

COMRADE-ESS GIRL:¹
SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TRILOGY
AS COMING OF AGE IN BETWEEN THE FEMINIST WAVES

Natalija Stepanović
Central European University
Vienna, Austria

Key words: Yugoslav literature, *Bildungsroman*, autobiography, narrative analysis, cultural history, girlhood studies, coming of age, femininity

Summary: This essay analyses the autobiographical trilogy authored by a Croatian writer mostly known for her children's stories, Sunčana Škrinjarić (1931-2004). The trilogy consists of the novels *Ulica predaka* [*The Ancestor's Lane*], *Ispit zrelosti* [*The Matriculation Exam*], and *Bijele strijele* [*White Arrows*], published between 1980 and 2004. I interpret them as feminist *Bildungsroman*, a genre present both in the West and in the East, tracking the heroine's venture from the private into public sphere, while downplaying the importance romance and marriage had in the classic, male-centric version of the form. Following a narrative analysis, I discuss Škrinjarić's portrayal of aesthetic norms and cultural production and outline possibilities of resistance through reading and writing. The third section of the essay engages with the history of Yugoslav feminism and situates Škrinjarić within a recently revised timeline of women's activism that emphasizes the continuity between the government-supported project of women's emancipation and second-wave feminism. By combining textual analysis with wider cultural context, I have found that Škrinjarić's still widely obscure trilogy offers valuable insights into the formation of female identities and possible plots in which we encounter said identities.

DRUG-CA OMLADINKA:
AUTOBIOGRAFSKA TRILOGIJA SUNČANE ŠKRINJARIĆ
KAO OPIS ODRASTANJA IZMEĐU FEMINISTIČKIH VALOVA

¹ The title is an allusion to one of the formative events of Yugoslav second-wave feminism, 1978 conference "Comrade-ess Woman: Women's Question – A New Approach?" held in Belgrade.

Ključne riječi: Jugoslavenska književnost, *Bildungsroman*, autobiografija, kulturalna povijest, djevojački studiji, odrastanje, ženstvenost

Sažetak: Ovaj se esej bavi autobiografskom trilogijom Sunčane Škrinjarić (1931-2004), hrvatske spisateljice uglavnom poznate po pričama za djecu. Njezina se trilogija sastoji od romana *Ulica predaka*, *Ispit zrelosti* i *Bijeke strijele* koji su objavljeni između 1980-te i 2004. Te romane tumačim kao feministički *Bildungsroman*, žanr prisutan i na zapadu i istoku koji prati priključivanje protagonistkinje javnom životu istovremeno izbjegavajući motive romanse i braka privilegirane u klasičnoj inačici žanra o muškim likovima. Nakon narativne analize, raspravljam o Škrinjarićinom prikazu estetskih standarda i kulturalne produkcije te opisujem mogućnost otpora putem čitanja i pisanja. Treći dio eseja posvećen je povijesti Jugoslavenskog feminizma i smještanju Škrinjarić unutar nedavno uspostavljene kronologije ženskog aktivizma koja naglašava kontinuitet između državnog projekta ženske emancipacije i drugovalnog feminizma. Uparivanjem tekstualne analize i šireg kulturalnog konteksta, Škrinjarićina još uvijek uvelike nepoznata trilogija nudi zanimljive uvide u oblikovanje ženskih identiteta i mogućih zapleta unutar kojih susrećemo te identitete.

the history will condense itself into
sentences
we will secretly rip out the pages
toward always novel taste
imposed by the accidental century
in which we have found ourselves
accidentally²

1. Formational Narratives

Looking back, the representative figure of Yugoslav state socialism may seem to be the working mother, who, gaining full and equal access to employment, education, and welfare (Einhorn, 1993: 20-7; Harsch, 2014: 489), signaled the advent of general human emancipation (Zaharijević 2017, 266) and a triumph of socialist modernity over capitalist patriarchy. However, a (wo)man is not born a proper socialist subject but becomes one;

² From poem "I Was But a Blink" by Sunčana Škrinjarić.

