

6.9 Written with Her Pen: Early Slovene Women Authors Breaking with the Paradigm of National Literature (abstract)

The Slovene literary canon in the 1848-1918 period is formed, apart from writer Zofka Kveder (1878-1926), by male authors. From the poet France Prešeren, who takes the figure of the first and greatest national poet in Slovene literary history, onwards, authors were building the identity of the modern subject in their texts. In Slovene literature, as elsewhere, the creator is an autonomous personality, an artistic genius ever since Romanticism. It develops and takes shape in relation to social reality, which is defined in the 19th and early 20th century primarily by bourgeois individualism, nationalisms, technological development and industrialisation. The rise of the Slovene intellectual, who rises above the narrow confines of the (most often rural) community he originates from and yet keeps returning to it to build his identity in opposition to foreign culture, is the starting point of many Slovene 19th century texts and, next to linguistic skill, a requirement to join the literary pantheon of the modern age. Although certain periods in Slovene literature, as shown by the Slovene comparatist Dušan Pirjevec (1978), typically have an author figure monopolising the literary sphere, we find other authors surrounding the key figure of a given period who contribute to the story of the progressive change of Slovene literature. However, to judge from *Zbrana dela slovenskih pesnikov in pisateljev* (The Collected Works of Slovene Poets and Writers), there are no women authors in the front line of 19th and early 20th century authors through to 2005, when the first volume of *Zbrano delo Zofke Kveder* (Collected Work of Zofka Kveder) was published. This does not mean that they are completely neglected or omitted, as they were included in literary surveys and school textbooks, but they always appear somewhere in the margins.

This book deals with Slovene female literary authors in the period between 1848 (when the first Slovene text signed by a woman writer was published) and 1918, when changes in the Slovene literary system took place as Slovenia joined a new state. As Marko Juvan, finds, the period of the 19th and early 20th century on Slovene ethnic territory is defined by cultural nationalism. This is a concept that Juvan adopts from the Dutch comparatist Joep Leerssen and which highlights the “role of the language as well as folk traditions, collective memory, literature, culture, art and sciences as the principal - indeed seemingly the only possible - factors that shape and maintain national self-awareness among the people through the process of cultivation (Bildung), while also displaying national identity within inter-ethnic or international relations” (Juvan 2008: 10). This Slovene researcher also finds that cultural nationalism left a mark not only on Slovene literature but also on the formation of Slovene national and comparative literary history (idem: 11). Slovene literary history, as its role was first programmatically established by Ivan Prijatelj, felt its mission was to hold up a mirror to the nation, which means it had the role of national self-recognition (idem: 12) and this is why “even far into the 20th century it belongs to the same ideology that Slovene literature drew from since Enlightenment - cultural nationalism” (idem: 13). This literary history and, even earlier, literary criticism made a positive assessment of works that in one way or another expressed Slovene national identity. As argued by Matija Ogrin, the content aspect of a piece of literature was an important baseline in Slovene literary assessment during a period delimited by the activity of two major critics, Fran Levstik at its beginning and Izidor Cankar at its end. He points out that the content criterion was “subject to historical circumstances, literary currents and various spiritual grounds, notably freedom of thought and Catholicism” (Ogrin 2002: 334). One thing all of the critics discussed by the above researcher in his study (excluding Ivan Bernik) have in common is that the content criterion “is characterised by a demand that literature should be based on national spirit” (Ogrin 2002: 335). Fran Levstik wants to go back to the essentials of Slovenehood and later Stritar sees the foundation of literature in national spirit. A very similar view is

typical of the Catholic critics Francišek Lampe and Aleš Ušeničnik. Ivan Prijatelj feel that literature should express the spirit or “soul” of the Slovene nation (335), and a national perspective is also characteristic of Fran Levec’s criticism. Similarly, Izidor Cankar’s enthusiasm for the vital poetry of Oton Župančič still stems from the belief that the poet is “artistically the prime voice of contemporary (national) consciousness” (Ogrin 2002: 329). The development of Slovene literature did not take place independently of literary assessment; Ogrin argues it was influenced at least by Fran Levstik and Josip Stritar with their criticism. At the level of content, this paradigm of Slovene literature is on the one hand determined by its link to a national perspective and on the other hand, as established by Matjaž Kmecl, by the special status of the Slovene intellectual that is thematised by Slovene writers in the 19th and early 20th century. Notably, for a literary work to be successful in the 19th century its content had to have a national character, expressed particularly in the positive (male!) protagonist of Slovene nationality.

Illuminating the development of Slovene literature and literary history with regard to women authors helps to clarify why for a long time their works were excluded from the Slovene literary canon. The baselines for assessing the works of women authors that had prevailed until recent research consisted of juxtaposing them with the key male authors of the period in which their work was produced. From this viewpoint, the divergences were often great: the language is not as rich, especially not in folk language, women fiction writers display sketchy or almost no narrative strategies that distinguish the works of their contemporaries, national identity is highlighted too much (to approach the dominant ideology and gain access to the literary system) or too little (being interested in other types of identity beside national) and the central motif and character are entirely different from those in the dominant paradigm. As a result, critics and literary historians in the past used to assess the work of women writers only as feeble attempts to approach the writers inscribed in the annals of Slovene literary history. In doing so, they completely overlooked the fact that, in all respects (thematic and formal), the women authors

were writing their own story, the story of a woman - *her* story, which was rather different from *his*. It was taken for granted that the latter was universal.

Moreover, the contributions of women writers, poets, dramatists, essayists, critics, translators and cultural mediators were studied partially up to the 1990s - within studies of periods, genres, writer generations and other literary phenomena as developed by male authors. Women's literary authorship had therefore always been observed "from the outside", as an underdeveloped part of the tradition outlined and created by authors committed to cultural nationalism. Facing a lack of references in national literature, Slovene women authors followed the example of their predecessors or contemporaries from foreign literary scenes, but these examples were exposed to sharp criticism, even ridicule, which may be explained by the dominant paradigm of Slovene literature at the time, in which cosmopolitanism is relatively rare and "tradition of intertextual generation of meaning by referring to national and international records [...] gives place to the modern 'realistic' trend of directly modelling the (linguistic) actuality of Slovene society" (Juvan 2010: 368).

It is also significant that even in those women authors who were given research attention, their oeuvre was not treated in its entirety. The creative women who were part of the Slovene cultural scene but also wrote in other languages were studied only as Slovene authors, leaving the remaining part of their oeuvre unexplored. Their foreign-language works remained marginal to the interest of national literary history or of no interest at all.

