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Becoming a Woman Writer: The Self-representations in the Letters of Women Writers of the Slovene moderna

Abstract

In the period of the Slovene moderna in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century Slovenian women writers were establishing themselves in the literary field for the first time. With the analysis of their correspondences from the point of view of the history of emotions we focus on how they experienced the new roles they assumed in this period: the writer/poet, the editor, the intellectual, the critic and emancipated woman. The analysis shows the struggles they experienced when trying to be a part of the Slovenian literary system. Their letters were a place of critical reflection and intimate relationships forming a community of women writers that at the time were a marginalised group.

Keywords: literature, women writers, intimacy, Slovene moderna, letters

Introduction

In the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Slovenian women writers that lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire began to be active in the literary field for the first time. In this article¹, I investigate the characteristics of the “new woman”² that

¹ The author acknowledges financial support by the Slovenian Research agency for the research project Transformations of Intimacy in the Literary discourse of Slovene “moderna” (J6-3134).

² The concept of the new woman was created by 19th-century feminism as a positive representation of femininity, but it received negative features in the then-dominant journalistic discourse (Mihurko Poniž 2014: 163).

emerged in the moderna period and was active in the socio-cultural sphere as an intellectual and a writer. A new image of women was described in literary works, articles and biographies at the time, but in this paper I deal with their own epistolary correspondences as they are one of the richest data towards women's voices in the field of literature, as well as politics and science (Richter 2010). In the article I answer the question of how these creative women described themselves, how they drew their own portraits in their correspondences, without being subject to appropriation by other authors writing about them. "Correspondence means, among other things, the way in which an individual constitutes himself both in front of himself and in front of others" (Foucault 2019: 445), therefore I present the analysis of the self-reflective parts of letters by women writers that contain narration of oneself as a means of self-representation.

The analysis includes the letters of Slovenian women writers from the moderna period in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century that are kept in the manuscript department of the Slovenian national and university library in Ljubljana (NUK). The included authors are Kristina Šuler, Marica Nadlišek Bartol, Zofka Kveder, Ljudmila Poljanec, Vida Jeraj and Elvira Dolinar who were intellectuals, artists, editors, writers and/or poets who tried to establish themselves in the Slovenian cultural space. They were colleagues and friends who lived in Ljubljana and in different other parts of today's Slovenia, but also in Trieste, Vienna, Zagreb and Prague, they frequently travelled, published fiction, worked as writers, poets, literary critics, teachers, editors and at the same time did emotional labour (i.e. taking care of the household and respond to the needs of children, partners, friends and others). After the archival work I conducted the close reading of letters treating them as a source of (literary-)historical information and at the same time taking into account the specifics and functions of the genre.³ The self-representations of the authors are not the central purpose of the discussed letters, but they are a frequent phenomenon that can be found in them. One

³ As Catherine Delafield explained, the private letter is unique because it is dependent for its existence on an absent correspondent and when one half of the relationship is not available to the reader (Delafield 2020: 12–13). The limitations of my research come from the characteristics of the letters as a primary source, namely it is based on the collection of letters that is limited since not all letters have been preserved in history.

of the reasons for this is the fact that the authors of the letters were women who at the time were only establishing themselves in the Slovenian cultural space, so they consolidated their identity and their position with their correspondences. Letters, which can be described as “writing of the self”, are interesting sources when trying to grasp the subjective experiences of people of a bygone age (Eiranen 2015: 78). Letters are “narratives, language in action, production of texts and contexts” (Mastrantonio 2021: 231). With their research we can grasp the subjective experiences, feelings, and thoughts of people of the past (Eiranen 2015: 82). Namely, they “provide freedom from the claims of reality precisely because they are private, recording desires necessarily silenced by prevalent social codes. [...] They attempt to create an image of self and are the effect of such an effort” (Benstock 1988: 91–92).

After the so called emotional turn emotions – that were always a central part of literary expression – became widely discussed in the field of contemporary literary studies. From the new historicism on, the synchronic text of the cultural system replaces the diachronic text of autonomous literary history (Montrose 2004: 586). A possible focus of literary research became the emotional point of view on the literary works themselves or their reception among readers and in the wider society (cf. Hogan 2018), but in this article I focus on the process of writing and publishing fiction from a perspective of the history of emotions. From this perspective “we had come to ask, how did it feel like? Questions of identity, the self, interpersonal relations, relations with institutions, the production and reception of culture [...] have fallen into the realm of historical analysis” (Bodice 2018: 8). The history of emotions does not look only for facts in historical events, but focuses on the emotional aspects of this events and from this point of view I answer the question of how women writers felt when assuming new positions in the literary system. It is known that during the period in question women writers asserted themselves in the Slovenian literary system, their achievements (publications, books) are also known in Slovenian literary history, but in my research I am interested in how they themselves *experienced* these new roles and how the emotional part of this process was taking place. Because the establishment of women in the Slovenian literary system was slow, I analyse the emotional contents that it was connected to. First I explain the concept of self-representation

as an emotional aspect of the discussed letters, then I extract from the letters the new roles that women writers assumed in the cultural field in this period. I focus on their intimate self-depictions and their self-awareness, namely on the textual constructions of their identities. Thus it is possible to document the many diverse roles that they had adopted in accordance to changing circumstances given the existence of social norms and power claims that were and that still are compelling for women of ambition (Bosch 2013: 19). I thereafter break down the different emotions accompanying the content of the emancipatory assertions of women.⁴ How women experienced themselves, how they established their new roles and what they felt is relevant data from the point of view of the history of emotions. On this basis new dimensions of the process of women's inclusion in Slovenian literary circles in this part of literary history are revealed.

