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Original Scientific Article

From Bohemian Lifestyle to Feminist Consciousness: Sunčana Škrinjarić and Yugoslav Women's Writing

This article interprets Sunčana Škrinjarić's prose and radio plays in the context of Yugoslav cultural history as well as socialist and contemporary reflections on female authorship (its social significance as well as thematic and stylistic particularities). I reflect on Škrinjarić's trilogy, the novels *Ulica predaka* [The Street of Ancestors], *Ispit zrelosti* [The Matriculation Exam], and *Bijele strijele* [The White Arrows]. In the trilogy, written between 1980 and 2004, Škrinjarić uses autobiographical material to tell the story of Tajana's fraught coming of age and thwarted artistic ambitions. The trilogy sardonically reflects on the male-centered official and counter-cultural canon. While the trilogy is the most comprehensive example of Škrinjarić's recurring preoccupations and character types (ambitious mediocre man, sullen young woman, struggling poet, crazed communist) and also the work in which she first introduced her polyphonic, lyrical style, I argue that she has been exploring the theme of marginality since the 1960s. In the stories "Jedno ljeto" [One Summer] and "Trovanje biljkom" [Poisoned by a Plant], the non-normative bodies were finally given a distinctly feminist slant. As her short story "Mesareva ljubav" [The Butcher's Love] shows, even in the conservative 1990s Škrinjarić was not deterred from criticizing violence against women and the judicial system that facilitated it. The article also reflects on Škrinjarić's lesser-known novel *Kazališna kavana* [The Theatre Café], a depiction of bohemia in 1950s Zagreb – the liberalism of men was pardoned, while that of women could have led to a horrific and illegal abortion. Finally, Škrinjarić's radio play "Tamna soba" [The Dark Room], an intersectional representation of various socialist femininities, reflects pessimistically on the erasure of women's oeuvres. These works are placed in a dialogue with scholarship on Yugoslav women writing (Lukić, Zlatar, Lóránd) as well feminist theory (Halberstam) and narratology (Cohn, Rimmon-Kenan).

Keywords: second-wave feminism, socialism, *écriture feminine*, creativity, agency .

1. Introduction

Sunčana Škrinjarić articulated marginality and corporeality in a way that was to become typical of Yugoslav women's writing, both in theoretical discussions and in the lively literary production of the 1980s.[1] Škrinjarić's formal inventiveness and style, described as "fluid [and] evocative" (2001, 264) by British Slavic studies scholar Celia Hawkesworth, one of the few authors to mention her adult prose, is omitted from regional feminist history. In this article, I argue that Škrinjarić should be included in the canon of Yugoslav women's writing because of her focus on female characters and feminist themes, as well as her polyphonic, poetic style.

In her 2018 book *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, historian Zsófia Lóránd emphasizes that the Yugoslav project of general emancipation was fundamentally influenced by Marx's paraphrase of Fourier's assertion that the social status of women indicates the level of social progress (2018, 48). According to historian Chiara Bonfiglioli, criticism of women's inequality was already present before the emergence of second-wave feminism in Yugoslavia. It was a part of official discourses, especially those of women's organizations such as the Antifašistički Front Žena [Anti-Fascist Women's Front] and, after its dissolution in 1953, Savez Ženskih Društava [Union of Women's Societies]. The Anti-Fascist Women's Front, founded in 1942, continued its work in the post-war period with the aim of representing "the concerns of women" as part of "wider class-based" issues (Bonfiglioli 2021, 69-71). While the organization's cadres shared the Party's stance on feminism as a bourgeois distraction from proletarian solidarity, the historian argues that they addressed the discrepancy between formal rights and daily practice, denounced party members for their patriarchal views, and internally discussed violence against women (Bonfiglioli 2021, 71; Bonfiglioli 2014, 13). Because they addressed the listed feminist issues, Bonfiglioli shows that these activists belong to the red feminist wave, the mid-20th century movement that focused on improving women's civil rights in collaboration

[1] This article was originally written as part of my Master's thesis (defended at Central European University in 2021) entitled *From Nonconformist Lifestyle to Feminist Consciousness: Reading Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević in the Context of Yugoslav Second-wave Feminism*. I would like to thank Jasmina Lukić, who was extremely generous with her time and feedback while I was writing my thesis and, like Škrinjarić's heroines, struggling with isolation and self-doubt. My thesis was also the basis for the article "Perpetually Peripheral: Life Narratives of/by Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević" (*Dacoromania litteraria*, 2023). "Perpetually Peripheral" primarily offers insights into the life narratives of the two titular authors and criticizes the entrenched timeline of Yugoslav feminism, which tends to exclude Cold War creatives. As part of my ongoing efforts to promote Škrinjarić's works, I have written a more popular overview of her life and output for the feminist website *VoxFeminae*: https://voxfeminae.net/strasne-zene/suncana-skrinjaric-od-boemke-do-feministkinje/ (accessed 19.4.2024).

with the state (2021, 67). By challenging the understanding of the Cold War era as uniformly conservative, Bonfiglioli is important for contextualizing women writers who, like Škrinjarić, entered the literary scene before the emergence of second-wave Yugoslav feminism.

From the 1970s until its violent disintegration, socialist Yugoslavia had a network of scholars and activists who were avid readers and translations of foreign feminist theory and fiction. The group became known as second-wave feminists or, more rarely, neo-feminists. They were also quick to establish a local knowledge production that, while accepting socialism as ideologically and economically just, criticized the state for not doing enough for women's emancipation. As Lóránd explains, the second-wave feminists challenged "the socialist state … based on one of its biggest promises, the equality of women" (2018, 2). Although she never belonged to neo-feminist circles, the proliferation of Yugoslav critical thinking about gender inequality coincided with Škrinjarić's turn to bleak depictions of women's lives.

