

Feminism without Fortune: Figures of Femininity in Selected Texts of Adela Milčinović

It is not significant events that kill us, but everyday trifles.

Adela Milčinović

During the fin-de-siècle in Croatia, when the professionalization of women's writing was still in its infancy, Adela Milčinović¹ published her first articles, literary reviews, and vignettes. This paper is dedicated to an analysis of the author's literary texts (the novellas "*Nedina ljubav*" [Neda's Love] and "*Sjena*" [Shadow], the play *Bez sreće* [Without Fortune], and *Autobiografija* [Autobiography]), which we read as representations of the social status of women in that era. We assert that these representations are characterized by a series of ambivalences, which may ultimately signal the instability of gender boundaries. The texts are predominantly about female characters who forge their own gender identity by transgressing the common social functions of femininity. Although it could be assumed that these are proto-feminist efforts, the paper examines the effects of female emancipation and the subversion of patriarchy.

Prose writer and dramatist Adela Milčinović (Sisak, 1879 – New York, 1968) arrived on the Croatian literary scene at the beginning of the 20th century during the modernist period, when she published shorter prose pieces in periodicals and co-authored, with her husband Andrija Milčinović, a collection of vignettes under the titled *Pod branom* [Under the Dam] (1903). Already in those first texts, "topics that would be reiterated in different variants, more or less emphasized, in her entire literary oeuvre can be identified. A woman in the broadest sense of the word, with all of her inner psychological complexities and multifaceted lyrical

¹ In this type of literary-historical or literary-theoretical analysis, one must highlight the fact that Adela Milčinović (1879-1968), a Croatian novelist, playwright, and publicist, advocated for women's rights and the protection of children, and that she actively participated in the National Council and the National Women's Association in Zagreb. During the 1920s, she was one of most agile representatives of the early women's rights movement, writing articles about the social status of women. In 1925, Milčinović moved to New York, where she headed the office of the Emigrant Delegation, and worked as a proof-reader and journalist at the War Information Office and an associate for the Voice of America. She described her activities in her Autobiography, which was sent to the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Science (JAZU) Literature Institute in 1964.

nature.”² The two literary historians who most exhaustively dealt with Milčinić’s literary output, Miroslav Šicel and Dunja Detoni Dujmić, agree that the dominant theme therein is the social status of women.³ Our approach to the novellas *Nedina ljubav* [Neda’s Love, 1905] and *Sjena* [Shadow, 1919], the play *Bez sreće* [Without Fortune, 1912] and the text *Autobiografija* [Autobiography, 1968] is partly based on this idea. However, right at the start, we must distance ourselves from the presumption that the thematic preoccupation with women makes her writings “feminine” or feminist. We primarily advocate the position that her textual representations of femininity in public and private life, which vary widely from characters such as teachers, seamstresses and embroiderers to mothers, stepmothers, and spinsters, are a symptom of the complex power relations in the cultural and social reality of the time, which not even educated women could completely resist. We, therefore, claim that literary representations of women, no matter how much they strive to be gender-conscious and emancipatory, are ultimately conditioned by dominant social relations, by normalizing the age, economic and status functions of femininity.

In our view, the persistent return to the place and role of women in society is symptomatic in the analysed texts. Although we are talking about literary representations, that is, about linguistic constructs of gender that are not a mere reflection of reality, when sorting through fictitious categories, we keep in mind that they are crucial in life. That is why we take into account the fact that in *Toward a Feminist Narratology*, Susan S. Lanser points out that gender narratives have a dual nature.⁴ In order for fiction to be serviceable in everyday life, as the author reminds us, both feminism and narratology should simultaneously include the linguistic, literary, historical, biographical, sociological and political context of the narrative in analyses. Expanding our interpretation according to these contexts, we also hypothesize that the presented social positions of women are to a certain extent emancipatory attempts to reveal their unnoticed positions and the spheres of action.

We will first look briefly at the *Autobiografija* (1968), published almost half a century after the literary templates that form the core of this work. Milčinić did not write it with literary pretensions. At the request of Dragutin Tadijanović,⁵

² ŠICEL 1968: 190-191.

³ The author herself wrote in the Autobiography: “My literary work focused mostly on issues pertaining to women.” Cf. MILČINOVIĆ 1968: 331.

⁴ “The challenge to both feminism and narratology is to recognize the dual nature of narrative, to find categories and terms that are abstract and semiotic enough to be useful, but concrete and mimetic enough to seem relevant for critics whose theories root literature in the real condition of our lives’.” LANSER 2000: 200.