The narrative construction of the self

As Eiranen (2015) states, narration and construction of one's experience have a crucial role in human existence. Moreover, people structure their knowledge and findings in the form of narratives, and this is how an individual's identity and his place in culture are formed (Bruner 1997: 53–55). However, like other stories, an individual's story about himself can combine heterogeneous elements that may or may not be compatible with each other (Eiranen 2015: 80). The individual's identity is “being made in relational and collective systems of meaning [...] as something that has to be ‘done’ rather than something that individuals ‘are’” (Bosch 2013: 19). Storytelling is also closely related to emotions, as it is a universal way of understanding and reflecting on our world and life. The structure of stories is a product of the human emotional system (Hogan 2011). As Martha Nussbaum (2004: 290–291) explains, even the individual's emotions are structured in the form of a narrative. Moreover, letters are a form of life writing that includes “both traditional autobiographical writing and also a wide range of genres that involve writing about the self and theorizing about self-writing” (Dowd and

⁴ Because emotional responses are manifested in a particular place and time in words, actions and objects, emotions are always embedded in history (Champion and Lynch 2015: x). On the other hand it is important to acknowledge the general subjective nature of literary historical data.

Eckerle 2010: 132). Self-representations in letters are a means of manipulating how the readers perceive the authors.

In the self-narrative of woman writers the individual subject has relatively complete control over the presentation of herself in her own voice. On the other hand the content of letters is influenced by the conventions and restrictions of the genre, as well as the cultural and social norms of the time and place in which the letters were created. The self-representations in the letters show the image the authors had of themselves, or more precisely: the self-image the authors wanted to convey to the addressees of the letters in a manner of self-fiction. The expressed emotions are subject to the conventions of the period and the rules of the medium of letters.

The different self-representations in letters

The notion of self-representation as constructing and consolidating one's own identity is particularly important because the letters included in our research were written at a time when women writers were acquiring new social and cultural roles, for example the role of a published author and editor of a literary publication. Although we also find examples of traditional roles attributed to women in the letters, e.g. the role of mother and housewife, the analysis focuses on the roles they acquired anew in the literary and cultural field. The discussed letters bear witness to a time when they were becoming an increasingly important intellectual force, as they studied, organized meetings of intellectuals in salons, published in magazines, worked as editors and were establishing themselves in the new social roles they had acquired seeking an influential position.⁵

The writer and/or poet

The authors of the collection of letters were active in the literary field in a time when the role of the Slovenian writer in society changed as he became “an aesthetically autonomous creator who, from the depths of his interior, confesses his own, unique artistic

⁵ Using the examples of the ancient letters of Seneca, Foucault (2019: 444) argues that correspondence in general brings egalitarianism to relations between correspondents, as advice is not one-sided and correspondence provides a context for exchange.

truth” (Dović 2007: 159). The discussed authors were mostly employed as teachers, which was one of the new professions for women that appeared towards the end of the 19th century and allowed them to become economically independent (Mihurko Poniž 2014: 163) – with the exception of Zofka Kveder, who was the first Slovenian woman to work as a professional writer also working as a translator and editor, and Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič, who was the first Slovenian professional journalist. In their correspondence, women present themselves as writers and/or poets, and this identity is reinforced by descriptions of their processes of writing fiction and publishing literary texts in periodicals and books.

Women writers mostly published their work in literary magazines, some of them even managed to publish books: poetry, short stories, novels and dramas. Kristina Šuler published her poems in the magazines *Bohinjska Sava*, *Ljubljanski Zvon*, *Dom in svet*, *Slovenka* and *Planinski vestnik*. Her songs deal with themes of femininity, the First World War and the search for love and the lost youth. During her lifetime she did not publish her work in a book. Marica Nadlišek Bartol published prose in *Ljubljanski Zvon*, in this magazine she published her novel *Fata Morgana* (1898). At first, she wrote about the everyday life of teachers and love, later about the townspeople of Trieste. She did not publish any books during her lifetime, but she translated literature from Italian. Zofka Kveder has published in *Slovenka*, *Slovenski narod*, *Edinost*, *Dom in svet*, *Domači prijatelj* and many other publications. She published books of short narrative prose *Odsevi* (1902), *Iz naših krajev* (1903), *Iskre* (1905), *Misterij žene* (1900), a collection of dramatic scenes *Ljubezen* (1901) and the drama *Amerikanci* (1908). *Misterij žene* was partially translated into German, Czech and Polish, moreover, Zofka Kveder also wrote for numerous German, Czech and Croatian publications. She published her first novel, *Nada*, in the magazine *Slovan* (between 1903 and 1904). She published several other books in Slovenian and Croatian: the novel *Njeno življenje* (1918), a collection of short stories about the Balkan wars, *Jednaest novella* (1911) and the novel *Hanka* (1917), she also published dramas and collections of short narrative prose. Among other things, she wrote about women’s lives and their social role, love suffering, sexuality, pregnancy, motherhood and the relationship with children. She also worked as a translator from Czech and Croatian into Slovenian and from Slovenian into