2. Transmissions from the Outskirts

Sunčana Škrinjarić was born in Zagreb in 1931. As the precocious child of an artistically inclined, middle-class family, she published her first volume of poetry at the age of 15. Her stories for children became popular in the 1960s. Originally appearing in literary magazines and newspapers since the 1960s, her short prose for adults were brought together in the collection *Noć s vodenjakom* [A Night with an Aquarius] in 1978. Together with her texts from the 1980s, Škrinjarić republished them in the 1991 collection *Jogging u nebo* [Jogging in the Sky]. Her final collection of short stories, *Pasji put* [A Dog's Path], was published in 1996.

Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu [The Book on Sunčana and Sever], co-edited by scholar Lidija Dujić and writer Ludwig Bauer, is publication containing photographs, Škrinjarić's detailed biography, and the writer's interpretation of her most notable works. While primarily describing Škrinjarić's relationship with poet Josip Sever, it also reveals the writer's somber understanding of her literary legacy. As she remarked to Dujić shortly before her death in 2004, Škrinjarić believed that future scholars and readers will not be interested in her works (Dujić and Bauer 2010, 12). She considered *Ulica predaka* [The Street of Ancestors], the first part of her coming-of-age trilogy, to be her best work (Dujić and Bauer 2010, 8).

In *The Street of Ancestors* (1980), the author debuted her experimental style which is characterized by meandering sentences and shifting points

of view. Like the subsequent installments *Ispit zrelosti* [The Matriculation Exam] (2001) and *Bijele strijele* [The White Arrows] (2004), the novel follows Tajana, a peculiar girl from an abusive family who loses its fortune during socialism. The trilogy depicts the protagonist's maturation from the early 1930s to the late 1950s. In largely linear narrative, the readers are given details about Tajana's traumatic childhood, her turbulent school years during the early years of socialism, as well as several affairs, a few attempts at writing, and numerous encounters with notable historical figures. Before the novels were out, Škrinjarić published several episodes from the trilogy as short stories written in the first person. Rewriting in the third person enabled ironic distancing from the events described as well as a vivid portrayal of the contrasting perspectives and divergent speech styles.

Tajana's formative years largely coincide with Škrinjarić's biography. The 2004 edition of Škrinjarić's selected works, which, as indicated in her letter to the editor Ante Matijašević included at the very end, was published in collaboration with the author, describes the trilogy as autobiographical. Along with this categorization, Škrinjarić's professed tendency to incorporate personal experiences into the fiction (Dujić and Bauer 2011, 8) suggests that her coming-of-age novels are confessional. The comparison between the biographies of Sunčana and Tajana clearly shows that the two women, who share the history of employment, creative aspirations and family dynamics (middle-class origins, early death of younger brother), are doubles. *The Street of Ancestors*, *The Matriculation Exam* and *The White Arrows* not only offer interesting insights into the eventful life of a writer who is usually remembered as the benevolent auntie behind many classics of Croatian children's literature, but are also among the most extensive regional female formational narratives. Moreover, like Škrinjarić's 1988 novel *Kazališna kavana* [The Theatre Café], portrayal of bohemia in 1950s Zagreb, they describe the changing gender norms during the Cold War, an era usually underrepresented in feminist scholarship (Bonfiglioli 2014, 1).

While working at Radio Zagreb, Škrinjarić began to write radio plays. In addition to farces set in newly erected socialist blocks, she wrote three plays that show a shift towards polyphony and centering female characters (that is, defining traits of her novels). While the 1970s plays *Konferencija za štampu ili ponovno sužavanje* [Media Conference or Narrowing Again] and *Vježba za četiri glasa* [A Study for Four Voices] are about established male writers and their female admirers, *Tamna soba* [The Dark Room], which aired in 1983, depicts stalled female creativity. *The Dark Room* is a fragmented cacophony of voices discussing who should move into the reclusive protagonist's studio apartment after her death. Remembered by her friends as a gifted artist and

by her neighbors as a *loose* woman "visited by all sorts of suspicious fellows" (Škrinjarić 2004, 78), the lonesome protagonist's best friends tell how

> she painted many paintings
> and one day burned them in the field
> I have no talent for painting, she said. (Škrinjarić 2004, 68)

The hauntingly complete eradication of the artist's works is remedied by her feeble attempt of narrating about herself. While the other voices merge as the play nears its end, (the arrival of the new tenant, who opens the blinds and lets the sun illuminate the studio) the protagonist's voice stays distinguishable – her speech is conveyed in capital letters.

In Croatian literary studies, Škrinjarić is a highly regarded author of children's books. As can be seen from the proceedings of the conference held in Osijek in 2008, the only volume to analyze her works in detail, her texts aimed at adults are usually regarded as examples of established literary styles such as realism and postmodernism (Ivančić 2009; Ljubešić 2009). She is not mentioned in feminist overviews of Yugoslav women's writing (Lukić 1996; Zlatar 2004; Lóránd 2018; Lóránd 2019), which focus mainly on three writers commonly associated with poetics: Dubravka Ugrešić, Irena Vrkljan, and Slavenka Drakulić. Moreover, Škrinjarić's feminism is wrongly dismissed by Irena Lukšić, a literary scholar who has written the only comprehensive overview of Škrinjarić's prose. Lukšić claims that Škrinjarić only briefly aroused the interest of her more notable contemporaries, such as the historian Lydia Sklevicky and the journalist Vesna Kesić, because she was the granddaughter of the interwar socialist and women's rights activist Zofka Kveder (2002, 127). In the following sections, I refute this claim by analyzing Škrinjarić's critical depictions of gender norms and sexual violence, as well as her literary style, whose thematic range, generic fluidity, and formal inventiveness are consistent with the Yugoslav interpretation of women's writing.

