

NATALIJA STEPANOVIĆ

**PERPETUALLY PERIPHERAL:
LIFE NARRATIVES OF/BY SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ
AND DIVNA ZEČEVIĆ**

Marginal Intellectual Trajectories

This article supplements the history of Yugoslav women's literature with the works of two overlooked Croatian writers: Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević. Working at the same time as better-known literary figures associated with the second-wave feminism, notably Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić, and Irena Vrkljan¹, Škrinjarić and Zečević depict their attempts to claim the identities of a creative and an intellectual. I argue that Škrinjarić and Zečević articulate a feminist point of view by comparing male and female life trajectories as well as by researching their literary predecessors, the writers Dragojla Jarnević and Zofka Kveder. The two authors, who are remembered primarily as fairy tale writer (Škrinjarić) and folklorist (Zečević), left behind extensive oeuvres that should be (re)interpreted in the context of recent feminist inquiry into Yugoslav cultural history.

Solitary figures living on the outskirts of the Croatian capital Zagreb, Škrinjarić and Zečević never joined feminist circles. Their contributions to this movement are limited. Škrinjarić's debut novel *Ulica predaka* [*The Street of Ancestors*] (1980) briefly aroused the interest of her contemporaries², and Zečević published a scholarly essay and a prose fragment in the 1983 issue of the literary journal *Republika*, which brought the subject of women's literature to the attention of the Croatian public³. "Perpetually Peripheral" argues that Škrinjarić's and

¹ During socialism, Slavenka Drakulić was known mainly as a columnist. Her 1987 novel *Hologrami straha* [*Holograms of Fear*] is a frank account of illness and a female support system around her. In her early period, Dubravka Ugrešić developed a tendency toward postmodern pastiche. Her best-known work from the socialist period is *Štefica Cvek u raljama života* [*Steffie Speck in the Jaws of Life*], a 1981 novel about an office worker in search of love, in which Ugrešić parodies popular romances and fairy tales. Drakulić and Ugrešić faced fierce backlash in the 1990s for publicly criticizing the rapes committed by soldiers of all ethnicities during the Yugoslav civil war (this was perceived as traitorous to Croatia). Irena Vrkljan is best known for her three novels, in which she interweaves her own life story with that of the Croatian actress Dora Novak and the Russian émigré poet Marina Tsvetaeva: *Svila, škare* [*The Silk, the Shears*] (1984), *Marina ili o biografiji* [*Marina or about Biography*] (1986), and *Dora, ove jeseni* [*Dora, this Fall*] (1991).

² Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi* [*Horses, Women, Wars*], Zagreb, Ženska infoteka, 1996, p. 250.

³ Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 101.

Zečević's stories about unruly women and their (failed) creative pursuits belong to the corpus of Yugoslav feminist literature.

Born in Zagreb in 1931, Škrinjarić gained recognition as a writer for children in the 1960s⁴. During the 1960s and 1970s, she published a dozen short stories in literary magazines and daily newspapers, finally compiling them in the collection *Noć s vodenjakom* [*A Night with an Aquarius*] in 1978. Together with her stories from the 1980s, she republished them in 1991 in the book *Jogging u nebo* [*Jogging to Heaven*]. As she noted in conversation with Lidija Dujić and Ludwig Bauer, a scholar and a writer who co-edited the book *Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu* [*The Book about Sunčana and Sever*] about her relationship with the poet Josip Sever, Škrinjarić considered *The Street of Ancestors*, the first part of her *Bildungsroman* trilogy, to be her best work⁵. Subsequent parts, *Ispit zrelosti* [*The Matriculation Exam*] (2001), and *Bijele strijele* [*The White Arrows*] (2004), were partially published as short stories in the first person, and, as her novelistic debut, rewritten in the third person.

The 2004 edition of Škrinjarić's selected works, on which she collaborated, as her letter to the editor Ante Matijašević at the very end shows, describes the trilogy as autobiographical. Along with this categorization, Škrinjarić's professed proclivity toward using personal experiences as inspiration makes me inclined to think of her coming-of-age novels as confessional⁶. Although it is the story of Tajana, an aspiring writer from an abusive bourgeois family struggling to adapt to the new, socialist regime, the described events (employment at the Statistical Office and Radio Zagreb, encounters with notable cultural personae, untimely death of her younger brother) largely coincide with Škrinjarić's life. The only major divergence, the fact that Škrinjarić gave birth to her daughter in 1954 while Tajana remained unmarried and childless, challenges the normative formational experiences of women's (auto)biographies.

The trilogy is an example of "personal storytelling"⁷ characterised by longevity and generic fluidity – therefore, it is comparable to Divna Zečević's diary. However, since it was published (and presumably completed) in 2004, in the post-socialist period, Škrinjarić's trilogy apparently does not belong in this article on Yugoslav literary history. I chose to include it for several reasons. It helps to parallel Zečević's life story, describing similar experiences while illuminating the gendered power dynamics of the Yugoslav cultural space and, consequently,

⁴ Irena Lukšić, "Sunčana Škrinjarić: Autobiography from Various Narrative Points of View", *Croatian Studies Review*, 2, 2002, 1, p. 119.

⁵ Lidija Dujić, Ludwig Bauer, *Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu* [*The Book about Sunčana and Sever*], Sisak, Aura, 2010, p. 8.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁷ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography. A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 14.

Škrinjarić's commitment to feminist causes, which analyses of her work either fail to acknowledge or deny⁸. Partly because of the temporal distance from the events it depicts, the author's autobiographical trilogy has a degree of candour not present in her earlier prose. In contrast to Škrinjarić's short stories, which focus on intimate encounters and domestic plots, Tajana's narrative deals with the cultural politics of the 1950s and 1960s. Škrinjarić's novels are not only engaging female formation narratives – they also describe the questioning of gender norms in a period that is often underrepresented in feminist historiography: Cold War era.

After her death in 2004, Škrinjarić is regarded in Croatian literary studies as a beloved writer for children. As the proceedings of a conference organized in Osijek in 2008, the only publication to analyze her works in detail, show, her writing addressed to adults is rarely engaged with. Since she is not mentioned in overviews of Yugoslav women's art, with the exception of Celia Hawkesworth's 2001 essay "Croatian Women Writers 1945–95," which lists all the authors who published during socialism, Škrinjarić's "fluent, evocative style"⁹ has yet to find its place in feminist literary history.