German. Ljudmila Poljanec published in *Ljubljanski zvon*, *Dom in svet*, *Slovenka*, *Slovan*, *Domači prijatelj* and also in the magazines for young readers *Angelček* and *Zvonček*. Vida Jeraj published in *Slovenka*, *Ljubljanski zvon*, *Vrtec*, *Zvonček*, *Angeljček*, *Domači prijatelj* and *Ženski svet*, she published the poetry collections *Pesmi* (1908) and *Iz Ljubljane čez poljane* (1921), as well as several dramatic and prose texts for youth. Her poetry is distinctly lyrical, impressionistic, symbolistic, decadent and also inspired by folk songs. Elvira Dolinar published biographies of woman writers between the two wars, and also non-fiction articles on feminist topics in various publications.

In their letters women writers list the problems they encounter while writing: low motivation, the censorship by editors and unsympathetic literary critics. Although they wanted to write, it was difficult for them due to lack of time, work and family obligations. The letters show the demanding everyday life of women writers, who at the same time went to work, educated themselves and took care of children and the household, and often also suffered from various illnesses. The authors described the circumstances in which they worked, for example Ljudmila Poljanec wrote to Ljudmila Prunk that it is difficult to be a writer and critic in the Slovenian cultural space, because it is divided and small, the Slovenian intellectuals prefer to follow literature in foreign languages, and literary magazines have few subscriptions (Ms 1906, letter 1). In another letter she described how the editor of *Ljubljanski zvon* Fran Zbašnik⁶ changed her poems saying to her: “There is no point, lady, if you have talent, joy [...] If you are lucky enough to write a lyrical poem, a poem about feelings, so that other lonesome people shudder next to it ... but you have no place in the cartel and no recognition either ...” (Ms 1906, letter 4). This pressures from outside resulted in different emotional responses: in one of her letters Vida Jeraj wrote that she would like to send to the editor a lot of good poems but she couldn’t manage to write them. She expressed her wish to write fairy tales too but on the other hand she complained that she did not have time because of cooking, school work, her garden and other “little things” that she had to devote her time to (Ms 703, letter 24). Vida Jeraj wrote to Marica Nadlišek Bartol that the first half of the night she

⁶ Fran Zbašnik was the editor of *Ljubljanski zvon* from 1903 to 1910.

was baking, the other half she was writing poems (Ms 703, letter 12). In the letter to the editor of *Slovenka* Marica Nadlišek Bartol, the poet Vida Jeraj reflected on her writing with a romanticized view: the poem, she said, tormented her late at night, she wrote it in bed when it was raining outside (Ms 703, letter 3). She also mentioned that she would probably destroy it in the morning if she didn't finish it at night, because she wouldn't like it anymore. She added that in her opinion she does not have the "narrative talent", which is why she did not send prose to *Slovenka* (Ms 703, letter 3). Other women writers also expressed self-criticism about their own work and their lack of confidence. Elvira Dolinar in a letter to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič complained that she had problems with depression and a severe headache, which hinder her work, so she struggled to write a new text for *Slovenka*. She also expressed doubt that the editor would be satisfied with her (Ms 1429, letter 1). Zofka Kveder wrote to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič that because of the housekeeping she had headache and could not sleep (letter 117). In a letter to Fran Zbašnik Zofka Kveder mentioned her illness and bad emotional state even mentioning suicide (Ms 1115, letter 3).

Established Slovenian male writers advised women writers about writing, for example Vida Jeraj reported to Marica Nadlišek Bartol that Ivan Cankar advised her to be sentimental in her writing, because that is what she is best at in her opinion, while Fran Govekar on the other side always wanted to "cross out" her love poetry and encouraged her to write epic poetry instead (Ms 703, letter 17). Vida Jeraj was on the other hand strongly influenced by the editor of the literary magazine *Ljubljanski zvon*⁷ Anton Aškerc, who critically assessed her works in their private correspondence (cf. Ms 703, letter 7) and whom she called "poet – teacher – chef – critic" (Ms 703, letter 12).

Marica Nadlišek Bartol wrote about her poor health in various letters mentioning that the doctor prohibited her to write letters and recommended her to spend some time in nature. Zofka Kveder wrote about the problems she had with writing stating that she had been an "extremely lazy child" since birth as the reason for her to have "a hundred headaches" when writing (Ms 1115, letter 16). She added

⁷ *Ljubljanski zvon* was the central Slovenian literary monthly magazine from 1881 to 1941. It was founded by Josip Jurčič, Janko Kersnik, Fran Levce and Ivan Tavčar.

that she can't even describe how hard it is to get to her desk, but at the same time she pointed out that she also had a lot of other things to do and mentioned that she had troubles to write because her young daughter needed a lot of attention (Ms 1115, letter 1).