3. How the Yugoslav Femininity Was Tempered

The newly established socialist regime set out to shape the Yugoslav population into "physically and morally healthy, courageous and creative" (Duda 2017, 10) citizens. Embodied by exemplary personae such as the partisans, the shock work heroes (Hofman and Sitar 2016, 248) and the "new 'woman-worker-mother' type" (Lóránd 2015, 125), these normative

Yugoslavs with their productive bodies form the backdrop against which Škrinjarić explores marginalized subjects.

Škrinjarić has been fascinated by the lumpenproletariat since her first collection of short stories. For example, "Noćni trg" [The Night Square] (1976) is a tableau of the people gathered in the central part of Zagreb, consisting of the farmers' market and the cathedral. A hub of commerce and worship during the day, the square is populated by beggars and sex workers at night. These nocturnal creatures have no fixed addresses. Unable to articulate themselves, they are prone to "murmuring and grinning, stammered nocturnal speech" (Škrinjarić 1978, 59). Moreover, the characters depicted have severely damaged bodies that fuse together during the debauchery. "The Night Square" parodies the socialist collective, citizens whose bodies are clearly separated, optimally shaped, and displayed in ceremonies that blend militarism and athleticism to convey that Yugoslav society was "a fully organized and disciplined whole" (Pejić 2001, 62).

Presented from a neutral, detached perspective in her early short story, movement through the city at dusk becomes a gendered endeavor when focalized through female characters in *The Street of Ancestors* and *The Theater Café*. Shady places promise adventure, but also harbor the danger of assault. Škrinjarić's fascination with the underworld, which is transformed into the articulation of female experience of urbanity, is in line with a view of women's prose influenced by Russian literature, which Ugrešić articulated in her 1988 essay "Surovo žensko pismo" [Women's Brutal Writing]. As Lóránd summarizes, Ugrešić argues that the introduction of the first-person narrative (skaz), as well as quotidian topics, encouraged the development of women's writing in Russia (2018, 110). Without elaborating, Ugrešić also mentions that the depiction of marginal characters, which were popular in "black" Russian prose, allowed the voices of "thieves, drunks, madmen, homosexuals and – finally – a woman" (1988, 166).

Another mode of straying from the newly forged socialist subjectivity is portrayal of *madness* and suicide. As the depiction of the demimonde, these motifs are frequent in Yugoslav women's writing, but not immediately recognizable as gender-specific. According to Jasmina Lukić, a literary scholar whose overview of Croatian and Serbian women's writing marks the beginning of the post-socialist engagement with this corpus, the aforementioned themes are used by Serbian author Biljana Jovanović to "criticize institutional psychiatric practice" (1996, 229). They are also present in works by the key Croatian representatives of this poetics. In her 1981 novel *Štefica Cvek u raljama života* [Steffie Speck in the Jaws of Life], Ugrešić treats them farcically. Preceded by parodied advice from women's magazines,

a warning not to use a hairdryer while bathing, Steffie takes an *overdose* of a few sleeping pills and multivitamins. Vrkljan not only examines the lives of actress Dora Novak (declared incurable and living as a shut-in) and poet Marina Tsvetaeva (died by hanging), but also mentions a number of tortured poets who committed suicide. Drakulić dedicates one of the chapters of her 1987 novel *Holograms straha* [Holograms of Fear] to the relationship between gender and the staging of one's own death. By writing about the carefully planned gas asphyxiation of her friend Nina and the orderly apartment she left behind, the author presents Nina's thoughtfulness as a female trait, which Lukić interprets as a component of the novel's female-centered world (1996, 236–7).

The switch to third-person narration allowed Škrinjarić to include marginalized voices directly, without the editorial interventions found in "The Night Square". *The Theatre Café* (1988) ends on this note. The novel depicts Kavkaz, the café frequented by the Zagreb bohemians of the 1950s. Before it was converted into an upscale eatery, the Kavkaz's patrons were an unnamed poet and translator, who can be identified as Tin Ujević, and the writer Vjekoslav Majer, who is addressed as Lojzek. These famous cultural figures are only mentioned in passing. Instead, Škrinjarić focuses on anonymous women – the local beauty Ivona, the aspiring actress Mia and the sentimental Eda. Eda, who first appears in the 1985 short story "Stablo" [The Tree], is a failed poet and daughter of an ascetic communist who was eventually declared insane and institutionalized. While the final chapter is about Ivona and Mia, who have married into wealth, the conclusion consists of a series of frenzied letters written by Ana, a minor character who was committed to a sanatorium after a botched abortion and suicide attempt.

The Street of Ancestors alludes to the hereditary dimension of *madness* – both Tajana's Auntie, the meek sister of her despotic mother, and her Real Daddy, zealous partisan who accused the Party of not being sufficiently committed to communism, spent some time in asylums. Tajana occasionally dreams of throwing herself under the train. Narrator ironically scrutinizes the young heroine: "she could not overcome her hypersensitivity. She still cried before going to bed and wept like unhinged during sad movies in the cinema" (Škrinjarić 2004, 354). As she approaches her thirties, Tajana's reluctance to start a family of her own is viewed with suspicion by other characters – both lines of commentary implicitly draw on opposing images of femininity (stoicism versus girlish emotionality, that is, married mother versus spinster).

