

Female Desire in the Epistolary Novels of South Slavic Women Writers¹ (*Hanka* by the Slovene Croat writer Zofka Kveder and *Jedno dopisivanje* by the Serbian writer Julka Chlapec-Đorđević)

This paper, which deals with Central European literature in the comparative perspective, contains an analysis of the representation of intimacy and love (female desire) in the epistolary novels *Hanka* (1918) written by the Slovene Croat writer and feminist Zofka Kveder (1878-1926) and *Jedno dopisivanje. Fragmenti romana* (A Correspondence. Fragments of a Novel, 1932) by the Serbian writer and feminist Julka Chlapec-Đorđević (1882-1969). Both of these South Slavic women writers and feminists were cultural nomads with multiple linguistic identities, part of the Habsburgian myth, and they lived for a time in Prague, then an important city of European modernism and the avant-garde. In the novels, they created a picture of a new woman and her intimate world, focusing on the motifs of love and extramarital affairs. In the novel *Hanka*, readers follow the thematization of the new independent woman and her intimacy in the chaos of the apocalypse of the First World War, focusing on representations of the idealized love of a woman for a man and a woman's suppressed desire. Julka Chlapec-Đorđević inherited the legacy of Zofka Kveder in Prague, and her novel *Jedno dopisivanje* is an homage to Kveder's artistic achievements. The writer depicts gender intimacy in fictitious letters between Marija Prohasková from Prague and her lover Oton Šrepan, a doctor from Slovenia. In both case studies, the representation of the secret love affair and writer's understanding of intimacy and romantic love as the key concepts of modernity will be examined.

I.

In the novel *Jedno dopisivanje* [Correspondences], the protagonist Marija writes to her male lover: "Sometimes it seems to me that the main source of my sensitivity is not so much erotic hunger as longing for life in general"². The novel was

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² CHLAPEC-ĐORĐEVIĆ 2004: 18.

written at the end of the 1920s by the Serbian writer Julka Chlapec-Đorđević, and this single sentence describes the new phenomenon of intimacy presented in the female literature of the early 20th century: women writers in Central Europe also began to depict the phenomenon of love and dialogue with the opposite sex as the main problem of human existence.

The article deals with the representation of intimacy and love (female desire) in two novels: *Hanka* (1918) by the Slovene Croat writer and feminist Zofka Kveder (1878–1926), and *Jedno dopisivanje. Fragmenti romana* (A Correspondence: Fragments of a Novel, 1932) by the Serbian writer and feminist Julka Chlapec-Đorđević (1882–1969). In their self-representative texts readers can follow the “the discursive practise between truth, gender, and identity”³. Both of these South Slavic women writers and feminists were cultural nomads with several identities who were conversant in several languages and connected to the Czech feminist movement. For a time they lived for in Prague, the hub of European modernism and the avant-garde in the first half of the 20th century⁴. Both were active in Czech culture and society and their writing was very much inspired by it. They were cosmopolitan intellectuals, always moving between places and cultures, “willingly” displaced,⁵ with multiple linguistic identities. Their connections to women writers and feminists were crucial to the construction of their gender identity and their self-awareness as professional writers.⁶ Their work was successfully published in the Czech and Central European regions during their lifetime. Their positive reception was also due to the tradition of Slavic solidarity and reciprocity. After their deaths, they were unjustly forgotten in both Czech literature and in their national literatures until the feminist re-evaluation in the 21st century⁷.

The link to modernity can be traced in their writing. We may speculate that in their transnational discourse they were more open to the Other and to addressing gender problems than their Central European contemporaries, who were “solidly grounded just in their national literatures.” In these two novels, both writers constructed a picture of new women connected to the representation of Prague. That vibrant and – for its time – modern city was the right place for the new emancipated woman represented in their novels, in which we can find a new understanding

³ GILMORE 1994: XIII.

⁴ BERNARD 1900.

⁵ The movement of Central European writers in geographical territory of the Monarchy was a constant social and historical phenomenon and a part of the monarchy’s culture prior to the First World War, but in their cases, it was also due to personal situations (being married and following their partners).

⁶ Agatha Schwartz underlined the connection between women writers and the feminist movement in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. SCHWARTZ 2008.