From the correspondences we can see that at that time it was difficult for women writers to publish a book. For example Ljudmila Poljanec wrote about the possibilities of publishing her poems in a book in several letters and finally published a collection of poems called *Poezije* in 1906 with the collaboration of the editor Lavoslav Schwentner. She also discussed the option for the works of other women writers to be published in a book. In her letter to Ljudmila Prunk, she mentioned a poetry collection planned by Kristina Šuler to be edited by Fran Saleški Finžgar or Anton Medved. In one of the following letters, she states again that the author is preparing a collection of poetry and in a later letter she mentions that she will edit Kristina Šuler's poems herself. In fact Kristina Šuler never published a book during her lifetime, her collected work was published only in 2008. In a letter to Ljudmila Prunk Ljudmila Poljanec also mentioned that Vida Jeraj was planning to publish a book of poetry. In a later letter Ljudmila Poljanec stated that Vida Jeraj's book will be edited by Oton Župančič. Vida Jeraj published the poetry collection *Pesmi* in 1908, her second collection, which consisted mainly of children's poems, *Iz Ljubljane čez poljane*, was published in 1921. The poet Ljudmila Prunk also wanted to publish a book and Ljudmila Poljanec advised her how to publish it in Ljubljana (Ms 1906, letter 11), noting that she should be paid well for it (Ms 1906, letter 12). She also suggested that a literary critic should read her poems before publication, and confided in her that her own poems were reviewed by Anton Aškerc before publication.⁸ In her correspondence Ljudmila Poljanec also mentioned that Marica Nadlišek Bartol does not intend to publish her poems, and she indeed did not publish any books of fiction during her lifetime. Ljudmila Poljanec also reports to Ljudmila Prunk about the planned publication of a collection of her own poetry that she wanted to be published by Bamberg, but added that the writer Anton Funtek was not too fond of her verses that in his opinion were too smooth. On the other hand, the editor

⁸ It is not clear whether the correspondence referred to the publication of a collection of poems for youth by Ljudmila Prunk, which was published in Trieste under the title *Kraguljčki* in 1915.

Fran Zbašnik advised her not to correct them too much, because that way they lose a lot of their joyous freshness.

Women writers complain that they have no money and in the letters we also come across requests to the editors for the payments.⁹ Moreover, women writers also discuss the payments of literary magazines for their contributions, for example Zofka Kveder wrote to Anton Aškerc in 1902 when he was the editor of *Ljubljanski zvon* when she found out that the payment of the magazine was not the same for her as for some other male writers, the “sirs professors” as she called them. She said that she will no longer allow to be exploited like this as she needs the money more than others because did not have a regular job like them and she had to “beg around for money” (Ms 1114, letter 1). In a letter to Ivan Cankar, Zofka Kveder says that it is a “terrible scandal” that he is being paid so poorly (Ms 819, letter 39). Zofka Kveder reported to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič from Switzerland that the editor of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* had paid her a fee, even though he did not dare to print her works due to the anticipated disapproval of her topics among readers (letter 48). In Elvira Dolinar’s correspondence, the requests for the payment of the honorary that she sends to the editor of *Slovenka* Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič turn into anger, namely in the letter she states that she will no longer write for this newspaper because she has not received payment for her shares, and at the same time the management of *Slovenka* accused her of deceiving her authors with beautiful words and making fun of them (Ms 1429, letter 11). She adds that she already requested payment in the previous letter, but still did not receive it, which offended her, because otherwise she feels a sense of belonging to the Slovenian woman. She also wrote that she feels betrayed, because her opponents insult her because of her publications in *Slovenka*, but when she asked the newspaper for help, suddenly no one knew her anymore (right there). In a later letter Elvira Dolinar asks the editor Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič again if she could be paid explaining that her family had many expenses (Ms 1429, letter 12).

⁹ From Zofka Kveder’s letter to Ivan Cankar on February 26, 1919, we can see that Cankar asked the editor of *Domači prijatelj* for the payment, but she could not send it to him due to the current shortage at that moment, so she apologized to him.

The editor

The exchange of letters is also related to the editing of newspapers or magazines, namely in several cases it is an exchange between editors or editors and literary authors or authors, so correspondence is also a key tool for performing this profession. Thus, in the letters we find mentions of attached literary texts for future editions and, among other things, apologies to the editors that the writers finished their works later than planned. Authors who wrote for periodicals used letters to agree on planned texts and publications, and they received requests from the editors to send their texts or to inform them if they were preparing anything for future issues during that period. In the letters, we also find mentions of writing for other publications, suggestions for new writers and content, reports on the amount of contributions for the new issue, occupancy of printing presses and descriptions of editorial work, which was understood as an elite activity, e.g. in a letter from editor Zofka Kveder to her colleague Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič (letter 69). The role of editor was new for women at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries: Marica Nadlišek Bartol was the first Slovenian newspaper editor of *Slovenka*, whose first issue was published in 1897. In 1899, she handed over the editorship to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič, and after six years of operation *Slovenka* ceased publication at the end of 1902. An insight into the editorial work at that time is provided by the correspondence of Marica Nadlišek Bartol, who often reports on future editions of *Slovenka*, indicating the texts that are planned for publication and indicating whether he has enough or too few texts.