as historian Igor Duda elaborated in the introduction to the book *Stvaranje socijalističkoga čovjeka* [*Making of the Socialist Man*], the qualities such as “mutual affinity and comradeship” (2017, 5) were to be gradually acquired. Mass wartime organizations, such as Women’s Antifascist Front and The Pioneer Alliance of Yugoslavia, both founded in 1942, continued to aim for a wide outreach (Bonfiglioli, 2021: 69). An elaborated, state-funded schooling system, heralded as a “success story for women under communism in Europe” by historian Donna Harsch (2014: 494), was established following the Second World War. Accessible, widely available culture, amateur sporting events, and youth work actions were envisioned as some of the ways toward the “making of healthy, brave and creative socialist human,³ who has a rich inner life, who is open to new ideas, who loves his homeland and respects other people, who grows up from good pioneer and youth” (Duda, 2017: 10). As the quote indicates, the socialist subject is framed as an adult (male), but it is the continuity of proper behavior in childhood and youth that is truly crucial for his maturation. Hence, youth (and possible teenage delinquency) represents a potential source of cultural anxiety (Kolanović, 2011: 232-3) as it threatens a bright, comradeship-oriented, and egalitarian future.

Equally interested in formational processes, the Yugoslav second-wave feminists – participants in the political current emerging in the 1970s, relying on “progressive legislation” and “egalitarian policies” (Einhorn, 1993: 29), while pushing for further changes, especially within the private sphere and culture (Lóránd 2019, 110; Zaharijević, 2017: 274-5) – read, translated, and penned out coming of age narratives. Lydia Sklevicky, the pioneer of regional feminist historiography, praised Sylvia Plath’s portrayal of post-adolescent crisis in her 1963 novel *The Bell Jar*, claiming that the young American writer lost her genius (and life) to oppressive marriage (1996: 231-3). Local production also thrived. Irena Vrkljan, Berlin-based poet, published the first two parts of her autobiographical trilogy, the novels *The Silk*, *The Shears* (1984) and *Marina, or about Biography* (1986), where she described her middle-class childhood and romances in the bohemian circles of the 1950s. In 1988, journalist Slavenka Drakulić published *Mramorna koža* [*Marble Skin*], a first-person narrative in which an adult sculptor recalls neglect and sexual abuse she suffered as a child.

Although the first part of Sunčana Škrinjarić’s coming of age trilogy, the 1980 novel *Ulica predaka* [*The Ancestor’s Lane*], was praised by prominent

³ While describing the new subject, Duda relies on postwar speeches and 1958 program of The League of Communists of Yugoslavia. These sources are, generally, gender-inclusive in terms of language, but they do allow some ambiguity as Croatian work for human (čovjek) is often understood as referring to men.

feminists such as Sklevicky, journalist Vesna Kesić and literary scholar Ingrid Šafranek (Lukšić, 2002: 127), the trilogy remains (mostly) obscure and is often *dismissed* as children's literature. Along with *The Ancestor's Lane*, it comprises the novels *Ispit zrelosti* [*The Matriculation Exam*] (2002) and *Bijeje strijele* [*White Arrows*] (2004). Narrated in the third person, by an omnipresent, omniscient, and occasionally ironic narrator channeling a multiplicity of perspectives intersected with newspaper clippings, Škrinjarić's trilogy follows Tajana, a peculiar girl from an impoverished bourgeoisie family who is hoping to experience "a great love, passionate and very romantic" (Škrinjarić, 2004: 277), while halfheartedly trying to publish her writing. Škrinjarić describes the period from 1932, the year of Tajana's birth, to 1959, when she finally moves out of her parents' apartment following the sudden death of her younger brother. The books were published in a strange rhythm. Unlike her contemporaries Vrkljan and Drakulić, whose maturation narratives were published in the 1980s, during a period when "'women's writing' seemed like one of the most promising poetics in recent Croatian literature" (Zlatar 2004, 79), Škrinjarić returned to her trilogy just before her death, in the early 2000s, when the momentum of focusing on women's experiences and fragmentary, generically fluid prose (ibid: 35-6; Lóránd, 2019:113-7) came to an abrupt halt. However, some of the episodes presented as Tajana's experiences – notably, the description of an affair with a Bohemian man known as the Count – were published in the late 1960s and throughout 1970s as confessional prose in a first-person narrative.⁴ Mostly known for her writing for children (Lukšić, 2002: 119), Škrinjarić's poignant descriptions of women's artistic endeavors, hypocrisy of allegedly liberated artistic circles, and a painstaking acquisition of *properly gendered behavior* never managed to find their place in the Yugoslav feminist cannon.

