth.

From her childhood onward, the poet stood out among her peers – “I got the nickname ‘wild girl’ because I walked barefoot, wandered around without a hat, jumped from a boat into the open sea, swam during a storm, lay in the sun until my skin peeled, and thus shocked every provincial Sevastopol young lady” (Ахматова 2014, 298). She also possessed the gift of clairvoyance.

The family would later move to Tsarskoe Selo, near St. Petersburg, where at the age of 11 she started writing poetry. Andrei Gorenko was not interested in his daughter’s literary experiments at all. Moreover, he was dismissive of them, he categorically forbade her to use her real family name, so as not to disgrace him. Anna turned to the family tree and found that the surname of her grandmother on her maternal side, Akhmatova, sounded powerful and majestic. The grandmother of the future poet believed that her family were descended from the famous Ahmed Khan (Khan Akhmat) from the Great Horde – which is how the pseudonym Anna Akhmatova came to be.

Her talent, sharp mind and striking appearance have never ceased to inspire artists, poets and writers. One can study the history of 20th-century art in Russia and Europe just looking at her portraits (Ситалова 2016). Numerous famous artists admired her personality and chose her as their ideal muse. The story of the 12 portraits painted by Amedeo Modigliani, with whom Akhmatova had a warm and friendly relationship long before his international popularity, is very interesting. She became not only his favourite muse but also a beloved person, and one of the few who understood his work. Later, she was one of the first to write and publish *Memories of Modigliani* (Ахматова 2014, 571) in defence of him and his historical mission.

It is said that Akhmatova had love affairs with the most famous writers, scientists, and artists. She chose men who were not inferior to her in intelligence, talent, and strength of character. She was an equal assistant to her husbands in their work and in their art. She was the first to publish the works of her husband, Nikolai Gumilyov. She also helped her second husband, Vladimir Shileyko, an orientalist and a poet and a specialist in Ancient Egypt, with the translation of his scientific works. She also went on to help her third husband (Nikolay Punin, Akhmatova's third spouse, being an art historian, also found her support).

It is symbolic that in an epigram written in the summer of 1957 Akhmatova would say about herself: "I taught women to speak ..." (Ахматова 2005, 218). In the book *Contemporaries. Portraits and Etudes* (1962), Korney Chukovsky writes of Akhmatova: "Women had remained mute for many centuries until she taught them to reveal their joys, pains and aspirations in poetry".

Celebrated as one of the greatest Russian poets, Akhmatova had to endure plenty in her life and experienced numerous personal tragedies. Three of her close family members fell victims to the regime's repressive policies. Her first husband Nikolay Gumilyov was executed by shooting in 1921; her third husband Nikolai Punin died in the Gulag in 1953; her only son Lev Gumilyov spent more than a decade in prison and forced-labour camps. The unbearable grief of wives and mothers of "enemies of the people" is reflected in one of the most powerful of Akhmatova's poems, "Requiem".

In 1941, when Hitler attacked the USSR, Akhmatova, along with many other women, took part in defence of Leningrad – the city she saw as her hometown. Under constant bombardment the poet continues to write verse and makes inspiring announcements on the radio.



Amedeo Modigliani, Anna Akhmatova, 1911; The Anna Akhmatova Literary and Memorial Museum, wing of Fountain House, St Petersburg, Russia.

Then her evacuation to Tashkent followed, where she spoke in hospitals, recited poetry to wounded soldiers, and “waited agog for the news of Leningrad, of the front”. Aware of her calling and mission to be with her people, she conveyed through poetry a message to the people, revealing a courage and dedication that contributed greatly to the victory of the whole country: “...The living, the dead: none are dead for fame” (untitled, 1942).

“None fears to die under the bullet’s siege, / None bitters to lose one’s home here, / And we will preserve you, great Russian speech, / Russian great word, we all bear.” (from the poem “Courage”, 1942)

Recalling that period later in life she would write: “I was lucky to have lived in that time and witnessed events that can’t be compared to any others” (Ахматова 2014, 285).

She lived her life with dignity and always stayed true to her moral principles, with her spiritual integrity and nobility intact, no matter what kind of difficulties and challenges she was forced to endure. The poet carried her burden with such grace that her fate became the symbol of great non-compliance and endurance, which is precisely why Akhmatova, who belonged to the Russian intel-

ligentsia, eventually became “Anna of all the Russias”, as Marina Tsvetaeva would later put it (Tsvetaeva 1922, 87).

### **Marina Tsvetaeva**

Marina Tsvetaeva (8 October 1892 – 31 August 1941) – Russian poet, writer, translator.

Marina Tsvetaeva was born on 8 October 1892 in Moscow. Her father, Ivan Tsvetaev, was a doctor of Roman literature, an art historian, director of the Rumyantsev Museum, and the founder of the Museum of Fine Arts (now the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts). Her mother, Maria Main, was a talented pianist who put all her energy into raising her children, Marina and Anastasia, to become musicians.

After the death of Maria Main, when Tsvetaeva was just 14 years old, the mother’s music lessons waned. But her melodious character remained in the poems Tsvetaeva began to write at the age of six – in Russian, German and French simultaneously.

In her quest to find herself, Tsvetaeva, like Akhmatova, referred to the history of her family, first of all to the female line. Meanwhile, her knowledge of her ancestry was rather intuitive, mystical: “The genius of our family, of the female line, of my mother’s fam-

ily was the genius of early death and unhappy love". In September 1914, in her early twenties, Tsvetaeva wrote the famous poem "To Grandmother" (Цветаева 2016, 40): "Grandmother! - / This fierce rebellious spirit/ In my heart - do I get it from you?...". Marina Tsvetaeva never knew her grandmother, Maria Bernatskaya, a young Polish woman who died after giving birth to her mother. She saw her grandmother only in a portrait. Most likely, she was not aware that her great-grandmother, Marianna Ledokhovskaya, had come from a family of Polish descendants of the Great Sejm, the authors of the Polish Constitution; that the Catholic Saint Ursula belonged to the same Ledóchowski family (Minakowski). Tsvetaeva noticed the recurring expression of Polish features, she felt, in her rebellious temper. In addition, the very name she bore, Marina, was reminiscent of Marina Mniszek, the infamous Polish-Russian princess.

About her "poetic ancestry" Tsvetaeva wrote: "Some ancestor of mine was a violinist, / A rider and a thief at the same time. / Is this not why my taste wanders And hair smells of wind?.../ So my ancestor was a violinist./ I became - such a poet" (Цветаева 2016, 47; Tsvetaeva, RuVerses). Through the gypsy theme she claimed the inseparability of good and evil as a sign of the diversity of life, of a comprehensive dedication to love, nature, creativity, qualities inher-

ent in the poet whose life also strayed far from the commonly accepted standards.

In 1910 Tsvetaeva published her first collection of poems *The Evening Album* with her own money, to which the masters of Russian poetry such as Valery Bryusov, Maximilian Voloshin and Nikolai Gumilev responded positively. In Koktebel, at Voloshin's house, Marina met Sergei Efron, the son of Yakov Efron and Elizabeth Durnovo, members of a revolutionary political organization The Narodnaya Volya (People's Will). In January 1912, they married and soon two books were published: *The Magic Lantern* by Tsvetaeva and *The Childhood* by Efron. The next collection of Tsvetaeva's poems *From Two Books* consisted of previously published verses. It marked a sort of line between her peaceful youth and the poet's tragic mature years.

In 1912, their first daughter, Ariadne, was born, and, in 1917, their second daughter, Irina, came into the world. The family endured the First World War in Moscow, in a house in Borisoglebsky Lane. Sergey Efron was conscripted in 1917; later he moved to Turkey and then to Europe. Marina Tsvetaeva stayed with the two children in Moscow and did not receive any news about her husband during the Civil War. In February 1920, the younger daughter died of starvation in a boarding school. A year

later, news of Efron came from abroad and Tsvetaeva decided to go to him.