The letters testify to the fact that some influential individuals also opposed the publication of *Slovenka*: Vida Jeraj in a letter to Marica Nadlišek Bartol reports that the writer, playwright, critic and cultural worker Fran Govekar does not approve of the newspaper, while Vida Jeraj encourages the editor and writes to Govekar that he is unfriendly (Ms 703, letter 9). In the continuation of the letter, she also reports that Govekar praised the *Slovenka* editorial team, and advised the editor, Marica Nadlišek Bartol, to start publishing the publication only as a monthly, and suggested that she change her editorial policy and start publishing fewer literary texts, because according to him, in his opinion, the literary monthlies *Ljubljanski zvon* and *Dom in svet* are enough for publishing literature, while *Slovenka* should in his

opinion focus on practical women's topics (Ms 703, letter 9).

The intellectual

In the letters, the women asserted themselves as intellectuals, pointing out that they have a certain intellectual education, that they monitor cultural events in Slovenia and abroad, and that they themselves are active both in the creation of literary works and in their critical reception as informed readers and literary critics. From the discussed letters, we can understand that female intellectuals, writers, poets and editors accompanied and supported each other, and individual efforts to integrate into the cultural field were understood as part of a common effort. Others reported on their work, publications in periodicals and books, plans for future publications, as well as criticism of their own literary texts. In addition, they followed the work of other Slovenian poets and writers and reported on it to each other. Connections with foreign countries were also part of the identity of an intellectual: in their letters, the authors highlight the fact that they know or are learning foreign languages, and they also mention various foreign literary works that they have read or translated. As Zadavec (2005) writes, Russian literature was popular among Slovenian writers in the modern period, which, judging by the letters, also applied to women writers. Thus, in a letter to Marica Nadlišek Bartol, Zofka Kveder explains that she found an old German-Russian grammar and is “with great enthusiasm” learning Cyrillic, and in her opinion, Russian is not a difficult language (Ms 703, letter 4). Similarly, Ljudmila Poljanec writes to Ljudmila Prunk that when she visited Bulgaria, the literati there “loaded her with books” and that she is learning Bulgarian as well as Russian (Ms 1906, letter 5). Part of the identity of an intellectual, as can be concluded from the correspondence, was also regular reading, visiting theaters and literary salons, and correspondence with other intellectuals. In a letter to Fran Vidic, Marica Nadlišek presented herself as an educated woman and outlined less educated women that are not good readers as her opposite. She thought that they could not read because they empathized too much with the characters in the novel and felt with them, but at the same time they did not look at the work itself and the writer (Ms 1834, letter 5). She was therefore convinced that women are less effective at reading literary works than men, and assumed

that the reason for this is their greater emotional involvement in literary texts and complete identification with characters at the expense of the perception of other elements of literature.

The critic

The letters were a place to exchange opinions about literary and wider socio-cultural phenomena. One of the topics that often appears in the discussed letters is literary criticism, as the authors – e.g. Marica Nadlišek Bartol, Zofka Kveder and Ljudmila Poljanec were also active in this field. They exchange opinions about the work of certain authors¹⁰ and theater performances,¹¹ they describe their own critics of fiction, the critics of their own fiction by others or critics of other author's works that they read in the periodicals. Marica Nadlišek Bartol, as the editor of *Slovenka*, also describes the process of editing – for example, she asked Fran Vidic to send her a review of a book (Ms 1834, letter 21).

Ljudmila Poljanec describes the commentary on the state of literary criticism in Slovenia in her correspondence with Ljudmila Prunk, namely in two letters she says that friends praise each other in criticism. As an example, she cites the criticism of the editor of the newspaper *Naš list*, whose work was highly praised by his friend in the same publication: “Bad for a poet who only writes for critics. He can write the worst – he hires someone to praise him and he can become famous overnight” (Ms 1906, letter 4). In their correspondence, we can follow how Ljudmila Poljanec's attitude towards criticism is changing. In a letter from 1906, when her first poetry collection *Poezije* was published, Ljudmila Prunk wrote that she was worried about what the critics would say (Ms 1906, letter 2). Ljudmila Poljanec advises her friend Ljudmila Prunk not to let criticism come to her, and writes that no one offends her anymore, and in the field of criticism she notices that friends praise each other (Ms 1906, letter

¹⁰ For example Ljudmila Poljanec writes a judgment about the work of Anton Aškerc in a letter to Ljudmila Prunk: “Aškerc writes too quickly – and does not let ideas and form mature, and this is supposedly his biggest sin!” (MS 1906, letter 6).