⁵ As is known, the Croatian poet and translator Dragutin Tadijanović (1905-2007) was the director of the JAZU Literature and Theatrical Studies Institute from 1953 to 1973. Over the course of two decades, he established the Institute as an umbrella institution for the collection of archival

she arranged her Autobiography for an edition of her selected works in the “Five Centuries of Croatian Literature” book series, where it was published for the first time as a separate text. In it, the then 85-year-old writer narrated her own public and intimate life in concise outlines. She scrutinised the political ideas that she had supported and the duties she had performed in various institutions and bodies. It is interesting that her political activism⁶ passed virtually unnoticed in the essays by both Šicel (1968) and Detoni Dujmić (1998). Milčinović’s interest in politics is undeniable, as expressed in the Autobiography. It arose as early as 1914 but continued even after 1925, and her move to New York, where she worked as the chief of staff of the Emigrant Delegation, a proof-reader and journalist of the Office for War Information, and an associate for the Voice of America. Since Šicel’s foreword to Milčinović’s texts in the Five Centuries of Croatian Literature volume was published in 1968, when the status of women in Croatia was characterised by improved education and employment opportunities but still rather limited political visibility⁷ it is hardly surprising that he overlooked the political and activist potential of both the author and her texts.

The Autobiography is not and cannot be an objective mirror of reality, but it is still indicative of the fact that women became political subjects in the 1920s: “That’s why Meštrović and Trumbić agreed for me to return to my homeland and persuade Croatian politicians to emigrate to Rome or to send a written statement that they agree with the agenda of Yugoslav emigration. Trumbić gave me two letters, one for Lorković and one for Starčević, which I brought hidden in a parasol. (...) In 1920, I was appointed to serve as a teacher and assigned to the National Women’s Union, under whose auspices I undertook extensive activities in the struggle for women’s suffrage and the protection of children.”⁸ Adela Milčinović was thus presented as a pro-feminist subject in the autobiography. From the idea of a woman as a political being, one could perhaps speak of her projected status, which

data, research into the Croatian literary heritage and publication of critical editions and literary and historical chronicles dedicated to eminent Croatian writers. In the same period, he established the first Croatian literary museum by setting up memorial rooms and organizing exhibitions dedicated to Croatian writers. Since he also served as the president of Matica hrvatska (as of 1951) and was a member of the editorial board of Matica’s book series, Five Centuries of Croatian Literature, including volume 73 in which the selected works of Ivana Brlić Mažuranić, Adela Milčinović, and Zdenka Marković were to be published, he asked Milčinović to write her autobiography for that volume.

⁶ According to Andrea Feldman: “Milčinović was a socialist, a vehement supporter of Yugoslav-oriented Croats, such as Ivan Meštrović or Ante Trumbić. However, in the 1920s, she moved with her family to the USA, where she soon became aware of the unacceptable ways in which the Yugoslav government treated its citizens, especially those of non-Serb origin.” FELDMAN 2004: 240.

⁷ Cf., for example. FELDMAN and KARDUM 2022: 159-190.

⁸ MILČINOVIĆ 1968: 329.

is no longer marked exclusively by the sphere of intimacy or family life but by public activity. However, the text of the autobiography suggests that the representation of women is not independent of existing socially formed imaginaries about a woman's position. In one instance, for example, the subject of the autobiography speaks about how the husband regulates the financial assets in marriage, and that it is the wife's task to follow his professional path without hesitation. It is clear from the text that the writer, who devoted her entire life to representing women's rights, did not overcome the concept of patriarchy even at an advanced age.⁹ Although it does not promote them, it retains patriarchal values and is necessarily defined by them. In our research, therefore, we take heed of Teresa de Lauretis' warning that opposition is "'always already' inscribed in what Fredric Jameson would call 'the political unconscious' of dominant cultural discourses and their underlying 'master narratives' – be they biological, medical, legal, philosophical, or literary – and so will tend to reproduce itself, to retextualize itself (...) even in feminist rewritings of cultural narratives."¹⁰ All of the texts analysed herein can be read as modernizing pro-feminist breakthroughs. But this form of resistance cannot be imagined beyond social matrices; the patriarchal concept anticipates these oppositions and uses them for its own renewal.

In this sense, the socio-historical context and material circumstances behind the creation of the novella "*Nedina ljubav*" (1905) are important to us. In 1899, at a time when opportunities for the education of women in Croatia were on the rise, Milčinović graduated from the women's teaching school at the Sisters of Mercy Abbey in Zagreb. She began to publish in 1901, approximately at the same time when women in Croatia first gained the right to enrol in the Faculty of Philosophy, and then in other university faculties.¹¹ Neda, the novella's protagonist, is shaped as a woman whose educational path, as expected, led to the teaching school at the Sisters of Mercy. She grew up in a patriarchal world where patterns of behaviour were instilled through continuous repetition from early childhood onward. Her grandmother whipped her for disobedience and spending time with boys. Her education at the Sisters of Mercy school in Zagreb, which due to her mother's death depended on the financial support of her wealthy widowed aunt, was motivated by the idea of preserving her "from the corruption of the world."¹² Nevertheless, Neda does not accept the forced image of idealized patriarchy. According to

⁹ We use the term patriarchy in the sense of problematizing the established definition (*Patriarchy is most often defined as a system based on the power of the father; and patriarchy as a series of features of that system.*), which Jasenka Kodrnja warns against. We understand patriarchy primarily as a socially constructed concept, and we recognize its visibility in Milčinović's texts in the values encapsulated in gender notions and their roles.

¹⁰ DE LAURETIS 1987: 1-2.

¹¹ Compare OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2004: 157-179.

¹² DETONI-DUJMIĆ 1997: 281.