Divna Zečević was born in Osijek in 1937. She moved to Zagreb to pursue studies in English and Yugoslav languages and literatures, eventually earning her doctorate under the mentorship of Professor Ivo Frangeš. After a short period of tutoring and working in the administration of the Museum of Serbs in Croatia, Zečević began to study oral literature at the Institute of Folk Art. Zečević, who was initially interested primarily in modernist poetry and reluctant to enter this field (especially when research required visiting remote villages and carrying heavy equipment) eventually became a prominent folklorist.

From 1961 until her death, Zečević kept a diary. In it she often interpolated her daily routines and reflections with lives of others, especially the confessional writing of Croatian nineteenth century literate Dragojla Jarnjević whom she relentlessly studied. In addition to personal experiences, critical essays, and project ideas, Divna, as she noted while searching for a publisher for her collected poems, also used her diary to write verse and prose passages¹⁰. Some of them were published in *Netremice [Intently]* (1976), *Pjesme i fragmenti [Poems and Fragments]* (1990), and *Autoportret s dušom [Self-Portrait with the Soul]* (1997). Detailing urban living and emotional turmoil, *Intently* and *Poems and Fragments* complement Zečević's life narrative as presented in her diary. Zečević's obituary

⁸ Ante Matijašević, "Foreword", in Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi [House of Words]*, Zagreb, Mozaik knjiga, 2004, p. 13; Irena Lukšić, "Sunčana Škrinjarić: Autobiography", p. 124.

⁹ Celia Hawkesworth, "Croatian Women Writers, 1945–95", in Celia Hawkesworth (ed.), *A History of Central European Women's Writing*, New York, Palgrave, 2001, p. 264.

¹⁰ Smilja Kursar Pupovac, "Foreword", in Divna Zečević, *Autoportret s dušom [Self-Portrait with the Soul]*, Zagreb, Duriex, 2008, p. 7.

describes her as having “lived for her scholarly and literary work”¹¹. Since she married in 1967 and gave birth to her daughter Marijeta a year later, Zečević tried, often unsuccessfully, to divide her time between the public and domestic spheres.

Literary critic Marija Ott Franolić, whose book *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom* [*Diary of the Unattainable*] compares Zečević’s diary with autobiographical narratives of intellectual or artistically inclined women struggling with social limitations¹², transcribed, compiled, and edited the manuscript which was published in 2017 under the title *Život kao voda hlapi* [*Life Evaporates Like Water*]. As with Škrinjarić, the time gap (and, in this case, a different editor: the segments submitted for publication by Zečević were far less revealing than the expanded, posthumously published version) allowed for a lesser degree of (self-)censorship.

Existing Scholarship

While this article focuses primarily on the two overlooked authors, it also aims to bring Škrinjarić and Zečević into dialogue with scholarship on Yugoslav feminism: early efforts to examine the writing of regional women, essays by literary scholars Jasmina Lukić and Andrea Zlatar, and contributions by the subsequent generation, especially Zsófia Lóránd (who builds on Lukić) and Marija Ott Franolić (who draws on Zlatar). Feminist historians Zsófia Lóránd and Chiara Bonfiglioli significantly upended the field in the 2010s. Lóránd’s 2018 book *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* traces the emergence of second-wave feminism in Yugoslavia in its artistic and activist aspects. Bonfiglioli’s understanding of local feminism as a continuous critical current¹³ is important for inserting Škrinjarić and Zečević into the timeline of the Yugoslav women’s movement, specifically for interpreting the authors’ works that preceded its resurgence in the 1970s and 1980s.

The new generation of educated and outspoken city-dwellers, as the second-wave Yugoslav feminists are described by Lóránd, challenged “the socialist state [...] based on one of its biggest promises, the equality of women”¹⁴. The historian emphasizes that these women collaborated with the state and relied on public

¹¹ Ljiljana Marks, Ivan Lozica, “Divna Zečević Zdunić (1937–2006)”, *Narodna umjetnost: hrvatski časopis za etnologiju i folkloristiku*, 43, 2006, 2, p. 221.

¹² Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom: svakodnevnica u ženskim zapisima* [*Diary of the Unattainable: Everyday Life in Women’s Records*], Zagreb, Disput, 2015, p. 15.

¹³ Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Women’s Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia”, *Aspasia*, 2014, 8, p. 2; Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Communisms, Generations, and Waves: The Cases of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Cuba”, in Anna Artwińska, Agnieszka Mroziak (eds.), *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond*, New York and London, Routledge, 2021, p. 73.

¹⁴ Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge*, p. 2.

funds when promoting feminist ideas¹⁵. Born after WWII to parents who had experienced the war firsthand¹⁶, the feminists began to articulate their dissent in the early 1970s¹⁷. Yet to become established scholars, women who tentatively critiqued state socialism were mocked and ostracized¹⁸. According to Lóránd, feminists entered the mainstream through art and the mass media¹⁹. She argues that *Drug-ca žena: Novi pristup* [*Comrade-ess Woman: A New Approach*], the 1978 conference in Belgrade attended by a number of internationally known leftist activists and theorists²⁰, contributed to the visibility of Yugoslav feminism. The gradually emerging network of research groups *Žena i društvo* [*Woman and Society*], the first of which was founded in Zagreb²¹, also signaled the strengthening of feminist consciousness.

As avid readers and translators of foreign fiction, Yugoslav feminists eventually created literature of their own. In the 1983 issue of *Republika*, Ingrid Šafranek published an essay “‘Ženska književnost’ i ‘žensko pismo’” [“‘Women’s Literature’ and ‘Women’s Writing’”], in which she discussed Hélène Cixous’s elaboration of *écriture féminine*. The proliferation of regional women’s writing soon followed. Yugoslav women’s literature, characterized by a frank engagement with corporeality and sexuality²² and a tendency toward confessional genres²³, was, as Zlatar argues in her 2004 monograph *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* [*Text, Body, Trauma*], a poetics capable of subverting entrenched textual patterns²⁴. Used in retrospect to group the most prominent authors of the period, “women’s writing” usually refers to the works of Ugrešić, Vrljan, and Drakulić, as well as Daša Drndić and Rada Iveković²⁵.

In her pioneering article “Women-centred Narratives in Contemporary Serbian and Croatian Literatures”, Lukić provides a comprehensive overview and astute

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 31-33.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 46-47.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 32-35.