By relying on narrative analysis and cultural history, this essay positions Škrinjarić's coming age trilogy within the genre of feminist *Bildungsroman* that gained traction both in the West and East (Felski, 1989: 128-38; Ross, 2019: 132-3). The first two parts outline various female subjectivities, predominantly established through coalescence and clashes between the patriarchal family and the socialist modernity, while reflecting upon the practices of literary reception and production. The third part engages with recent historiographic interventions in understanding the Cold War as a period of conservatism (Bonfiglioli, 2014: 1) and re-establishment of rigid gendered roles (ibid, 7) by comparing them with Škrinjarić's fictional take on the era. Neither a "heroine worker" (Einhorn,

⁴ First appearing in daily press and literary journals, these short stories were gathered and published in the 1978 collection *Noć s vodenjakom* [*A Night With an Aquarian*].

1993: 218), nor a romantic protagonist she imagines herself to be, Tajana and her life trajectory (both in motives and in style) represent a riveting narrative on emancipation and authorship.

2. New Girl

As literary critic and translator Irena Lukšić elaborates in one of the rare overviews of Škrinjarić's oeuvre, which – because of the date it was published – could not include the complete trilogy, *The Ancestor's Lane* is mostly read as heavily inspired by the writer's life (2003: 131).⁵ The events depicted in the text, such as the early passing of a beloved class colleague, visiting an aunt in a sanatorium, a summertime fling and the already mentioned affair, are featured in Škrinjarić's early first-person writing. While this does not necessarily make them any more factual than their retelling in the trilogy, it shows intent and aesthetical switch from autobiographical mode toward “novelized biography” or “novel of formation” (ibid: 128) and allows Škrinjarić to combine various points of view. Hence, it enables the presence of multiple (female) voices which are not limited by the protagonist's knowledge as they were in her short stories. Documenting “the individual's progress through the social world” (Evans, 2005: 35), these novels can also be recognized as feminist *Bildungsroman* divided into three parts.

Developed in the 19th-century Europe as a narrative of a young man's attempt to find his place in the rapidly changing modern world and, by overcoming temptations, to settle in exemplary bourgeois life (Felski, 1998: 134-5), the *Bildungsroman*, as a linear biographical form following the individual's venture into the public sphere and path toward self-knowledge,

⁵ Škrinjarić's biography, which I have mostly patched up by means of prefaces to various editions of her books, as well as interviews and articles from and about her prominent family of artists, largely coincides with Tajana's. To list a few telling examples, both the author and the heroine attended the Faculty of Teacher Education, worked at Radio Zagreb and had a brother, drummer in the Zagreb rock band *The White Arrows*, who died in a car crash. However, in 1954, Škrinjarić gave birth to her daughter, Croatian children's literature author Sanja Pilić, whereas Tajana remained childless and unmarried (a fact that, as I will try to show, challenges the established notions of adult womanhood). In *Kuća riječi* [*House of Words*], the 2004 selection of Škrinjarić's works as approved by the author just before her death, the novels are listed as an “autobiographical trilogy”. In her 1998 book *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, literary scholar Rita Felski argues that autobiography, written in either journal form that emphasizes the “dailiness” of women's lives structured through repetitive domestic work and emotional labor (1998: 96) or as retrospective accounts (Vrkljan's novels belong to this genre), is the foundational narrative mode of contemporary women's writing (ibid: 86). As texts I have discussed in the introductory section indicate, these genres also held important role in Yugoslav literature (Lóránd, 2019: 118).

was rearticulated by the second-wave Western feminists in the 1970s and 1980s (ibid:133-8; Ross, 2019: 130). As demonstrated by Estonian literary critic Johanna Ross in her analysis of a Soviet novel *Ukuaru*, the notion of female *Bildungsroman* is useful in reading socialist literature. Yugoslavia is usually depicted as a mixture between the “East” and the “West”, which is particularly true for its later decades when Škrinjarić published her short stories and started working on the trilogy, (Kolanović, 2011: 77-80); the presence of the form apparently popular in both spheres is thus nothing completely unexpected. Moreover, the state was dedicated to socializing the youth into conscientious citizens able to participate in the social life and in the possession of all-round intellectual and creative abilities (Duda, 2017: 7). Portrayal of female (mis)education could be understood as a way of challenging the state, which the new Yugoslav feminists did by claiming that the mere fact of women’s participation in the public life is insufficient to fully eradicate patriarchal patterns (Zaharijević, 2017: 274-6). Reading Tajana’s life trajectory certainly indicates the same.