Tsvetaeva and Efron met in Berlin, in May 1922, where she later published a total of five books. Then in the Czech Republic great poems like "The Poem of the Hill" and "The Poem of the End" appeared. There she wrote so-called "Russian" fairy-tale poems like "Molodets" [Fine fellow], "Pereulochki" [Lanes], "Ariadne"<sup>2</sup> and started to write "Krysolov" [The Ratcatcher], a rethinking of an old German legend [*The Pied Piper of Hamelin* legend]. While in exile, Tsvetaeva's epistolary affair with Boris Pasternak endured for almost 14 years: "What amazing poems you write! / How painful that now you are bigger than me! / Actually, you are an outrageously great poet!" Pasternak wrote to Tsvetaeva (Коркина & Шевеленко 2004, 95).

In 1925, the Tsvetaeva-Efron family moved with their son Georgy to Paris. Tsvetaeva's poetry evenings were a great success and her poems were published. The last edition of the book *Posle Rossii* [After Russia] published in her lifetime appeared in 1928 in Paris. But the disagreements between the independent Marina Tsvetaeva and the "old" Russian intelligentsia in exile had become increasingly apparent. Her manners were too different from the habits of the

masters Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Gippius, Vladislav Khodasevich, and Ivan Bunin. Tsvetaeva lived on casual earnings: she lectured, wrote articles, and did translations. Meanwhile, her daughter and husband dreamed of returning to their homeland.

The first to leave for Moscow was Ariadne Efron, in March 1937. She was a graduate of the *École du Louvre*, an art historian and graphic artist. Ariadne got a job at a Soviet magazine which was published in French. In the fall of 1937, Sergei Efron fled to Moscow and settled in a dacha in Bolshevo. Life seemed to be getting better. Then in June 1939, Tsvetaeva came to the USSR. Two months later, Ariadne was arrested, and six weeks after that, Sergei Efron. A period of poverty and wandering began for Marina and the fourteen-year-old Georgy. They lived with relatives in Moscow, at the Writers' House of Art in Golitsyno; and Tsvetaeva was unable to publish her work.

On 8 August 1941, in the midst of the fascist offensive on Moscow, Tsvetaeva and her son were evacuated to Yelabuga. There she unsuccessfully applied for a maid's job in the kitchen. "She completely lost her head, completely lost her will; she was suffering terribly," Georgy later wrote about his mother's last days (Эфрон 2007, 253). On 31 August, Marina Tsvetaeva committed suicide. By a strange, mystical coincidence, on the same day forty

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2 <https://cvetaeva.su/ariadna/>

years earlier, her cousin, the Polish poet Nikolay Bernatskiy, had committed suicide in Lviv.

Suicide is a grievous sin in Christianity. However, with the permission of Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow, the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) allowed a memorial service for her on the 50th anniversary of Tsvetaeva's death. "I gathered records of Tsvetaeva's exile to Yelabuga, about the conditions of her terrible life there. It is highly likely that such living conditions drove her to commit suicide," said Protodeacon Andrey Kuraev (Куряев & Кириллина, 2012).

Georgy Efron perished on the front in 1944. His father had been executed in October 1941. Ariadne Efron was rehabilitated in 1955. After returning from exile, she started to translate and prepare Tsvetaeva's works for publication and wrote memoirs about her. The first posthumous collection of poems by Marina Tsvetaeva entitled *Izbrannoye* (Selected Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva) was published in the USSR in 1961, 20 years after her death. These poems were met with great success and popularity.

The strength of Tsvetaeva's poems and the strength of her character are undeniable. The driving force behind her work was her life, and first and foremost, war and revolution. Tsvetaeva's poetry shows how art can serve as a

means of cognition: attaining not scientific knowledge, but higher, complete knowledge of being, nature, a different coordinate system, where good and evil, estimates and judgments do not exist. In her work, Tsvetaeva fully realized her motto: "One of many, one for all, and one against all."

### **Zinaida Gippius**

Zinaida Gippius (20 November [O.S. 8 November] 1869 – 9 September 1945), critic, writer, poet. Contemporaries called Zinaida Gippius the "Satanessa" (the "devil woman"), a "witch", a "decadent Madonna", and a "living legend", for her peculiar beauty, sharp tongue, and courage. Her best work was herself: she was both an author and a woman who loved to play all these roles and more. She began to write poetry at the age of 16; later, she created many novels and articles, and became the founder of several literary salons in Russia and Europe.

Zinaida Gippius was born in 1869 in Belyov, where her father Nikolai Gippius, a respected lawyer worked. The family often moved due to Nikolai's work, so Zinaida and her three sisters received little formal education.

After the death of Nikolai Gippius, his wife and daughters moved to Moscow. However, Zinaida soon became ill and moved to Yalta, and then in 1885 to her relatives in Tiflis (now Tbilisi). It was then that Zi-

naida Gippius began to write poetry. "I wrote all sorts of poems, but hid or destroyed the serious ones and kept only the humorous ones" (Гиппиус 2019, 5).

In 1888, in Borjomi, a resort town near Tiflis, Gippius met the poet Dmitry Merezhkovsky. A year later they were married in the Church of Michael the Archangel. They lived together for 52 years without, as Gippius later wrote, spending a single day apart.

In 1889, she and her husband came to Petersburg, a city where the majestic shadows of Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoyevsky roamed the streets, a city in which it was easy to get lost, dissolve, and where the provincial poets, thousands just like her, had perished.

Initially, she tried to get used to and steep herself in the literary life of Petersburg. At that time there were many places where important and useful literary acquaintances could be made – the famous "Fridays" of Yakov Polonsky, Literary Fund evenings, meetings in numerous literary clubs and societies. Such acquaintances were useful, not because they could help get one published in a well-known magazine, but because they showed her certain things with great clarity: it was all wrong, and it was not only about that. A little time would pass, and from the pages of the *Northern Herald* magazine she would talk about her

life: about the spiritual discord of a person exhausted by disbelief, about the fear of death and fear of life, about God... It was then that those big words would be uttered, which would indicate a turn in the course of new Russian literature – a change from "I" to "Idea", "Ideal", "Word", "Absolute", and God. And Zinaida Gippius, who stood at the crossroads, at the origin of this turn, was impossible not to notice. She declared herself too impertinently, and her words "I love myself as God himself..." were simply too bold. Gippius was also an early presence in the symbolism that was emerging in Russia at the time; and she was elevated to the rank of a "senior symbolist" (decadent) during her lifetime.

Her name continually appeared on the pages of literary magazines old and new, she published collections of her poems and prose, she would write plays, act as a literary critic, was venomous, and often wicked, but invariably bright and intelligent – qualities that were highly valued by her fans and her opponents in equal measure. And there were many of both in her life when she lived in St. Petersburg, where she spent almost thirty years and where she managed to claim her own very special place; and then, in exile, where she remained at the heart of the literary life of Europe.

And not simply owing to her great literary talent, but rather as

the result of her personality and particular character traits, she was the creator, the initiator of the idea.

Her house from 1900 until 1910 served as the main literary salon in St. Petersburg which drew the attention of the entire literary community. She helped Alexander Blok launch his literary debut, she introduced the upstart Osip Mandelstam into literary society, and she owned the first review of the poems of then-unknown Sergei Yesenin.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 introduced new themes into the work of Zinaida Gippius: she became interested in social and political issues. Civic motives emerged in her poetry and prose. The poet together with her husband opposed autocracy as well as conservatism, and spent more than two years in exile in Paris.

In 1908 the couple returned to St. Petersburg. From 1908 to 1912 Zinaida Gippius published two collections of short stories, *Black on White* and *Moon Ants*, which she considered her best work. In 1911, in the magazine *Russian Thought* [Russkaya Mysl], Gippius published her novel *The Demon Dolls*, which became part of an unfinished trilogy. At the time, she published the collection of critical articles *Literary Diary* under the pseudonym Anton Krainy. Gippius denounced the October Revolution; then in early

1920 the Merezhkovskys emigrated to France, for good.

In 1927, on Gippius's initiative, a literary and philosophical Sunday society was founded under the name Green Lamp in Paris, which included writers and thinkers from abroad, such as Ivan Bunin, Mark Aldanov, Nikolai Berdyaev, George Ivanov, George Adamovich and Vladislav Khodasevich, who gathered together in the Merezhkovskys' house. They reported on philosophical, literary and social issues, discussed the mission of literature in exile, and talked about "neo-Christian" concepts that were being developed in the Merezhkovskys' poems.