⁷ HAWKESWORTH 2000.

of human existence, gender roles and modern psychology. This paper will focus on the representation of female desire, intimacy and romantic love as pictured in these novels.

II.

In his book *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Anthony Giddens described how much intimacy has changed in modern societies over the last one hundred years. He emphasised the category of romantic love and its importance in modern societies in the 20th century, underscoring that, from its earliest origins, romantic love has raised the question of intimacy⁸. The complex of ideas associated with romantic love connected love with freedom for the first time, as both were seen as normatively desirable states. Passionate love has always been liberating, but only in the sense of generating a break from routine and duty. It was precisely this quality of “amour passion” that distinguished it from existing institutions. Ideals of romantic love, on the contrary, inserted themselves directly into the emergent links between freedom and self-realisation⁹

When considering this category, we must be aware of the limits of that period’s patriarchal society and its social, historical, and cultural context, as expressions of intimacy were subject to very strict rules. The latter particularly applied to women, for they were still confronted by many prohibitions. A woman became what cultural rules and gender prejudices dictated. Thomas Laqueur, in his book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, noted that even at the beginning of the 20th century, under the prevailing patriarchal discourse of Western Civilisation it was believed that women had no sexual drive nor could not experience erotic pleasure¹⁰.

Therefore, it was difficult for women writers and intellectuals of that time to express romantic love in literature. But the times were changing. According to Rita Felski: “In the early 20th century, the figure of the New Woman was to become a resonant symbol of emancipation, whose modernity signalled not an endorsement of an existing present, but rather a bold imagining of an alternative future”¹¹. According to Barać, the novel *Jedno dopisivanje*, which provides the most consistent, most radical image of the new woman, is poetically grounded in the parody of sentimentalist novels. The “bareness” of the novel’s structure,

⁸ GIDDENS 1993: 45.

⁹ GIDDENS 1993: 40-

¹⁰ LAQUEUR 2017: 265–340.

¹¹ FELSKI 1995: 45.

playing with intimate genre styles and the hybridization of prose, poetic and essayistic discourses, approaches the poetics of a short avant-garde novel.¹²

In their novels, both authors depict romantic love and female desire as the main component of their narrative. There is also a clear motif of secret love in both novels – a motif which was, according to Elisabeth Frenzel, one of the most productive in world literature. According to her, at the end of the 19th century, this motif formed as a secret relationship that became the main solution for a previously unfulfilled or senseless life¹³. Also in the analysed novels, we find the main belief that secret love, its realisation, and intimacy constitute the only possibility for human existence, specifically female existence. Fictitious letters form a psychological picture of the new woman in literature.

The new understanding of love and gender in Europe in the first part of the 20th century have been present in several works by historian Luisa Passerine, who underlined transformations of the social discourse on love, especially in the interwar period¹⁴. The transposition of the discourse of love from the private to the public space and the reversal of gender roles were intensified by the consequences of World War I¹⁵.

III.

The first Slovenian professional woman writer and feminist, Zofka Kveder (1878–1926)¹⁶ belonged to the second wave of Slovene women writers and thus far she has been a symbol as the first independent female writer with a distinguished poetic style who was unafraid to pursue her career. The most important period

¹² “Роман Једно дописивање, у ком је дата најдоследнија, најрадикалнија слика нове жене, поетички се утемељује у пародији сентименталистичких романа, „огољавању“ романескног поступка, поигравању са интимистичким жанровским предлошцима, хибридикацији прозног, поетског и есејистичког дикурса, што овај роман приближава поетици кратког авангардног романа”. БАРАЋ 2015: 245–246.

¹³ FRENZEL 2015: 455.

¹⁴ PASSERINI 1999.

¹⁵ See also PETROVIĆ 2019: 256–259.