Jasenka Kodrnja, the concept of patriarchy promotes the value of motherhood and care for the family, while the father is portrayed as the head of the family or the leader of the people who ensures the community's safety and security.¹³ In “*Nedina ljubav*” [Neda's Love], the patriarchal imaginary is therefore partially violated. Neda's attitude towards the woman's maternal role is not at all unambiguous: “I have read so many times that the purpose of a woman is to take care of the young – to be a mother. I didn't feel even a hint of a desire for motherhood – on the contrary, the thought of it brought me fear. (...) It seemed to me that teaching these children to read and write was more to their detriment than to their benefit.”¹⁴ The question of one's purpose in being a mother and a teacher is intriguing for several reasons. Firstly, Neda clearly has mixed feelings not only about her role as a mother but also about her role as a teacher. Secondly, she does not see in education, for example, the possibility of freeing girls or future generations from inherited religious or social and also, indirectly, patriarchal myths. Neda is also critical of the Zagreb teaching school's educational policy, which disciplines girls and makes them obedient and submissive automatons deprived of any initiative but also spontaneity: “In that eternal fear of hell and in that eternal apprehension to take just one step, to think one thought, without also feeling fear: isn't that a sin? – they became automatons, who moved their lips when both asleep and awake, whispering prayers.”¹⁵ But neither disobedience nor resistance bring happiness to Neda, nor is such behaviour presented as a value to be cherished. It primarily becomes the cause of her bitterness and hatred towards the world and her own body. After completing her education, she began her career as a teacher in a village in Zagorje, which temporarily gave her a sense of freedom: “I was satisfied for not feeling as if I have a master, for feeling that I could live the way I wanted.”¹⁶ The realization that the teaching profession provided her with a space for free action and unsupervised behaviour suggests advocating for the independence and emancipation of women, but the further course of the narrative still questions this idea of independence. Namely, the narrative is dominated by Neda's hesitation when it comes to her own position. Her moral and social habitus is presented in such a way that it indicates a constant questioning, indecision, and ambivalence about her own place, but also the place of others in the world and about the *propriety* of actions. Rejection of firm answers and awareness of the impermanence of knowledge also mark Neda's understanding of gender roles, friendship, or marriage. This is convincingly illustrated in the portrayal of feelings and roles that take shape around her relationship with the character of Pavao, a physician in his thirties and the nephew

¹³ KODRNJA 2004: 74.

¹⁴ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 284.

¹⁵ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 281.

¹⁶ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 283.

of the pastor with whom Neda lived as a teacher. She initially understood the feelings she began to develop for Pavao as a substitute for the lack of maternal love, which is why she refused his proposal. The idea of losing her only friend to be someone's wife was unacceptable to her. Here we are dealing with the identity of a subject who is in constant motion and ambivalent to her own status, knowledge, or role – teacher, mother, wife, housewife – and who is incomplete and ambivalent in all these categories. In previous literary and historical interpretations, Neda's hesitancy was to a certain extent understood in line with established gender divisions according to which women are irrational and emotionally *capricious*. Neda first rejects Pavao's proposal in a letter, but a month later she becomes his wife. Probably based on this stylization of the main protagonist, Detoni Dujmić asserted that "the true theme of the novella is a report on rationally inexplicable changes in women's feelings and moods, thus a history of painful sensitivity in different degrees of connection with the opposite sex: from almost inexplicable repulsion to equally incomprehensible slavish devotion; therefore, from suspicion to trust, from fear to worship."¹⁷ We would not, however, relate this replacement of platonic love with conjugal love, this turn from misfortune to unimaginable happiness, with her ignorance of herself and the way the world works,¹⁸ but rather to the influence of the cultural history of representations of gender constructs. Let us recall that the representation of Neda's character points not only to the fact that she did not see herself in any of the social roles that society usually attributed to women but also to the fact that she did not see herself in those assigned to men. Self-reflexive questioning of ideas about oneself and the world that surrounds the narrative subject is confirmed by statement: "I, who became an unrestrained, spoiled child with Pavao, had to be a serious housewife, who knows how to kindly entertain a guest. (...) How strange it was for me to hear them call me 'ma'am', and then those questions about 'my darling husband' – is he good? – how do I feel in the new class? – No, it was truly unbearable..."¹⁹ It is obvious here that the narrative subject cannot completely identify with the imposed and expected gender, class or societal roles. The narrative constantly functions to promote uncertainty about classifications or hierarchies. This is supported by the obvious *inconsistency* in the depiction of typified male-female divisions. Thus, in Milčinović's story, the demarcation between women as beings of nature and men as creatures of culture does not apply: Pavao as a man expresses his longing for a child, while Neda as a woman does not share this sentiment. Moreover, even during her pregnancy, she felt disdain for the idea that she had to share Pavao's love with the child: "Pavao longed for a child. Although this longing is so natural – I did not feel it. (...) Now

¹⁷ DETONI-DUJMIĆ 1997: 246.

¹⁸ Cf. DETONI-DUJMIĆ 1997: 290.

¹⁹ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 293.