The link between madness and gender is made explicit in *The Dark Room* (1983) as the lived experience of the protagonist – a reclusive woman artist. According to Lukić, the figure of the artist was common in

Yugoslav women's literature because she enabled autobiographical poetics by connecting the authors with their heroines. Moreover, this character type, widely regarded as an example of nonconformity, was likely to challenge "conventions related to gender" (Lukić 1996, 228). Škrinjarić uses her character to criticize gender norms, but the play itself also reflects on the pervasive racism against the Yugoslav Romani population. While her strange behavior such as loud monologuing and barking with her dog is mentioned, the artist is considered crazy by her neighbors mainly because she is a woman living alone. Her melancholia is repeatedly attributed to her singleness and childlessness. A neighbor, who describes her as "not quite there … always wanting what she could not have", remarks that "if she had had three ruffians, she would not have had time to dwell on it" (Škrinjarić 2004, 73). Those living in the artist's immediate surroundings repeatedly foreground her *reproductive failures*. Like her creative output (poems locked up in a chest and paintings burned in the yard) the artist's biological output is non-existent. Another female voice emerges to articulate contrasting and, in Yugoslav culture, even more obscure experience. A Romani mother of ten, living in an abandoned bus because her family is denied state housing, tries unsuccessfully to justify her right to the artist's studio. Her *overproductive* body is judged by the tenants – their discourse, which focuses on the allegedly poor upbringing of *uncivilized* children, showcases the ways in which gender intersected with race during nominally egalitarian Yugoslav socialism.

As she was born in interwar Yugoslavia, Škrinjarić spent her formative years in a society whose female ideal changed from the androgynous figure of the partisan fighter to the socialist woman who was supposed to be elegant, yet modest and practical (Sitar 2020, 110). According to ethnologist Polona Sitar, official culture urged women to signal the success of modernization without succumbing to consumerism or vulgarity (2020, 104-5). Škrinjarić's trilogy reflects the speed at which the norms of femininity were changing. By introducing the figure of the former partisan Šile, who attends high school as an adult and excels in military training courses to the dismay of her classmates and the admiration of Tajana, Škrinjarić contrasts two rejected models of femininity – the female fighter, a character written out of fiction published immediately after the war (Kolanović 2011, 203-7), and the middle-class girl unable to participate in important components of socialist life such as sports. Moreover, Škrinjarić depicts the self as constantly in the making. She narrates how Tajana

> wanted to make everyone like her, but it was very tiring, she had to strain herself, pretend, be kind, her true nature would erupt like a

> volcano after a few attempts and she would momentarily ruin and spoil everything, then she was desperate, her lovely intentions turned into something nasty and stupid, she lacked perseverance, she threw herself on the floor, kicked her legs in anger and cried. (Škrinjarić 2004, 60)

Tajana's occasionally monstrosity is visible behind the veneer of girlish loveliness – she throws tantrums, bites a classmate with her "horrendous, vampire-like teeth" (Škrinjarić 2004, 30), and has early outbursts of sadism and masochism. The adult rendition of aberrant femininity is embodied by the artist from *The Dark Room*. Škrinjarić's female characters vacillate between the grotesque and the beautiful (Tajana's feigned loveliness and the naked figure of the artist on the balcony admired by one of her neighbors). Moreover, they display a queer form of rebellion that goes beyond the conventional understanding of feminist agency.

Neither planned nor pleasurable, their inability to conform corresponds to Jack Halberstam's articulation of failure as an event with esthetic qualities. Failure reveals the patriarchal underpinnings of "feminine success" while forming an alternative feminist archive that favors "shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming, and violation" (Halberstam 2011, 4). Halberstam describes "shadow feminism", an underside of the optimistic belief in future emancipation, as a propensity for commitment-breaking, inertia and suffering, habits and states that are often not considered resistance (2011, 124–9). When Lukšić argues that Škrinjarić does not belong to the corpus of Croatian women's literature due to a lack of coherent feminist stance in her works (2001, 124), she reaffirms very narrow vision of agency. Škrinjarić is not interested in self-actualized heroines who revel in their ability to overcome setbacks with the support of like-minded *sisters*. However, her exploration of uncanny, ailing, and lonely (female) characters do subvert the scripts of (socialist) feminine success. Between two forms of active femininity, partisan and neo-feminist one, Škrinjarić articulates marginality, alienation, and self-sabotage which can also occasionally sabotage prevailing social norms.

4. Unruly Bodies, Unconventional Sexualities

While embodiment is widely recognized as a key topic in women's writing, the extent to which it should define poetics is debatable. In her 1983 essay, literary scholar Ingrid Šafranek warns against reducing women's writing to its recognizable motifs such as "affect, intuition, corporeality and

organicity" (1983, 17). Although Šafranek defines it as "writing the body as it is felt from within" (1983, 20), she argues that avant-garde textuality should be privileged over content. Šafranek's conclusion is clearly articulated, but her argument meanders between emphasizing and downplaying the role of the body in women's writing. In Ugrešić's exploration of the concept, corporeality, together with an interest in trivial matters, compensates for the lack of explicit articulation of gender difference in Lyudmila Petrushevskaya's work (1988, 165-5), allowing her prose to be interpreted in the context of women's writing. The body, which is crucial for performing womanhood, occupies an important place in Škrinjarić's works, both as an individual experience of having an improper body and as a way of interacting with others via sexual relations and their *consequences*, which primarily affect women.