¹⁶ Kveder was born in Ljubljana and spent most of her childhood in the countryside. She began working in Ljubljana in 1897. In 1899, she first moved to Trieste. The starting point for the new Slovenian generation of women writers was the appearance of the newspaper *Slovenka* in Trieste in 1897. The appearance of female voices was for Zofka Kveder also a process connected to the feminist movement and new ideas about the status of Slovenian women in society and the arts. She tried to study in Switzerland, she did not have enough money and so travelled via Munich to Prague. She lived there from 1900 to 1906. In 1906 she moved to Zagreb with her husband Vladimir Jelovšek and their two daughters. She divorced Jelovšek and then married the prominent politician Juraj Demetrović. She committed suicide in Zagreb in 1926. For more on her life and work, see the book by Mihurko Poniž. MIHURKO PONIŽ 2004; see also MIHURKO PONIŽ in DE HAAN, DASKALOVA, LOUFI 2006: 282–284.

in her life was her Prague period (1900-1906). As Katja Mihurko Poniž stressed, the contacts she made in the Czech capital benefited her in the Croatian cultural space when she moved to Zagreb in 1906. Her desire to discover new worlds and establish contacts with representatives of foreign cultures was a trigger for many activities in the field of cultural transmission¹⁷. She was also a mediator of ideas: feminism, Yugoslavism, and ideas about coexistence and mutual respect between different cultures.¹⁸ Kveder began to write texts mostly in the Croatian language in her Zagreb period.¹⁹

As a typical cultural nomad, she was part of the Habsburg myth, exploring cultural life in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The monarchy's space was a special cultural, social and historical milieu – a phenomenon that Csáky characterized in postcolonial discourse as a third place, with many meanings and modes of representation: '*Vielfältige Repräsentationen*', a fluid and flexible space for many contexts, great cultural exchange, and cultural transmission²⁰.

Gender problems became vivid and widely represented in literature in the monarchy at the turn of the 20th century. Women were unhappy with the rigid patriarchal system and the division of power, but on the other side at that time, men, in their own gender roles, were also insecure and full of uncertainty and fear. Writers often highlighted relations between the two sexes as problematic. The erotic and carnal in particular were a space of great trauma, which was due to the strict morality of the Christian faith and Catholic predominance as part of the patriarchal discourse of that time.

Kveder published her literary debut *Misterij žene* (The Mystery of a Woman), an anthology of short stories about the tragic condition of women in a patriarchal society, in Prague in 1900. She has been declared the first professional women writer in Slovenian literary history, and she became a part of the Slovenian canon. She published three novels and several autobiographical short stories (in different collections) during her lifetime. She wrote about women from different levels of society. In her critical observations of the place of women in a patriarchy, she

¹⁷ MIHURKO PONIŽ 2020: 1–26.

¹⁸ While living in Prague, Kveder constructed a network of connections with different national literary circles: Croat, Czech, German Jewish and Slovene. Prague was at that time also a hub for Czech and European modernism, where the Czech impressionist, symbolist, and decadent movements were successfully (and literally) incorporated into Czech life in the early 20th century. The circle of Prague German Jewish writers also produced Franz Kafka, who published his first short story in 1908. Kveder had connections to the renowned group of German-Jewish authors, including Oskar Wiener (a member of the literary circle that included the decadent writers Paul Leppin and Franz Werfel). In 1906 they introduced her in their newspaper *Wir* as a front-page author.

¹⁹ The short story collection *Iskre* (1905) already included stories written in Croatian.

²⁰ CSÁKY 2019: 35.

portrayed their different cultural roles. She wrote about emancipated women who were seeking a new role in society and did not want to deny their sexuality. On the other hand, she also described the lives of prostitutes and disadvantaged women from the less-advantaged classes. She also depicted the problems of the middle-class society, such as prearranged marriages, and she introduced problematic topics such as abortion, violence against women and suicide. She also published several plays, first in Slovenian and then in Croatian.

In Croatian literary history, Kveder also figured prominently in the beginnings of the avant-garde. According to Detoni-Dujmić, her contribution to Croat literature was a combination of a psycho-naturalistic interest in the inner world of her characters with several pre-avant-garde dynamic innovations in narrative structure²¹. During her long literary career, from her literary debut in 1900 to the novel *Hanka* (1918), the change in her linguistic identity and the transition to modernity in her narrative solutions, as well as the shift to intimate motifs and themes, can all be followed²².