I will have to share Pavao's love with another creature."²⁰ She perceives her own child as alien and foreign, as an adversary and competitor. In this regard, the difference between the male and female character when it comes to the desire for socialization and city life is to a lesser extent biologically and to a greater extent socially determined. During his education in Vienna, Pavao experienced the hustle and bustle of urban life, while Neda was deprived of it during her stay at the teaching school in Zagreb. What can be noticed is that neither Neda's nor Pavao's actions and reactions are whimsical in essence but are socially conditioned. Therefore, no matter how much the text tries to shake up patriarchal ethics, it is imperceptibly and deeply woven into the behavioural patterns of the characters. Even Neda's intimacy is marked by a patriarchal super-ego²¹ that scolds her and imposes a sense of responsibility for giving birth to a dead child, an event she could not have anticipated or controlled. She also takes the blame for the traumatic event that will destroy the previous marital bliss: "I gave birth to a dead child. In the deepest corner of my soul, something stirred, like guilt – and the thought of it being my fault that my child was dead tore at my chest."²² So, no matter how much the narrative subject is presented as one who resolutely verbalizes resistance to the predestined roles of wife and mother, her behaviour confirms the impossibility of resistance.

In the play *Bez sreće* ["Without Fortune," 1912], published seven years later, patriarchal ideas in representations of girlhood, marriage, motherhood, step-motherhood, and widowhood seem to weaken. The patriarchal community is not accepted without question, nor is it portrayed as harmonious. The drama is teeming with injustices, self-interest and cruel murders as consequences of romantic/adulterous entanglements. Despite numerous images of the subversion of patriarchy, the depictions of women in the dramatic text are marked by patriarchal relationships. The patriarchy is at work, although the concept changes space, time, or scope. However, although the patriarchal system is in force and is publicly supported, neither female nor male characters adhere to the principles of such an arrangement, which clearly speaks of its crisis. The gap between the imposed, prescribed, and exemplary way of life and the one that is truly lived is the cause of trouble not only for the central female character Franjka but also for most of the other characters as well.

The play is set in a Slavonian village at the beginning of the 20th century, and the play takes place over three summer months. The text focuses on the complex

²⁰ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 293-294.

²¹ "Often, when I imagined the child on those ruddy, tiny legs, I dropped to my knees and buried my head into the divan, as if I wanted to beg him for forgiveness for the times I found him superfluous." MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 294.

²² MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 295.

relationships between the characters, which are further complicated after the death of Toma, the father of two underage girls from his first marriage, whose present wife is Franjka. From the stage directions and the depiction of the characters' behaviour at the beginning of the play, the Slavonian village seems idyllic.²³ However, the idea of harmony, the unity between culture and nature, is only an illusion. The mutual (dis)favours and intricate passionate relationships between the characters, largely adversarial, insincere and concealed, are complicated by the idea that someone deliberately caused Toma's death.

Representations of women, characterized by tensions and conflicts, make it impossible to systematize feminine group identity. The text projects a difference or gap between younger women, who are characterized as hot-headed, impulsive, and passionate, and older women, who are assigned the role of wisdom. Older female characters (Baba Manda, Baba Marica, Baba Liza) mainly criticize the way of life of young women as well as men. Paradoxically, they prescribe duties and responsibilities to young women so that they can become *real* women, as if they are not already. The old women's preaching is partially similar to the commentator and moralizing role of the ancient chorus. In classical Greek tragedy, the chorus "had the aura of an extra-dramatic and commentary instance,"²⁴ and here the old women take part in events. The old women not only comment and moralise, rather their choral function affects the definition of the place of women in society. A woman can only be honest by mistake or as an exception, as in the case of the twice-widowed Franjka. In the choir's interpretation, her honesty cannot be a self-conscious choice but an existential necessity. And in almost all other cases, the *chorus of old women* calls younger women scamps, snakes, and cunningly shrewd women. Although they are also critical of men, whom they regard as gullible, devious drunkards and slackers, for example, they exclusively place the blame for a failed marriage on the woman. With such repetitive linguistic strategies, they circulate the community norms that define women as less valuable than men. If we perceive the role of the *chorus of old women* as a form of paratextuality, beyond the drama, it confirms the idea that naming is never a mere statement but also the inculcation of a norm. In this sense, the function of the chorus is creative – the concept of patriarchy is implanted through the repetitive production of discourse. At the same time, the dramatic text indicates that the power of patriarchy also works from those places in the social distribution from which this power is criticized or contested. If the women in the old women's chorus

²³ "You can see next to the barn of Baba Manda, the flax is coming. From a distance comes the sound of a tamburica and mischievous singing, which is getting closer and closer. Under the plum tree, a young man and his young daughter-in-law met (...) In no time there was a tamburica player." MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 332.