While lacking the collective of nurturing female companions and the optimistic resolution commonly found in the Western *Bildungsroman*, Škrinjarić’s trilogy features a number of traits characteristic for the genre as described by Felski. Third-person narration allows ironic distance (Felski, 1998: 136) and a slightly scornful commentary (albeit rare) on the discrepancy between Tajana’s sentimental musings and her social surroundings: when she noticed that the local Lothario arrived to their clandestine meeting, she “almost passed out from happiness ... oh, it is bad to read fairytales during childhood, you come to expect them in life and view everything wrongly. Tajana sought secrets in ordinary people, often attributing them virtues they certainly didn’t possess” (Škrinjarić, 2004: 294). Upon returning to Zagreb and being ignored by her summertime suitor, the narrator mentions that Tajana “couldn’t overcome her oversensitivity. She would still cry before sleeping and weep like unhinged during sad movies in the cinema” (ibid: 354). By following Tajana’s trajectory from the confines of an upper middle-class family into the “urban and public spaces of modernity” (Felski, 1998: 141), Škrinjarić reflects on a number of femininities. The first two contrasting models are Mommy, Tajana’s beautiful and abusive mother who married a wealthy engineer after parting with the protagonist’s communist father, and Auntie, her allegedly mentally challenged sister residing with the family and forced into domestic work. As a child, Tajana is encouraged to emulate her mother, which she either refuses or does unsuccessfully. Imperative of well-mannered, bourgeois girlhood articulated in *The Ancestor’s Lane* is equally exemplified by Tajana’s insubordination (“she was some superfluous brat

that didn't want to greet people on the street. Say, I kiss your hand says her lovely amiable debauched mommy, but she is silent [Škrinjarić, 2004: 28]) and attempts to conform:

She wanted to make everyone like her, but that was very tiring; she had to strain herself, pretend, be kind, her real nature would rupture through like a volcano after a few attempts and she would momentarily ruin and spoil everything, then she was desperate, her lovely intentions turning to something nasty and stupid, she lacked perseverance, she would throw herself on the floor, kick her legs in anger and cry. (ibid: 60)⁶

Tajana also encounters some pre-war models of the *emancipated woman*, middle-class professionals such as cheerful Edita Goldberger, a Jewish piano player unbothered by her *spinsterhood*, who was killed in the Second World War. As she starts attending high school during the newly established socialist regime, Tajana gets acquainted with diverse students whose access to the educational system was directly enabled by the state-sponsored expansion of the field (Harsch, 2014: 494): Slavica, a village girl struggling with the curriculum who wishes to escape the limitations of hard and undervalued rural work, Vlasta, a daughter of a poor seamstress and the class prodigy who eventually became a bank clerk, and ex-partisan fighter Šile who, upon returning to high school as an adult, excelled in mandatory military training. She was “the only one who knew how to assemble and disassemble a shotgun in fascinating speed” (Škrinjarić, 2004: 242), which elicited Tajana's approval. While their narrative trajectories were crucially shaped by the “state-socialist style” of women's emancipation (Einhorn, 1993: 18), the heterosexual marriage is an important part of *the good life* these socialist heroines aimed to achieve. For example, listless and often lazy Tajana who admired Vlasta's genius and expected her to become a traveling diplomat with an exciting life and numerous lovers was severely disappointed when the valedictorian married young and settled into white-collar employment. While Tajana's projection belongs to the romantic imagery mocked by the narrator, it also indicates two major aspects of Škrinjarić's trilogy: her awareness of class stratification that is often absent from Western *Bildungsroman* (Felski, 1998: 152) and dismissal of the final coupling typical for the genre (ibid: 128-9). Albeit her family fortune dilapidated, Tajana fails to relate with Vlasta's preference for security that she lacked while growing up in poverty. She also *fails* to follow in her

⁶ A similar model, featuring disobedience and performativity, is also present in Vrkljan.

footsteps by “marrying, as did almost all of her peers, some even managing to give birth to a few babies” (Škrinjarić, 2004: 128-9).