The epistolary war novel *Hanka* (written in 1915, published in Zagreb in 1918) signifies the peak of her career writing in the Croatian language. It could be understood as a war novel or a woman's intimate journal, an autobiographic diary of the turbulent war years, where in wartime Prague is the ideal place for her heroine. The classical story is erased, and the fragments are depicted within the scope of inner time. Detoni-Dujmić found three types of discourse in the novel, and she underlines the complex, modern antithetical composition²³. The narrative is written in *Ich*-form. The young Polish intellectual and historian Hanka is Zofka Kveder's alter ego. In the narrative, we follow the representation of romantic love and female desire as a new space of freedom²⁴. In *Hanka*, Kveder constructed an entirely different type of modern woman: an active and emancipated one, a 'New Woman'.²⁵

The autobiographical intimate story is interwoven with the historical narrative – the beginning of the First World War. The novel consists of fictional letters which the first-person narrator Hanka writes to her male friend, the Polish historian Staszyński, who is possibly her lover. Hanka is not happy in her marriage to a pragmatic and rational German, with whom she has two daughters. After discovering her husband's infidelity, she separates from him. In the shadow of great historical changes and the First World War, she settles in Prague and becomes a nurse in a hospital. War brings suffering, death, chaos and great movements of

²¹ DETONI-DUJMIĆ 2008: 47–57.

²² JENSTERLE DOLEŽAL 2008: 82–99, JENSTERLE DOLEŽAL 2011: 125–143.

²³ DETONI-DUJMIĆ 2008: 53.

²⁴ See PETROVIĆ 2019: 274–279.

²⁵ See Sally Ledger's definition of the "New Woman". LEDGER 1997.

peoples. Her love for him ends with the news of Staszyński's death. At the end, she discovers a solution to working for society: she establishes a nursery for working women in Poland.

The reality of narrated time and space disappears in the foggy, dream-like world of the novel: its discourse is dominated by an expressionist world of visions and symbols. The narration thematizes Hanka's intimacy. The achievement of the erotic desire is only possible for her in symbolic dreams. There is not just the problem of geographical distance: Stasyński is mostly far away, he is a soldier in the frontline who dies in the combat.

Hanka also possesses inner "metaphysical borders" and principles: to her love could only be expressed symbolically; desire is depicted in a sublime way. Expressions of carnal and physical love are forbidden. Love ends with a kiss. There is great tension between the desire for love and hopes for intimacy and suppressed emotions. The heroine must not go beyond the imaginary border.²⁶ One of the reasons why Hanka does not want to consummate their love is that future life with one's partner means the possible burden of daily reality, which could ruin her idealised picture of the imagined Other. The realisation of their life on the other side implies also "the power of patriarchal rules":

"Even if I were completely free today, I would not want to be your wife. The feeling I feel for you cannot bear the banality of everyday life. [...] I have placed you high above all other people. [...] And now, that hero of all heroes would become my legitimate husband, which means for example, he snores or he is grumpy if the soup is too salty or if the socks are not well patched! Ha-ha! These are trivial things, but they would certainly be detrimental to the idol, which I created for myself from you and which I need, because it makes my life higher and more valuable."²⁷

Between the private and public spheres, Hanka seeks redemption from her great erotic and sexual desire for Stasyński, an intellectual and spiritual friend and her potential lover. Love ends in death and oblivion: it is wartime and reality does not provide many opportunities to act on this immense "amour passion" and it

²⁶ Kveder's almost philosophical approach to understanding love was influenced by Ivan Cankar's 1912 symbolist drama *Lepa Vida* (Beautiful Vida), in which the longing of male characters for a beautiful woman is formulated not just as erotic desire but also as an ontological principle of existence.

²⁷ "Kad bih danas bila sasvim slobodna, ne bih poželjela, da budem Vašom ženom. Čuvstvo, što ga osjećam za Vas, ne podnosi banalnost svakidašnjosti. [...] Stavila sam Vas visoko nad sve druge ljude. [...] A sada da bude taj junak sviju junaka pravi moj zakoniti muž, pa da primjerice hrče ili da bude zlovoljan, kad bi juha bila odviše slana ili kad ne bi čarape bile dosta fino zakrpane! Ha, ha! To su zapravo sitnice, ali svakako bi one bile na štetu idolu, što sam ga od Vas stvorila sebi i što mi je potreban, jer mi čini život višim i vrjednijim". KVEDER 1918: 162–163, trans. A.JD.

also appears that the woman is not prepared for that: she is in some way satisfied to simply express longing for a man in an ideal form.