In 1939, the collection of Gippius's poems entitled *Siyania* [The Shining Ones] was published in Paris, which was to be her final collection of poetry: subsequently, only individual poems and introductory articles to collections would appear. The poems constituting *Posledniy krug* [The Last Circle] collection are permeated with a sense of nostalgia and loneliness.

Dmitry Merezhkovsky died in 1941. Gippius took the loss of her husband very hard. "I died, the only thing left to die is the body", she wrote after her husband's death (Гиппиус 2001, 440). She dedicated the last years of her life to work on her memoirs, the biography of her deceased spouse, and to the long poem *The Last Circle*, which

was only published much later, in 1972.

Zinaida Gippius only survived Dmitry Merezhkovsky by four years. She died on 9 September 1945, at the age of 76. She was buried in the Russian cemetery at Saint-Genevieve-des-Bois, near Paris, in a single grave together with her husband.

Zinaida Gippius's heritage is presented in the Museum of the Silver Age (Moscow) and the Library of the Silver Age in Yelabuga (Yelabuga, the Republic of Tatarstan). The list of memorial sites includes the Mourouzis house in Saint Petersburg (24 Liteiny Prospect) and her other apartment in St. Petersburg (83 Chaikovskogo Street). Further research would be required to determine the exact addresses of the places she stayed while in Moscow, Yalta and Kislovodsk.

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A. Akhmatova: Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin. Portrait of Anna Akhmatova. 1922/ Wikimedia Commons/ Public Domain.

M. Tsvetaeva: Pyotr Ivanovich Shumov, 1925, Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

Z. Gippius: Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

Biljana Dojčinović

# The European Routes of Jelena J. Dimitrijević<sup>1</sup>



Jelena J. Dimitrijević

Jelena J. Dimitrijević (1862–1945) was born in the post-Ottoman Empire Principality of Serbia, and died in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. She spent most of her life in Serbia and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. She was 16 when Serbia gained its independence at the Congress of Berlin after 500 years under the Ottoman Empire. It is known that Jelena J. Dimitrijević took part in the Balkan Wars, which were fought to end the Empire's five centuries of rule over the Balkans. Self-educated, fluent in French, German, English, Italian and Turkish, among other languages, she was an inveterate traveller and went to many countries of Western and Southeastern Europe, North America, North Africa, and Asia (Project Knjiženstvo).

From her death in 1945, as World War Two was coming to a

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close, up until the second half of the 1980s, her works were neither reprinted nor discussed, except in some very narrow scholarly circles. Thanks to feminist literary critics, interest in her work has since soared, and her work is now both reprinted and part of primary school curricula, as well as translated into foreign languages. Recent translations of Jelena J. Dimitrijević's writings include *Pisma iz Soluna* [Letters from Salonika], translated into Greek in 2008, and into English and Italian in 2018, and *Letters from India* (*Pisma iz Indije*), translated into Hindi and English in 2016. The story *Amerikanka* [The American Woman] was also translated in 2020.

Herein her vision of Europe as presented in her novels and travelogues is discussed. Dimitrijević travelled extensively through Europe, and even when travelling to the United States or to the Middle and Far East, Europe remained her reference point. In her prose and poetry, she sees the Balkans, from

Niš all the way to Salonika, more as a part of the Orient than as a part of Europe. Yet she left fewer traces of Western Europe in her work: we learn about her love for London, the centre of the Western world before New York became such a shiny star in the constellation of the world's great cities. Also, in her poetry collection from around 1930 in French, we find a poem in which she seems to be preparing for her final "mystical journey", as the title announces. But this is not her concluding poem. Some time later, she wrote the following verses in the poem entitled "Paris", in which the city of light supremely illuminates her mundane life.

Before Death comes to take  
me away

While waiting for its inevitable  
visit

According to the supreme law  
of Eternity

I feel a fervent desire and an  
unusual courage

To open my wings, my wings  
tired from wandering,

One more time.<sup>2</sup>

In the American travelogue, written during her journey there in 1919–1920, Europe appears as a continent deeply wounded by war, and as the reference point for

understanding America. Her travelogue from her journey around the world (1926–1927) works similarly.

## Oriental Europe

Dimitrijević's first works were inspired by Turkish culture. When only 19 years old, Jelena married Jovan Dimitrijević and moved from Aleksinac to the city of Niš (Project Knjiženstvo).<sup>3</sup> Her husband was a military officer and an avid reader who supported her intellectual pursuits. In Niš, she began learning the Turkish language and was accepted in the harems. Her literary output of this period is a rich one, beginning with the volume of *Jelena's poems* [Jelena's Poems], *Pisma iz Niša o haremima* [Letters from Niš on Harems], the novella *Đul-Marikina prikažnja* [Đul-Marika's Story, 1901], the short stories *Fati-sultan*, *Safi-hanum*, and *Mejrem-hanum* (1907), the reportage *Letters from Salonika* (1908, and published as a book in 1918), and the novel *Nove* [New Women, 1912].

*Jelena's Poems* is the first and only collection of poetry by Jelena J. Dimitrijević published during her lifetime: she continued to write poetry almost until the end of her life, but never published another collection – though one was planned, as the book carried the subtitle *Volume One*.<sup>4</sup> All her poetry after

3 She signed her works as Jelena Jov. Dimitrijević, or Jelena J. Dimitrijević.

4 There is also in *Novi Svet ili u Americi godinu dana* [The New World or A Year

2 Originally written in French. See 2020, pp. 29-30.

1894 was published in periodicals or remained in manuscript form. This collection “presents images of multicultural Istanbul/Constantinople, where two elements – the Ottoman and the Byzantine – intertwine and merge” (Dojčinović & Koch 2017). This earned her the nickname “the Serbian Sappho” as it was permeated with a lot of erotic meditation about the beauty of women. This “gender transgression” came to the fore again in her short stories from 1912 and 1924, in *U Americi “nešto se dogodilo”* [“Something Happened” in America].

*Letters from Niš about Harems*, published in Belgrade in 1897, represents a special type of travelogue. Although Dimitrijević did not travel outside the city in which she lived at the time, she was on a special route. That is to say, she was describing the Turkish harems of Niš at the time. Harems were the female parts of Muslim homes, and it was forbidden for any males to enter them except for the closest family members. Non-Muslim women were also banned from entering. However, by the time Jelena was writing about them, a number of Western European women travellers were accepted in harems as guests, but they were largely neither well-informed nor particularly sympathetic about what they saw.

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in America], published in 1934, an announcement of the collection *Sedam mora i tri okeana* [Seven Seas and Three Oceans] subtitled as *Slovodni stihovi* [Free Verses].

Dimitrijević wrote about harems as a non-Muslim woman guest who knew both the language and the customs, and one who had great empathy for Muslim women. This work has been described as an epistolary novel, but it is also a “sedentary travelogue”, because the author was exploring parts of the city closed to others. The “microspace” of the Harem marks the beginning of the route around the world that took Dimitrijević further east, to Skopje and Salonika, Istanbul, Cairo, and India; but we must not forget that this also represents a depiction of a part of Europe at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

Her novella *Đul-Marika's Story* (or, more precisely *Đul-Marika's Performance*, as it is about narration as performance) was first published in 1901. It is a story set in Niš, but this time in a Serbian community awaiting liberation from Turkish rule. Despite the strong social and religious divisions, we find a mixture of traditions in many aspects: in the first instance, of clothes, furniture, and dish and tableware. More importantly, the lives of Serbian women were determined by the rules of the patriarchy, just as was the case with Muslim women in *Letters from Niš*, *Letters from Salonika*, in other stories, and in the novel *New Women*.

*Letters from Salonika* is a collec-

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<sup>5</sup> Microspace (mikroprostor) is a term coined by Jovana Reba Kulauzov in her 2010 study.

tion of letters Dimitrijević wrote in Salonika and sent to her Belgrade friend Lujza Jakšić from 2 August to 11 September 1908, at the very outset of the revolution of the Young Turks. Dimitrijević explains to her friend the motivation that prompted her ambitious enterprise: “You know that this time I have prepared myself to go to Europe and then.... You know why I turned my way to Asia. That one report in our newspapers, that the Turkish women unveiled themselves, that they are walking on the streets with men, women with their husbands, had a great impact on me” (Dimitrijević 2018, 50).