In Škrinjarić's plays, the naked body is used to undo the dichotomy between private and public. The writer in *Media Conference* claims that writing the bestseller was his only route to fame, as he "freezes too easily to walk the streets naked" (Škrinjarić 2004, 28). The artist from *The Dark Room* is recalled as lying naked on her balcony. While these habits seem to belong to the widely acknowledged unconventionality of creative types (Lukić 1996, 228), they could also be referencing two famous Yugoslav performances – Tomislav Gotavac's 1983 nude walk in Zagreb and Sanja Iveković's 1979 *Trokut* [The Triangle], in which the artist pretended to masturbate on the balcony during Tito's visit to the Croatian capital (Pejić 2001, 52-3). As art historian Bojana Pejić argues in her article on the relationship between communism and embodiment, countercultural performance artists from the 1970s onwards used bodies as material that gained esthetic qualities in their works (2001, 63-4). According to Pejić, both the regime-sponsored exercise and regime-critical performance art (re)made the body through action (2001, 64).

Pejić claims that the communist bodies were assigned roles according to their gender. Often relegated to the background as members of the collective, women were only given a central place in the "communist nude" (Pejić 2001, 62). Eroticization did not necessarily mean emancipation. Škrinjarić was skeptical about the liberatory potential of heterosexual intercourse. While the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s represented the most comprehensive (if ambivalently feminist) challenge to proletarian puritanism (Lóránd 2015, 123), women writers reflecting on the 1950s, such as Irena Vrkljan in *The Silk, The Shears* and Sunčana Škrinjarić in *The Theater Café*, portray post-war bohemia as sexually libertarian. This lifestyle (precursor of more encompassing 1960s and 1970s sexual revolution), of which the open marriage between Vrkljan and the poet Zvonimir Golub is the best example, primarily benefited the men.

Škrinjarić documents the development from post-war puritanism to a gradual liberalization – the presence of sex in mass culture and the 1974 constitution that introduced abortion as a right (Dobrivojević 2016, 85-95). She questions gender asymmetry in romances modelled on popular literature (idealized by the characters, ironized by the narrator), as well as in marriage and motherhood. In the short story "Jedno ljeto" [One Summer], Škrinjarić describes a libertine woman who has a fling in semi-private corners of an unnamed coastal town. The heroine is as indifferent to her lover as she is to the possibility of starting a family, seeing both as an "perpetual and unavoidable nightmare of repetition" (Škrinjarić 1978, 31). Indifference is also the consequence of the first sexual encounters in the trilogy and in *The Theatre Café*. While not directly rebellious, the heroines' apathy questions the patriarchal framing of first sexual intercourse as an experience that can change a woman's identity.

"One Summer" is also the beginning of Škrinjarić's direct confrontation with patriarchal sexual mores. The episode is repeated in the trilogy with different affective undertones. The sentimental Tajana falls in love with her summer lover, the handsome law student Marko, but the affair is given a somber coda when her friend and occasional lover Slavko warns her that she may end up needing a visit to a clinic. As historian Ivana Dobrivojević shows through analysis of legal documents and medical reports, despite decriminalization at the beginning of the decade, having an abortion in 1950s Yugoslavia required an evaluation by a commission, which led many "already underprivileged women to seek out unlicensed providers" (2014, 87). In *The Theater Café*, Škrinjarić writes about the immediate post-war period, noting that

> abortions were forbidden, everything was done slyly, clandestinely. Operations were performed on kitchen tables, in suspicious pre-war practices and, of course, all without anesthesia. A woman must suffer for her guilt, her lust, her twisted and illicit desire. (1988, 117)

By describing two abortions, Ana's attempt to perform it on herself, and Eda's, forced upon her by her lover, Škrinjarić skillfully shifts the focus from ironizing general opinions about a woman who *found herself* pregnant to centering female perspective and exposing the unequal distribution of power in relationships. In her short story "Mesareva ljubav" [The Butcher's Love], published in *A Dog's Path*, the author revisits this theme. Story describes the abusive relationship between Ana, a child working as a maid, and a wealthy, married butcher who murders her after finding out that she is going

to give birth to his child. Framed as a case told to the narrator by a judge who recalled that this was the only time she had sought a death sentence, which "turned into a prison sentence, the neighbors told how good and hardworking he was" (Škrinjarić 1996, 55), the short story is an eerily relevant portrait of patriarchal violence. The publication of such a story in the conservative 1990s, a time characterized by Catholic zealotry and severe backlash against women's rights, is nothing less than an act of feminist bravery.

Like her contemporaries (Lóránd 2015, 131-2), Škrinjarić evokes recognizable, if occasionally stereotypical or overtly homophobic gay types such as the closeted artist and the predatory lesbian. In *The Theater Café*, the author denounces the 1950s imperative to remain closeted in order to achieve artistic acclaim and depicts a lesbian as a lecherous creature lurking in a shadowy alley. In her 1977 story "Trovanje biljkom" [Poisoned by a Plant], Škrinjarić explores queerness as anti-normativity and transgressive desire. The story consists of the fervent ramblings of a woman in love with a plant, which she eventually swallows in the hope of carrying its offspring, and a letter in which she declares that "the male body was never so smooth and elastic … it was better to sleep with a mute plant, to be embraced and taken to exhaustion, to be completely absent from life" (Škrinjarić 1978, 97). The women's narrative is juxtaposed with a conclusion written in an official manner stating that "the lonely Mrs Jane Doe", now deceased, behaved erratically, "as confirmed by the testimony of her ex-husband, a respectable and orderly citizen whose life was always irreproachable" (Škrinjarić 1978, 100). In addition to the attention Škrinjarić continuously devoted to the female body, the articulation of queer types and plots illustrates the novel, frequently troubled portrayal of embodiment and sexuality that we find in Yugoslav women's writing.

