

**Zorana Đukić**  
[zdjukic201730006@student.fil.bg.ac.rs](mailto:zdjukic201730006@student.fil.bg.ac.rs)  
University of Belgrade  
Faculty of Philology

## **Women Who Have Left Their Mark – The Route of Slavic Women Writers<sup>1</sup>**

*Defiant Trajectories, Mapping out Slavic Women Writers Routes* / Edited by Katja Mihurko Poniž, Biljana Dojčinović & Maša Grdešić. – Ljubljana: Forum of Slavic cultures, 2021, 96 pages, ISBN 978-961-94672-7-5.

In feminist culture, the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of resistance to male hegemony, accompanied by continuous attempts on the part of feminists to achieve long-desired liberalization. The construction of the feminist ideal of the *new woman* introduced radical changes into a society fettered by the patriarchy. The female intellect and female talents finally gained prominence, and the number of independent, educated women who adopted the feminist lifestyle, who valued freedom and were beginning to explore new, hitherto uncharted territories, was on the rise.

The topic of the edition *Defiant Trajectories, Mapping out Slavic Women Writers Routes*, edited by Katja Mihurko Poniž, Biljana Dojčinović and Maša Grdešić, is rooted precisely in the concept of the *new*, liberated woman, and this is not a conventional scholarly book of proceedings. The papers combined in this edition of the Forum of Slavic Cultures were also presented at the conference *Women Writers Route*, held in April 2019 in Ljubljana, and they result from the successfully implemented idea of creating a sui generis route map of selected Slovene women writers. Their lives and artistic oeuvres are narrowly related to the socio-political circumstances of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, so the provision of a broader historical context is an integral part of each of the separate studies. Dealing with the fates of women who have left their mark, in their papers the authors revive the memories of some of the most renowned women of Croatian, Montenegrin, Polish, Russian, Serbian, and Slovene literature.

In her paper entitled *The Gender of Croatian Modernity: Marija Jurić Zagorka and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić*, Maša Grdešić thoroughly analyzes the artistic routes of two women writers, while simultaneously paying attention to the development and impact of the feminist theory and gender studies in Croatia, as well as to the question of women's integration into the

Croatian literary canon. Coevals Marija Jurić Zagorka, author of historical novels, and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, who earned fame as a writer of fairy tales for children, stand out as the most thoroughly researched women of Croatian literature. The study is conceived of as a comparison of the then-current perceptions of these two women writers' artistic oeuvres, perceptions that were based on their different attitudes to life. Marija Jurić Zagorka's strong feminist ideals, political engagement, and striving for the introduction of innovations into the traditional literary model are juxtaposed with Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's aristocratic origin and acceptance of the role of a woman and mother. Analyzing the circumstances under which they wrote, the author of the paper also points to the thing that connects them – the stigma that was attached to Marija Jurić Zagorka as a feminist activist and to Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić as a woman writer whose work was understood as a mother's duty, devoid of any artistic value.

The cultural and social circumstances of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Montenegro were one of the central topics of the paper *Divna Veković – Our Heroine*, authored by Ksenija Rakočević. The paper includes the biography of Divna Veković, the first female Doctor of Philosophy in Montenegro, famous for her translations of *The Mountain Wreath*, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj's poetry, and Vuk Karadžić's stories into French. Just as in the case of the Croatian women writers, Divna Veković's extraordinary talent was accompanied by much criticism and denial of value, for which reason there are not enough relevant sources on her life and work.

As one of the most prominent women of Polish literature, the book of proceedings mentions Maria Konopnicka. A world-class author, whose works are compared with the works of Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann, she experienced a fate similar to the ones that befell other Slavic women writers of that time. A study by Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokolowska and Emilia Kolinko, entitled *Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910): In Search of Individual Emancipation*, reveals details from the life of this famous woman writer, her struggle with the patriarchal order, her denunciations of the clergy, and her advocacy of gender equality and women's rights. In accordance with the very concept of the book of proceedings, in their paper the authors also present Maria Konopnicka's adventurous journey across European countries, which was characterized as a period of personal freedom that stimulated her creativity and engendered some of her best-known works.