²² Ingrid Šafranek, “‘Ženska književnost’ i ‘žensko pismo’” [“‘Women’s Literature’ and ‘Women’s Writing’”], *Republika: mjesečnik za književnost, umjetnost i društvo*, 1983, 39, p. 19.

²³ Jasmina Lukić, “Women-centered Narratives in Contemporary Serbian and Croatian Literatures”, in Sibelan Forrester, Pamela Chester (eds.), *Engendering Slavic Literatures*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 227.

²⁴ Andrea Zlatar, *Tekst, tijelo, trauma: ogledi o suvremenoj ženskoj književnosti* [*Text, Body, Trauma: Essays on Contemporary Women’s Literature*], Zagreb, Naklada Ljevak, 2004, p. 79.

²⁵ Jasmina Lukić, “Women-centered Narratives”, pp. 229-238; Andrea Zlatar, *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*, p. 83; Zsófia Lóránd, “Sisterhood and Second Wave Feminist Stakes in Women’s Art and Women’s Literature in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s”, in Annette Bühler-Dietrich (ed.), *Feminist Circulations between East and West*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2019, pp. 110-111.

interpretations of regional women's writing without ignoring formal differences among authors. She argues that first-person narratives were gradually replaced by explorations of female experiences "as part of a larger framework"²⁶. Distinguishing narrative instances, as Lukić aptly does in her article, is important for reading Škrinjarić and Zečević, who have been blurring the normative modes of narrating one's life since the 1960s. To follow Lukić's example, I rely on two concepts: "life narrative" and "life writing". As literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain in *Reading Autobiography*, a book that summarizes a decade of their collaboration as well as findings from the authors' monographs, "life writing" refers to all confessional, fictional, and historiographical texts that are "about life", while "life narratives" are generically diverse self-referential texts²⁷.

Male Role Models, Female Disappointments

For Škrinjarić and Zečević, a narrative one can inhabit is structured by gender. The situation of the female artists and intellectuals we encounter in their works differs from that of their male counterparts. Often without supportive peers, lacking in time or space to work, and never quite sure if they are suited for the role, their (auto-)biographical trajectories illuminate the inhospitality of archetypal formative narratives. Stalled, unproductive, and maladjusted periods and lives, descriptions of failure rather than success, are foregrounded by Zečević and Škrinjarić. This section argues that they illuminate disparities within nominally egalitarian Yugoslav society.

Škrinjarić and Zečević are authors fascinated by various genres of life writing (memoirs, biographies, and confessional poetry) as well as by shifting modes of telling stories about their own lives and the lives of others. They have produced a variety of (auto-)biographical writings, including two overarching narratives: a *Bildungsroman* (published in part as a series of short stories in the first person) and an extensive diary. Born in the 1930s, awkwardly positioned between anti-fascist militants and second-wave feminists, and coming of age in the 1950s, influenced by male-dominated intellectual circles and selectively loosening sexual mores, Škrinjarić and Zečević had limited opportunities to negotiate their marginality, especially given the general hostility towards the confessional genres to which they tended. Therefore, their autobiographical narratives can be described as stories of failure.

Failure is certainly not in the foreground if we systematise the events presented: published books, intellectual exchange with peers, and influence on subsequent generations of feminists. Nevertheless, it is given a prominent role

²⁶ Jasmina Lukić, "Women-centered Narratives", p. 238.

²⁷ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 3.

within the narrative, which, as Smith and Watson argue, should not be interpreted as a mere reflection of historical circumstances²⁸. Because “they offer a subjective ‘truth’ rather than a ‘fact’”²⁹, the narratives authors wrote about themselves diverge from what we have come to see in retrospect as stories about overcoming great difficulties and leaving influential works that redefined literature both academically and artistically.

Much like life narratives, which, as English poet and social critic Stephen Spender points out in his essay “Confessions and Autobiography”, combine “externalised and internal points of view”³⁰ (ventures of a “social or historical personality”³¹ witnessed by others and reshaped through introspection) failure for Škrinjarić and Zečević has an external and an internal dimension. Occasionally related with misperforming in the public sphere, stuttering or stumbling before an audience, failure is depicted as an internal experience of improper gender embodiment. For women, more than the public persona is under scrutiny. While Smith and Watson stress the importance of this dual perspective, Spender also notes that “self-revelation of the inner life is perhaps a dirty business”³². His remark is to be understood as a warning to read skeptically, because narrators who claim to be the most truthful tend to fib and evade in order to present themselves as they want to be seen. However, the “dirtiness” of the female confessional writing has different implications. Unruly bodies, oversharing about unconventional sexuality, and socially unacceptable reproductive choices, themes present in Škrinjarić’s and Zečević’s lives trajectories and foregrounded in the exploration of their predecessors, can disqualify women from becoming artists/intellectuals.

The authors deal with the specter of undisciplined bodies and reject monogamous heterosexual coupling. From the depiction of the warts on Tajana’s hands to her lack of athleticism, Škrinjarić frequently reflects on aberrant embodiment. By introducing the character of Šile, a former partisan who attends high school as an adult and excels in military training courses, Škrinjarić juxtaposes two models of femininity that were discarded in the late 1940s: overtly androgynous fighter (character written out of the war fiction published immediately afterward)³³, and a sickly middle-class girl who could not participate in important components of socialist life such as sports. However, Tajana is

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

³¹ Stephen Spender, “Confessions and Autobiography”, in James Olney (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 116.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 118.

³³ Maša Kolanović, *Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač... Popularna kultura i hrvatski roman od socijalizma do tranzicije [Striker! Rebel? Consumer... The Croatian Novel from Socialism to Transition]*, Zagreb, Naklada Ljevak, 2011, pp. 203-207.

usually not a frail waif – she throws tantrums, bites a classmate with her “horrendous, vampire-like teeth”³⁴, and has early outbursts of sadism and later tendency toward masochism. Zečević, who also had no interest in vigorous exercise, often wrote about the shame she felt about all physical matters during her upbringing and her ailing and aging body. Moreover, she complains about feeling sluggish during menstruation, and wishes to separate the hormonal body from the mind and the imperative to “overcome feelings with the will, to work like a man”³⁵. According to Smith, this duality structured history of the Western autobiography by dividing universal, male subject from the female, embodied one³⁶. The latter can negotiate its secondary status through life writing while also undermining its protocols³⁷.