Juvan correctly determines an ideological base to Slovene literary history as well as comparative literature, in which he likewise identifies starting points derived from cultural nationalism (idem: 14). However, cultural nationalism is not the only ideology that formed the foundation of Slovene literary history and comparative literature. It may be inferred from many pieces of criticisms and even texts in literary histories and surveys that their authors were committed to traditional ideas

about gender roles in society. Hence their judgements did not lack an ideological background and yet they influenced the formation of the literary canon in the 19th and 20th century and, as a result, its exclusion of women authors. Some of them declared their views on women writers without any scruples, for example Ivan Pregelj, who candidly stated in his review of Marija Kmet's works that he is not a friend to women writers and therefore cannot be a fair critic of them (Pregelj 1927: 160).

The ideological base of Slovene literature, national literary history and comparative literature is grounded in a view of gender relationships that gives the female gender the role of the *other sex*. The coordinates of creativity are defined by male tradition, which is why women's texts, as mentioned above, always exhibit certain flaws or departures from the model. It seems interesting that this is the same attitude that comparative literature took to Slovene authors, who from such a perspective often became a "second-rate, derived and unoriginal phenomenon dependent on foreign influences" (Juvan 2008: 13). In Juvan's opinion, alternatives would be provided by a view that would "describe the development of Slovene fiction from within, for instance as an enactment of national mentality or as a reflection of acceptable social conditions (idem; 14). Juvan's findings in this point coincide with my view on the reassessment of the creative work of Slovene women authors, where gender clearly takes the place of the national.

Almost two decades of research on early Slovene women authors, during which I always derived from feminist theories and gender studies, and an inspiring reading of one of the seminal books on gender of modernity, from which I quote at the beginning of this introduction, at some point sparked the question of why not build my study around female authors - why should I always observe them from a standpoint that takes in their male counterparts as well? Why should I, out of scientific propriety and for fear of being reproached for consenting to biologism and essentialism, assent to the thesis that gender as the first and basic starting

point of research amounts to ghettoisation of women authors? Why not instead ask questions about female literary continuity, about what makes discourse written by women special and why these features do not exclude them from Slovene literature but rather make them an inseparable and indispensable part of it?

This is why my aim is to highlight everything in the works of early Slovene female literary creators that was different, innovative and therefore meant points of breaking from Slovene (male) literary tradition. Breaks from the paradigm are revealed in the following processes:

- introduction of sexual identity as a factor in the construction of national identity in literary texts,
- innovations in the sentimental model,
- a turnabout in depicting mother figures as central characters,
- narrative strategies in autobiographical discourse,
- highlighting the category of the literary sphere as a factor in the process of emancipation,
- creating the figure of the new woman as a fusion of modern views on the role of women in late 19th and early 20th century society.

The first chapter centres on the **role of women writers in cultural nationalism after 1848**. In comparison with the representatives of other nationalities, Slovene women entered the Slovene public arena relatively late, only after 1848; their countrymen in general likewise became actively involved in political life only on the eve of the revolution (Vodopivec 1994; Verginella 2003). However, in 1838 Matevž Ravnikar Požnenčan was already encouraging his countrywomen in his poem *Slovenkam* (To Slovenian Women) to join male poets and help them raise the national awareness. Slovene men invited their womenfolk to join their cultural struggle with forethought and not out of courtesy: the involvement of their “gracious countrywomen” would help establish Slovene culture to legitimise the idea of maximum political autonomy

for the Slovene nation; they would be stronger together. Ravnikar Poženčan was followed by Lovro Toman ten years later when he addressed his countrywomen in the poems *Edinost* (Unity) and *Slovenskim dekletom* (To Slovenian Girls). Although his direct influence on the creativity of Slovene women poets cannot be confirmed (excepting his wife Josipina Turnograjska), the first women's activities in the Slovene public domain are considered to include above all their participation in the cultural and especially the literary area.

To speak of "the first woman poet" or "the first woman writer" in Slovene literary history would be not only to consent to a discourse of genealogy but a problematic act, since it seems that the first woman poet is still an elusive figure. This position was long occupied by **Fanny Hausmann (1818-1853)** who published the poem *Vojaka izhod* (The Soldier's Way Out) on 25 October 1848 in *Celske novine* (The Celje News). Jela Tomšič published the poem *Prijaznost* (Kindness) in *Novice* (The News) (and was never to be heard from again), but the literary historian and editor Irena Novak Popov starts her *Antologija slovenskih pesnic* (Anthology of Slovene women poets) neither with her or Fanny Hausmann but with Ivana Lepušič (1807-1880), who signed herself as Jeanette when she wrote a few lines of verse into the visitor's book of the Counts Coronini in 1825.

The first publications of Slovene women poets and fiction writers are thematically and formally simple; the authors communicate and emphasise their national allegiance. Their sexual identity plays an important role as well but always in relation to national identity, sometimes using their allegiance to Slovenehood to justify their "boldness" in publicly displaying their creativity. In the period following the March Revolution of 1848, poetry and prose with patriotic subject matter was published in Slovene newspapers and magazines also by **Leopoldina (Lavoslava) Kersnikova (1833-1850)**, **Antonija Oblak**, **Milica Žvegljeva**, **Ljudmila Gomilšak** and **Josipina Turnograjska (1833-1852)**. She was the only one to establish herself as a writer of fiction as well and her work made its way across the current borders of the Slovene

ethnic territory. Her texts are noteworthy also because she did not restrict herself to Slovene characters but also depicted male and female members of the Croatian, Bulgarian, Czech, Slovak, Serbian, Russian and Polish nations, extending the topographical boundaries of settings in current Slovene literature.

The first interpreter of Josipina Turnograjska's narrative oeuvre, Ivan Lah, already pointed out that as a writer she loves "especially heroines and likes to illustrate women's triumphant power, as if wanting to make Slovene women excited about the national struggle" (Lah 1921: 31–32). Later literary historians likewise emphasised her enthusiasm for Slavic themes, without noticing how strongly her female characters differ from the currently prevalent figures of femininity in Slovene literature: the woman in the role of a love object and the mother. It was not until 1996 that Silvijja Borovnik linked the gender and national allegiance of her characters and wrote that "observation of Josipina's women gives the impression that the writer used 'national heroines', beautiful, strong and unconquerable maidens from 'Slavic history' to awaken an interest in Germanized Slovene women for their common past and, under the influence of the demands of the awakening middle classes, a sense of the Slovene 'national cause' or at least an interest in reading and writing in Slovene" (Borovnik 1996: 32–33).