²⁴ RAFOLT 2009: 408.

are spokespeople for the patriarchal order, folk beliefs and narratives that govern the village community, patriarchy is simply all-pervasive. However, it should not be overlooked that this regime is represented in the drama as ethically and legally controversial. It rests on an entire series of problematic social principles (for example, Baba Liza is in charge of illegal terminations of pregnancy,²⁵ Aunt Marica passes on the techniques of bribery and corruption to future generations, men are often cruel to women and animals). Even if patriarchy is less visible in the ideology of this play compared to “*Nedina ljubav*,” the text in effect confirms the thesis of Sylvia Walby (1990) that one cannot talk about patriarchy in the singular, because this concept manifests itself in different forms and to varying degrees. It can be more or less related to repression, oppression, disciplining, hierarchization, militarism, and similar strategies that express gender inequality. For example, the husband of the young village beauty Manda, Mate Tadin, is portrayed in the text as a man who does not insist on the female monogamy; however, the community does not mock him, but mocks Manda (stigmatizing her with derogatory attributes: wicked, cursed, a snake).²⁶ Everyday practices in that imagined community are presented as dependent on conventions and social norms, and all identities as those that should fit into these practices. Let us recall here Milčinović’s life motto from her Autobiography: “It is not significant events that kill us, but everyday trifles.”²⁷ In the play, therefore, marriage is staged as one of everyday moulds. The voice of the *chorus of old women* presents it as a *cure* for sexual deviations. The old women condemn both Franjka and Manda Tadina for breaching marital norms. Manda Tadina’s promiscuity²⁸ is considered particularly problematic. The solution lies in compliance with the logic of patriarchy, that is, in finding the right man and monogamy. In the text, therefore, marriage is obviously

²⁵ In Nada Sremec’s study of the ethnographic research carried out in the late 1930s, *Nismo mi krive* [It Is Not Our Fault], published in the third book of the book series *Kako živi narod* [How People Live], Slavonian daughters-in-law testified that in the past the practice of illegal abortion was common in that Croatian region. The recollections of Slavonian women indicate that women were often forced to have abortions when faced with harsh socioeconomic conditions, such as the preservation of family property. These abortions were performed in secret, usually under the supervision of an experienced older woman (midwife), while a goose feather, a knitting needle, a pointed dogwood stick, a lilac branch, a marshmallow or hellebore root, etc. served as surgical instruments. Women often died as a result of poor hygienic conditions in which the abortions were performed. First, because women had no money to see a physician in case complications, and second, due to the laws of the time, they were permanently stigmatized as someone who violated the norm. Cf. SREMAC: 23-24.

²⁶ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 361. For example, Kodrnja maintains that behind the “gender association of women and snakes are, however, layers of archetypal mythical consciousness, the history of gender relations, the hierarchization of power and mythical attributions.” KODRNJA 2008: 89.

²⁷ MILČINOVIĆ 1968: 331.

²⁸ Compare MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 370.

necessarily associated with the procreative act of creating offspring, and extra-marital relationships are not tolerated for either women or men. The chorus of old women condemns adultery, which at the end of the play harms the characters who practiced it. Franjka is left with no potential happiness with a lover who committed murder, and Manda Tadina ends up in the furnace. Therefore, public opinion does not evaluate different forms of sexual behaviour consistently. The chorus of old women is quite conciliatory towards the *sin* of Franjka's lover Mile, but not towards the *transgressions* of Manda Tadina. By prescribing what is forbidden and what is allowed in terms of thought and deed,²⁹ the chorus, as the voice of the patriarchy, carries out normalization practices, that is, carries out attempts to stabilize sexual relations in marriage, which condition the judgments and actions of the characters in the play *Bez sreće*. Franjka's choice not to be bound by the conventions of patriarchal marriage or to choose the burden of motherhood at the expense of the pleasure of love does not depend solely on her or her intimate ideas or desires but is nevertheless codified by the unwritten laws of the village. Although patriarchy is presented in the play as order in a sort of crisis, we should not ignore the fact that the village validates desirable or acceptable parenthood and motherhood and *proper* marriage. Everything happens under its magnifying glass: "You know, the whole village will bellow."³⁰ Furthermore, a woman gains authority only through motherhood, which is evident from the moment Franjka refuses to have an abortion. Although she submitted to the wishes of her lover Mile, doing everything according to his will, she did not agree to his demand to have an abortion after the death of her husband Toma. She persists in her decision to keep the child, even if it jeopardizes her own existence and if she is left without her late husband's property. Therefore, only through motherhood can a woman in the community secure the authority, that is, the power she could not obtain in her maidenhood or in a childless marriage. As Vidmar Horvat observes, in Western culture, "reproduction, therefore, the sexual act that leads to progeny, is the only representational field in which a woman is allowed full subjectivity."³¹ The play illustrates the existence of value establishments of gender in society, so motherhood is valued only if it is biological. The attitude of the depicted village community towards the concept of stepmother is extremely negative. Due to the very fact that Franjka is not the biological mother of Toma's children from his first marriage, Baba Manda, as the public voice of the village, claims that the girl is better off dead than step-mothered: "Oh, if only you were there with her, six feet under. You'd be better off!"³² Accordingly, any woman who has not given birth

²⁹ Compare the history of codification of the ethics of married life in classical texts in Chapter V of the *History of Sexuality*, FOUCAULT 2013: 145-181.

³⁰ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 374.

³¹ VIDMAR HORVAT 2017: 15.

³² MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 356.

could be nothing more than a bad (step)mother. Neither the fact that Toma's six-year-old daughter shows affection for her father's second wife, her stepmother, addressing her as mama, nor the knowledge that Franjka has been raising both girls for three years, can change this.

Almost all of the relationships between the characters in the play are toxic in their social, political, and economic aspects. Through their behaviour and speech, the characters in the play take into account the written and unwritten rules of the village community, but beyond the gaze of others, in the dark of night, they indulge their passions, as Manda Tadina or Mile do. However, group identities are mostly presented as split and often driven exclusively by instincts. In order to satisfy them, they stop at nothing, they are ready to plot and subvert, lie and conceal, even kill. Only Franjka is portrayed as a somewhat morally conscious being because she is ready to give up her own pleasure for the benefit of another. However, since she does not completely follow the rules and customs of the community, at the end of the play she expectedly ends up "without fortune."

The play portrays the village patriarchal community as extremely hypocritical and implicitly condemns it. Although it is exposed in the text as a "unfortunate" concept, patriarchy survives. Be it gender or class, the same standards do not apply to everyone. Mile cannot escape his poor background, and although he is hard-working, he cannot own land. Franjka, despite resisting the patriarchal strictures of marriage or completely submitting to her man's will, still adheres to them when she forgives her lover's ethically questionable act of murdering his former lover. Furthermore, Franjka's already mentioned renunciation of love to achieve motherhood (offspring outside of marriage) and rejection of her lover's idea to have an abortion should not be read exclusively as co-opting the patriarchal order as her actions call into question its ethics and logic or at least give it a different meaning. As Walby notes, "gender relations are not static, and a developed concept of patriarchy is the best way of theorizing the changes."³³ It could be concluded that even though the dramatic representation partially outlines the strategies of patriarchy, it undoubtedly also represents a powerful tool for its redefinition, even the effects of a possible departure from that socially imposed order.³⁴

A longer narrative, "*Sjena*" [Shadow, 1919], has been assessed as Milčinović's most mature prose in literary and historical discourse so far.³⁵ Its plot is built around the news of the death of family friend Radomir Stančić, which the main female character, Mrs. Vida, learns from a newspaper. The chronotope of the narrative is

³³ WALBY 1990: 200.

³⁴ "The way we understand and frame important dimensions of inequality and injustice has important consequences for social action and public policy (Entman 1993; Bacchi 2009)." MILLER 2017: 4.

³⁵ For more, compare DETONI DUJMIĆ 1997: 249.

evident from the analepsis. At the railway station, Vida and her husband Veljko see off their friend, Radomir Stančić, who is going to war during the tumult of August 1914. Although we are theoretically *trained* to strictly separate Milčinović as an author from the narrative subject, here we deliberately do not do so. *Sjena* was published fourteen years after “*Nedina ljubav*,” and seven years after *Bez sreće*, so we pose the *forbidden* question as to whether her literary representations of patriarchy changed with age. If we agree with Jasenka Kodrnja that age is an important feature of the acceptance and expression of patriarchy and that statistically, with age, the acceptance of patriarchal attitudes increases,³⁶ we notice that the author’s suspicion of this concept has not diminished with age in this story either. It seems to us that it would be hasty to assert that older women, for example, in the play *Bez sreće* (1912), are presented as more patriarchal than younger women. If this opposition exists in the play, it is neither solid nor systematic.

If we consider that Vida in “*Sjena*,” was modelled after Neda in “*Nedina ljubav*” and Franjka in *Bez sreće*, the represented worlds of the female characters are by no means a sign of the author’s more prominent adoption of patriarchal values. We would even say that the gender stereotypes and boundaries established by patriarchy are further loosened in this text. Boundaries meander and character contrasts between men and women are not unambiguously presented. Veljko is represented as sociable and chatty, and Vida is the embodiment of a silent introverted figure. In “*Sjena*,” men are initially portrayed as more talkative than women; emotions are associated with women and reason with men, but the situation changes and established binary oppositions are devalued. In her study *Kulturna politika emocija* (The Cultural Policy of Emotions), Sara Ahmed claims that emotions are “associated with women, who are portrayed as ‘closer’ to nature, to controlling appetites, and less capable of transcending physicality with thought, will and reasoning.”³⁷ The author believes that emotions should not be viewed exclusively as psychological states but as social and cultural practices.³⁸ Bearing in mind the social aspect of emotions, by identifying feelings with the language of the female character Vida and emotional control with the male character Veljko,³⁹ the narrative raises the question of boundaries: are feelings common to all women, does physicality connect all feminine subjects, and prudence all men? And what happens if it is repeated enough times that emotions, which are shared by both

³⁶ See KODRNJA 2008: 71.

³⁷ AHMED 2020: 10.

³⁸ More on that in AHMED 2020: 12.