Similar to her contemporaries, Škrinjarić portrays relationships as strikingly bleak and unfulfilling. While the male protagonist of a classic *Bildungsroman* achieves self-discovery through sexual and/or romantic relationships, these have significantly more ambivalent place in feminist reinterpretation of the genre (Felski, 1998: 131). While Tajana is constantly expecting ‘a miracle’, vaguely described as an intervention of masculine powers (at first attributed to God, then to her biological father, and finally to potential romantic partners), conniving patriarchal patterns, contested both by Cold War Party activists and the second-wave feminists (Bonfiglioli 2014, 11-3), are present throughout the trilogy. Tajana is exposed to sexual violence upon the return of her biological father, who “kissed her squarely on tightly pursed lips, the kiss lasted a bit too long, just a tad” (Škrinjarić, 2004: 133), leading her to realize that “there are no miracles” (ibid, 135). This conclusion, which is also the very last sentence of *The Ancestor’s Lane*, signals both Tajana’s individual disappointment and a general power imbalance in intimate relations. As already mentioned, she remains unmarried, despite being courted by a promising young writer Slavko and the *bon vivant* Count. She instead opts to live alone and write while “having a queer feeling that everything had happened to her and that she had been living too long” (ibid, 395). The question of whether creative work represents “alternative symbolic configuration which can provide a locus of meaning” (Felski, 1998: 132) for the disenchanting heroine goes unanswered.

3. Resisting Reader/Future Writer⁷

A curious contradiction is apparent in Donna Harsch’s overview of women’s status in socialism: the historian notes that “female students clustered in humanities [and] arts” (2014: 494) but their presence did not

⁷ The term „resisting reader“ was introduced by the American feminist scholar Judith Fetterly in her 1978 monograph of the same name: Fetterly argues that American prose represents itself as universal while actually being male-centric. In order to interpret it, the female reader has to identify with the male point of view; she “is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself” (Fetterly, 1978: xii). Unlike the docile reader, the resisting one refuses identification with culturally imposed male gaze (ibid: xxii). While Tajana does not exactly acquire feminist interpretative strategies, her resistance is, as this section demonstrates, visible in *mucking up* aesthetic hierarchies as well as in her tendency toward *naïve* reading, “the experience of involvement and identification” (Felski, 1989: 102), commonly attributed to untrained and female readers.

challenge cultural imagery which – unless specifically targeting female audience – remained male-centric (ibid, 490). While Škrinjarić describes Tajana’s counterparts, some of whom are female cultural workers in city newspapers or at Radio Zagreb, the literary canon articulated in the trilogy is masculine, which does align with the underrepresentation of women in Yugoslav literature in the depicted period (Lóránd, 2019: 100). Two aesthetic ideals are contrasted: European realist and modernist literature and socialist realism, eventually merging in the work of Miroslav Krleža, renowned writer and important cultural authority in socialist Yugoslavia (Kolanović, 2011: 288). While a number of male writers are mentioned, such as Tajana’s favorites Balzac, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Flaubert, she rarely reads women as their works are repeatedly dismissed as “sentimental kitsch” (Škrinjarić, 2004: 232). Tajana encounters only two: Marija Jurić Zagorka, journalist and author of popular romances for whom she writes a eulogy crudely cut to two sentences by her editor, and Vesna Parun, a poet living with no permanent address. Slavko,⁸ who becomes an established writer in the final chapters of *White Arrows*, is far more successful in navigating the literary world. Self-assured and convinced in his future glory, the young literate is depicted as dragging all of his notebooks around Zagreb due to being “terribly afraid of someone stealing his ideas which he considered marvelous and exceedingly original” (Škrinjarić, 2004: 233). *Exceeding originality* is to be taken ironically – in fact, Slavko plagiarizes passages from Tajana’s letters despite thinking that “women are stupider and less talented than men” (ibid: 211), so the editorial board of women’s magazine is the best she can hope for.⁹ Referenced in passing, any discourse directed against socialist mores also seems to be male-dominated; it is either

⁸ Unlike Krleža, Zagorka, and Parun, who are easily recognizable as their names are unchanged, Slavko is more difficult to connect with his historical analog, writer Antun Šoljan. Škrinjarić confirmed that Slavko is modeled after Šoljan in conversation with Lidija Dujić and Ludwig Bauer, an academic and a writer who coedited the book on her relationship with poet Josip Sever (Dujić and Bauer, 2010: 7).