5. On Creativity

Like Zlatar, who describes the Croatian literature as a "male, self-satisfied discourse" (2001, 3), Škrinjarić also sees the local literary genealogies as male-dominated. In both *The Theatre Café* and her autobiographical trilogy, she contrasts two canons – the official, socialist-realist one and the alternative one, an eclectic mix of European modernists. *The Theatre Café* depicts the generation that, as Škrinjarić puts it, has replaced identification with Pavel Korchagin, the working-class protagonist of the 1932 novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Russian socialist-realist writer Nikolai Ostrovsky, with the admiration for decadent, melancholic verses written exclusively by male writers.

Unlike her friend Slavko, modeled on the Croatian existentialist Antun Šoljan (Dujić and Bauer 2010, 7), who managed to establish himself as a man of letters despite his mediocre writing skills, the listless Tajana never made it as a creative. The story ends in the late 1950s, before Tajana's 30th birthday, so her future prominence can only be guessed at if she is seen as Škrinjarić's double – Škrinjarić started to gain acclaim in the 1960s and her fame peaked in the 1980s. Tajana's first attempts at writing, reciting confessional poetry in her school's literary section, which advocated military odes and homages to the regime, were met with ridicule. Like the literary section, *Izvor* [The Well], a literary magazine published between 1948 and 1951 under the editorship of Josip Barković, a writer of socialist-realist prose, shows that the regime's literature was shaped by male role models, critics, and editors. In a crazy attempt to publish her poems in *The Well*, Tajana's father contrasts the socialist canon with the *real* literature of "Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, … Proust" (Škrinjarić 2004, 348). Tajana's collection was immediately rejected and disparagingly described as "some sort of typically female scribbling" (Škrinjarić 2004, 347). After joining the workforce and gaining access to artistic circles, Tajana realizes that female writers are pushed to the outskirts of literary life. While her male colleagues work on adapting plays by Miroslav Krleža, a writer who was rewarded by the Party with a vast villa in the heart of Zagreb, Tajana is condemned to administrative tasks and children's radio programs. She also meets two overlooked creatives – Marija Jurić Zagorka and Vesna Parun. A popular romance novelist and Croatia's first female political reporter, Zagorka is described as dying in obscurity. Parun, recognized by the editors of Radio Zagreb as "the greatest Croatian female poet" (Škrinjarić 2004, 335), is a homeless pauper. While not as explicit as in her passage on access to abortion, Škrinjarić outlines the dynamics of Yugoslav literary life before the rise of second-wave feminism by referencing canonized male (Krleža) and overlooked female (Zagorka and Parun) writers.

While she engages with feminist themes such as embodiment and sexuality as well as writes in a confessional mode that is occasionally interspersed with fiction, which, as Lukić shows, is prevalent in Croatian women's writing (1996, 238), Škrinjarić's works above all exemplify the formal inventiveness of this poetic. Initially a curiosity discussed in feminist circles, women's writing was introduced to a wider audience in the 1983 issue of literary journal *Republika* [The Republic]. In addition, the term is used to group (retrospectively) the works of important literary figures. While contemporary scholars aptly describe their poetic differences (Lukić 1996, 229-38, Zlatar 2004, 83), Ugrešić, Vrljan, and Drakulić, along with Daša Drndić and Rada Iveković, are usually listed as the representative authors (Lóránd 2019, 110-1).

With the exception of Ugrešić's early works, the first detailed elaboration of the concept, Ingrid Šafranek's 1983 essay "'Ženska književnost' i 'žensko pismo'" ['Women's Literature' and 'Women's Writing'] predates the literary production associated with the term. Šafranek's text, not only introduces the term "žensko pismo" [women's writing], (one of the possible) translations of Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine*, but also discusses literary production and reception, periodization and the relationship between high, formally complex art and popular culture. Šafranek distinguishes women's writing, a concept originally developed in Cixous' poetic manifesto "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) from women's literature, that is, all literary production by women (Šafranek 1983, 12). The critic defines "žensko pismo" as the articulation of female difference on a textual and thematic level (Šafranek 1983, 15; Lóránd 2018, 103). She considers the poetics to be equally influenced by feminism and the avant-garde emphasis on textuality as *the theme* of literature (Šafranek 1983, 19).

Although Šafranek is clearly influenced by Julia Kristeva, a French feminist critic who argues in her 1974 book *Revolution in Poetic Language* that social order can be effectively subverted through literature (1986, 113), her praise for the avant-garde is somewhat confusing, as it was only marginally present in Croatian women's literature (e.g. expressionist elements in Mara Ivančan and Verka Škurle-Ilijić [Detoni-Dujmić 2001,192-9]). I see this as a way of dismissing by then obsolete socialist realism and associating women's writing with the Yugoslav openness to modernist, anti-representational art, an attitude that was seen as a sign of the modernity of the state. Lukić associates this attitude with Yugoslavia's efforts to distinguish itself from "other communist dictatorships" (2001, 86). The insistence on associating women's writing with formalist, canonical modernism helps Šafranek to avoid appearing entirely antagonistic when she attempts to claim space for (local) literary women and the articulation of their difference. As Lóránd shows, emphasis on female difference challenged the notion of "generally human" that characterized both the Yugoslav project of women's emancipation and the regional literary scene (2019, 115).