³⁹ At the very beginning of the story, Veljko is portrayed as a man who “must sort out every feeling, every thought down to the smallest detail, control every little thing and then he will come to the end of everything and know where he stands and how he stands.” MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 308.

men and women, are still more feminine, and reason is masculine? The narrative is structured around the question of why the modalities of imagining a romantic relationship should align with socially imposed concepts of communication, the world, happiness and marriage. For Vida, feeling is untranslatable into language; she is stylized as a Janusian figure split between the external and internal, which is only seemingly unconquered by sociality. However, opting for feelings and giving up language does not imply being untainted by culture or social stigma. On the contrary, in the eyes of her own husband, Vida became unsocialized due to her behaviour: – “You have to learn to talk to people, you have to get used to social forms. No one is asking you to give your soul (...) you have to speak, it doesn’t matter what, just don’t stay silent so persistently and demonstratively.”⁴⁰ Vida’s personal experience is presented as solitary and a consequence of her nature; it is something that cannot be verbalized, but paradoxically, when Vida communicates with her own husband, she also communicates the inexpressible with us as readers. The effects of language convey the *non-verbalized* past by evoking our emotions. In “*Sjena*,” it is precisely the linguistic construction, the diary notebook from which Vida’s husband learns that his friend was in love with her, that triggers Veljko’s suffering and pain. According to Ahmed’s theses, “stories of pain involve complex power relations.”⁴¹ Emotions are not clearly separated from social languages and roles; language conveys and entices emotions and allows their effects to be brought to light. The diary, which expresses Radomir’s *unreadable* feelings, produced a feeling of uneasiness among the spouses that we, the readers, eventually experience when confronted with the text of the novella. Therefore, feelings are not spontaneous, direct, and inalienable; they are still mediated by language. This is how the notebook revived the dead man and caused pain for an absent third⁴² who can reorganize the romantic relationship between two people. We can see that the story in the diary is not the same for Veljko and Vida. Veljko gleaned from the notebook that his friend was in love with his wife, while Vida only saw Radomir’s friendly affection. Nevertheless, the notebook is the reason for a change in the relationship between the spouses. Vida was previously styled as someone who is socially maladjusted, as she does not verbalize her feelings. For her, the words “I love you” were just terribly stupid letters without specific meaning.⁴³ After the fatal notebook appears in the lives of the spouses, their gender

⁴⁰ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 310.

⁴¹ AHMED 2020: 33.

⁴² The third is physically absent but active: “He is a shadow, he can do everything. No one can catch him, call his responsibility into question! (...) When I reach out for him, when I think I grabbed him with my nails, he apologizes and laughs at me surreptitiously.” MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 324.

⁴³ Compare MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 310.

and social roles are turned upside down. She suddenly becomes socially active, well-formed, and adept. If this change in Vida's behaviour can be interpreted as advocating obedience to her husband in the name of love, the narration shows that such a distribution of male-female roles is not fixed. The narration works in such a way that these roles change: "It seems to her now that they have changed roles. It was always he who spoke before and she was silent, now it's the other way around."⁴⁴ Change does not guarantee a happy marital concept for either the male or female character. Showing the permutations of marital roles here implies that they cannot be shown. It is as if the narrative represents the position that the absence of mutual understanding stems from the impossibility of harmony or being on the same path. The analogy that Vida tries to establish between the events prompted by the diary and the previous episode of their married life is therefore unsuccessful. Namely, when Veljko bought a long-desired charcoal drawing of a girl's face, Vida was extremely jealous and hurt. However, by reminding him of his own jealousy, she fails to translate that feeling of hurt into her husband's. The painted girl whom her husband longs for is just as absent from the drawing as the deceased Radomir is from his diary. The feeling and experience depend on the reader and cannot be repeated. The meaning of both image and text is built around the invisible, around what is excluded from representation. Representation opens within itself a place for what cannot be shown whether it is the feeling of a dead friend or the face of an unknown beauty from a drawing. The meaning of a notebook or a picture oscillates in the play of the present or visible and the absent or invisible. What is constant is the impermanence of the viewpoint; contradiction and irreconcilability of conflicting views. There is no absolute idea. Although Radomir is just a character in the diary, he wields power over Veljko. Thus, the diary notebook, which is in principle an unstable field of linguistic representation, opens a place for both readers-spouses who stabilize Radomir's elusive feelings by excluding their extreme instability and illegibility. Both the notebook and the narrative as a whole open up the problem of the work of representation. Here we look at Hall's reading of the work of representation using the example of Foucault's interpretation of Velasquez's *Las Meninas*. The author's narrative is structured in such a way that it "forces us to oscillate between these two subjects without ever finally deciding which one to identify with".⁴⁵ The concept of marriage is constituted by the narrative, but at the same time it disappears, it disperses like dust in paradoxical and disconnected statements.

The novella "*Sjena*" deals with the effort to petrify the concepts of love or marriage through the story. The ways of distributing gender roles in these techniques are unstable and incomplete. The narrative almost consciously complicates their

⁴⁴ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 325.

⁴⁵ HALL 1997: 59.

description, deals with the representational strategies of their establishment. The novella functions as the impossibility of deciding who is the torturer and who is the victim in a marriage. The meanings of marriage or love here are the results of the act of reading as an experience of crisis. In conclusion, it could be said that the imaginaries of marriage or love are only the work of the shadow, the elusive differences between the numerous precarious positions that the shadow occasionally occupies.