⁹ Women’s magazines were paramount for structuring new femininities in Yugoslavia: Škrinjarić’s grandmother and socialist feminist Zofka Kveder founded two such magazines between 1917 and 1920. As did Marija Jurić Zagorka, also an important women’s rights advocate. During the Second World War, Antifascist Women’s Front, a mass organization aiming to mobilize women (Bonfiglioli, 2021: 69), started publishing *Žena u borbi* [*Woman in Combat*], a magazine in which the “new woman”, empowered by participation in the resistance, is portrayed as “no longer bashful, shy prisoner in her home ... She left that narrow sphere and felt like an equal member of the people, she speaks at assemblies, reads and writes” (Sklevicky, 1996: 51). As Reana Senjković, a scholar studying daily life in socialism, shows, the only Yugoslav magazine for girls *Tina* (1971-1974) also articulated a specific version of girlhood by combining articles on beauty, fashion, and romance commonly found in Western publications with socialist values (2011: 485-91).

pornographic literature penned by Tajana's coworker Hanibal or texts secretly written by Slavko who did not hold women's writing in high regard. Škrinjarčić's portrayal of Yugoslav cultural field resonates with practices noticeable in the rest of the Eastern Bloc, where women were mostly absent both as producers of official culture *and* as representatives of dissent writing (Einhorn, 1993: 231-42). Even if Tajana is committed to writing by the end of the trilogy, regardless of her confessional poetry being dismissed as *too feminine*, she is, for the most part, framed as a reader rather than as a writer.

In *The Ancestor's Lane*, the protagonist is introduced as a(n) (*undisciplined*) reader who disturbs aesthetic hierarchies. Equally enamored with Prince Andrei from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and with proletarian Pavel Korchagin, the Bolshevik hero of Ostrovsky's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Tajana reads all day while lying in bed, skipping the parts she finds dull. As "no one told Tajana what is a masterpiece and what isn't and she simply read everything, anything she could find" (ibid, 44), she continued mixing cultural codes while (over)identifying with fictional characters. Despite Slavko's urge to continue their correspondence, the same he intended to publish upon becoming famous, Tajana promptly tosses away his letters and instead reads Russian classics and hagiographies, recites socialist poetry in school, and "sometimes thinks that she should throw herself under the train like Anna Karenina" (ibid: 147).

The opposition between the *active*, male writer and the *passive*, female reader may seem as an awfully conventional way of denying women's agency. This interpretation is undermined by Tajana's reading tactics that challenge well-established protocols of reception (i.e. careful, distanced reading respectful toward the distinction between *high art* and *popular culture*). In her 2011 book *Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač... [Striker! Rebel? Consumer...]*, cultural studies scholar Maša Kolanović uses Michel de Certeau's distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics' to describe oppositional attitudes in Yugoslav 'Jeans Prose', coming of age stories mostly focused on male protagonists that gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike strategies, which are characterized by localized and centralized power and imposed from the above (de Certeau, 1984: 53), tactics such as creative consumption and *improper* inhabiting of the urban space are tools of the weak for utilizing what is already available while also "limited by the possibilities of the moment" (ibid: 55). In Kolanović's analysis, strategies are official imperatives of labor and comradeship embodied by partisan fighters and postwar strikers while tactics are characters' tendencies to "do nothing", mostly by loitering in public spaces (2011: 241-50). While some other ways of rebelling, notably casual sexual

relations, (ibid: 225-7), are in Yugoslav coming of age narratives codified as a male domain “supportive toward patriarchal structures” (ibid: 286), the distinction between strategies and tactics as elaborated by Kolanović is useful in interpreting Škrinjarić. Within this framework, Tajana’s tendency to indiscriminately deploy *good* and *bad* reading materials, while liberally applying them to her own situation, represents an important challenge to Yugoslav cultural canon which excluded women, at least until the emergence of the second-wave feminism.

4. What Makes a Feminist?

The lack of a hopeful ending that would be easily recognizable as emancipatory, perhaps a hint that Tajana indeed does become a successful writer, might feel frustrating for a contemporary interpreter. This affective structure fails to fully align with either rendition of *Bildungsroman* as it is described as a fundamentally optimistic genre, both by Ross (2019: 138-9) and Felski (1998: 133), the latter attributing the possibility of a happy ending to “mediation of a women’s movement which provides an ideological framework sanctioning the self-conscious affirmation of a gendered identity” (1998: 133). Despite not having a genre-typical resolution, I think that Škrinjarić’s trilogy offers valuable insights into overlapping ideologies structuring the Yugoslav coming of age experience and its dialogue with “long women’s movement” (Bonfiglioli, 2021: 73).