Kveder also depicted the emancipation of women in the realm of intimacy: her woman has the right to be an individual with feelings and longing – and erotic desire. She further presented these emancipatory ideas about the new status of women in a changing society in her essays and articles. During and after the First World War, she published numerous essays on the role and status of women in *Agramer Tagblatt* (Zagreb's German-language daily newspaper) and, in the new state, in the Croatian language magazine *Ženski svijet* (Woman's World), later renamed *Jugoslavenska žena* (Yugoslav Woman).

IV.

Julka Chlapec-Đorđević (1882–1969) inherited the legacy of Zofka Kveder in Prague.²⁸ A philosopher, feminist, and writer of Serbian origin, “also part of the Habsburgian culture due to her education and living in Vienna,” but she lived for most of her writing career in democratic Prague (1922–1945) and participated in Czech open society before the Second World War. At that time and place, she – already in her forties – became an outspoken feminist and a writer. In her essays, she “encyclopaedically mapped the discourse about women and femininity in her position between the cultures”²⁹.

After her Austrian-Habsburg period, Chlapec-Đorđević experienced a period in Prague (from 1922 to 1945) after the First World War. The Czechoslovak First Republic was successfully formed after the World War I with T. G. Masaryk (1850–1937) serving as its president. The new republic based its identity on progress, modernity and democracy. The equality of men and women was declared in the constitution; with suffrage, women officially gained the right to their own voice. In that period, Prague was still an open, multicultural, intellectually rich, very inspiring city, flourishing with new ideas and artistic approaches. The literature of the interwar period reveals the political crisis and the crisis of gender identity.

²⁸ Serbian philosopher and feminist Julka Chlapec-Đorđević (Stari Bečej, Vojvodina, 1882 – Ústí nad Labem, 1969) hailed from a wealthy upper-class family in Stari Bečej, Vojvodina (in northern Serbia – part of Yugoslavia after the First World War). She was educated in Vienna, where she remained until the collapse of the monarchy, so in her youth and adulthood she absorbed the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the complex and rich transnational cultural relations in the monarchy at the time – and particularly in Vienna as a cultural metropolis. She married a Czech officer, Zdeněk Chlapec (who first served in the imperial army, later in the new Czech Army, where he rose to the rank of general). She pursued her writing career in her forties after settling in Prague, where she lived from 1922 until 1945. After the change of the regime, she moved to the provincial town Ústí nad Labem with her daughter and died there in complete obscurity.

²⁹ ĐURIĆ 2014: 4–5.

In her philosophical theory and sociological analyses (contained in five books of essays), Chlapec-Đorđević invented new ideas and philosophical and cultural approaches. She explored topics such as abortion, female identity, her relationship to the body and sexuality, the problems of family and motherhood, new sexual ethics, new methods of birth control, women's rights, and the problems surrounding feminism and fascism, feminism and communism, and feminism and pacifism³⁰. Hawkesworth analyzed her work alongside the output of other Serbian writers: Milica Jakovljević, Ksenija Atanasijević, Anica Savić-Rebac, Jelena Spiridonović-Savić and Isidora Sekulić³¹.

In the 1930s, Chlapec-Đorđević was prominent in Czech feminist circles, as she was a member of the main committee of the Czech feminist movement together with Františka Plamínková (1875–1942) and Milada Horaková (1901–1950). She also wrote articles for their journal *Národní rada* (National Counsel). She was quite transnational: she wrote books in Serbian and Czech and published them in Belgrade and Ljubljana, as well as three in Prague. In all of them, she demonstrated her profound knowledge of philosophy and culture between national ideas and transnational contexts, addressing gender problems through the political prism of national identities and cosmopolitan ideas³². According to Magdalena Koch, she was the most active, determined Serbian feminist and essayist in the interwar period, with a brilliant mind and an immense grasp of sociological thought³³.