According to Lóránd, who signals the peculiarity of the term by referring to it in the original, "žensko pismo" is not a simple translation, but "an expression with layered meanings" (2019, 113). As an adjective, "žensko" can refer to both femininity and womanhood, which distinguishes the Yugoslav translation from the typical English translation of *écriture feminine* as "women's writing" and signals an anti-essentialist stance (Lóránd 2019, 113-4). This stance is also evident in Šafranek's list of representative authors, which includes Colette, Marguerite Duras, and Jean Genet (three examples

given by Cixous [1976: 879]), Marcel Proust, "the most feminine writer of all time" as well as a number of her female contemporaries (Šafranek 1983, 8-11). Regarding the second part of the phrase, Lóránd notes that "pismo" can mean "scripture", as in Holy Scriptures (underlining the subversive potential of women's writing as a practice directed against established cultural codes), a general writing system, or, simply, a letter (2019, 114).

Unlike Cixous, Šafranek pays attention to class issues. Although Cixous briefly mentions "the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by the economy that works against us and off our backs" (1976, 877), she focuses primarily on the psychological obstacles that prevent women from writing. Cixous portrays capitalism as stultifying rather than exploitative – utopian possibilities of female creativity do not require fundamental changes in the sphere of (re)production. Šafranek quotes Cixous' remarks about the feeling of inferiority in the face of literature reserved for "the great – that is, for 'great men'" (1976, 876) but supplements them with additional unfavorable conditions. Šafranek lists "historically conditioned lack of systemic education, difficulties in entering the cultural field, the oppressive role of the family, the male partner and motherhood" (1983, 9). While summarizing the history of Western women's writing, she mentions that "writing has always been a privilege" because "assembly line workers do not write, nor does a medieval peasant" (Šafranek 1983, 18). This contribution is important because it shows that the concept of "women's writing" changed upon its arrival to Yugoslavia. The change was influenced by the specificities of local second-wave feminism, which was, as Lóránd remarks, heavily interpolated with critical Marxism (2018, 2-3). Despite their ambivalence toward Yugoslav socialism and its ruling cadres, Škrinjarić's works similarly communicate a certain class consciousness and the limits of upward mobility. Sub-proletarian characters and their dank dwellings are described in in short stories and *The Theater Café*. *The Dark Room* expresses the inaccessibility of creative work through the voice of an early-rising factory worker who is disturbed by the nightly clatter of the protagonist's typewriter.

Lukšić, whose interpretation of Škrinjarić's prose is still authoritative (as the 2008 collection of essays dedicated to the writer and her works shows) emphasizes form. While Lukšić claims that Škrinjarić focuses primarily on male characters, she also notes that her fragmentary, lyrical style is consistent with Šafranek's understanding of women's writing (2001, 123-7). Škrinjarić occasionally does privilege male narrative trajectories, particularly in her 1970s radio plays about literary figures. As the dynamic between the male creator and the female fan in *A Study for Four Voices* shows, such emphasis

possibly indicates that "becoming a writer" was simply not a plausible woman's plot before the second wave of Yugoslav feminism. Lukšić's assertion does not quite apply to Škrinjarić's prose. *The Street of Ancestors*, like the rest of the trilogy, is a female formation narrative – although influenced by the male canon, Tajana's coming of age takes place primarily through negotiating different kinds of femininity, as well as through encounters with, at the time of the events described, obscure literary women. *The Theater Café*, the novel Lukšić primarily draws on, contains an essayistic paragraph on abortion, a topic of great importance in feminist circles, and shifts the focus from the great men (Ujević and Majdak) to anonymous women (Ivona, Mia, and Eda). In her short stories, Škrinjarić focuses on female confessionals or, when describing male characters, on themes commonly associated with women's writing such as physicality and marginality.

Compared to her earlier prose, which is either written entirely in the first person ("One Summer") or narrated by clearly separated instances ("Poisoned by a Plant"), the most significant innovation in Škrinjarić's debut novel, *The Street of Ancestors*, is the rapid alternation between different discourses. It cleverly incorporates recognizable themes of women's writing into an innovative narrative framework. Lukšić describes it as skaz because the uninvolved or, in narratological terms, extradiegetic and heterodiegetic (Rimmon-Kennan 2005, 98), narrator mimics figural speech and adopts the characters' perspectives (Lukšić 2001, 129). The uninvolved narrator is not impartial: the idiolects and inner monologues of the characters are often ironized, either through commentary or through juxtaposition with objectively depicted events. While making an occasional overt appearance, the narrator usually withdraws to give space to the characters' perspectives and acts as an arranger of their views. These views not only contribute to the stylistic complexity of the novel, but also reveal conflicting ideologies that influence Tajana's striving for conformity as well as her attempts of rebellion:

> Should he have married a woman with a past, even if her beauty is undeniable, perhaps with imperfections, but they are overshadowed by eyes that look dreamy and passionate, and soft skin and golden curls, it is boring to listen to all their nonsense, always blathering on about the same thing, and the girl is between them, she stands out, she is a superfluous brat who refuses to greet passers-by. Say, I kiss your hand, says her lovely, amiable, debauched Mommy, but she is silent, dressed prettily, in white socks and shoes, lacquer with white, and in a beautiful blue corduroy dress, what an angelic face, some people say, but she is very persistent and will not say hello to anyone and will not

go to school and will not behave the way they want. (Škrinjarić 2004, 27–8)

In just two sentences, the narrator switches from the narrated monologue of Tajana's stepfather, a technique which, according to Cohn's classification of possible ways of representing consciousness, "reproduces verbatim the character's own mental language" while retaining "the third person reference" (1978, 14) to the listing Mommy's requests ("Say, 'I kiss your hand'") and the opinions of others ("what an angelic face") in the form of free indirect discourse. As mandated by utilized narrative technique (Rimmon-Kenan 2005, 117), these sentences should be attributed to the characters and not to the narrator, who merely collages them with the description of Tajana's defiant behavior.