It is important to note that for our author Salonika is actually Asia, and not Europe. On the fringe of Europe, in the Oriental Balkans, she will again encounter the beginning of a modernization process, but, as usual, she is focused primarily on women. The revolution has only just begun, and she finds in Salonika a big oriental celebration to the strains of the “Marseillaise” and shouts of “Vive la Liberté”. She describes the multi-ethnic city, the enthusiasm following the declaration of the constitution, her visits to various respected homes (primarily Turkish households, but also the homes of Salonika Greek and Jewish women called Dönme), and their discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of the charshaf (the women’s covering apparel). While in her previous work, *Letters from Niš*, the voice of

the Serbian narrator prevails, in this book Turkish women are given a voice with which to articulate their ideas and concerns (Dojčinović & Koch 2017).

For Dimitrijević, the issue of the veil is the issue of the “right to the sun”, the basic human right to feel the sunlight and to move freely. *Letters from Salonika* is a multi-genre text in which we can find forms such as the letters, travelogue, micro-essay, epistolary novel, historical record, anthropological record, reportage, interview, apology, even a short drama. *Letters from Salonika* can be also read as an epistolary novel. The collection seems to be arranged in a plot that unfolds toward a kind of conclusion with all the various components – humour, poetry, anthropology and drama – assuming their proper place and function in it. Yet, it is also a travelogue, a text that reflects on rather unfamiliar landscapes and/or situations from a distinctly subjective point of view.

Initially produced as a private text, *Letters from Salonika* became a public text when printed in newspapers and later published in book form. Written (actually or ostensibly) for one reader, the letters attracted a far wider audience. Their appeal to a broader readership is bound up with their affinity with genres closer to journalism. We could legitimately suggest that Dimitrijević’s basic idea was to undertake a journalistic investiga-

tion, and, consequently, what she sent to her friend were reports on the issue she had set out to research. The historic events serve as both the background of the things she was interested in and the impetus of that interest (see Dojčinović & Koch 2017).

The unresolved status of women, the lack of emancipation from behind the “cover” of even the New Turkish Women, politically aware and resolved to end the “old” rules, must have served as the impetus to write the novel *Nove*. Published in 1912, the novel with a title that can be translated as “New Women”, describes the lives of young Turkish women in a harem in Salonika. The novel’s plot takes place on the eve of the revolution, when old and new values are mixed and hard to distinguish. The young girls are aware of the golden cage they live in but cannot do anything to set themselves free. In the final part of the novel, we find a pledge to educate all female children, in contrast to the decorative “knowledge” the young harem women were then receiving, and which only led them to nurture unrealistic expectations.

While her first period of writing was based on Oriental culture in Serbia and the entire Balkan region, her second addressed not only the West but the New World itself – America. The same year the novel *Nove* was published, Dimitrijević also published the first piece

from what we now call her “American Cycle”. The story entitled “The American Woman” tells us about an encounter between a gentleman from an unknown European country and an American lady. It is told in the first person by a male narrator and set in an unnamed city, which, however, can be easily recognized as London. “The American Woman” was reprinted in Serbian in 1918, 2016, 2018 and 2019, and published in English in 2020. Other works in the “American Cycle” are the story “*Something Happened in America*” (originally written in French in 1920, published in Serbian in 1924, and republished in 2019), the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America* (originally published in 1934, reprinted in 2019), as well as a number of poems written during her stay in America in 1919–20 and during her second visit to the USA in 1927. Many of these poems were published in contemporary journals and magazines; today, all of the manuscripts are kept in the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade.

### Europe in the American Travelogue

The story “The American Woman” (“Amerikanka”), published for the first time in *Srpski književni glasnik* in 1912, marked a turning point in Dimitrijević’s career. Six years later, she reprinted the story as a booklet.<sup>6</sup> The story represents

<sup>6</sup> *Американка. Сарајево: И. Ђ. Ђурђевић, 1918.* Republished in 2016, and

a break with her focus on the lives of Muslim women and a turn towards other, Western, topics.

The story is located in an unnamed European city, where the narrator meets an American woman and falls in love with her. The lady has some traits of Henry James's Isabelle Archer, yet the encounter during the journey reminds us of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, also published in 1912. The story's protagonist feels a strong erotic magnetism towards the young woman, and even tries to kiss her once. Interestingly enough, a contemporary critic liked the story, and did not find anything scandalous in the fact that a woman had written it. On the contrary, he wrote that it had obviously been written by a woman because the character's passion was not fierce enough, or in other words, that it was "suffering from femininity" (Jevtić 1918, 150). Although the story is in great measure the (hi)story of a passion, it is obvious that the central point of interest is actually women's emancipation.

One day she invited me for an excursion. I was beside myself with joy. "Now is the chance to change our relationship", I thought and rejoiced. But on the trip she was just the same as in the hotel: natural, free – with male fellow travelers she spoke as with her female friends, and to me she behaved

as to a female companion; and when once I got carried away and almost lost the train, she took my hand and pulled me into the train, and then laughed at me. If only she knew why I had gotten carried away! And that the touch of her hand drove me insane: made me want to kneel before her, kiss her hands, her dress, and tell her the craziest sort of things, beg her not to leave me so that we should live together as husband and wife... But she brought me to my senses with her free behavior. As free as a man, she had all the traits of her female gender: to motherly take care even of those who were far older than her. (Dimitrijević 2020b, 4-5)

Goran Petrović, the translator of the story into English, writes that "[...] the narrator (that is, the author, for the narrator actually sets forth Jelena J. Dimitrijević's views) not only expresses her firm belief in the righteousness of feminism, but also prophesies the coming of a new age of gender equality, which he, obviously, does not view as some kind of an abstract theory, but rather as an entirely practicable idea" (Petrović 2020, viii).

That the unnamed city is London was confirmed when, in 1934, Dimitrijević published the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America*, some decade and a half after the actual journey. After WWI, in 1919, Jelena J. Dimitrijević began her year-long trip to America. In

this travelogue she records a kind of history of private lives, with the focus clearly on women.

“Nothing calls me to America, but something makes me run from Europe”, runs the first sentence of her travelogue, with the title of the first chapter “Running Away from Memories”. Jelena J. Dimitrijević lost her husband on the battlefield in 1915, which must have been the hardest of all the memories from which she was running.

At the beginning of the travelogue, on European soil and later, on the ship, death and destruction set the basic tone. The first pages of the travelogue present an image of Europe in ruins and in mourning:

Mothers, sisters, and young wives are still wearing black. Our old Europe, the bulwark of modern human civilization, was turned into a bloody battlefield of the Asian conquerors of yore.

But Europe is now a sacred part of the world, too. I have gone through it with horror and revulsion, but also with piety; for from its collective pale tombs, Europe has become the world’s collective Pantheon.<sup>7</sup> (Dimitrijević 1934, 2)

Even England, though an island, seems to be full of traces of war and suffering. The Montague Hotel, where years back she had met

Katharine Flagg, an American from Brockton who was the inspiration for her story “The American Woman”, has been closed, as during the war it was turned into a hospital.

While crossing the English Channel, it seemed to me that I would arrive in the land of oblivion before getting over the ocean. England. It is not on the bloody continent, although it is in Europe, but on the island, where blood was not shed. And when I arrived in London, I headed joyfully for Russell Square, for Montague Street, for the hotel *Montague*, for it is in this neighbourhood, this street, this hotel that I would find my dear memories; I would find my golden tears for which, in sadness, I had cried so many times. And, of course, what went with me from my country, my pain, would stay on the European continent. But, alas! What a delusion! When I ordered the coachman to stop in front of the hotel *Montague*, he turned and said: “What!?” The former hotel *Montague* had been used as a nursing facility during the war... There it is, upon my first step – the war! I took lodging in the same street, at a different hotel, and on entering the lobby, the first thing that caught my attention was a woman in black!<sup>8</sup> (Dimitrijević 1934, 2)

Her journey across the Atlantic on the ship “Rotterdam”, from Plymouth, England to the USA be-

gan on 12 September 1919 and lasted six days. While on board, she notices that the ocean looks like a desert, like a “wasteland”. She pays attention to a group of people from Flanders, about whom she says: “They are my kin, in terms of the hardship, the starvation, the fear, the humiliation” (Dimitrijević 1934, 19).