Chlapec-Đorđević also wrote a novel and four travelogues. Her Serbian epistolary novel, *Jedno dopisivanje. Fragmenti romana* (A Correspondence. Fragments of a Novel) published in 1932 (written in the late 1920s), is an homage to Kveder's artistic achievements. The construction of the plot and its motifs are also influenced by Kveder's *Hanka*³⁴. The novel presents "the feminist view of marriage and love"³⁵. The novel was influenced by the tradition of 18th century European prose writing. Chlapec-Đorđević's text was a very modern modification of the traditional form due to its subversive motifs and themes, which became popular already at the beginning of Serbian modernism³⁶. According to Petrović, "in the voice of her heroine... (the female author) ... inscribe the social, cultural and political reflexion into the structure of love discourse, expressing in this way her own (politically engaged) standpoint, as well as the standpoint of contemporary

³⁰ See SLAPŠAK 2004: 153–170.

³¹ HAWKESWORTH 2000: 180–185.

³² See JENSTERLE DOLEŽAL 2020: 1–26.

³³ See KOCH 2019: 176–184.

³⁴ JENSTERLE DOLEŽAL 2016: 1–7.

³⁵ PETROVIĆ 2019: 261–267.

³⁶ KOCH: 2007: 149–153.

women (i.e., interwar female authors) [...]”³⁷. In Serbia the novel was greeted with interest and reviewed by Ksenija Atanasijević³⁸.

The writer also depicts gender relations – female and male intimacy – in fictitious letters between the Serbian female protagonist Marija Prohaskova living in Prague (Czech culture) and her lover, Slovene physician Oton Šrepan from Ljubljana. The dialogic form is more modern than in Kveder’s novel: the second focalizer is a man. The novel is also more open in other gender approaches: it depicts not only the emotional struggles of a woman, but also the emotional chaos and “explosion” of male intimacy. The main theme in the narrative is a secret heterosexual love affair between two middle-class married people from different nationalities. The narrative focuses on female and male erotic desire and their fulfilment, even though other gender motifs are exposed: for example, the problem of marriage and the family, gender roles, infidelity and the relations between parents and children. Intimacy is the main postulate of life.

The simple narrative is presented in a realistic, intellectual style with considerable intertextual allusions and essayistic fragments. It depicts a secret love affair between a man and a woman, who are married and no longer young: Marija and Oton actually resume a relationship from their student years in Vienna. The love story and the representation of romantic love, which has many retrospective passages, ends inconclusively: it is suggested that in the end Oton commits suicide.

The construction of the main female protagonist is very autobiographical here: a middle-aged Serbian woman, an intellectual living in Prague with three children while her husband is a soldier posted elsewhere. Marija pivots between different cultures, and she is an altruistic, enthusiastic feminist, interested in gender, emancipation, global problems and cultural transfers. An intellectual discourse on love by the new woman is full of doubt. The narration proceeds as a stream of ideas and contradictory feelings:

“Our relationship is unclear. The paths of our future lie in a heavy fog. If we were ten years younger, it would make sense to think about becoming a couple in line with our mentality and understanding of life. If we were ten years older, certain wishes and aspirations would no longer disturb us. We are both young and old, and we do not even know if we are more friends or lovers. All this makes us insecure. We are afraid that we will not tarnish the pure memories of our past with forcefulness and compromise, while the experience of each day pushes us to take advantage of the

³⁷ PETROVIĆ 2019: 262.

³⁸ HAWKESWORTH 2000: 183. Korać, in a study of the Serbian novel between the two World Wars, only mentioned her work, stressing its literary qualities and its originality in terms of genre. KORAC 1982: 473.

moments and not postpone our joy for tomorrow, because we may not experience them.”³⁹

There are passages in the novel in which the narrator describes the two main cultural components of Chlapec-Đorđević's life: first her life in Vienna before the First World War and then life in interwar Prague.⁴⁰ In the letters of this modern epistolary novel we can discover the construction of the prototype of the 'modern woman': an active, intellectually (but not financially!) independent woman with modern ideas on her status in society and also on sexual ethics, living in multicultural Prague, with all of her energy absorbing its rich cultural life. The typical nomadic character of a Central European intellectual of that time is hidden in the metaphor of travel, which for the two lovers signifies a place of freedom. Petrović defines the motif of travelling as a political and personal nomadism⁴¹. Marija is a more liberated and stronger personality than her partner: she is not so dependent on the duties, demands and prejudices of that era's patriarchal society. The narrator is also female gendered: she is emotionally and morally on the side of Marija.