¹¹ For example Marica Nadlišek Bartol in a letter from 1912 to Ljudmila Prunk describes what happened in the last season of the Slovenian theater in Trieste, today's Slovenian Permanent Theater (MS 1906, letter 1).

10). In a later letter, she states that criticism at the time was black and white: either highly destructive or highly laudatory, and advised the author not to take either of them to heart. It is precisely because of the state of literary criticism that Ljudmila Poljanec believes that for Slovenes, literature, and poetry within it, is particularly demanding. She states that it is about Calvary and Sinai at the same time (Ms 1906, letter 14), with which she wants to emphasize the suffering of literary creators, since Calvary is the hill where Jesus Christ was crucified, and Sinai is the mountain where Moses received the ten commandments of God. In the next letter, after she had already read some literary critics, she comments that she is not moved by the negative reactions: “otherwise, I tell you frankly that I am so dull and cold in front of these criticisms – that I wonder at myself” (Ms 1906, letter 3), and in the next letter she states that she is completely indifferent to criticism (Ms 1906, letter 4). She also mentions the impact of negative reviews on the work of the poet Kristina Šuler, saying that because of this she lost the courage to publish a poetry collection.

Ljudmila Poljanec writes to Ljudmila Prunk about Ivan Prijatelj’s article entitled “Literatur der Slovenen”, which was published in German in the journal *Österreichische Rundschau* in 1905. A detailed review of the publications of his literary and historical writings was made by Zoltan Jan, who says that the shorter version of the review, published in the Slovenian press, drew many criticisms, especially because of his critical attitude towards Anton Aškerc. In a letter to Ljudmila Prunk, Ljudmila Poljanec writes that Prijatelj wronged many people in an article about Slovenian literature (MS 1906, letter 1) and that he is only sympathetic to Oton Zupančič, Zofka Kveder and Ivan Cankar, while accusing the others of not being original and imitating more known authors (Ms 1906, letter 1; Ms 1906, letter 3): „finally ignored all poets, except for Zupančič – and he does not mention women at all, no, there is nothing special either – nothing new“ (Ms 1906, letter 3).

A similar attitude towards literary criticism can be found in the correspondence of Elvira Dolinar, who writes to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič that it is ridiculous how far they have come in Kranjska with, in her opinion, inappropriate praise of low-quality literary works just because they are Slovenian. On the other hand, she observes that dissenting opinions are silenced and tried to be suppressed instead

of being encouraged to think. She ends part of her letter with a rhetorical question asking if this is the way to progress (Ms 1429, letter 3). In a letter to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič, Elvira Dolinar comments on the reluctance of t. i. free-thinking literary critics who criticize female writers at every opportunity: „but if they are really free-thinking, as they call themselves, they should stand on our side“ (Ms 1429, letter 1). In a letter to Ivan Cankar, Zofka Kveder writes about the unfavorable criticism of his work in the *Slovenski narod* and says that she laughed when she read it, saying that it was so sad that it was already funny, and at the same time she asked Cankar to respond harshly to the criticism, as this would also please his admirers (Ms 819, letter 4).

An emancipated woman

The letters of modern authors that we are discussing were written at a time when efforts for the emancipation of women began to spread in Slovenia, which is a theme that appears in them several times, as the authors of the letters actively strove for women's rights in various ways. These are representations of a free woman who does not take into account traditional ideas about what a woman can do in society. The discussed authors published journalistic texts on these topics, and similar ideas are also reflected in their correspondence. In individual letters, we find examples of self-representations of women that aim at being free and independent, which also means that they do not take into account the socially determined gender hierarchies and the at that time restrictive conventions of behavior for women. In an article entitled *O tem in onem* (1900), Zofka Kveder points out that women who do not behave as expected are not well received in society. Among other things, she mentions that it is problematic for a woman to talk to strangers on the street, while emphasizing that every woman has the right to freely choose how she will act. Similarly, Zofka Kveder creates the image of an emancipated woman in her writings about her free life, and at the same time describes the behaviors she also wrote about in the mentioned article. Her perception of freedom, found in her letter to Ivan Cankar, is associated with free movement and socializing: she describes how happy she is, how she dances and hangs out with strangers on the street and in bars, where she likes to tell stories, which make people

admire her (Ms 819, letter 4). In the description of swimming in the Vltava River, she emphasizes the freedom she feels during movement: “I was in the water for almost an hour. Did I jump? It is so nice when one can move as much as one can” (Ms 819, letter 4). In one of her letters, Zofka Kveder describes her unplanned night walks with strangers and tells how she returns home late from the club in Prague and how she addresses strangers during walks around the city, with whom she then walks and talks for a long time. In doing so, as she describes, she is surprised by people who at first glance act rudely (Ms 819, letter 4). It is therefore a matter of self-representation, in which the author points out that, as a woman, she does not follow social norms, but moves freely and socializes with people. In a letter to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič, Zofka Kveder asks the author to prepare an article on the topic of emancipated women, explaining her point of view on this topic, pointing out that people are convinced that an emancipated woman cannot be a wife and a mother at the same time, saying that she would thereby betray her ideals (letter 4). In a letter to her friend Ljudmila Prunk Ljudmila Poljanec praises Prunk’s husband, because he is very supporting. Ljudmila Poljanec writes that she likes men who are not only looking for a loyal, obedient maid in their wife, but a woman equal to themselves (Ms 1906, letter 2).