Josipina Turnograjska was the first female author who not only helped build the female literary tradition but broke away from the existing literary models in her work. She was unique in Slovene narrative fiction for adding an exceptional female character to the numerous stories about the wars with the Ottomans while stressing her national allegiance at the same time. She improved the one-dimensional characters in Slovene stories about the ottoman wars by emphasising their sexual and national identity. The latter, with the exception of the title character in the story *Rožmanova Lenčica*, was not tied up with Slovenehood alone; her works also included male and female members of other Slavic nations. As a result, her name and work became known also to these other nations, transcending the narrowness

and smallness of the Slovene ethnic territory and cultural scene in the 19th century. Research on the representation of Slavic nations showed that Josipina Turnograjska consciously picked the kind of material she could count on to bring her success in a broader arena than the Slovene cultural scene. In the context of the struggle for Slavic independence, even strong, autonomous and independent female characters acting on their own will and convictions were acceptable. Owing to her distinctly pro-Slavic orientation and commitment to middle-class and Christian values, Josipina Turnograjska for a long time remained, despite her artistically modest oeuvre, the personification of a Slovene woman writer who is actively involved in the struggle for Slovene national emancipation, which is why her work never fell into complete oblivion.

Luiza Pesjak and Pavlina Pajk likewise touched the intersections between sexual and national identity, which remained a perpetual feature in Slovene poetry in the 1890s and through to the end of the First World War, when even the formally and expressively bolder poets (Vida Jeraj, Marica Cizerl Strnad) return to rural motifs communicated through an emphatically feminine experience. A new wave of women authors thematising women's national allegiance appeared in the *Slovenka* (Slovenian Woman) magazine (1897-1903). Simultaneously, the relationship between the home and the world appears in women's texts as prompted by their own experience. The innovation in these texts is again that they turn the attention to the female character, shedding light on the female migrant experience. The female migrant figure is treated earlier by Pavlina Pajk, but foreign countries are hostile to her woman (girl), and only become a possibility for personal fulfilment in Zofka Kveder's texts; she boldly adds new features to the female role that did not exist in Slovene literature until then.

Another innovation in the works of Slovene women writers of fiction is **introducing a different female figure into the Slovene sentimental and middle-class novel**. *Beatin dnevnik* (Beata's Diary) (written in 1877 and published in 1887) by **Luiza**

Pesjak (1828-1898), the first novel written in Slovene by a woman writer, was produced in the period of the early Slovene middle-class novel. Despite this, no reference to it may be found in studies on the beginnings of the Slovene novel, and the rare texts that mention its author only make critical rejections that are explained by the literary historian Miran Hladnik with the author's inadaptability to the dominant type of the Slovene novel in the 19th century: "The contemporaries had mixed feelings about Luiza Pesjak's work: on the one hand they were impressed by the educated and refined author, so they invited her collaboration and set her as an example, but as soon as she tried her hand at a genre that was not part of the programme national literature, she met with an adverse stance." (Hladnik 2007: 40–41)

When attempting to place Slovene women writers in the literary-historical context of the Slovene middle-class novel, their inadaptability to the mainstream is revealed. The middle-class novel along with its subgenre - the sentimental novel - was understood as a "male" creation with a central male and not female character. As literary criticism and history bypassed the sentimental texts of Luiza Pesjak and **Pavlina Pajk (1854-1901)** (or labelled them as trivial literature), Slovene literature moved away completely from the European sentimental tradition, in which the genre studied was largely produced by woman authors in the eighteenth and in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In her study *Ženski roman v evropskem sentimentalizmu* (Women's Novel in European Sentimentalism), Katarina Bogataj Gradišnik finds that Slovene women writers of fiction in the 19th century adopted the sentimental model particularly from *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson and also from the novels by George Sand, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, *Marta* (1873) by the Polish writer Eliza Orzeszkova and, of course, Rousseau's *The New Heloise* (1761) (Bogataj Gradišnik 1989: 26). Katarina Bogataj Gradišnik thus rejected the narrow view of the narrative prose of Luiza Pesjak and Pavlina Pajk as not very

good imitations of Eugenie Marlitt's work, which is what they were seen as in Slovene literary history until her study. The original and most important finding that Katarina Bogataj Gradišnik made is that a new female character appears in the work of both fiction writers, a relatively educated and independent woman, as a positive figure and no longer as a seductress. In the early Slovene middle-class novel (and also in texts produced later), a controversial or even adverse attitude to autonomous and independent women predominated, which also resulted from an interesting transformation of the sentimental legacy that occurred in the works of Slovene writers: "[...] the central character [is] a young man and not a female figure as in the original sentimental novel" (Bogataj Gradišnik 2003: 4).

Early Slovene women fiction writers (Luiza Pesjak, Pavlina Pajk in Marica Nadlišek Bartol) thus introduced the female character as the central personality into the Slovene middle-class romance novel and highlighted marriage for love as the highest value. If compared with the novels of the key 19th century Slovene fiction writer, Josip Jurčič, it is vital that the decision to marry (when it is the individual's choice and not the parents' will) should spring from love. At any rate, the most active role in the introduction of the new novelistic paradigm was played by Pavlina Pajk, who firmly stood up to the critics of her work when they attacked her in order to force her, as a successful writer, out of the literary sphere and take control of the Slovene literary market.

The prose of early Slovene woman fiction writers depicts women's search for romantic happiness, and yet the authors also weaved their own views into such works, the views of critical observers of women's position in society, sometimes laced with irony. This narrative strategy proved that they could distance themselves from the fictional world and reflect on it with humorous undertones. The irony in their works was not always recognised as a specific narrative strategy, but it is these ironic accents that show that the texts produced by the mentioned authors not only

compromised with the society in which they worked but expressed different views as well in a subtle way.

Research on the sentimental elements revealed that while the texts created by the women writers contain some motifs that bring them close to the sentimental tradition, these elements were transformed into autonomous pieces of narrative in which a woman's decision to marry does not spring entirely from feelings of love. Just as the rise of the young rural intellectual to middle-class society was a projection of the desire of Slovene male writers with a rural background, achieving marriage for love was a projection of the desire of the discussed women writers, and given the social position of women in the 19th century, this desire was as legitimate as the aspirations of their male peers. However, the male role in a relationship as constructed in the works of Luiza Pesjak, Pavlina Pajk and Marica Nadlišek Bartol, was so demanding that it was easier to reproach them with implausibility and plagiarism than to accept the democratic charge of the sentimental model (even if it lost much of its edge in Slovene texts) as a possible view on relationships between the sexes. Causes for rejection can also be found in another divergence from the currently established novelistic genre - the inclusion of emotions and reflection into works of literature.