When disembarking in America, the American citizens are separated from the other travellers, and Jelena finds herself helping a German woman whose son, already an American citizen, had to leave her unattended. Jelena J. Dimitrijević tries to comfort the elderly lady: “Women are not for war, and neither are children...” (Dimitrijević 1934, 30), clearly pointing to her sense of tolerance, pacifism and compassion, especially for women.

The rest of the travelogue is a story about America, but Europe and Oriental roots always lurk somewhere in the background. During her year spent on the East Coast, Jelena J. Dimitrijević encountered a world completely different from that from which she came. It is the golden age of skyscrapers, and the time of prohibitions: on alcohol, public flirting and the “shimmy” (dance), as well as women smoking in public. On the other hand, women have gained the right to vote, although real socio-political equality is still far from complete, especially as regards divisions along the lines of class and

race. Young women leave their parents and seek jobs to make their living in cities other than their birthplaces. They work, fall in love quickly, get married, and often divorce even faster. In many ways this American way of life is completely different from the European lifestyle. Even the rich people from the two continents practice different divisions of work in their homes – in America there is not enough household help available, and they increasingly depend on electric devices. This lifestyle will, in the course of 30 years, become European, too. At one moment, fascinated by the magnificent skyscrapers of more than 50 storeys, the modern means of mechanization and transport that make New York “a monster city”, Dimitrijević cries out: “Poor old Europe with its elevators and telephones!” (Dimitrijević 1934: 104)

We can compare this travelogue to a fictional work that takes place at the same time in New York – F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel, *The Great Gatsby*. How are these two works similar? The novel, published in 1925, is set in 1922. Young and ambitious Nick Carraway comes to New York and gets to know his eccentric neighbour Jay Gatsby, who organizes glamorous parties. Nick soon learns that Gatsby wants to attract the attention of Daisy Buchanan, his old flame. When Gatsby dares to believe that his fervent wish to be with Daisy is close to fulfilling his dreams, it soon turns

out that neither she nor any of the characters in his circle are worthy of his romantic vision.

At first glance, this story does not have much connection to Dimitrijević's travelogue. Upon closer examination, however, we can find in her travelogue a quote that sounds like a summary of the novel:

This is a country of jazz bands [...] of women's speeches and priestly sermons, and a country of advertisements, or as one would say in "Serbian", *reklama*. [...] My ears are full: ancestors, descendants, naturalized, assimilated, full-blooded, church, school, the Bible, missionaries, busy, rush, hustle, downtown, banks, Wall Street, the Stock Exchange; and dollars, dollars, dollars...; then the largest, longest, widest, tallest, America, the best; patriotism, Americanism, Americanization...<sup>9</sup> (Dimitrijević 1934, 94-5)

The place and time of both works are the same. Jelena J. Dimitrijević spent seven months in New York during her visit to the States. She did not attend any Gatsby-like parties, but she quickly realized that money was the central driving force in society there; the prohibition on alcohol allows Gatsby to become fabulously rich. While Jelena J. Dimitrijević devotes a lot of time to observing middle-class women's lives, focusing on their

newly acquired rights, Fitzgerald depicts two upper-class women whose wealth gives them both freedom and the illusion of it. But the most interesting point these two works of letters have in common is the First World War. In the novel, Gatsby is very proud of his decoration from Montenegro:

"Then came the war, old sport. [...] I was promoted to be a major and every Allied government gave me a decoration—even Montenegro, little Montenegro down on the Adriatic Sea!" Little Montenegro! He lifted up the words and nodded at them—with his smile. The smile comprehended Montenegro's troubled history and sympathized with the brave struggles of the Montenegrin people. It appreciated fully the chain of national circumstances which had elicited this tribute from Montenegro's warm little heart. My incredulity was submerged in fascination now; it was like skimming hastily through a dozen magazines.

He reached in his pocket and a piece of metal, slung on a ribbon, fell into my palm.

"That's the one from Montenegro."

To my astonishment, the thing had an authentic look. *Orderi di Danilo*, ran the circular legend, *Montenegro, Nicolas Rex*. "Turn it."

*Major Jay Gatsby*, I read, *For Valour Extraordinary*. (Fitzgerald 1974, 72-3)

9 Translated by Goran Petrović.

The war in which Fitzgerald's fictional character has earned his decoration is the one in which Jovan Dimitrijević was killed. WWI is the major turning point of the first decades of the 20th century, and the most important trauma widely described by modernist authors. These two works both speak about the same period, only Jelena J. Dimitrijević's European trauma is real, and her travelogue describes America from a particular, peculiar point of view – from a European and an Oriental perspective simultaneously.

Dimitrijević compares New York and the people of America, especially women, to Istanbul and Turkish women. This is an interesting comparison as it works along the lines of gender. The point where it breaks is political power. On the one hand, there are Turkish women deprived even of the "right of the sun", while on the other there are American women, the majority of whom can vote, who work and can lead independent lives. The largest part of the book portrays middle-class American women. She notes their social milieus, the fashionable dances, life under prohibition, the wild popularity of motion pictures, class and racial divisions, and religious conduct. Most importantly, she notes that women, having recently received the vote, can now affect political life in America. She compares American to Turkish women on many occasions – in their separation from

men's lives, in their harem-like events – yet, she also clearly sees the striking differences between them.

Of all the women I kept company with in foreign countries, I am the most interested in Turkish and American women. / Turkish and American women! What could they possibly have in common? / A Turkish woman is an old Eastern Woman, even when she calls herself a *new one*: she is conservative, passive, a dead past and past only. / An American woman would be a new one even if she would, out of flirting or caprice, claim that she was an *old one* – progressive, active, a lively presence and – the future. (Dimitrijević 1934, 96; see also Peković 2018)

## Conclusion

In 1926, Jelena J. Dimitrijević set off to travel around the world. She started from Genova and proceeded to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and the Holy Land, and then went on to India, Ceylon, China, Japan, Hawaii, the American West Coast, and then to New York, from which she returned to Europe. From that journey we have the travelogue *Seven Seas and Three Oceans*. The first part, published in 1940, and republished in 2016, describes her travels in the Middle East. The second part, which is largely devoted to India, remained as part of the manuscript kept in the National Library of Serbia. It

consists of 482 pages and was prepared and published only in 2020 under the *Knjiženstvo* project.

At the beginning of her long journey, Jelena J. Dimitrijević was 64 years old and a seasoned traveler. In many ways, this marked her return to the Orient, only this time she went all the way. Her travels in India began in February 1927. She travelled from Mumbai to Jaipur, Delhi, Bengal, Chennai (then Madras), Kolkata (then Calcutta), and Varanasi (then Benares). She frequently addresses the country as “Mother India” and praises the honesty and openness of its people. At one moment, one of her hosts advises her to sleep with the door open as it is very hot; upon seeing that she is afraid of being robbed, he says:

-- Do not be afraid, Lady. There is nothing to be afraid of. The people here are quiet and religious. We do not grab others' possessions. This is India, that is, this is not Europe [...]

I smiled and thought: “Poor Europe with its civilization and high culture, look what a reputation it has in the uncivilized ‘wild’ Asia.” (Dimitrijević 2020a, 170)

Europe is again “poor”, as in the American travelogue, only this time not as the result of a lack of wealth and modernization, but rather due to its arrogance and ignorance about Asian culture. For Jelena J. Dimitrijević, who felt close

to the Orient (and was a part of it, too) since her earliest days, this conversation naturally led to the ironic remark – unsaid, yet recorded.

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It is safe to say that the Europe portrayed in the works of Jelena J. Dimitrijević is often closer to the Orient than to Western Europe, especially in her writings up until 1912. In her travelogues Europe becomes a point of reference, a place she compares to America and the Middle and Far East. In her writings, Dimitrijević displays a cosmopolitan, curious, non-biased spirit, thinking beyond divisions and moving easily across social and geographical borders. To follow her European and pan-global routes presents an enormous challenge for both present and future generations.