Reflecting on the rapidly changing sexual politics of the second half of the 20th century, the authors also expose two ideals of partnership as asymmetrical: romance modelled after popular literature (upheld by Škrinjarić’s characters and ironized by the narrator) and intellectual camaraderie (in Zečević’s diary). They document the evolution from postwar puritanism to gradual liberalization – the presence of sex in mass culture and the relaxation of abortion laws that culminated in the 1974 Constitution allowing abortion on demand³⁸. Škrinjarić and Zečević challenge normative socialist womanhood, both in its reproductive function (as wife and mother, which should override other forms of becoming) and during sexual intercourse itself.

In her 1971 short story *Jedno ljeto* [*One Summer*], Škrinjarić depicts a young woman (also a narrator) having an affair in semi-private corners of a coastal town. The heroine is as apathetic toward her lover as she is toward the possibility of starting a family, seeing both as an “eternal and inevitable nightmare of repetition”³⁹. This story is retold in *The White Arrows* with a different affective undertone: the sentimental Tajana really does fall in love with her summer lover, the handsome law student Marko. The affair takes on a somber coda in Slavko’s (Tajana’s friend and occasional lover) warning that she may end up needing a visit to a clinic. Tajana’s unconventional sexual preferences are already hinted at in *The Street of Ancestors*:

³⁴ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 30.

³⁵ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi: izbor iz dnevnika 1961–2006* [*Life Evaporates Like Water: Selected Diaries 1961–2006*]. Edited by Marija Ott Franolić, Zagreb, Disput, 2017, p. 70.

³⁶ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 23.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁸ Ivana Dobrivojević, “Planiranje porodice u Jugoslaviji 1945–1974” [“Family Planning in Yugoslavia 1945–1974”], *Istorija 20. veka*, 2016, 2, pp. 85–95.

³⁹ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Noć s vodenjakom* [*A Night with an Aquarius*], Čakovec, Tiskarsko-izdavački zavod “Zrinski”, 1978, p. 31.

When her mother lashed her once, she was left with feelings of humiliation and hatred, later, when she grew up a bit, she wanted to be beaten by men, and she also sought the velvety, immovable tenderness of the teddy bear [Tajana's childhood toy], these things cannot be found in one person, so there always had to be several⁴⁰.

Despite its longevity, Zečević's marriage was passionless. She frequently mentions her "frigidity" and disregards sex in favor of seeking intellectual companionship with her peculiar, platonic romantic interests – Professor Frangeš, Priest Soldo, and a much younger colleague. Zečević downplays the significance of events nominally recognized as turning points – the description of her wedding is only a few sentences long. She also constantly criticizes the male entitlement to the female bodies. After meeting a friend from university who was looking for an affair rather than, as she hoped, a discussion, Divna remarks that "only when the boys offer their beds is there a lot of work and opportunity for a woman"⁴¹. When she became pregnant with her daughter Marijeta (and reluctantly decided to keep her), Zečević mentioned her 1960 abortion. Zečević recalls how, after being rejected by several doctors (at that time women were still forced to justify their decision to commissions)⁴², she managed to get an abortion just in time, witnessing in the ward "horrible screams and a physicality that was anything but dignified"⁴³.

As Smith and Watson show using the Western autobiographical canon, identities that can be asserted, denied, and remodeled are shaped by context: "there are models of identity culturally available to life narrators at any particular historical moment that influence what is included and what is excluded"⁴⁴. In Škrinjarić's autobiographical trilogy and Zečević's diary, there are two main conflicting patterns of becoming: "the (socialist) intellectual" and "the (married) woman". The tension is to be sought in the antagonism between the masculine coding of the intellectual and the feminine coding of normative femininity. The main models of identity in Škrinjarić's and Zečević's narratives are compound: I have chosen to bracket the adjectives because of the ambivalent role of socialism and marriage, and the frequent renegotiation of their relations to intellectual labor and womanhood.

Sidonie Smith's discussion of representativeness and rebellion, concepts developed in two major works on autobiography, Georg Misch's *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* and Karl Joachim Weintraub's *The Value of the Individual*, helps illuminate the models of subjectivity in Škrinjarić and Zečević. For Misch, autobiographies, although expressions of one's personality, are always representative to some degree, since their authors engage in the public sphere and

⁴⁰ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 41.

⁴¹ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 375.

⁴² Ivana Dobrivojević, "Planiranje porodice", p. 87.

⁴³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 125.

⁴⁴ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 34.

depend on circulating discourses on selfhood⁴⁵. Misch's disciple Weintraub sees the value of the confessionals differently: a truly interesting autobiographer rebels against social mores and makes himself an outcast instead of being a proper representative of his time⁴⁶. Before interpreting the life narratives of Anglo-Saxon women writers, Smith notes that both ways of belonging to one's context are "men's life scripts" – women's access to political and cultural life is restricted and attempts to enter the public arena "transgresses patriarchal definitions of female nature by enacting the scenario of male selfhood"⁴⁷. Similarly, the position of an outcast is made possible by his possibility of belonging to the social order, for "only in the fullness of this membership can the fullness of his rebellion unfold"⁴⁸. While the division between private and public was shifted by the socialist imperative of full employment, the possible plots and identities for female protagonists were still limited. The meandering life trajectories of the authors show the prevailing inaccessibility of cultural life in socialist Yugoslavia. Neither vehement Party members nor dissidents, Škrinjarić and Zečević recount their quests for recognition and, by doing so, challenge the socialist framework.

The circumstances of production and publication differ between Škrinjarić and Zečević. Although both published part of their autobiographical writings (the complete first book as well as episodes from the subsequent parts of the autobiographical trilogy, or prose excerpts and poems) in the socialist period, the genre dictates the relationship between the time of the events described and the time in which they are narrated. The full texts were published after the collapse of Yugoslavia, in 2004 and 2017. However, the events described, either recounted retrospectively in Škrinjarić's *Bildungsroman* or reflected upon as they are happening in Zečević's diary, describe the gender-based asymmetries that governed Yugoslav cultural sphere.