The literary historian Miran Hladnik wrote that Pavlina Pajk's novel *Arabela* would be a classic if it had the following qualities: more life-like literary persons, refined thematisation of class relations and a critical attitude to them, a more skilfully constructed plot and more dynamic action, a more complex illustration of social reality, a more vivid and stylistically polished language and a greater share of irony.

Clearly, these points describe the features of the realistic novel. It would therefore seem that setting Pavlina Pajk, Luiza Pesjak and **Marica Nadlišek Bartol (1867-1940)** against the male contemporaries, who had more literary success and were canonised - the classics of Slovene realistic of naturalistic literature, is a process that

always defines their narrative texts as deviations from the norm only to label them as deficient. From a different perspective, these narrative texts can be assessed as the first and therefore valuable attempt to include a segment of the European literary tradition into Slovene narrative prose and modify it according to one's own poetic principles.

Reasons for the acceptance of the sentimental but not the realistic novelistic model should probably also be sought elsewhere and it seems quite likely that the situation of Slovene women authors was not easier than the one experienced by French woman writers and lucidly presented by Margaret Cohen in *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*.

Another break from the paradigm in women's fiction is the **construction of mother figures**. Mother figures rarely appear in Slovene literature of the 19th century. The early prose of this period sometimes include the rural mother but merely as a supporting character and not the protagonist. This situation is linked to the fact that, at the time, the majority of the Slovene population consisted of farmers, and the traditional sexual and social roles (the father as the central family figure) were largely preserved in rural settings also in an age of industrialisation. The subordination of women in the role of the mother, typical particularly of the pre-industrialisation age, is already evident in the Slovene oral folk tradition. In narrative folk poems, the mother is depicted negatively; unmarried mothers and step-mothers in particular are described as wicked and cruel.

The position of the rural mother in the 19th century is also reflected in the Slovene rural tale, in which good mothers are rarely featured; they stay silent in the background and have no decisive role in how the events unfold (Hladnik 1997: 116). They likewise feature wicked step-mothers or mother-in-laws more often. Helga Glušič emphasised that next to the figure of the 'Fair Vida', "perhaps the most frequently devised literary figure is that of the martyr mother, the rural mother with

a flock of children and a piece of land from which she draws her strength” (Glušič 1991: 59), but she only discovers such “martyr-like, patient and loving” mothers in the works of Ivan Cankar, Vladimir Levstik and Prežihov Voranc (Lovro Kuhar), i.e. authors who wrote (with the exception of Cankar’s early text about his mother) in the 20th century. In addition, she points out that “these firm rural wives are in many respects idealised” (Glušič 1991: 59). In other genres, dramas, novels and various short narrative prose genres set in an urban environment, the presence and role of mother figures is similar to those in the rural tale, i.e. marginal or (though more rarely) idealised.

Therefore, mother figures were not foregrounded in Slovene literature until the texts of early Slovene women writers, with the exception of Virgin Mary songs, which poetised Mary’s suffering at her son’s death. The poems *Trepetlika* (The Aspen) and *Jerihonska roža* (The Rose of Jericho), written by **Luiza Pesjak**, signal a turning point in Slovene poetic depictions of Mary by communicating the poet’s sympathy for Mary’s loving and close relationship to her child. In both poems, Marija is foregrounded as the active principle of life; Jesus is not included in the first poem at all and merely as the source of maternal happiness in the second one. Luiza Pesjak poetised motherly love in two more cycles and included it in her novel *Beatin dnevnik*. Her mothers are not silent creatures and they express their feelings as well as the distress and fears brought by motherhood. Similar features may be discovered in the mother characters of Pavlina Pajk and in the women authors published in *Slovenka*.

In the 19th century, national identity also defines the maternal role, shifting motherhood from the private domain into public life. The mother’s role in raising nationally aware children is highlighted by **Marica Nadlišek Bartol** in her story *Moja prijateljica* (My Friend), which touches on the problem of nationally mixed marriages, which were often the subject of debate in the print and literature in the late 19th century. Since a mother was expected to raise her children in her

own language and culture, a marriage in which the children assimilated a different culture meant national apostasy.

Most of the mother characters, who are portrayed in different relationships to children, ranging from loving to hostile, were created by **Zofka Kveder (1878-1926)**. There is no idealisation of motherhood whatsoever in her early texts. While mothers in the countryside are numbed by their struggle for survival and cannot or do not know how to show tenderness for their children (*Silva, V oblasti teme, Moja prijateljica*) (*Silva, In the Power of Darkness, My Friend*), the mothers in towns are calculating and interested above all in their own comfortable life, which is why they (try to) force their daughter into marriages that (will) make them unhappy, since the suitor is a blasé, much older man and tired of life (*Pravica do življenja, Strti*) (*The Right to Live, Crushed*), both 1901). The writer's works generally portray motherhood, which brings not only happiness to women but much suffering as well and is not productive in any respect. For Zofka Kveder, suffering and sacrifice are an inevitable part of motherhood but not something that women should endure silently and internalise to the point of being incapable of self-reflection. While the suffering of her literary persons is described poignantly, it is not idealised. The writer sees it as the consequence of entrenched representations of motherhood in various discourses that present the suffering and sacrificing mother as her only socially acceptable image.

The author furthermore exposes and decisively rejects the double standards of patriarchal society which, on the one hand, glorifies motherhood and requires a woman to make great sacrifices to achieve fulfilment as a model mother but provides no alternative at the point when she is no longer able to play this role to save her from a complete breakdown. The works of Zofka Kveder offer the widest variety of representations of motherhood in Slovene literature, ranging from pregnant women to elderly mothers abandoned by their children, from happy, tender motherhood to

scenes of cruel confrontations between mother and daughter and from infanticide to a breakdown or even insanity caused by the death of a child.

Zofka Kveder's debut book, *Misterij žene* (The Mystery of a Wife) (1900), enriched Slovene literature with new, daring portrayals of motherhood and pregnancy, which does not always end with happiness at the child's birth. Naturalistic narrative devices are used to show that a pregnant woman on a farm may lose her child when trapped in the taxing routine of her daily chores.