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Јелена Ј. Димитријевић. Нови свет или У Америци годину дана. Београд: Ed. Y. P. – N. Y. C., 1934 / Public domain.



Katja Mihurko Poniž

# Zofka Kveder – Slavic Cultural and Feminist Icon of the Early 20th Century



Zofka Kveder

From today's point of view, when the notion of a cultural icon is connected with billions of followers across an array of social media platforms, the perception of the writer, editor and feminist activist Zofka Kveder as a cultural icon across Central and Southeastern Europe might seem an exaggeration. However, in the first three decades of the twentieth century Kveder served as a role model for many women striving for emancipation. Clearly, the process of "becoming a cultural icon" is complex:

Why, one might ask, do some individuals stand out as cultural icons, and should they? Ours is a world shaped by symbols and images. We are bound to select from and simplify the infinite complexity of what we perceive. Somehow we must choose and act, must decide what to value and strive for, what to fear and guard against. For what can be quantified, we may have recourse to computers and their algorithms to enable us to select, simplify and act. For what is hu-

manly meaningful, individually and collectively, for what is imbued with feeling and integral to who and what we know – or imagine – ourselves to be, we resort to more open, multivalent, and suggestive symbolism, to images, to icons. (O'Connell & O'Connell 2008, 961)

Cultural icons are not always also popular personalities; however, they can be powerful identification figures for certain groups in certain periods. Often, they later fall into oblivion, but can come to serve as inspirational figures yet again when similar societal problems arise. Here, essays and literary texts by her contemporaries in which Kveder appears as a central figure are explored, and Kveder's correspondence is examined in order to determine how her contemporaries responded to the representations of womanhood Kveder incorporated in her work.

Zofka Kveder wrote in three languages: in Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, and German. During

her lifetime, many of her works were translated and published in Czech, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Polish newspapers and literary magazines. She was also a cultural mediator and ardent feminist. Kveder was never entirely forgotten as an author, as seven volumes of her selected works were published in the 1930s. Similarly, articles commemorating her birth or death were published over the course of three decades, her books were regularly reprinted, and scholarly articles about her published; she was also included in various textbooks. However, she was not included in the prestigious national collection *Zbrana dela slovenskih pesnikov in pisateljev* [Collected works of Slovenian poets and writers] until the arrival of the new millennium. Early attempts by the Slovenian literary historian Erna Muser in the 1970s to have her included were severely rejected with the explanation that she was simply not good enough to be included in the (predominantly male) literary Pantheon. Owing to her status as a feminist and cultural icon, there has never been a large overview of the author's life and work. By the same token, the strategies behind her "canonization" have never been formally considered, even though Slovenian, Croatian, Czech and Serbian literary history has dealt intensively with both her work and persona over the course of the past two decades.

### **Kveder's life**

Zofka Kveder was born in 1878 in Ljubljana; soon after her birth, however, her family moved to the countryside. After two years of primary school in her home village, her father sent her to Ljubljana, where she attended a convent school. Back in her home village, she suffered at the hands of her father's alcoholism and her mother's religious fanaticism before fleeing to the nearby town of Kočevje, where she worked as a secretary in a land surveyor's office. After several months she returned home, but her parents did not welcome her. In August 1897, she went to Ljubljana and found a legal practice job copying out files.

In 1898 she published her first short stories. Her first story was published in the magazine *Slovenka* [Slovene Woman] (1897–1902), the first Slovene magazine for women. In the years to come, Kveder also published many articles in which she touched upon numerous issues affecting women, including situations that range from women wage earners to women's university education. Ljubljana soon proved too small for her and in January 1899 she left for Trieste, where she stayed for some months and, dressed in men's attire, visited the harbour's dumps, where she found inspiration for her writing. Although it was a vibrant port at that time, she could not settle in Trieste but headed for Switzerland

to study at a university. After a successful interview with the rector, which she had to pass since she had not graduated from a secondary school, she was able to enrol at Bern University in October 1899. During Kveder's stay in Switzerland, she wrote an interesting novella, *Študentke* [Female students, 1899-1900], in which she vividly depicted the lives of Russian and Bulgarian students whose company she had enjoyed. However, it was rather difficult for her to study and work at the same time, living on her own. She decided to go to Prague, where her fiancé Vladimir Jelovšek was studying medicine. Jelovšek was also a decadent poet. On the way to Prague, she spent two months in the artistic capital of Munich.

She arrived in Prague in March 1900 and remained there for six years. In 1901, Kveder gave birth to a daughter Vladimira (Vladoša), but her civil marriage to Jelovšek only took place in 1903. In 1904 she became the editor of the magazine *Domači prijatelj* [Homefriend]. In 1906, she moved to Zagreb (Croatia), where in 1911 she became the editor of a supplement to the Zagreb daily newspaper *Agramer Tagblatt* named *Frauenzeitung* [Women's newspaper]. Her daughters Marija (Maša) and Mira were born in 1906 and 1911, but at this time her marriage to Jelovšek – who was having extramarital affairs – fell apart irreparably. In 1913, soon after Kveder's attempted suicide and

their divorce (1912), she remarried. Her second husband, with whom she had a church wedding, was the Croatian journalist Juraj Demetrović. In 1915, during World War I, Croatian women chose Kveder as their delegate to the International Women's Congress at The Hague. Unfortunately, she could not attend this important event due to a miscarriage.

In 1917, she began publishing the magazine *Ženski svijet* [Women's World], in 1918 renamed *Jugoslavenska žena* [Yugoslav woman], in which she published articles on women's movements in Slovenia, Croatia, and other Slavonic countries. She was grief-stricken when her eldest daughter Vladoša (a student in Prague) died in 1919. The absence of her husband, who became an important politician in the post-war Yugoslav government, and the death of her daughter took a heavy toll on her health and she spent the following years in various spas, trying to recuperate. In 1926, when her health had somewhat improved, her husband informed her that he wanted a divorce, because another woman was expecting his baby. On 21 November 1926, Kveder committed suicide. Two days later, she was buried in Mirogoj Cemetery, Zagreb. At the funeral, female representatives of Slovene, Croatian, and Serbian women's organizations paid their respects (Mihurko Poniž 2006, 282-285).

## Kveder's literary legacy

Kveder's oeuvre consists of prose, dramatic works, literary and theatre reviews, and feminist writings. The messages in Zofka Kveder's work that describe the role of a woman at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century correspond with the realizations, expressed by the author in her essays, which clearly exhibit the influence of the feminist discourse of the time (Mihurko Poniž 2016, 146). Primarily she tells stories about women – her contemporaries – as well as her own stories. Kveder wrote: "I believe we women always write only about ourselves; our yearnings; our hearts" (as quoted in Orožen 1983, 273). Her prose collection *Misterij žene* [Mystery of Woman, 1900], which she self-published in Prague, is an important turning point in both her creative work and the Slovenian tradition as a whole. She depicted violence against women amongst the proletariat, as well as more subtle mechanisms of constraint, such as those of pre-arranged middle-class marriages. For Kveder a woman's suffering is connected with the fact that the society only sees her in the role of a woman and a mother. When a man does not respect his female partner and when poverty depersonalizes both, her physicality and her emotions lead a woman into suffering and complete physical exhaustion and debilitation. Her images of proletarian women, prostitutes, and emancipat-

ed women who were not ready to deny their own sexuality upset her contemporaries. Many reviewers discredited the collection's artistic value. Among those few who defended her was Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar (1876–1918), who himself had to fight the philistine response to his own writing. He wrote: "Zofka has left a beaten path; she is independent; she wanted to say something that she saw by herself and felt by herself; her pictures are not copies of the works created by male artists: she looked through her own eyes, not through the spectacles patented by our worthless tradition." (Cankar 1974, 88)<sup>10</sup>