Compared to Kveder's representation of romantic love, Chlapec-Đorđević is unafraid to show the meaning of the erotic for the human condition and also how important it is for an individual to fulfil erotic desire rather than just dream about it. At one point, Marija still accepts the double standard of patriarchal society's morality and its hypocrisy: she wants to follow her lover, but because of her children, she refuses to divorce her husband.

Chlapec-Đorđević continued to put forth new ideas on gender roles as part of her feminist theory on women's emancipation in the early 1930s. She also pursued the idea of the necessity of women's liberation in her theoretical work, where she expressed the idea that women have the right to sexual freedom. She insisted on birth control, and she affirmed female sexuality outside the reproductive context.⁴² She underlined contraception as one of the liberation methods for women and their erotic life – which in her time was quite original and subversive.

³⁹ “Nejasna je naša uzajamnost, u teškoj magli leži putevi naše budućnosti. Da smo deset godina mlađji, imalo bi smisla misliti na izgrađenje zajednice po našem mentalitetu i shvaćanju života. Da smo deset godina stariji, izvesne želje i težnje ne bi nas uznemirivale. Mi smo i mladi i stari, i ne znamo ni sami da li smo više prijatelji ili ljubavnici. Sve to pravi nas nesigurnima. Bojimo se da usiljenošću i kompromisnošću ne uprljamo čiste uspomene na svoju prošlost, dok nas iskustvo svakog dana goni da iskoristimo trenutke i da ne odlažemo radost za sutra, jer ih možda nećemo doživjeti”. CHLAPEC-ĐORĐEVIĆ 2004: 70, trans. A.JD.

⁴⁰ This is an autobiographical experience: as the first woman in Austria-Hungary, Julka Chlapec-Đorđević earned her Ph.D. in Vienna in 1906.

⁴¹ PETROVIĆ 2019: 261.

⁴² She was a member of European and American associations for birth control.

V.

In a preceding article I compared her novel *Jedno dopisivanje* with the novels of the prominent Czech women writers of that time (Helena Malířová, Marie Pujmanová). As a writer, Chlapec-Đorđević was not as talented and artistically skilled as her Czech contemporaries, who came from a long tradition of women writers. In this way, we could compare her Serbian novel to the Czech novels of this period in terms of finding new ways of intimacy and love, as well as models of the new woman. For example, Helena Malířová's (1877–1940) novel *Deset životů* (Ten Lives) from 1937 also addresses the issue of female identity in relation to the male sex in Czech patriarchal society, which was shaken by the new ideas of communism, but also feminism. Even more interesting is the comparison of Chlapec-Đorđević's novel to the 1931 novel by Marie Pujmanová (1893–1958), *Pacientka dr. Hegla* (The Female Patient of Dr. Hegel). The narrative also takes place in Prague and it depicts a middle-class girl who is engaged to be married but has a romantic relationship with a married physician. Although Pujmanová's novel is more modern in its narrative strategies, more complex in its narrative composition, and more artistically compelling, the novel by Chlapec-Đorđević is more radical in its construction of a modern female intellectual confidently following the impulses of erotic desire and the imperatives of love. In the 1930s, she was surely quite subversive in presenting the new woman as a free, autonomous, complex human being with a rich inner world and the right to experience romantic love and to fulfil her erotic desire – unafraid of her body or her feelings⁴³.

Conclusion

In their autobiographical novels,⁴⁴ both South Slavic women writers – cosmopolitan intellectuals with several cultural identities – depicted the intimate geographies of life, love and death in a specific historical period. Among other Central European women writing after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they represented an original narrative and a new female experience: the story of a woman in love who refuses to remain silent in the “first-person form” – a novelty, according to Leigh Gilmore, because “women's self-representation

⁴³ JENSTERLE DOLEŽAL 2022: 9–21.

⁴⁴ Kveder wrote about the autobiographical construction of the novel to her friend, Czech Zdenka Hasková. JENSTERLE DOLEŽAL 2011: 125–143. The protagonist in the novel *Jedno dopisivanje* reflects the cultural, sociological, political and personal situation of Julka Chlapec-Đorđević living in Prague (Archive of Julka Chlapec-Đorđević – owned by Pavla Frýdlová). Due to a lack of information, nothing is known about the autobiographical origin of the love affair described in the novel.

describes territory that is largely unmapped, indeed unrecognizable, given traditional maps of genre and periodisation⁴⁵.