Škrinjarić narrates her coming-of-age trilogy in the third person. Unlike in *A Night with an Aquarius*, she opts for an external narrative instance. This allows her to take an ironic stance toward the period depicted, Tajana's formative years (spanning from the early 1930s to the late 1950s). Because the narrative breaks off before her creative maturity, Tajana's potential to become a self-actualized artist is present only if the protagonist is conflated with the author who gained prominence in the 1970s. A precocious child, Tajana began journaling at an early age. However, her first public attempts at writing (penning confessional poetry), which she undertook in the literary section of the school immediately after the war, were met with rejection and the accusation of being "backward, sentimental, and, worst

⁴⁵ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

of all, reactionary”⁴⁹. After her book of poems submitted to the literary magazine *Izvor* (an actual publication in print from 1948 to 1951) was disparagingly described as “a kind of typical female scribbling”⁵⁰, Tajana became increasingly aware of the marginalization experienced by female creatives.

In contrast to the first two parts, which focus on her upbringing, the third part of the autobiographical trilogy traces Tajana’s entry into the workforce and her involvement in artistic circles. It features a number of historical references, the most important of which is the triptych of writers: Miroslav Krleža, who does not appear as a character but is mentioned as the pinnacle of Yugoslav literature, Marija Jurić Zagorka, revered for her romances but obscure and impoverished in her later years, and Vesna Parun, a struggling poet who takes Tajana on as a protégé. Parun, like Zagorka, is praised by contemporary scholars as a feminist foremother⁵¹. These vignettes allude to the relationship between gender and success, which Škrinjarić develops further in Tajana’s life narrative. Tajana’s colleagues are pushed into children’s radio programmes and excluded from notable projects such as the adaptation of Krleža’s plays, and even a respected poet like Parun is unhoused and widely considered unhinged. Tajana is warned by an older colleague that her male peers are mainly interested in romancing her, because “prestigious positions are, of course, only for men naturally for those who belong to their circles. Women are only companions, secretaries... editors of unpopular programmes”⁵². Exposed to sexual violence from an early age, Tajana’s attempts to establish herself in official and bohemian artistic circles are repeatedly sabotaged.

Zečević began writing her diary after graduating from university in 1961. In her mid-20s, she already had the feeling of “being a failed existence”⁵³. Occasionally recalling the cruel early socialization into proper feminine behavior that Tajana also experiences, Zečević further departs from conventional diary entries (i.e., recording autobiographical events)⁵⁴ by interspersing events from her life with poems written by her or others, as well as essayistic paragraphs on literature and social issues. In addition, her diary departs from classic self-referential writing through literary devices such as second-person address:

Where are you going, Divna? Stay in your place. Where is your place? You live in all places – except your sick place. What is happening to you and where is it leading? I have to ask you this, like everyone else. [...] Homeless, you know you are homeless with a miserable Museum [of the Serbs in Croatia] job that is as insecure as your

⁴⁹ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, pp. 184-185.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 347.

⁵¹ Zsófia Lóránd, “Sisterhood and Second Wave Feminist”, p. 110.

⁵² Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 333.

⁵³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 193.

rented room. [...] You always weep – when you reach your limits and it is pointless then – now, every attempt to look you in the eye. I am seeking understanding for your embittered soul – for your affection, your desire for love, and my caution meets your desperate confusion. I am holding my hand on your hair and waiting for you to calm down⁵⁵.

Precarious working and living conditions as well as frequent emotional upheavals characterise Zečević's diary of "failed ambition and creative impotence"⁵⁶. She struggled to publish her confessional prose, which was rejected by *Republika* in 1962. In his 1975 article "Žena u suvremenoj književnosti" ["Women in Contemporary Literature"], literary critic Jure Ujević described Zečević's poetry as insufficiently avant-garde⁵⁷. Half-heartedly, Zečević worked in cultural institutions, but never managed to enter academia as she had desired – as a lecturer at the Department of Croatian Language and Literature. Divna portrays herself as "a stupid, persistent and diligent woman, good for conversation but not for assistantship, there are enough clever men for that"⁵⁸ and constantly compares her limited opportunities with those of men.

In these two life narratives, the limits are revealed through contrasts – the limitations of the "script of a woman's life"⁵⁹ become clear in the interaction with the men's life trajectories. As a brief overview of the life narratives by Škrinjarić and Zečević shows, institutions are more open to men. Moreover, the cultural canon favors masculine plots and protagonists – in Škrinjarić's novels, everyone competes to work on Krleža's plays, while female literary figures such as Zagorka and Parun are pushed to the outskirts of cultural life. Although interested in feminist classics such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Dragojla Jarnević since the early 1960s, Zečević worked primarily on the writings of great men. Before turning entirely to folklore, she researched the avant-garde poet Antun Branko Šimić and the Croatian national movement of the 19th century. Škrinjarić and Zečević engage with what Smith describes as "paying tribute to the lives of men"⁶⁰, both living (peers who gained recognition and entered prestigious professions) and dead (canonical writers): their texts are suspended "between paternal and maternal narratives, those fictions of male and female selfhood that permeate [their] historical moment"⁶¹. The oscillations between paternal and maternal lineages, which also play out domestically in the form of strained mother-daughter relationships and identification with paternal figures, allow authors to

⁵⁵ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 258.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁵⁹ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

engage with both literary history and their contemporaries: artists and intellectuals they encountered in Zagreb. Striving to join their circles, Škrinjarić and Zečević simultaneously work to appropriate male plots and embody a culturally acceptable femininity whose script of dressing up, childbearing and childrearing, housework, and emotional labor leaves little time for reading and writing.

Because of their great interest in literary production, the authors meet a variety of notable men and write about them, sometimes with admiration, sometimes with irony. While describing numerous interactions with various cultural workers and non-conformists, they compare themselves with two parallel plots: that of regime writer Slavko, modeled on the representative of existentialism Antun Šoljan,⁶² and that of Professor Ivo Frangeš. Intellectual role models doubling as romantic interests, they are success stories against which the protagonists measure their arduous attempts to participate in cultural production on an equal footing with their male counterparts. Slavko, an overconfident man of letters who plagiarizes Tajana's writings and carries his manuscripts around in a briefcase lest someone do the same to him, is mocked by the narrator. Frangeš is held in high esteem by Divna and is among "the only four people with whom I felt spiritually connected: my father [Nikola Zečević, an amateur poet], Thomas Mann, Professor Frangeš, and Ivo Andrić [Yugoslav modernist writer and Nobel laureate]"⁶³. Their efforts awarded and their prominence widely acknowledged, Slavko and Professor Frangeš show what the authors could have done had it not been for gender-based discrimination.