At the end of the novel, Škrinjarić uses the narrated monologue to unsettle the reader by conveying Tajana's adolescent inability to adequately understand the adult world. The ending also communicates the young heroine's vague dread in the face of sexual violence. The narrator channels thoughts of Tajana's biological father, who compares his "little, perfectly clean and healthy daughter" (Škrinjarić 2004, 134) with his ex-wife (Tajana's mother), before kissing the girl on the mouth. After this act, which Tajana recalls when forcedly kissed by one of her dates as a grammar school student, the novel ends with the depiction of the protagonist's entry into adulthood, symbolized by the slashing her beloved teddy bear. The final passages resolutely dispute commonly reiterated idea that Škrinjarić completely adopts the infantile perspective of her protagonist (Matijašević 2004, 10-1; Ivančić 2008, 83) and illuminate her stylistic virtuosity. The poignancy of the ending lies in the difference in knowledge between the narrator (and, consequently, the reader), who is informed of the father's intentions, and Tajana, who cannot yet fully comprehend the situation.

6. Conclusion

In the more than 40 years of her artistic career, Sunčana Škrinjarić has developed an assemblage of characters and plots that are not exactly an example of feminist agency (that is, if we understand it as rational action for a common cause). However, by living on the margins of society and residing in the shadows, her characters question the regulation of bodies during Yugoslav socialism, an ideology that attempted to transform an amorphous mass of Southeastern Slavs into a socialist collective. Moreover, Škrinjarić reflects on

the underrepresented early days of the newly established regime, the turbulent period during which the arms-bearing partisans were abandoned in favor of modest workers and mothers. Her texts depict those who are unwilling or unable to undergo these changes – the sentimental Tajana who squanders her artistic talents, Ana and Eda who, instead of giving birth to young Yugoslavs, have illegal abortions, and the anonymous artist who loses her mind in a state-owned studio apartment. By focusing on those who, like the beggars and sex workers roaming Zagreb's inner city, have not successfully embodied socialist modernization or yielded to state regulation, Škrinjarić embraces deviance – the poor, the insane, the queer. As the list of Škrinjarić's most memorable heroines shows, she was primarily interested in female failures.

If one compares Škrinjarić's short stories from the 1960s and the radio plays from the 1970s with the works produced from 1980 onward (autobiographical trilogy, *The Dark Room*, *The Theatre Café*), a clear progression towards an aesthetic that places formally complex narration and female characters at the center. Although, as I have tried to show, these works clearly correspond to the concept of Yugoslav women's writing, they have been unjustly overlooked, both by Škrinjarić's contemporaries and by the following generation of scholars. My project of reading Škrinjarić counteracts this exclusion. As its final instalment, this article brings the writer into a dialogue with the (historiographical) polemics surrounding female embodiment, sexuality and authorship. In doing so, I hope to reverse the disinterest in Škrinjarić's adult prose that she had predicted shortly before her death.

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Od boemskog životnog stila do feminističke svijesti: Sunčana Škrinjarić i jugoslavensko žensko pismo

Ovaj se esej bavi prozom i radio dramama Sunčane Škrinjarić u kontekstu jugoslavenske kulturalne povijesti te socijalističkih i suvremenih promišljanja ženskog autorstva (njegovog društvenog značaja kao i tematskih i stilističkih posebnosti). Esej se osvrće se na Škrinjarićinu trilogiju, romane *Ulica predaka*, *Ispit zrelosti* i *Bijele strijele.* U trilogiji koja je napisana između 1980. i 2004, Škrinjarić koristi autobiografske zgode kako bi ispripovijedala priču o Tajaninom mučnom sazrijevanju i osujećenim umjetničkim ambicijama. Trilogija ironizira muški službeni i kontrakulturalni kanon. Premda je najopsežniji primjer Škrinjarićinih tematskih preokupacija i prepoznatljivih tipova (ambiciozni, osrednji muškarac, tumorna mlada žena, gladujuća pjesnikinja, zaluđeni komunist) te rad u kojem autoričin polifoni, lirični stil dolazi do izražaja, tvrdim da autorica istražuje marginalnost od 1960-ih. Priče „Jedno ljeto" i „Trovanje biljkom" iz feminističkog ugla pripovijedaju o ne-normativnim tijelima. Kao što njezina kratka priča „Mesareva ljubav" pokazuje, Škrinjarić je ostala predana kritici nasilja nad ženama i pravnog sustava koji ga omogućuje čak i tijekom konzervativnih 1990-ih. Ovaj esej također analizira Škrinjarićin manje poznati roman „Kazališna kavana", opis zagrebačke boemštine 1950-ih u čijim je krugovima muško slobodoumlje opraštano, dok je žensko često završavalo bolnim, ilegalnim abortusom. Konačno, Škrinjarićina radio drama „Tamna soba", intersekcionalni prikaz raznolikih socijalističkih modela ženstvenosti, pesimistički je komentar uništenja ženskih opusa. Škrinjarićini su tekstovi stavljeni u dijalog s akademskim osvrtima na jugoslavensko žensko pismo (Lukić, Zlatar, Lóránd) te feminističkom teorijom (Halberstam) i naratologijom (Cohn, Rimmon-Kenan).

Ključne riječi: drugovalni feminizam, socijalzam, *écriture feminine*, kreativnost, moć djelovanja.

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