Even as the bourgeois and Catholic non-fictional discourse extolled and idealised motherhood, the short stories in *Misterij žene* unveil the dark sides of the struggle for survival in working-class families, where a new pregnancy brought no joy, only despair and horror that consume the wife and husband.

The mother-daughter relationship is presented and problematised in many works by Zofka Kveder, the negative role conspicuously occupied by the mother characters. Here one cannot fail to note that in her early texts the writer mostly observes from the point of view of the daughters. The same characteristic is seen in the works of women writers from German-speaking areas.

By creating varied mother characters who are placed at the centre of the literary text, influence the course of events and confidently express their thoughts and feelings, and by problematising traditional maternal attributes and models, Slovene literary creators enriched Slovene literature with new characters and motifs, following the examples of their European predecessors and contemporaries.

The inspiration that Slovene women writers drew from the European literary tradition is also revealed in **autobiographical discourse**. Slovene women's autobiographical discourse begins with the texts of Luiza Pesjak. Through memories of her childhood, the author establishes the character of a little girl who

inquisitively observes what is going on around her and at the same time learns about the restrictions imposed on her gender by middle-class society. Her texts are echoes of the events from the life of an educated and cosmopolitan middle-class woman. As a successful middle-class wife, mother and writer, she created a positive image of femininity in her autobiographically characterised texts. The sentimental narrative prose of her contemporary, **Pavlina Pajk**, encodes a (at least partially autobiographical) story about a woman who did try to break with traditional images of femininity and literary models but did not quite succeed in doing so. In a similar way, **Marica Nadlišek Bartol** integrated her personal views on the romantic relationship between an educated woman and a male intellectual into her texts, but her autobiographical discourse could not flourish within her poetics due to her long period of silence as a writer.

The author who made the most recognisable contribution to women's autobiographical discourse was **Zofka Kveder**. Even her earliest texts were autobiographical, and only a few of her short stories have no such background. The writer derived from her own feelings and emotions even in texts that are apparently quite fictional. For example, in her letter to Ivanka Anžič of 9 June 1899, she wrote about the novella *Telegrafistka* (The Telegraphist) (1899), "You're asking if I think as Liza does in *Telegrafistka*. Yes, sometimes. On the whole, *Telegrafistka* is all mine, all those good and bad feelings are felt by me, sometimes these and sometimes others. Take e.g. the love and passion!" (Kveder 2005: 523). This writer revealed most of herself in the tale *Moja prijateljica* which at first glance, judging from the title, is not an autobiographical work but an "outwardly disguised personal communication" (Koron 2011: 12). Zofka Kveder is not just telling a story about herself but uses narrative strategies. The text is introduced by a frame story in which the author communicates that she once had a friend who told her the story of her life before dying. The narrative frame ends with the words: "This is her tale." Zofka Kveder projects a part of her own self into the friend character, mirroring what the writer used to be at one point and converting it into a new image. The mirror is one of the

key concepts in feminist theory. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* describes a woman as a mirror to man, "reflecting the figure of man at twice its size". The split in the female self and the dependency on the view of the other that hampers attempts to establish an identity is thematised by women writers also in literary texts with autobiographical elements and in autobiographies: female autobiography "frequently multiplied, summed up as well as staged the experienced dispersion, fragmentariness and arbitrariness" (Šlibar 1996: 69).

There are two narrators in Zofka Kveder's *Moja prijateljica* the first-person narrator of the frame story and the first-person narrator of the framed story who is also the protagonist. From a narratological perspective, this is not an autobiography as defined by Susan S. Lanser, i.e. as a text in which the narrator is made-up, fictional and tells the story of her (made-up) life, but at the same time, we cannot ignore the link between *Moja prijateljica* and autobiographies that introduced a narrative innovation, the category of personal voice, into the first-person life story of a woman as a rebel. S. S. Lanser derives from the hypothesis that the woman's voice was the intersection of ideological tensions, crises, contrasts and challenges that became visible in textual practices. The author point out the pitfalls of women's autobiographical discourse, arguing that by emphasising her gender the narrator risks the reader's revolt, especially if the story being told or the self being constructed within the act of narration oversteps the boundaries of acceptable femininity. This is why many woman writers avoided first-person narration, for fear that their stories might without reflection be understood as autobiographical. The personal voice is therefore used by self-confident woman writers who precisely define the sexual identity of their story's narrator (Sniader Lanser 1992: 19–20). The personal voice is the narrator's voice in *Moja prijateljica*. The tale does not begin with the protagonist's melancholic return into the time of her childhood; the narrator immediately says the words that explain almost all of the events she tells about later. Namely, Lenka says: "People say I am not normal" (Kveder 2010: 511). With these words, she establishes a relationship to her environment, which does not

accept her behaviour. She starts her narrative violently by reporting her emotional reactions to the world around her and her feelings of redundancy in the family and broader community. The sentences are short, as though torn from passionate emotion, and are interrupted by silences, exclamations, questions. There is no calm narration of an autobiographer who recounts the story of her childhood with bitter-sweet feelings in Zofka Kveder. Not just in *Moja prijateljica* but in all her works, Zofka Kveder's narration is direct, relentless and without any nostalgic undertones. Autobiographicality is a constant feature of her creative work. Since she lived the life of a modern intellectual who experienced happiness and despair in love, and since she was able to find fulfilment as both a mother and an artist, her autobiographical texts are also a psychogram of the new woman and as such an unparalleled novum in Slovene Modernism.

Another innovative narrative strategy revealed in the works of early Slovene women writers is the **depiction of foreign lands as spaces of freedom** and home as a place of restriction, where space is more than just the location where events take place. I therefore analysed the texts investigated both from the perspective of travelogue genres and from the perspective of inscribing sexual identity into the text. I followed the findings of feminist narratology and narratology in the context of gender studies, both of which explore space in the framework of the gender matrix and examine how spaces are connoted with sexual specifics. Accordingly, I understood space as a cultural phenomenon that mirrors sexual ideologies: nature is connoted with feminine attributes and the town is its opposite, the achievement of civilisation. Early Slovene women authors discuss the category of space in their travelogues and problematise it in their narrative prose. The first text about foreign lands (**Luiza Pesjak**: *V Draždanih* (In Dresden), 1877) already presents the city as a space of freedom and a place where one can absorb art. Luiza Pesjak's attitude towards the beauty of natural, cultural and historical sites is also revealed in her images of Italy. Female authors of the second generation who wrote at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century ventured into other European

capitals as well as to the Orient. **Marica Gregorič Stepančič (1874-1954)** depicts the Orient or Egypt in her short story *Šumi Nil* (The Murmuring Nile) (1901) as a place of debauchery where there is sexual promiscuity and prostitution, but her female character is able to resist them. Her protagonist freely determines her own destiny and returns home with the aid of her countrymen. The theme of prostitution in Egypt was developed in an entirely different way by Anton Aškerc in his poem *Egipčanka* (The Egyptian Woman) (1906), in which his Malka is lured by the luxury life she enjoys as a mistress only to pay for her short-lived happiness in love and wealth with a moral and physical breakdown.