When it comes to dissidents rather than representatives, they are given a more prominent role in Škrinjarić's writing. While Zečević longs for a life outside of monogamous marriage and a bureaucratic job, noting that "if [she] were a man, [she] would have visited all the taverns in the world"⁶⁴, she concedes that she is a provincial woman who values a decent, orderly life. Škrinjarić's inclination toward less upstanding citizens was present even before the publication of her autobiographical trilogy. Originally published in 1969 in the daily *Večernji list* and included a decade later in *A Night with an Aquarian, Obitelj [The Family]* is a first-person short story about the companionship between the narrator, her brother, and a man named Grof [Count], a polyglot and occasional stage designer. The narrator is urged to part with childlike, rootless Count, seek steady employment and "start living seriously"⁶⁵. She is also encouraged to "marry like every honest woman, and Count is not a good match, he only yaks and fibs"⁶⁶. These imperatives suggest that, in socialism, the normative women's script includes both

⁶² Lidija Dujić, Ludwig Bauer, *Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu*, p. 7.

⁶³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Noć s vodenjakom*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

paid work and heterosexual marriage. These outcomes are avoided both in the short story and in *The White Arrows* in which the story about Count is told in the third person, as Tajana's adventure.

Perpetually on the verge of divorce from her husband Petar Zdunić, Zečević is similarly critical of marriage and an exemplary woman's life. Neither fully integrated as intellectuals nor able to become properly feminine, Škrinjarić and Zečević authored stories that resonate with the persistent double bind of female autobiography that Smith describes as follows "vulnerable to erasure from history because it is, on the one hand, an 'unfeminine' story and, on the other, merely the 'inferior' word of woman"⁶⁷. Smith's understanding of the dangers of speaking one's truth publicly, and consequently speaking from a position of authority, aptly explains the obstacles that Škrinjarić and Zečević faced when they attempted to publish their confessional writings in the 1950s and 1960s. Also, it resonates with Rebecca Solnit's depiction of femininity as a "disappearing act".

Reminiscing about her own artistic development and perils of urban living as a young woman in 1980s San Francisco, American essayist Rebecca Solnit compares bodily autonomy to claiming ownership of one's writing, even though one has been conditioned not to do⁶⁸. She sees the erasure of matrilineal genealogies in the politics of naming (i.e., adopting the husband's surname at marriage, a practice that was widely spread in Yugoslavia, although socialist Family Law allowed otherwise)⁶⁹:

Femininity at its most brutally conventional is a perpetual disappearing act, an erasure and silencing to make more room for men, one in which your existence is considered an aggression and your nonexistence a form of gracious compliance. Your mother's maiden name is often requested as the answer to a security question by banks and credit card companies, because it is assumed her original name is secret, erased, lost as she took on the name of a husband. It's no longer universal for women to give up their names but still rare to pass them on if they're married, one of the ways in which women vanish or never appear⁷⁰.

Despite major differences in context, Solnit's assertion applies to Škrinjarić, whose connection to her grandmother, the interwar feminist Zofka Kveder, as well as to her daughter, the popular children's book author Sanja Pilić⁷¹, is obscured by naming customs. It also resonates with Zečević's refusal to publish under her legal, hyphenated last name (Zečević Zdunić). Another connection between these three autobiographical narratives is the question of legacy (or lack thereof). While the listless Tajana remains impassive when she realizes that Slavko has stolen some

⁶⁷ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of my Nonexistence*, Penguin Random House LLC, 2020, pp. 66-70.

⁶⁹ Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, p. 90.

⁷⁰ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of my Nonexistence*, p. 71.

⁷¹ Celia Hawkesworth, "Croatian Women Writers, 1945-95", p. 263.

passages from their ongoing correspondence and even tells him that he may use “her insignificant life ... in one of [his] stories”⁷², Divna fights fiercely against a colleague who plagiarized her research, even going so far as to sue him for copyright infringement in 1990. Due to the texts covering different periods of life, the question of preserving one’s works is handled antithetically. Both protagonists are skeptical about their literary talent. However, Tajana is careless with her collection of poems, while Divna takes great pains to preserve her scholarly and confessional writing. Zečević, ethnically Serbian and staunch anti-nationalist, carried her manuscripts everywhere and hid the diary during the violent disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia (1991–1995). The very last sentence of her diary, both in the edited edition and, as seen in the photograph of the last page, in the manuscript, underscores the negative affect and personal history as one of defeat rather than triumph. With a hand trembling from early-onset Parkinson’s disease, Zečević notes:

I can barely write. Never
I have never been well⁷³.

Despite the grim ending, the diary (more as an object and publishing project spanning more than 60 years and linking distant feminist generations than as a text) is an example of amazing resilience and, ultimately, of faith in one’s ability to leave something for (feminist) generations to come.

Feminist Foremothers

Škrinjarić and Zečević not only transformed their experiences into life narratives, but also used (auto-)biographical trajectories to establish continuity with the pre-war generation, the literary women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For both authors, these divergent biographies, involving both the performance and the refusal of the female roles of wife and mother, became an example of resilience and a way to engage with political issues of their time. The tendency to interpolate different female experiences is reflected in terms used retrospectively to describe Yugoslav women’s writing as “sym-gyno-graphic” (Zlatar and Ott Franolić) or “writing the sisterhood” (Lóránd).

Andrea Zlatar coined the term “sym-gyno-graphy” to describe mirroring life trajectories in Vrkljan’s novel *Marina or about Biography*⁷⁴. As Ott Franolić explains when using the concept to analyze similarities between Jarnević, Zečević and herself, “sym-gyno-graphy” is an amalgam of two neologisms: Domna

⁷² Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 394.

⁷³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 616.

⁷⁴ Andrea Zlatar, *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*, p. 90.