From the *Silver Age* of Russian literature, the following Slavic women writers stand out as best known to the public – Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Zinaida Gippius. Ekaterina Artemyuk points out that the goal of her study, entitled *The Life and Literary Work of Russian Women Writers of the Early 20th Century: Their Artistic Merit, Cultural*

*Contribution, and Meaning for the Present*, is to shed light on unknown data about the life and work of these women writers, and also to include contemporary cultural organizations, libraries, memorial houses, literary salons, and other locations of significance into the map of Slavic women writers.

The character and work of Jelena J. Dimitrijević, the greatest Serbian woman writer among women travelers and the greatest woman traveler among women writers, is presented by Biljana Dojčinović in her paper *The European Routes of Jelena J. Dimitrijević*. The central topic of this research rests on Dojčinović's exhaustive analysis of the role of traveling in this woman writer's life, work and worldview. Writing about the fates of young Turkish women in harems, Jelena J. Dimitrijević strengthens empathy for women, for which reason the spirit of feminism becomes one of the main characteristics of her literary oeuvre. Biljana Dojčinović analyzes the best-known works of this Serbian woman author while chronologically following her journeys from Europe to North America, Africa, and Asia. Dimitrijević's desire to reveal the unknown drives her to move the boundaries of women's freedom, to get acquainted with new worlds, and turn her valuable experience into literature. The study provides a broader context for understanding the literary significance of a woman writer whose works do not boil down to mere descriptions of landscapes and events but rather deal with very important socio-political issues. Freed from all kinds of prejudice, permeated with a cosmopolitan spirit and multiculturalism, the works of Jelena J. Dimitrijević incessantly question cultural traditions, patriarchal principles, the position of women in different social environments, and, as such, they are a sui generis criticism of European lifestyle.

A strong feminist ideal also determined the literary creation of the Slovene woman writer Zofka Kveder. A woman whose work left a deep mark on the regional literary scene of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a role model for many of her contemporaries, and she was highly esteemed as a writer of prose works, dramatic and literary criticism, but also as an editor of women's magazines and a fighter for women's rights. Paying attention to the turbulent life and tragic end of this Slovene icon of feminism, in her paper entitled *Zofka Kveder – Slavic Cultural and Feminist Icon of the Early 20th Century*, Katja Mihurko Poniž thoroughly examines the merits of this famous woman writer, which secured her a significant place not only in Slovene but also Yugoslav literature. The memory of Zofka Kveder is as permeated with her artistic creation as it is permeated with her efforts towards the development of feminist ideals, given the fact that her works often reflected the status of the women of that time. With her active re-evaluation of the issue of women's inferiority, gender stereotypes, femicide, prostitution, sexuality, out-of-wedlock maternity, reproductive rights, free love, and other controversies, the Slovene woman

writer directed fiery criticism against the hypocrisy of contemporary society and blatantly rejected traditional paradigms, for which reason she may be regarded as a universal personality, even according to modern-day standards.

The similarity between the apparently different life paths of the aforesaid Slavic women writers is reflected primarily in the fact that they were women in a predominantly male world and individuals with a free spirit, yearning for new experiences and challenges, for journeys, and desiring to fight for a brighter future. With her courage, Marija Jurić Zagorka, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Divna Veković, Maria Konopnicka, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Zinaida Gippius, Jelena J. Dimitrijević, and Zofka Kveder traversed a path that paved the way for new generations of female literary figures. The studies combined in this edition are not only part of a historical and geographical trajectory, but rather a feminist legacy of women who have left their mark on Slavic literature and, as emphasized by the authors themselves, bravely discovered new spaces.

Translated by Goran Petrović

---

<sup>1</sup> This book review essay was written within *Knjiženstvo*.

**Зорана Ђукић**

[zdjukic201730006@student.fil.bg.ac.rs](mailto:zdjukic201730006@student.fil.bg.ac.rs)

Универзитет у Београду

Филолошки факултет

## **Жене које су оставиле траг – рута словенских књижевница**