Ljudmila Poljanec (1874-1948) liked to use a lyrical mode of expression and communicated her travel impressions in two cycles of poems, *Ob Adriji* (At the Adriatic) (1906) and in a long poem in two parts, *Carigrajske vizije* (Visions of Constantinople) (1908). Although the *Ob Adriji* cycle sings the beauties of the not very distant town of Opatija and its near area, the poet is nevertheless in a foreign environment that does not restrict her. To the contrary, this is where she is delighted by the Romanian poet Carmen Silva and erotically captivated by the Russian baroness Sonja. Meanwhile, in *Carigrajske vizije*, she expressed her sensitivity to violence against women as well as her preoccupation with Orientalism. The first part of the cycle is the poet's vision of Christ walking through Constantinople ("Carigrad"), his wounds bleeding as he sees how the city had changed under Turkish rule. The second part tells the story of a kidnapped Christian girl who finds peace in the harem through faith in Christ. The poet perceives Islam as a threatening religion and finds comfort in worshipping Christ. The poet thus experiences Constantinople through her Christian and feminine identity most of all as a town where too much blood had been spilt and where Christians and women are still oppressed.

Travelogues created by early Slovene women writers have been completely overlooked in the past. However, the analysis showed that the selected authors used unique and innovative narrative strategies in descriptions of their travel

experiences. Compared to more contemporary writers, they used a personal narrative perspective and a light tone of conversing, and they put a female protagonist and her perceptions of the world in the centre of their descriptions. They viewed the world in a confident, sometimes ironic manner. They established a dialogic relationship between a depicted space and the people in it. They reacted emotionally both to the urban space and to more rural environments; moreover, they were open to new impressions, but they always rationally evaluated them and reflected on the state of being different. They paid special attention to the female traveller and her experiences, which is something that was not previously discussed.

The Modernist movement in Slovenia saw a shift toward the problematisation of the question of identity in relation to the conquest of urban spaces. In her earliest works, **Zofka Kveder** only daydreamed of travelling in a third-person narrative (*Moja prijateljica* (My friend, 1900)), whereas her texts from the turn of the century convey highly interesting portrayals of a woman's relationship to space. The writer discovered European cities as a "new woman", as a migrant and as an emancipated woman who did not submit to social rules, and so she could assume roles that her predecessors and many contemporaries dared not take up. Like the writer herself, her female characters explore the capitals of the old continent. They enter artistic studios not only as models but rather as artists (*V ateljeju* (In the Studio), 1908, *Slučaj* (Coincidence), 1910) and hurry about attending lectures in university centres or go out to the theatre at night without a companion. Relationships to space influence the process of developing the protagonist's identity. The urban location is most often presented as a space of emancipation. In this way, Zofka Kveder conveys an affirmative perception of the city as a space of freedom. The writer depicted the flaneur figure largely in her German texts. In the short story *Ich und meine Ziele* (Me and My Goals) (1899), she writes about how walking the streets of Bern inspires her for literary creation; walking is, to use the syntagm of the English researcher of the flaneur, mobile creation (Bowlby 1992: 28). Zofka Kveder experienced the Bavarian capital, Munich, in a similar way and presented it to the readers of *Agrammer*

Tagblatt through her experience of the city and not by documenting its points of interest. In her letters and literary texts, Zofka Kveder developed the image of a flaneur who freely strolls through the European capitals to watch street life and draw inspiration for literary creation from it. In doing so, she crossed the traditional boundaries between “male” and “female” spaces, between urban (foreign) and rural (domestic) topoi. By using the capital as the literary scene, she inscribed modern representations of femininity into her texts.

The writers analysed in this book are innovative in terms of their use of a personal narrative perspective, the female protagonist and her travel experience as well as the dialogic relationship between a specific space and the people inhabiting it. The confidence with which Kveder’s characters (even a little girl) investigate the capital separates them from Cankar’s protagonists who were, like their creator, torn between their native land and a foreign land; they were trapped in a vacuum of creative helplessness and urban (sometimes suburban) poverty. As Alenka Jensterle Doležal (2010: 69) already pointed out, it is only possible to understand the articulation of the cultural phenomenon of the city in Slovene Modernism when one juxtaposes Cankar’s texts on Vienna with Zofka Kveder’s texts on Prague. This thought can be expanded: Josip Stritar’s depiction of Italy in Slovene literature is properly complemented only by Luiza Pesjak’s *Popotne slike* (Travel Pictures). Without the portrayal of a determined and confident Alexandrian woman (‘Aleksandrinka’), Lina, Slovene literature would only have a one-dimensional, promiscuous Malka, a character Aškerc developed in *Egipčanka*.

At the end of the 19th century, Slovene women writers created the **figure of the new woman** in their prose and dramatic texts, modelled after other literatures and defined by financial independence, education and rejection of (petty) bourgeois double standards. The new woman as an icon of the literary fin de siècle was not identical to the figure of an independent woman of the period as she may be imagined today by reading the literary works of progressive European and American women authors

from the turn of the century and historical studies. The mentioned writers did not portray remarkable women in their texts, such as irresistible actresses, determined suffragettes or writers of essays on emancipation, but gave their female characters the roles of students and employees who do their jobs primarily to survive and not to fulfil their professional ambitions. These characters are in active pursuit of their happiness and striving for intellectual development and personal growth. When they find a man who accepts them as they are, they are prepared to cast off the prejudices and patterns they were brought up with. However, there are hardly any “new” men as these in the works of the earliest Slovene literary creators and so their new women experience no more than short-lived happiness in love and sometimes even pay for it with their own lives. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the tension between double standards and the new feminine image is thematised by many women writers (and some men) in European and American literature. Slovene female literary creators joined this literary current with their figures of new women and convey a modern view on women which is found missing in the texts of Slovene male authors.