Most of her stories feature a female character in various roles as placed in the foreground. She also touched on the concept of free love, which was an important issue at the time, and acknowledged problems related to forced marriages, illegitimate motherhood, abortion, suicide, prostitution, early death at childbirth, and many other themes common to life as a woman. Mothers also have an important part in the author's short prose: domineering mothers, mothers alienated from their daughters, suffering mothers, mothers who

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10 "Zofka je ostavila izhojeno pot; ona je sama svoja; povedati je jotela nekaj, kar je videla sama in kar je čutila sama; njene slike niso kopije del, ustvarjenih od moških umetnikov; gledala je s svojimi očmi, ne skozi naočnike, patentirane od naše ničvredne tradicije."

experience the death of a child, mourning mothers, even mothers who commit infanticide. The writer also depicted the suffering of a woman who cannot have children and her love for somebody else's children. Moreover, Zofka Kveder introduced a whole range of characters – students, artists, teachers and other workers, prostitutes, unusual eccentric women, even women who suffer psycho-emotional breakdowns. As with many authors from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zofka Kveder largely depicted the incompatibility of women's emancipation with marriage and motherhood, she criticized the double moral standards of the middle class, which is unable to accept a woman enjoying sex without feeling guilty, despite (or because of) her being single and unmarried. One reason why her teachers, saleswomen, and post office employees are unable to find happiness in love is their fear of violating the rules of the middle-class society (Mihurko Poniž & Parente Čapková 2015, 193-195). In both her journalism and literary writing, Kveder continually emphasized the problems faced by young women, particularly poor young girls, who wanted to study. Kveder rejected the traditional feminine model. She was interested in concrete possibilities that would allow women to overcome their position as the Other, to change their relationship with their own bodies and to overcome the feelings of

guilt and uselessness which, as she demonstrated, could lead to the disintegration of identity and even death – and about this she wrote with relentlessness, accuracy, and candour.

### **Kveder as a literary character in the work of her contemporaries**

Kveder's life was echoed not only in her writings but in the works of her contemporaries as well, whom she clearly inspired. As a literary figure, Kveder first appears in the poems and sketches of her husband, decadent Croatian poet Vladimir Jelovšek, in his collection *Simfonije* [Symphonies, 1900], which is dedicated to her, and in which she emerges as a nervous young woman who grows in a relationship with the man she loves (the lyrical subject) from an inexperienced, frightened, childish, yet warm and sincere, person, physically and psychically totally subjected to the lyrical subject, into a young emancipated writer. In the decadent rhetorics of Jelovšek's poetry Sonja is the Other, who defines herself in her liaison with the poet and grows under his guidance into a modern woman. However, her modernity is narrowed to literary authorship (which is mentioned only in one poem) and sexual freedom. Sonja's character is polarized between innocence and promiscuity, and that is a typical representation of fin de siècle femininity. Sonja looks up to the smug and egocentric man who

is not interested in social reality. Kveder's feminist engagement and everyday struggle for survival are concealed; Jelovšek ends his collection with a poem by the Czech modernist poet Josef Svatopluk Machar, who was his role model and later his and Kveder's friend.

Machar described Kveder in the magazine *Čas* [The Time] as one of the purest, most beautiful souls, as a hard-working and optimistic person who was brought to Prague by her thirst for knowledge. However, as Machar writes, she was not accepted with open arms but with snobbism and petit bourgeois narrowness. At the end, he calls her a "little Slovenian dove with a good and golden heart" (Machar 1905, 44). Machar's text is interesting because it features Kveder as a young, sunny person, full of life.

This image is later enhanced in the writings of Zdenka Hásková. She reflected upon their first meeting in the poem *Věnovani* [Dedication] in the collection *Cestou* [The Way, 1920]. Here the Slovenian author is idolized, and her luminous personality and creative geniality are exposed. Hásková also wrote an article about their friendship, *Jihoslovanské přátelství* [A Yugoslavian Friendship], which was published in 1923. A lengthy biographical text was written by the Slovenian feminist and Kveder's friend Minka Govekar. In the Serbian cultural space, her memory remained alive thanks to Julka

Chlapec-Đorđević who published, just two years after Kveder's death, the study *Iz praških dana Zofke Kvedrove* [From Zofka Kveder's Days in Prague, 1928]. Kveder also appears as a literary figure (hidden behind the initials ŽK) in the novel by Julka Chlapec-Đorđević, *Jedno dopisivanje, Fragmenti romana* [A Correspondence: The Fragments of a Novel, 1932]. Alenka Jensterle Doležal writes that the correspondence between Z. Hásková and Fran Govekar, Minka Govekar's husband, shows that Chlapec-Đorđević first wanted to write a book but eventually wrote the aforementioned article:

Chlapec-Đorđević wrote about Kveder's role in Czech culture and about her life and successful career in Prague, researching her texts and development as a writer. She discovered that the political, intellectual, cultural (feminist) and literary environment in Prague society during the early years of the 20th century "gave the young, self-educated Slovene more stimulation, influence and acceptance than was possible in any other city" and that in Prague Kveder was "surrounded by people with the same ideas, motivation and intellectual openness". When analyzing her literary work, she criticized her feminism, which in her view was only half-committed, theoretical and not sharpened enough. (Jensterle Doležal 2016)

In the German-speaking space,

Austrian politician Martha Tausk, another of Kveder's close friends, also wrote about her. In her collection of novellas *Fernambuk und anderes* [Fernambuk and Others, 1930], she portrayed Kveder in the memorial text *Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft* [The Story of a Friendship]. She is interested in Kveder's "magnificent and free personality" (Tausk 1930, 3), and not in her literary works. She legitimizes her writing in a warm love and lasting fidelity that bound her with Kveder. She also reflects her own narrative technique: she tells only what Kveder told her in the hours of their true friendship and what remained in her memory. But in describing her friend's life, the events from her own life intercalate, the biography transcends its borders and passes into an autobiography. The narrative is not linear but looks retrospectively into the past, at the events that happened before those she was talking about. At a certain point the narrative changes into a dialogue with the dead friend and she speaks directly to her and apologizes for not understanding her completely in the last years of her life. She does not identify with the biographee but rather establishes an intersubjective communication. At the end, Martha Tausk asks herself how to understand the ambiguity of Kveder's life – her courage and incredible life strength on the one hand, and her descent into depression and despair that lead her to suicidal attempts on the other?

Who is the real Zofka, asks Tausk, and answers that her friend might have more than just one soul (Tausk 1930, 21–22).

A lengthy biographical text was also written by Slovenian feminist and Kveder's friend Minka Govekar. She writes the story about, as she puts it, "Kveder's struggle, suffering, tragical mistakes, successes, and failures" (Govekar 1927b, 65), and illustrates it with fragments from Kveder's letters and works. Her text tries to present Kveder in relation to her parents, especially mother, her husbands and her children but also to her feminist friends, who supported her at the end of her life. In her contribution, the main characteristic of a feminist biography, which, according to Liz Stanley, is putting the biographee into a network of feminists, is realized.

In all these works a positive character dominates. An entirely different image is presented in the novel *Bjegunci* [Fugitives, 1933], written by the Croatian writer August Cesarec. Cesarec knew Kveder only fleetingly as a friend of her daughter Vladoša (Vladka) who is hidden in the novel behind the protagonist named Buga Vlatkovič. The story tells how Buga's father tried to abuse her because she resembled her mother, and it tells of Mrs Majstorovič's senselessness, shallowness, hysteria, haughtiness, and egocentrism (Cesarec 1972). Cesarec pathetically

idealizes the representatives of the young generation, whereas the representatives of the old generation are presented with drastic features, and the author passes into trivial exaggerations. The character of Mrs Majstorović is one-dimensional and testifies to a complete lack of the author's empathy with the position of a woman writer in interwar Croatian society.