Tajana is depicted throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950; there is no moment of reflection in which the adult heroine, after gaining feminist consciousness, looks back upon her (misguided) youth: Škrinjarić tried to articulate the experience as enabled during the state-sponsored project of women’s emancipation, which, at least partially, challenged patriarchal norms by giving women means to fully enter the public sphere (Bonfiglioli, 2014: 7-8), but preceding the second-wave feminism. It is suggested that Tajana writes in the confessional mode about “melancholia and gloomy clouds in the sky, greenish-grey eyes of the boy she had just fallen in love with, about Auntie’s worn-out shoes and tendency to collect cigarette butts” (Škrinjarić, 2004: 184), which had not yet been established as an aesthetic current in the 1940s and 1950s Yugoslavia, at least when it comes to women writers. According to Rita Felski, possible plots for female heroines are shaped by changing the “ideology of female identity” (1998: 124): as Škrinjarić’s trilogy is set in the early decades of Yugoslav socialism, becoming a well-received writer was not a feasible narrative outcome for the female protagonist. However, Škrinjarić started publishing the trilogy in 1980, when the style of writing and vocabulary for engaging with the topic

of female formative experience began circulating within Yugoslav cultural space, first through reception of foreign texts and then in works by local authors (Lóránd, 2019: 113). Gradually expanding the trilogy in the post-socialist period, she had rewritten her early short stories, originally published in the 1970s, as part of Tajana's life narrative. This convoluted timeline contradicts the frequently reiterated understanding of female-centric poetics and feminist politics as rediscovered by each up-and-coming generation (Sklevicky, 1996: 74; Zlatar, 2004: 79). Instead, it corresponds with the recent historiography that emphasizes the continuity of women's lasting struggle for gender equality.

As Adriana Zaharijević, Serbian philosopher and gender studies scholar, shows in her elaboration of differences between women's emancipation implemented by the "Yugoslav socialist state [that] fully endorsed equality of men and women" (2017: 266) and second-wave feminism – a critical current emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, that emphasized patriarchal patterns in "intimate, daily life" (ibid, 274) while still embracing the main tenets of Marxism – the period between women's armed resistance in the Second World War and feminist critique of the state was not as uneventful as earlier periodization suggests. Historian Chiara Bonfiglioli argues that the understanding of Cold War as an essentially conservative time that negated women's wartime efforts and forced them into traditional gender roles (2014: 1-2), presented in accounts of the second-wavers such as Lydia Sklevicky, is shaped by new standards of feminist organizing and their emphasis on autonomy (ibid: 3-4).

Due to its narrative technique, Škrinjarić's trilogy is able to encompass a variety of female trajectories. Some, like Slavica's, Vlasta's, and Šile's, are plots made possible by the state's efforts to encourage women to pursue education and employment. Others, notably Tajana's, reflect the second-wave critique of inequality in intimate relationships, claiming that "women writers and artists were by definition compared to and valued against men, that they were often denigrated in their achievement" (Zaharijević, 2017: 275). The project of "general human emancipation" (Lóránd, 2019: 115) both empowered women to speak up (or *write* up in this case) and prevented them from articulating gender-specific experiences (ibid) in a way that would be recognized and appreciated within the cultural scene. This tension is noticeable in Škrinjarić's portrayal of female writers – by opting not to fictionalize Zagorka and Parun, and by contrasting them with Krleža, she tentatively outlines the limitations of Yugoslav emancipatory policies.

Zsófia Lóránd, a historian whose 2018 book *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* is the first comprehensive account the second-wave feminism in Yugoslavia, reiterates her take on the 1970s and

1980s women's writing as "writing the sisterhood" (2019: 121) in her article from 2019 edited volume *Feminist Circulations between East and West*. Understood as "a genre and a technique of sympathetically reflecting on lives and fates of other women" (ibid, 118), this narrative mode enables critique of entrenched patterns of discrimination. By incorporating vignettes on different characters in the story of Tajana's coming of age, Škrinjarić does just that. Even though the narrator is occasionally cruel toward the protagonist due to her tendencies toward romantic reveries, a sympathetic attitude comes through in passages depicting sexual harassment, as experienced by Tajana on several occasions, and devaluation of female characters working in culture.