The first to portray the figure of the new woman in Slovene literature were **Marica Nadlišek Bartol** and **Zofka Kveder**. New women in the works of Nadlišek Bartol work for their living but are not happy with their lifestyles (as characteristic of Roza in the story *Pod streho* (Under a Roof), 1897, Zdenka in the novel *Fatamorgana* (Mirage) and Danica in the story *Strte peruti* (Broken Wings), 1894) and so wish for a marriage that would deliver them from the daily struggle for survival (Biber 2005: 335, 359). A description of the daily life of teacher Zdenka in the novel *Fatamorgana* (1898) reveals a new woman who sees her fate as unhappy, dark and unbearable: “Every day, exhausted, she collapsed on the sofa after her meal, lit a cigarette and read or stared into space.” (1998: 105). The character of a suffering teacher who hopes to find a better life by marriage is also brought to life by Marija Kmet on the eve and at the time of the Great War. Her short story *Spomladi* (In the Spring) (1915) describes the toilsome daily life of young Pavla that bears down heavily on

her especially when nature around her is waking up and makes her additionally aware how lonely and forsaken she is.

Students are already fighting the daily fight for survival (and mostly losing it) in the works of Zofka Kveder: *Študentke* (Students) (1900), *Megla* (The Fog) (1900), *Saša* (1901) and *Ljubas Sylvesterabend* (Ljuba's New Year's Eve) (1901). In her early texts, the author set down not only her experience as a student but also as a writer. Her attempts to publish in Swiss magazines are evoked in the sketch *Talent*, where a young writer no longer sees meaning in life which is just a hard struggle for survival, so she cuts it short in the depths of a lake.

The writer's debut, *Misterij žene*, is already a literary articulation of contemporary debates on the new woman and free love. In a collection of very short narrative texts the young writer quoted the then extremely popular though controversial authors, Laura Marholm (1854–1928) and Ellen Key (1849–1926). Although quoting Marholm's words as a motto to her collection, she fell back on Ellen Key in her most provocative representations of the new woman. She cited her thoughts from the German translation of her essay about women (*Die Frau. Weibliche Sittlichkeit*; in: *Essays*, 1899), where the Swedish writer says that love is immoral without marriage and marriage is immoral without love. Zofka Kveder explicitly stated her position on Ellen Key's thought by writing that the words of the Swedish writer are the sacred commandment of pure souls. Thus, she also touched on the concept of free love, which was big issue at the time. She also touched on this topic in her sketch *Danes je bila stara štiriindvajset let* (She was Twenty-Four Today), which shows a young woman unable to deny her sensuality and first surrenders to a married man and then enjoys a relationship with another partner. The writer resolutely took her side, again citing Ellen Key's thoughts on feminine virtue and chastity, and wrote: "She was worthy of the deep, unacceptable, healthy love of a husband; she could walk down the aisle to the altar of sacred motherhood with more justification than

hundreds of thousands of wives who give themselves to their lawful husbands without love” (Kveder 2005: 503).

At the end of the 19th century, the figure of the new woman was frequently associated with a decadent attitude to the world, since, at first glance, the idea of a free, unconventional person who rejects middle-class narrowness (or, in Britain, Victorian morals) was close to the principles of decadence. However, there were in fact few points in which the new woman and a decadent attitude to middle-class society overlapped, as revealed by the representations of femininity in works about the new women and in decadent texts (Dowling 1979: 435, 437). The latter gave priority to stylizations of promiscuous femmes fatale which had very little in common with the women who worked for their own living in European and American towns and were most often disappointed in their search for a life partner. The decadents and the female and male authors of texts about new women were closest to each other in their open thematisation of feminine sexuality (Ledger 1997: 95), but the women writers had to, as written by E. Showalter, save her from the romantic images of prostitutes destined for ruin or voracious vamps, so they depicted feminine desire as creative power in artistic imagination as well as in biological reproduction (Showalter 1993: xi).

The sketches in *Misterij*, which are written in a decadent manner, are a response to the spirit of the age and also to the poetry of Vladimir Jelovšek, a Croatian poet and the writer's partner at the time. He had devoted his poetry collection *Simfonije* (Symphonies) to his Sonja, as he called his life's companion poetically, with the Russian version of her name. Zofka Kveder thanked him with her last sketch in *Misterij*, in which she declared her love for him: “All my feelings to you, everything to you, artist! EVERYTHING TO YOU, VLADO!” (Kveder 2005: 54)

In *Misterij žene*, we find links between the figure of the new woman and decadence in two other sketches (*Molimo k bogu, svetnikom* and *Moja duša je bila kakor harfa*

(Let's Pray to God, and the Saints, and My Soul Was Like a Harp)). The first sketch rings with enthusiasm for Nietzsche's philosophy, but in contrast to the German philosopher, Kveder puts women in the same position as men; women are decadents and super-humans as well. Just as men pray to Mary, "the pure, holy, ideal beauty", women pray to Christ: "On our knees we crawl, with our arms we call, embrace and love! Every living atom of our bodies burns in a holy, pure ecstasy of prayer, worship and desire for Him!" (Kveder 2005: 15)

The rapture that overcomes a woman with the man she loves is also directly expressed by the author in the sketch *Nocoj sem bila pri vodi* (I Was at the Water Tonight): "Hot feelings of longing flooded my soul, my blood shouting: You! You! You! It shouted and all my nerves quivered, and desire poured like molten lava over the pure nakedness of my feelings. Longing shone from my eyes and all of me burned with desire." (Kveder 2005: 26) This sketch clearly has an autobiographical background.

At the turn of the century, Zofka Kveder personified the new woman. She lived alone in a metropolis, earned a living from writing, had a short haircut, smoked cigarettes and enjoyed sex unmarried, but at the same time, her every day was a relentless fight for survival. Perhaps this is why the image of a new woman, as it appeared in popular fin de siècle culture, is ironised in her sketch *Ena iz množice* (One in a Crowd), which concludes with Pavla's death and with the words: "All about her was calculated and measured for effect, and even a few hours before her death she was giving instructions how many candles should burn and how she should be laid out and dressed to make her look best and nicest. She was, after all, the daughter of our nervous age, which is strained to the extreme and hungry of nothing but sensation" (Kveder 2010: 659).

As with many authors from the late 19th and early 20th century, Zofka Kveder largely depicts as a writer the incompatibility of women's emancipation, reflected

also in a woman enjoying sex without feelings of guilt despite being unmarried, with marriage and motherhood. One reason why her teachers, saleswomen and post office employees do not find happiness in love is their fear of violating the rules of middle-class society.