### **Kveder's life in obituaries**

At the time of Zofka Kveder's death, several short notes and many long obituaries were published in newspapers. In this article, we will focus, due to spatial limitations, on the obituaries published in Serbian newspapers. The most extensive one was written by Zdenka Marković (1884–1974), a writer, literary historian and friend of Zofka Kveder's, for the magazine *Srpski književni glasnik* [Serbian Literary Herald]. Her record is a personal writing that delves into the writer's personality and determines whether her life is related to a woman's position in society and whether the writer's character was such that it brought her to a tragic end. She did not want to give an account of Kveder's work as it was still too close for her to write about it unencumbered, but she just wanted to capture her still warm soul, the exact contours of her personality. For Zdenka Marković, Zofka Kveder was "one of the smartest, most unhappy women among us", her life and death are

the greatest "tragedy of a woman I know, at least the greatest of the recorded and known (who can single out all the unnoticed!). The tragedy of the awakened, intelligent, talented women in our south, who with their weight and gloom remind only of the tragedy of the world-renowned writer Victoria Benedictsson" (Marković 1926, 608–609). She recognizes a duality in her personality: the joy of life and a tendency towards anxiety, pessimism – black and white threads intertwined in her life and work. When she remembers Kveder, she writes that Kveder was a world unto herself, a temperamental, strong, healthy soul, a true mountain nature, she knew how to laugh with that cheerful, open laugh when her eyes shine and gleam, she knew how to enjoy the beauty of the world. But there was also a deep-rooted tragedy in it (Marković 1926, 608–609). Zdenka Marković also points out her diligence and collection of materials for work at every step and her deep social sense: she took care of school children on the outskirts of the city, maids, workers. She also notes that no one has put in as much work as she has. The conclusion of the obituary is personal and poetic: Zofka Kveder died and realized the beauty of death and pain, as she once knew the beauty of life and youth. The dark in her beat the light (Marković 1926, 612–613)

Minka Govekar also wrote a commemorative article for the “Serbian sisters” and published it in the magazine *Žena i svet* [Woman and the World]. In it, she presented the life and work of Zofka Kveder and pointed out her Yugoslavness: “Serbian women will be especially interested in the fact that Zofka suffered a lot during and after the war because of her idealistic and ardent desire for closer unification. Due to her open ‘Serbophilism’, Croatian separatist newspapers inhumanly attacked, ridiculed and caricatured her. However, they did not criticize her literary works, but ruthlessly shamed her as a woman, a mother, and a wife” (Govekar 1927a, 8).

In *Učitelj* [Teacher], the obituary was published by Ida Runjanin, who presented the writer’s life and work, adding a very sensitive memory of the writer: “Her enthusiasm for creating great, noble works – her sacrifice, kindness, sincerity, openness attracted me strongly, and I felt how her convincing words, stories lift me above this valley of tears, full of troubles, misery, human malice, upwards through the whitish clouds of the summer evening, to the stars – to Nirvana” (Runjanin 1926-1927, 476).

## Conclusion

A comparison of Zofka Kveder’s trajectory and her views, as can be reconstructed from her letters,

journalistic articles, but also literary texts, shows that biographers did not write about certain views and events. Her suicide attempts and Jelovšek’s extramarital relations remain unthematized. Natascha Vittorelli (2004, 2007) was the first to point out Zofka Kveder’s anti-Semitism, which she discovered in literary texts (e.g., in the novel *Hanka*, 1917) and in journalistic articles (*Jugoslavenke i židovsko pitanje* [Yugoslav Women and the Jewish Question]). Vittorelli also drew attention to the writer’s indignation, written in an unsent letter, preserved in her legacy, to the editor of the satirical newspaper *Koprive* [Nettles] who published a caricature which depicted Zofka Kveder as a Jewish seller of articles in the market. Vittorelli states that Zofka Kveder’s husband, Juraj Demetrović, made the editor of the newspaper resign. Moreover, the author of the pamphlet against Kveder, published in *Koprive*, lost his job as a professor at the Zagreb grammar school (Vittorelli 2007, 61). These activities do not place Zofka Kveder in the light in which her biographers observe her as she reveals herself to us as a self-satisfied and vengeful woman who took advantage of the position of the stronger (in this case the wife of an important politician in the Yugoslav government of the time) over the weaker. At the end of the chapter on Zofka Kveder, Vittorelli argues that she acted as a projection surface and can be

located at the intersections of diverse and meaningful discourses: in the area of tension between women's emancipation and socialism, patriotic, even nationalistic Yugoslavism and anti-Semitism, and all of this made Zofka Kveder so incredibly attractive (Vittorelli 2004, 64).

Diverse attempts at presenting Zofka Kveder as a cultural icon of the South Slavic space opens up various questions – about the ways of glorifying the author's role in different literary systems and concealing the truth about certain characteristics that were inconsistent with the positive image of Kveder as a feminist role-model for younger generations. It seems that the biographical contributions written later stemmed mainly from the image of Kveder as a writer and a feminist due to the need to identify the figure of a strong and successful writer and feminist, on whom it was possible to build a tradition parallel to the dominant male and patriarchal discourse of Slovenian (literary) history. These strategies testify to both the positive, ambitious aspirations and problematic contradictions involved in constructing early feminist icons and role models.

For Kveder, the modern emancipatory values and goals of women were not merely empty phrases; throughout her lifetime she worked devotedly to realize these goals. Analyzing Kveder's cogni-

tive, spiritual and emotional horizon also tells us something about the context of the first wave of modern feminists who wanted to "have it all": a successful, professional life and a happy family, but who also had to learn in the end that many obstacles were simply too formidable, the bar simply too high. In spite of all such obstacles and setbacks, however, her story – the story of the foremother of today's (emancipated) women who are often not prepared to compromise – is still inspiring, as current research on her life and work demonstrates. Her life story also carries a vital message about the role and importance of female friendship in forming the feminist consciousness, and about achieving success in a society that is not favourably inclined towards those who try to transcend boundaries. But it also reveals the strength of a deeply rooted paradigm – that a woman has to be accomplished in all she does in order to truly see herself as a successful person. In other words, despite her emancipated convictions and actions, her accomplishments in a number of different spheres, she still insisted, at least in her marriage with Demetrovič, that it was best for a woman to be married and enjoy the protection of her husband. Naturally, this view is certainly problematic for her feminist successors; however, it serves as a reminder that traditional gender roles are very complex. A complete break with

them is not simply a matter of intellectual choice, but also demands a twist, a leap perhaps, in one's emotional and mental development.

Throughout her life – and this we can conclude from her personal documents and literary works – Kveder sought out love: the love of her parents, her lovers, her children and friends. She remained uncompromising until the end: once she no longer enjoyed her husband's love, no other love could fill the emptiness that divorce brought her. So, ultimately, her story serves as a testament to the power of feminism, which helped her win recognition as a first-rate writer and intellectual; but it also reveals the fact that every individual is unique. Her encounters with feminism were different from what they were like for her friends because her life story, emotional horizon, and historical context were different. By the same token, however, this does nothing to diminish the importance of feminism in and for her life.

On the contrary, her story proves once more that feminism is multifaceted and full of different perspectives, which is why she has been chosen to represent Slovenian women writers on the Cultural Route.

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*"Defiant Trajectories: Mapping out Slavic Women Writers Routes"* is an important contribution to feminist literary and historical research on gender in Europe. Six studies in the anthology illuminate the literary lives and cultural work of leading women writers and intellectuals in Slavic literature during the crucial period of the *fin de siècle* and the first half of the twentieth century. The focus is on important female figures as well as their shaping of literary and other identities. During this period, a number of new women writers appeared in Slavic literatures, as well as in other European cultures, with a completely new poetics and different conceptions of the world and of writing in a patriarchal context. Reviews of their work and analysis of their literary output show that the authors sought new paths in both real and intellectual geography. The studies in the volume *Defiant Trajectories: Mapping out Slavic Women Writers Routes* bring us closer to the individual personalities of these authors and their work in an in-depth and interesting way, using literary-historical, literary-feminist, and cultural studies methods to paint pictures of leading female figures in a particular space and time. The studies also have a comparative character.

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*"Defiant Trajectories: Mapping out Slavic Women Writers Routes"* is the first comparative attempt to trace the peculiarities of women's worldview, mentality, existential alternatives and narrative about themselves as expressed in the works of Slavic women writers. Although it highlights (only) emblematic representatives of women's literature from Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Croatia, Russia, and Slovenia in the 20th century, the collection develops an open structure/paradigm that can be filled and stimulates scholars to work out the overall state and functioning of a parallel Slavic (and not only) literary canon.

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