Tajana "rambled and didn't know how to organize her thoughts" (Škrinjarić, 2004: 185), kept a diary on "how no one likes her, her beautiful eyes and unlikable face, her first menstruation and the disappearance of Edita Goldberger" (ibid: 96), and stumbled and tripped in gym classes. Within the narrative of Tajana's maturation, Škrinjarić managed to skillfully combine individual experience (the protagonist as an underdog reflecting on her life), historical events (persecution of Jews in the Second World War) and processes through which socialist citizens were (re)made (coed physical exercise). Moreover, because of its irregular publication, starting with the short stories in the 1970s and ending with *White Arrows* in 2004, the trilogy spans through several eras of Yugoslav feminist writing and aligns with recent historiographic accounts by scholars such as Zaharijević and Bonfiglioli that emphasize the continuity of the regional women's movement. As Škrinjarić tracks the protagonist's path from the seclusion of an upper-middle class home, through educational system, into the world of employment and cultural production, she articulates various femininities and possible plots structured by several (occasionally conflicting) ideologies. While the trilogy lacks a hopeful resolution, this multiplicity, along with a unique, poetic narrative style, is Škrinjarić's legacy to regional feminist literature.

Literatura/References

- Bonfiglioli, Chiara. (2021). Communisms, Generations, and Waves: The Cases of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Cuba. In: Artwińska, Anna, Mroziak, Agnieszka (Eds.). *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond*. New York & London: Routledge: 66-81.
- Bonfiglioli, Chiara. (2014). Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia. *Aspasia* 8. 1-25.
- de Certeau, Michel. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Duda, Igor. (2017). Uvod: od nazadnosti do svemira, od projekta do zbornika. In: Duda, Igor. (Ur.). *Stvaranje socijalističkog čovjeka* [Introduction: from

- Backwardness to Space, from Project to Volume. In: Duda, Igor. (Ed.). *Making of the Socialist Man*. Zagreb & Pula: Srednja Europa. 5-22. (In Croatian.)
- Dujić, Lidija, Bauer, Ludwig. (2010). *Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu [Book about Sunčana and Sever]*. Sisak: Aura. (In Croatian.)
- Einhorn, Barbara. (1993). *Cinderella Goes to Market. Citizenship, Gender, and Women's Movements in East Central Europe*. London, Verso.
- Evans, Mary. (2005). Auto/biography as a Research Method. In: Griffin, Gabriele. (Ed.). *Research Methods for English Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 31-46.
- Felski, Rita. (1989). *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics. Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge: Hutchinson Radius.
- Fetterley, Judith. (1978). *The Resisting Reader. A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press.
- Harsch, Donna. (2014). Communism and Women. In: Smith, Stephen A. (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 488-504.
- Kolanović, Maša. (2011). *Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač... Popularna kultura i hrvatski roman od socijalizma do tranzicije [Striker! Rebel? Consumer... Popular culture and Croatian novel from socialism to transition]*. Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak. (In Croatian.)
- Lóránd, Zsófia. (2019). Sisterhood and Second Wave Feminist Stakes in Women's Art and Women's Literature in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s. In: Bühler-Dietrich, Annette. (Ed.). *Feminist Circulations between East and West*. Berlin: Frank & Timme. 109-128.
- Lukšić, Irena. (2002). Sunčana Škrinjarić: Autobiography from Various Narrative Points of View. *Croatian Studies Review, Vol. 2 № 1*. 119-133.
- Ross, Johanna. (2019). The East, the West, and the Female Bildungsroman: A Soviet Estonian Novel Half Remembered, Half Forgotten. In: Bühler-Dietrich, Annette. (Ed.). *Feminist Circulations between East and West*. Berlin: Frank & Timme. 129-149.
- Senjković, Reana. (2011). Negotiating (Socialist) Girlhood(s): The Case of the Only Girls' Magazine in Socialist Yugoslavia. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, Vol. 14 № 5*. 483-497.
- Sklevicky, Lydia. (1996). *Konji, žene, ratovi [Horses, Women, Wars]*. Zagreb: Ženska infoteka. (In Croatian.)
- Škrinjarić, Sunčana. (2004). *Kuća od riječi [House of Words]*. Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga. (In Croatian.)
- Zaharijević, Adriana. (2017). The Strange Case of Yugoslav Feminism: Feminism and Socialism in the East. In: Jelača, Dijana, Kolanović, Maša, Lugarić, Danijela. (Eds.). *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia. (Post)Socialism and Its Other*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 263-284.
- Zlatar, Andrea. (2004). *Tekst, tijelo, trauma: ogledi o suvremenoj ženskoj književnosti [Text, Body, Trauma: Essays on the Contemporary Women's Literature]*. Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak. (In Croatian.)