Elvira Dolinar writes in the letter, which refers to the reception of her already mentioned article, that the correspondent of the newspaper *Slovenski narod* cites the colleagues of the newspaper *Slovenka* Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič, Zofka Kveder and Elvira Dolinar as bad examples of emancipated Slovenian women, who, in his opinion, are proof that men give Slovenian women too much freedom (Ms 1429, letter 1). Because of this, Elvira Dolinar expresses her anger in a letter and writes that the times of female slavery are over (Ms 1429, letter 1). In a letter to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič, Elvira Dolinar mentions Zofka Kveder’s proposal to establish a women’s reading room, a kind of women’s club, where women would meet and come into contact with contemporary journalism on the topic of women’s issues (Ms 1429, letter 2). She pointed out that, in her opinion, women need encouragement and familiarization with these possibilities, as well as education (Ms 1429, letter 2). For her, the emancipation of women is also a condition for the development of the nation as a whole (cf. Ms 1429, letter 9).

In some letters, the theme of women’s emancipation is also high-

lighted when they come into contact with another culture in which women have even fewer rights: Ljudmila Poljanec, in a letter in which Ljudmila Prunk tells about her trip to Constantinople, describes, among other things, the life of the women there, namely, that the inhabitants there consider women to be inferior beings, in her opinion, at first glance it looks as they are slaves (Ms 1906, letter 5). She writes that women are never accompanied by a husband when walking or riding in a carriage, but at most by a eunuch (Ms 1906, letter 5). In a poem from the cycle *Carigradske vizije* with the same title, which combines impressions from a trip to Constantinople and was published in *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1908, Ljudmila Poljanec also included the subject of subordinate women in these places, namely in the poem she invites Jesus Christ to the women there “unlock the harem dungeon to make them happier”. The impressions of Ljudmila Poljanec from Sofia are different, as she says that it is a modern city where they put a lot of effort into the education of women and where they have four female high schools, so the Slovenians were almost ashamed when the Bulgarians asked them how many female high schools have (Ms 1906, letter 5). With this, she thematizes women’s education, which was an important part of the emancipatory efforts of the period when efforts for high school and, consequently, also for the possibility of university education for women appeared (cf. Mihurko Poniž 2009: 89). As Katja Mihurko Poniž notes (2009: 89), in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in the 19th century, the ideal was still represented by a woman who was knowledgeable to a certain extent, but at the same time not enough to start asking herself questions about her true interests and desires. In the discussed letters, the aspirations to acquire knowledge and education are connected with foreign countries and the knowledge of foreign languages, as well as with the establishment of women’s societies, which are supposed to fill this gap to some extent. Elvira Dolinar wrote to Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič that women need encouragement, knowledge and education (Ms 1429, letter 2) and reasoned that this can be achieved with a women’s association, which should wake women up from barren apathy (Ms 1429, letter 2).

Conclusion

In this paper, I showed various aspects that influenced the work of Slovenian female authors, and I analyzed some of the key functions that they assumed, thus gradually forming new rules about what it means to be a writer, critic, editor, etc. The discussed correspondences bear witness to a time when women became an increasingly important intellectual force, as they studied, prepared meetings of intellectuals in salons, published their literary and journalistic works in magazines and newspapers, and worked as editors. Authors formed a women's intellectual circle and, at the same time, established themselves in the literary field in their own way. As researchers point out, the development of identity thus is a collective process as "we are who we are through the help of others and in the eyes of others" (Bosch 2013: 14). By analyzing the emotions of female poets and writers connected their own socio-cultural roles, which are evident from their letters, I investigated the literary-historical context in which they asserted themselves, and the subjective views on their own socio-cultural roles, which are included in the letter correspondence.

In their correspondence, the authors highlight their identity as writers or poets by thematizing writing either as an idealized creative process of expressing one's inner self or as a demanding job that they find difficult to perform in addition to their other obligations. It can be seen from the letters that they were often advised on writing by established male poets and writers and literary critics who were often critical of their work. As the letters show, the creation of female authors took place in difficult circumstances due to unsympathetic editors of literary magazines, lack of time, illness, lack of motivation, low fees, etc., and it was also difficult to publish a book. With the exception of Zofka Kveder, who worked professionally as a writer and editor, and Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič, who was the first Slovenian professional journalist, the authors in question mostly worked as teachers. Marica Nadlišek Bartol portrays this role as negative in her letters, in contrast to her role as editor of the *Slovenka* newspaper. Letters were also a means of exercising the profession of an editor, as communication related to the editing of literary publications took place through them, and this profession is presented in a positive light. The authors asserted their role as intellectuals by