Stanton's "autogynography" and Consuelo Riviera-Fuentes's "sim/bio/graphy"⁷⁵. According to Ott Franolić, Stanton, whose study of female confessionals dates back to the early 1980s, coined the term "autogynography" to denote the difference evident in women's life writing⁷⁶. Her intervention, while affirming some widely recognised features of female autobiographies at the time she republished her essay in 1988, such as the privileging of a "discontinuous, digressive, [and] fragmented"⁷⁷ narration and a private sphere, should not be limited to including women in the autobiographical canon. She also challenged the understanding of the genre as honestly depicted life, as well as the agenda of a feminist critic whose "own identity depended on the referential reality of the woman in the text"⁷⁸. As Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield summarize in the overview of feminist research that precedes the essays in their 2000 co-edited volume *Feminism and Autobiography*, "excising the 'bio', that is 'real life', from 'autobiography'"⁷⁹ allows women to write about themselves without obliging them to pen a truthful testimony. The shift from realistic representation to textual constitution of female subjectivity⁸⁰ is important for understanding the peculiarities of Sunčana Škrinjarić's and Divna Zečević's account of their lives: Škrinjarić wrote about herself as if she were someone else, and Zečević used historical personae to examine her own intellectual curiosity and unconventional sexuality. Through these narrative strategies, the authors challenged the boundaries of the confessional genres.

As for the collective aspect of this feminist project, Ott Franolić explains that she refers to Riviera-Fuentes⁸¹, a scholar who refused to interpret texts as a disinterested reader and affirmed interdependence and the mapping of one's identity through (textual) encounters⁸². By introducing the biological term "symbiosis" to life writing, Riviera-Fuentes emphasizes relationality. However, this intertwining is not based on ascribed roles within the family, but on the shared experience of a queer sexuality that blurs linear temporality by occupying "not only a textual/sexual space, but also a time *warp*"⁸³. Collectivity, as it occurs in

⁷⁵ Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom*, pp. 239-240.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁷⁷ Domna C. Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" in Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson (eds.), *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*, Madison and London, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, p. 137.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

⁷⁹ Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield, "Introduction", in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000. p. 7.

⁸⁰ Domna C. Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?", p. 139

⁸¹ Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom*, p. 239.

⁸² Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes, "Doing Sym/Bio/Graphy with Yasna", in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography*, p. 248.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

Škrinjarić's and Zečević's works, has ambivalent rather than strictly positive implications. Cherished by the socialist regime, communitarian spirit is seemingly disregarded by Škrinjarić and Zečević as they portray solitary heroines, oppose the culture geared toward the masses (Škrinjarić) or disdain the working people who populate the socialist blocks (Zečević). Instead of seeking camaraderie with their contemporaries, the authors discovered relationality through their foremothers. Škrinjarić's and Zečević's (auto-)biographical texts also resonate with depictions of Yugoslav women's writing as "writing the sisterhood". Coined by Lóránd, the phrase "writing the sisterhood" acknowledges feminine difference while affirming interrelatedness, that is, the two traits also communicated by neologism "sym-gyno-graphy". According to Lóránd, "writing the sisterhood" conveys acute awareness of womanhood as shared experience: "'writing the sisterhood' is a genre and a technique of sympathetically reflecting on the lives and fates of other women through one's own story"⁸⁴.

While she contributed to the commemoration of her grandmother in 1978 (the centenary of her birth), Škrinjarić, who experienced a curious overlap between familial and literary foremothers, did not publish her essay on Zofka Kveder, "Zapisi o baki koja sja" ["Notes on My Grandmother Who Shines"], until 2004. It was her very last text. Kveder is described by historian Andrea Feldman as an ardent advocate of women's suffrage and social rights who sided with socialists rather than bourgeois feminists in the interwar period⁸⁵. Incorporating family memories and facts about her grandmother's literary and journalistic career, Škrinjarić portrays Kveder as a person caught between proactive political and creative efforts and listless melancholy. She describes Zofka as one of her doomed heroines:

[she] lived fast and shamelessly, recklessly and without prudence, gave birth to three girls, divorced her first husband and was abandoned by the second, edited literary journals and women's magazines, corresponded with numerous prominent and anonymous persons [...] with all her literary talent she also had a kind of urge to self-destruct⁸⁶.

Although she never met Kveder, who committed suicide in 1926, Škrinjarić read her works as a child and imagined Slovenian as a melodic, cryptic language of fiction. Škrinjarić's essay establishes the matrilineal transference with Kveder through early reading experiences that provided a lesson in the value of form and linguistic play, qualities foregrounded in Škrinjarić's polyphonic prose.

⁸⁴ Zsófia Lóránd, "Sisterhood and Second Wave Feminist", p. 118.

⁸⁵ Andrea Feldman, "Proričući gladnu godinu – žene i ideologija jugoslavenstva (1918–1939)" ["Prophesying a Hungry Year – Women and the Ideology of Yugoslavia (1918–1939)"], in Andrea Feldman (ed.), *Žene u Hrvatskoj: ženska i kulturna povijest* [Women in Croatia: The Cultural History], Zagreb, Institut Ženska infoteka, 2004, p. 239.

⁸⁶ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, pp. 588–589.

Zečević, while criticising Dragojla Jarnević's conservative attitude toward women's participation in politics, strongly identified with the writer, especially her doomed romances, heavy workload, and status as an eternal outsider. Unlike Kveder, whose feminist activism was widely recognised, Jarnević, one of the few female participants in the nineteenth century national movement known as much for her spinsterhood as for her writing, was not yet a feminist role model when Zečević began work on her diary in the early 1960s. Unable to complete a formal education due to the early death of her father and subsequent financial difficulties, Jarnević supported herself through sewing and tutoring⁸⁷. A devotee to the national cause, she published sentimental poetry and prose that, as historian Sandra Prlenda notes, was wrongly dismissed as inartistic, even though it conformed to the prevailing literary fashions of the time⁸⁸. According to Zečević, Dragojla was the first Croatian professional female writer⁸⁹. Her most voluminous work, the diary she kept for 41 years, was characterized as pathological and perverse throughout much of the twentieth century⁹⁰. Until the critical edition with commentary by Lukšić (the scholar who also wrote the only comprehensive interpretation of Škrinjarić's prose) was published in 2000, the diary was available only in excerpts.

When Zečević was asked to contribute to the 1983 issue of *Republika*, she submitted Jarnević's description of an affair with a peasant boy whom she supported financially. Arguing that the passage departs from nineteenth-century morality, Zečević notes that it remained controversial for her contemporaries, male critics who regarded Jarnević as

a "poor" woman without "a welcoming home" and "a master". Dragojla, suffered in the moments of crisis, from the circumstances that excluded her; it seems that the critics suffered much more, that is, replicated the general opinion about a woman's "proper place" in society much more often [than the diarist]⁹¹.