This article deals with female writers and ideas that challenged the established understanding of the status of women and gender in literature. The shift to intimacy, which can be followed in the literary work of both South Slav writers, was not just a problem of literary style and the search for new narrative solutions; it was above all a search for the new woman and her path to securing freedom on the basis of her feminist persuasion. Both authors had several national identities. Their open and complex understanding of love and intimacy was also connected to their experience of an emigrant and a nomadic personality in the context of Czech society. In their literary work, both women strove to represent a new female personality with the right to have a complex inner life with rich yet contradictory emotions and the right to love. Love became, for them, a synonym for the new freedom.

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⁴⁵ GILMORE 1994: 5.

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Ženska želja u epistolarnom romanu južnoslavenskih spisateljica (Hanka slovenske hrvatske književnice Zofke Kveder i *Jedno dopisivanje* srpske književnice Julke Chlapec-Đorđević

U radu su prikazane intima i ljubav (ženska želja) u dva autobiografska, epistolarna romana: *Hanka* (1918) slovenske hrvatske književnice i feministkinje Zofke Kveder (1878-1926) i *Jedno dopisivanje. Fragmenti romana* (*Korespondencije. Fragmenti romana*, 1932) srpske književnice i feministice, Julke Chlapec-Đorđević (1882-1969). Uspoređuju se dvije studije slučaja i redefiniiraju fenomeni srednjoeuropske književnosti na početku 20. stoljeća. Također se preispituju književni rad te problem ženske želje i intimnosti u srednjoeuropskom kontekstu i onom češke književnosti, kao njihov pomak prema modernosti. Južnoslavenske spisateljice i feministkinje bile su kulturni nomadi s višestrukim jezičnim identitetima, dio habsburškoga mita, te su živjele neko vrijeme u Pragu, tada važnom centru europskog modernizma i avangarde.

„Svojevoljno“ izmještene spisateljice, uvjerene u složenu književnost i otvorenije razumijevanje za Drugoga te za rodno pitanje, obje su bile duboko inspirirane češkom kulturom i književnošću. U razmatranim su romanima izgradile sliku novih žena i motive nevjere i izvanbračne veze. U analizi epistolarnog romana *Hanka* osvrće se na tematizaciju nove samostalne žene i njezine intime u kaosu apokalipse Prvoga svjetskog rata, fokusirajući se na prikaz idealizirane ljubavi i potisnute ženske žudnje. Julka Chlapec-Đorđević naslijedila je ostavštinu Zofke Kveder u Pragu i njezin roman *Korespondencije* pruža mogućnost analize konstrukcije rodnog identiteta protagonistica i protagonista (Marije Prohaskove iz Praga i njezinog ljubavnika Otona Šrepana, liječnika iz Slovenije), njihovu povijest izvanbračnih veza te njihovo poimanje intime i ljubavi. Time se preispituju nove ideje o rodnim ulogama – dio feminističkih teorija njihove spisateljice.

U radu se razmatraju i ideje koje su dovele u pitanje ustaljeno shvaćanje novog statusa spisateljica te teme intime u modernoj književnosti 20. stoljeća. Pomak prema intimi mogli bismo pratiti u književnom stvaralaštvu obiju južnoslavenskih književnica. Nije to bio samo problem književnoga stila i traženja novih pripovjednih rješenja, nego, prije svega, potraga za novom ženom i njezin put do slobode u pripovijesti. U književnosti se željelo izraziti novu žensku osobnost s pravom na složeni unutarnji svijet s mnogo emocija: pravo na ljubav shvaćeno je kao prostor za novu slobodu.

Ključne riječi: intima u književnosti, romantična ljubav u književnosti, književno djelo Zofke Kveder, književno djelo Julke Chlapec-Đorđević, južnoslavenske književnice u Pragu

Key words: intimacy in literature, romantic love in literature, literary work by Zofka Kveder, literary work by Julka Chlapec-Đorđević, South Slavic women writers in Prague

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