highlighting their education and knowledge of literary creation and wider culture both in Slovenia and abroad in their letters. In the letters, the role of an intellectual is also connected with the knowledge of foreign languages, reading and visiting literary salons, the authors also described their acquaintances with people abroad in the letters. Judging by the discussed letters, trips abroad, which broadened their cultural horizons and knowledge, and vacations in the countryside, which primarily meant a retreat from everyday obligations and an opportunity to calm down, were part of the contemporary female identity at the time. Correspondence was also a place for critical reflection of one's own and foreign literary works, as well as discussions about literary criticism, which some of the authors also wrote. In the letters, we can detect emotional reactions to extremely negative literary criticism of the works of female authors, as a result of which in some cases they even stopped publishing their works. The authors cultivated mutual friendships through letters and, in accordance with the customs of the time, exchanged endearing expressions. These bonds were expressive and passionate, while otherwise the expression of emotions, especially love, was often suppressed or marked as negative in letters. As a contrast to these tendencies, in the letters we find the theme of free love, which society perceived as unconventional. The relationships with the men described in the letters are often ambivalent, as their descriptions oscillate between enthusiasm and doubt. The topic of sexuality, which otherwise rarely appears in the letters, is often marked by questions of morality. Since the letters were written at a time when efforts for greater equality of women in society were awakening in Slovenia, among the self-representations in the letters we also find an emancipated woman who is free and does not pay attention to traditional conventions about how she should live.

The self-representations of women writers, which show how they saw themselves, express different levels of intimacy: from more formal relationships between editors or female editors and authors to intimate friendly and confidential relationships. With letters, women also performed the emotional work of mutual support, counseling and trust. The discussed letters show that Slovenian women writers in the modern period formed a community: they often mention each other's works and share news about their planned literary publications, as well as similar plans of other authors. In addition, they also

exchanged comments on the works of other authors; in these cases, the letters provided a rhetorical space where the community functioned and was created by the exchanges between the interlocutors (cf. Melonas 2020: 38–57). Their correspondence allowed them to speak about themselves in their own voice and shape their image in society. Their individual self-representations were intimate and at the same time embedded in the literary system and its institutions, as well as in the wider socio-cultural system, social circles and relationships between correspondents. Through letters, they shared their experiences with others and thereby built a common perception of reality and mutual understanding (Eiranen 2015: 81). Many excerpts from the authors' letters show that they felt that as a group they were marginalized, excluded from the Slovenian literary system. They were criticized by established editors and literary critics, who treated them patronizingly, so they had difficulty publishing their works. Case studies of interventions by male editors of literary magazines are examples of authority and control, which have traditionally influenced the creative process of female writers, on the other hand, they are also examples of resistance and emancipatory belief in one's own talent.

With a focus on the emotional aspects of the entering of women writers in the Slovenian literary system in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the different emotional pressures on them become evident. Although women at that time were traditionally still associated with the private space of the home, the research showed that the women writers in question were also active in the public sphere, as they published their works in magazines and books and acted as intellectuals, editors, writers and/or poets. At the same time, they still took on more traditional roles that were intended for women, as they took care of the children and the household. Thus, in their letters, they often express the tension between their public and private activities, namely they point out that they do not have time for literary creation due to obligations in the private sphere. If early women's correspondence highlighted women's altruism, the renunciation of self-fulfillment and the renunciation of ambitious goals in order to maintain the discriminatory hierarchies of men (cf. Celdran 2013), the roles of the authors in the analyzed letters were also progressive and showed professional ambitions. The analysis of the emotions expressed in letters showed that the

process of becoming a female writer and/or poet, editor, critic, intellectual and emancipated woman was emotional. With the analysis of the emotional content of letters connected with different new roles of women writers their feeling of insufficiency was detected: they felt dissatisfaction with their texts and lack of confidence, they felt incapable of writing and in their letters wrote about destroying their work because they felt that it was not good enough. Sometimes they feel that they are dependent on the opinions of well-known male writers, editors and critics. In their letters women writers describe their worries about literary critics of their work that they find discouraging and hurtful. They report that being a writer is demanding because authors feel a lot of pressure or on the other hand they feel indifferent to criticism. In intellectual debates among women writers reason is valued as more important than feeling. They feel happiness and freedom when they are not following social conventions about the prescribed behaviors of women in public, they feel anger when faced with those conventions. Women writers mention the need for encouragement of contemporary women to be emancipated and end the political apathy.

Epistolary writing was a place of intimate transformation of women writers in Slovenian literary history, when they were still minority members of the literary system. Based on this analysis, the considered period of literary history is shown in a different light: it is evident that the process of asserting women writers in the Slovenian literary system in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was emotional, namely women faced many problems when establishing themselves in their new roles and the descriptions of this process in their letters are regularly connected with negative feelings. The establishing of women writers in the Slovenian literary system was therefore distinctly difficult for them, as in their letters they express vulnerability and sensitivity. On the other hand the results of the analysis show that self-representations in the context of their epistolary discourse express empowerment and rebellion against a system that does not accept them.

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