Many of Zofka Kveder's texts show the relationship of the female characters to their body and the related development of identity, which is importantly influenced by romantic or sexual relationships. In some of her texts, the writer presents the body through the eyes of men to problematize the perception of women as objects of viewing. In the sketch *Biciklistinja* (The Bicyclist) (1898), the naive Dr Doberšek is delighted with a graceful bicyclist and wonders curiously who the strange girl is, while it is clear to his friend that she cannot be a distinguished lady or she would not be cycling unaccompanied to meet an officer. The direct connection between cycling and sexuality is expressed by the officer's remark: "Hm, spicy stuff, I tell you, doctor; I was terribly amused. Hat Temperament! Otherwise, she is a waitress in a seedy suburban pub near Ljubljana." (Kveder 2005: 266) The image of a young, active, sexually attractive and high-spirited (single) woman cyclist appears in many popular texts about the new woman (Willis 2001: 53) and this is also the role she is given in the mentioned sketch by Zofka Kveder. The cyclist does not speak and is just the object of viewing and conversation. Such a narrative strategy suggests the writer's indirect criticism of the mocking and derisive attitude of men to those women that do not comply with social norms.

The fiction of Zofka Kveder portrays women who are intelligent, independent as well as attractive but frequently unable to find a partner because of their high expectations. An example is the elegant but sarcastic and ironic teacher in the sketch *Ko bi našla – moža* (Finding a Husband) (1900), unable to make a match with a promising lawyer because he is not, as she says, a whole man; he does not possess any authority or make her feel that they are equals. A similar ending is found in the short narrative piece of prose *Nemoderna novela* (A Unmodern Novella) (1912-

14) by **Marija Kmet (1891-1974)**, where Mina decides against a safe existence in marriage with a civil servant who does not love her as she is, instead choosing an uncertain future and leaves for the big city (Trieste) where she might find love.

An obstacle to a harmonious relationship can also be the husband's past, which is only disclosed to the young wife after marriage. While the mother generation persisted in such a marriage in silent suffering, the new woman leaves, for example in Zofka Kveder's early one-act play *Strti* (Crushed), in which the teacher Ana leaves the conductor Ivan after losing their child due to his infection with syphilis.

Zofka Kveder describes alternative fates of young female intellectuals already in her novella *Študentke*. Its protagonists study in Switzerland and the foregrounded theme is their search for love. The Russian girl Saša Timofejevna shoots herself on realising that the father of the child she carries does not love her and that everybody, including him, sees her a loose woman for having had a few earlier love affairs. Her Bulgarian friend Ana Bogdunova finds a good-natured husband who does not take life too seriously or expects much of it, whereas the Russian Liza Aleksandrovna is not completely happy despite her conquest over the man she fell in love with. Expecting a lot from each other, they often experience pain and Liza realises: "Oh, one must have something else beyond one's personal happiness; perhaps then one may be content. You know, one must spend the most of his spiritual energy outside, so as not to be left with too much, and then one is happy" (Kveder 2010: 502-502).

Although such words were more than modern for the turn of the century, Zofka Kveder showed, in her sketch *Pogovor* (A Conversation) (1907) which centres on a dialogue between the painter Jelka and her friend Ana, that neither a happy family life nor an understanding husband with whom she can discuss art (Ana's wealthy husband is privately only, as she says, a mountain climber) nor professional success are guarantees for a happy daily life. Her Jelka is a demanding woman with high expectations from life. As a result, she is often disappointed and in a bad

mood, though also aware that she still gets a lot from life. The writer in conclusion recognises that “life is not a bed of roses, that no one is flawless, that there is no light without shadow and that this is how it should be or one would choke on all the honey” (Kveder 2013: 346).

Just as Jelka is matched with a man who is able to make the new woman feel like his equal by respecting her, Zofka Kveder grants a similar partner to Olga in her lengthy novella *Nekaj navadnega* (Something Unusual) (1910). She describes the forty-year-old teacher Olga as a stylishly dressed, upright woman with a modern hairstyle, the role model of all her students. When she visits her friend Mira, she first of all lights a cigarette, of course. Olga marries a four years younger painter, a professor at the academy in Warsaw. Kolienski is an idealist and a dreamer, while she as a realist steers their marriage to ensure its success, especially after they have a child. As a mature woman she expects little from her husband and in her conversation with Mira says that she would not even take infidelity too seriously. Mira is different and therefore sorely hurt by her husband’s cheating. She is also hurt by his blunt way of telling her they will have no children because they could be damaged by his promiscuous life. At the end of the novella, Mira is a resigned middle-class wife who whiles away her time doing charity, and Olga lives a harmonious life with the man she loves.

The novella *Nekaj nenavadnega* foregrounds the new, modern woman who, despite being different, finds happiness once she no longer cares for middle-class prejudice. The positive charge of the text probably also comes from being produced in a period when the writer was experiencing happiness in love with the six years younger Juraj Demetrović. In her lifetime, Zofka Kveder had no colleagues among Slovene women writers of fiction who would portray a satisfied independent woman as she did. The female characters of the prose writer Marija Kmet wallow in sadness because of unhappy romantic relationships and, with the exception of Liza, who boldly leaves

for Paris as mentioned above, they end up psychologically broken and passive, just as their author was after the annihilating reviews of her contemporaries.

Another artistically well-crafted personal communication that does not deny sensuality and expresses feminine sexual fulfilment is the poetry of **Vida Jeraj (1875-1932)**. It approaches decadence and symbolism, “although its longing for freedom and rebellion against narrow-hearted perception of sin are delimited by the search for romantic happiness” (Novak Popov 2003: 241). The new woman, identifiable behind the lyrical subject in Vida Jeraj’s poems, oversteps the boundaries of traditional femininity with her undisguised sensuality, unable to yield to a man and only living for the moment, and so finds no more than fleeting romantic happiness. Such an image of a woman was problematic for middle-class society. Since the new woman does not live out her sexuality in marriage, it cannot be managed or restricted. An attempted sanction was to label such women as immoral and promiscuous.



Breaking from the paradigm in Slovene literature was the act of those women authors who followed their own poetics even if rejected by their contemporaries and who emulated European as well as Slovene predecessors and contemporaries. Their confident, tenacious and bold addition of new themes, figures, narrative methods and other formal and stylistic features was energised in contact with other cultures and literatures that were not seen by the authors as threatening due to their self-confidence and cosmopolitan outlook. Their efforts cleared the path for their successors and showed that Slovene Modernism also had the *other* sex.