In addition to sarcastically summing up prejudices within literary studies, Zečević argues that Jarnević subverted the stereotypical link between sexuality and the femme fatale archetype and introduced "the career woman" as a new identity in regional literature. According to Ott Franolić, working on Jarnević's manuscript was for Zečević "almost as if she looked in the mirror and recognized herself in

⁸⁷ Sandra Prlenda, "Dragojla Jarnević", in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, Anna Loutfi (eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, Budapest and New York, CEU Press, p. 187.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

⁸⁹ Divna Zečević, *Dragojla Jarnević*, Zagreb, Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskog Fakulteta, 1985, p. 63.

⁹⁰ Sandra Prlenda, "Dragojla Jarnević", p. 187.

⁹¹ Divna Zečević, "O Dnevniku Dragojle Jarnević" ["On Dragojla Jarnević's Diary"], *Republika: mjesečnik za književnost, umjetnost i društvo*, 1983, 39, p. 169.

another [woman]”⁹². Zečević’s interpretation of Jarnević’s diary immediately received acclaim from feminists and solidified her affiliation with Yugoslav feminist circles.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

In this article, I argue that Škrinjarić and Zečević, two writers who have not been considered in recent research on Yugoslav feminism because they entered the literary scene between the established feminist generations, have authored comprehensive feminist oeuvres. Škrinjarić and Zečević were not directly involved in the activities that proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s – their works were referenced by their more prominent contemporaries, only to be forgotten by the following generation of scholars.

In their narratives of female formative experiences, Škrinjarić and Zečević prioritise creative pursuits over entrenched plots of romance, marriage, and motherhood. These two authors show that normative formational narratives, like Yugoslav artistic and academic circles, are fundamentally inhospitable to female protagonists. Returning again and again to questions of authorship, acclaim, and legacy, they asked what it meant to be a woman writer in socialist Yugoslavia. Finally, Škrinjarić and Zečević went beyond seeking to enter literary history as solitary, gifted individuals. By examining the lives of women’s rights advocates Dragojla Jarnević and Zofka Kveder, they crafted matrilineal narratives of intellectual becoming and artistic maturation.

This article not only adds them to the history of the Yugoslav women’s movement, but also pays tribute to Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević as literary figures whose life writing, to quote Solnit’s memoir,

changed the collective story from the old overarching story built on endless silencing [...] storytellers [...] who have broken that silence with their voices and made room thereby for other voices to be heard, perhaps before they too become survivors with terrible stories to tell⁹³.

I came to relate with the persistent efforts of Škrinjarić and Zečević to commemorate their lives in an environment hostile to unconventional women and their stories. I hope the others can do the same.

⁹² Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustremljen nedostižnom*, p. 260.

⁹³ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of my Nonexistence*, p. 195.

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PERPETUALLY PERIPHERAL:

LIFE NARRATIVES OF/BY SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ AND DIVNA ZEČEVIĆ (Abstract)

This article looks into the life writing of two overlooked Croatian writers: Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević. Life writing, texts that, according to the literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, depict (auto-)biographical trajectories, are the predominant mode of Yugoslav women's literature. Škrinjarić's and Zečević's confessional fragments, however, were published both too early and too late: while their works appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, their most important autobiographical texts, a coming-of-age trilogy (Škrinjarić) and an extensive diary (Zečević), were published only after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia. Moreover, these two writers never fully participated in Yugoslav second-wave feminism, a dissident political current that affirmed the aesthetic of female writing and thus helped more notable literary figures gain recognition. My analysis acknowledges these historical circumstances while arguing that Škrinjarić's and Zečević's texts depicting their lives, as well as the lives of other women, should be interpreted as part of Yugoslav feminist literature. The article is divided into two parts. The first part argues that Škrinjarić and Zečević wrote their autobiographical and biographical texts by comparing female and male life trajectories, and that their feminist stance is evident in women's inability to follow normative paths to success. The second part analyses their attempts to find feminist foremothers. Škrinjarić and Zečević, did so by researching biographies of two early women's rights activists, the interwar socialist Zofka Kveder and the nineteenth-century writer Dragojla Jarnević.

Keywords: women's literature, life writing, *Bildungsroman*, diary, failure.

PERPETUU PERIFERICE: NARAȚIUNI ALE VIEȚII
TRĂITE/SCRISE DE SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ ȘI DE DIVNA ZEČEVIĆ
(Rezumat)

Acest articol analizează scrierile autobiografice ale două autoare croate mai puțin cunoscute: Sunčana Škrinjarić și Divna Zečević. „Bioficțiunile”, texte care, potrivit cercetătoarelor Sidonie Smith și Julia Watson, configurează traiectorii (auto)biografice, reprezintă formula predominantă de reprezentare din literatura feminină iugoslavă. Cu toate acestea, fragmentele confesive ale lui Škrinjarić și Zečević au fost publicate atât prea devreme, cât și prea târziu: în timp ce majoritatea scrierilor lor au apărut în anii 1960 și 1970, cele mai importante texte autobiografice pe care le-au semnat, o trilogie despre maturizare (Škrinjarić) și un jurnal amplu (Zečević), au fost publicate abia după prăbușirea Iugoslaviei socialiste. În plus, aceste două scriitoare nu au aderat niciodată pe deplin la feminismul iugoslav din al doilea val, un curent politic disident care a promovat estetica scriiturii feminine și a ajutat, astfel, unele figuri literare mai notabile ale mișcării să obțină recunoaștere. Analiza mea ia în considerare aceste circumstanțe istorice, susținând în același timp că textele lui Škrinjarić și Zečević, care descriu propriile vieți, precum și viețile altor femei, ar trebui interpretate ca parte a literaturii feministe iugoslave. Articolul este organizat în două părți. Cea dintâi argumentează că Škrinjarić și Zečević și-au scris textele autobiografice comparând parcursurile de viață feminine și masculine, așa încât poziția lor feministă este evidentă prin tematizarea incapacității femeilor de a urma căile canonice spre succes. A doua parte analizează tentativele lor de a-și descoperi predecesoare feministe. Škrinjarić și Zečević au întreprins acest demers prin intermediul cercetării biografiilor a două activiste timpurii pentru drepturile femeilor, anume socialista interbelică Zofka Kveder și scriitoarea de secol XIX Dragojla Jarnević.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură feminină, bioficțiune, *Bildungsroman*, jurnal, ratare.