In the analysed texts “*Nedina ljubav*” (1905), *Bez sreće* (1912), “*Sjena*” (1919) and *Autobiografija* (1968) by Adela Milčinović, the issues surrounding the place and role of women and men in society and the problems of gender divisions in general are repeatedly presented. The reader is more or less directly confronted with pro-feminist shaped subjects such as Neda or Pavao, which call for a departure from hasty and thoughtless submission to *cemented* social constructs of women as non-political beings characterized more by feelings, intimacy, marital, and maternal identity than public and professional activity. They also distance themselves from the image of men as callous, silent, and rational patriarchs. In this regard, the texts warn us not to take gender classifications or their socially established hierarchization for granted. Our reading also rests on a feminist narratology thesis that both feminism and narratology in the analysis should simultaneously consider the linguistic, literary, historical, biographical, sociological and political text and context of the narrative. With this thought in mind, we problematized the imaginaries of what a woman is or should be.

We believe that representations of women are marked by patriarchy and its effects. On the one hand, patriarchy is presented as an order that is in a kind of crisis, a concept that is abandoned or criticized. But on the other hand, the proclamation and adherence to its unwritten conventions are a key landmark in the daily actions of the characters in the interpreted texts. Bearing in mind the text that the author writes specifically as a non-literary biographical draft of her own life, the *Autobiography*, it can be concluded that the author tacitly adheres to the rules of patriarchy which she persistently opposed in her literary texts. It is obvious that we cannot talk about patriarchy in the singular; its concept manifests itself in different forms and to different degrees and is in a closer or a more distant connection with repression, oppression, disciplining, hierarchization, and similar strategies for expressing gender inequality. Finally, we draw attention to the fact that the shaping of female characters in Milčinović’s work is an external sign that representations of gender identities are dependent on discourse, that is, subject to the influence of the interrelationship of knowledge and power as creative categories. One should not ignore the fact that the power relations function on the social micro-level, i.e., that it is precisely the “everyday trifles”⁴⁶ which

⁴⁶ MILČINOVIĆ 1997: 331.

govern the fate of female as well as male characters. The representations of gender relations read in this paper are not unequivocal and static; moreover, they are often ambivalent or devalue previously established binary oppositions between femininity and masculinity. Gender boundaries bend and overflow, in the same manner as the scope of women and men in marriage. It is through the representation and displacement of gender and marital roles, the transgression of personal identities in the texts analysed here that their uncertainty and unrepresentability are embodied. Ultimately, the analysed texts imply the idea that gender identifications, feelings or the concept of marriage cannot be represented without doubts or hesitations; they can only be mediated by words or necessarily blurred metaphors that further complicate their meanings, sometimes in extremely surprising ways. Despite this, the literary representation of patriarchy undoubtedly represents a powerful tool for its redefinition, dare we say, and a possible overcoming of the socially imposed order.

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Feminizam bez sreće: figure ženstvenosti u odabranim tekstovima Adele Milčinović

U našoj su akademskoj kritici književni tekstovi hrvatske književnice, novinarke i publicistice Adele Milčinović (Sisak, 1879 – New York, 1968) prepoznati kao iterativno tematizirajući mjesto i ulogu žene u društvu. Središnja perspektiva ovog rada više je usmjerena na simptomatične učinke ponavljanja (ne)književnih prikaza funkcija žene kako u javnoj, tako i u intimnoj sferi u djelima *Nedina ljubav* (1905), *Bez sreće* (1912), *Sjena* (1919) i *Autobiografija* (1968) ili biografija napisana za potrebe objavljivanja izbora djela Adele Milčinović u ediciji Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti. Metodološki utemeljeni na feminističkoj naratologiji, polazimo od pretpostavke da i feminizam i naratologija poštuju lingvistički, književni, povijesni, biografski, sociološki i politički tekst i kontekst narativa. Na taj smo način u odabranim tekstovima pokušali iščitati formirane vizije onoga što žena jest ili treba biti. Navedeni konstrukti ne mogu se izolirati od patrijarhata i njegovih učinaka. Ovisno o dobi, socijalnom podrijetlu i normama ponašanja koje ženama, ali i muškarcima, nameće već spomenuti, dominantni društveni poredak. Iz tih razloga prikaze društvenog statusa žene u novelama *Nedina ljubav*, *Sjena* i drami *Bez sreće* karakteriziraju brojne ambivalentnosti kao refleksije nestabilnosti rodne granice njezina identiteta. U skladu s tim, rodni odnosi u navedenim književnim modelima nisu prikazani jednoznačno i statično, nego višeznačno i promjenjivo,

osporavajući prethodno izgrađene binarne opozicije ženskosti i muškosti. Rodne granice također nisu ni čvrste ni fiksne, već propusne i nestabilne, baš kao i opseg muža/žene u braku. Zaključno ponavljanje beskrajnog mijenjanja rodni i bračnih uloga te transgresija identiteta predstavljenih tekstovima signalizira njihovu nužnu privremenost i neprikazivost.

Ključne riječi: Adela Milčinović, patrijarhat, književnost, moć, ženstvenost

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