

**GENDER AND NARRATION IN THE WRITINGS
OF THREE 19th-CENTURY SLOVENE WOMEN:
PAVLINA PAJK, LUIZA PESJAK AND ZOFKA KVEDER**

Katja MIHURKO PONIŽ

University of Nova Gorica

This essay explores the interplay between genre and narration in Slovene women's writing at the end of the 19th century. Focusing on three cases, it will discuss the ways in which Slovene female authors faced strong opposition as authors – particularly if they wrote novels and short stories. Although the novel was specifically the genre women writers in Europe in the 19th century engaged with, Slovene male authors saw both the novel and the short story as their own privileged genres. They tended to reject the work of female contemporaries such as Luiza Pesjak (1828-1898), Pavlina Pajk (1854-1901) and Zofka Kveder (1878-1926), dismissing it as “trivial literature”¹. This labelling has persisted even until very recently: their contributions were not only overlooked or ignored by their contemporaries, but also by literary historians, who have only now begun to recognise their work as innovative. They believed that narratives written by men should be the benchmark against which women's writing was measured, and generally found the latter to be lacking. In the first part of this essay I will present and revise this critical discourse on the works of the three aforementioned authors, while in the second part I will apply new tools provided by feminist narratology to Slovene women's novels, and argue that these three authors were indeed innovative – particularly with regard to narrative categories such as plot and narrator. In my analysis I will focus on the novels *Beatin dnevnik* (Beata's Diary, 1887) by Luiza Pesjak, *Slučaji usode* (The Accidents of Fate, 1897) by Pavlina Pajk and Zofka Kveder's collection of short stories entitled *Misterij žene* (The Mystery of a Woman, 1900). I will first provide a brief sketch of the historical context.

¹ I use the expression “trivial literature” as a synonym for popular literature or literature of entertainment.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE GENRES IN SLOVENE LITERATURE UNTIL 1900

The strong reaction these three (and other) female authors encountered when they published their works must first be examined within the context of the development of the narrative genre in the 19th century. This process is connected with the special position of the Slovene language. The latter was an important factor in preserving the identity of Slovene ethnicity, which had for centuries been a collective subject without any institutional basis². Due to the lack of a strong social and political structure, culture and literature became the focus of a national endeavour: the foundation, the meaning and the centre of the Slovene being³. In the 18th century, the Slovene historical subject consciously constituted itself as a project that needed to be realised⁴. This process encompassed the peasant class, the middle-class and the intellectual class.

19th-century romantic writers saw a miraculous power in poetry: it could sustain and constitute the Slovene nation. For example, in his *Sonetni venec* (Wreath of Sonnets, 1834) France Prešeren (1800-1849), who is considered to be one of the most important Slovene poets, compared his role to that of Orpheus. This poem features a poet who represents the creator of culture and civilization, and with his poems enchants the

² The beginnings of Slovene literature go back to the 9th century when the *Brižinski spomeniki* (Freising Manuscripts) were written; they are the first Slovene texts and belong to the genre of medieval church literature. These texts were named after the small town of Freising in Bavaria (Germany), where they were found. The Reformation period also produced texts which belong to liturgical literature: catechisms, church oratory, liturgical texts and church songs. The primary representative of protestant literature on Slovene territory – Primož Trubar – also wrote autobiographical anecdotes in prose. At the beginning of the Baroque period the interest in religious literature remained central; however, this period brought the development of new genres in the sacred drama. In the first decades of the 18th century we find also spiritual lyrics, while at the end of the 18th century rhetorical prose reached its peak, with the sermon as its main genre. The Age of Enlightenment encouraged secular genres of writing, such as the love song, drinking song, etc., in the attempt to ground the use of the Slovene (national) language in public life.

³ Bernik, France: The national and the universal in Slovene Literature, in: *Slovene studies*, 2, 1992, p. 125-131.

⁴ The initial step in this project, called the National Revival by its patrons, presented the first Slovene scientific grammar *Kranjska gramatika* (Carniola's Grammar, 1768) written by Father Marko Pohlin (1735-1801). Emphasizing that the Slovene language had to be spoken in administration, education and culture, he promoted the use of his mother tongue in public life, where German ruled as the official language. Further activities in the project of National Revival included the first two Slovene comedies written by Anton Tomaž Linhart (1756-1795) as well as his attempt to write the first comprehensive history of the Slovene Lands. However, he died before he could finish the latter. Besides Linhart's writing, the poems of Valentin Vodnik (1758-1819) are considered to be a very important contribution to the National Revival as well.

public and provokes ecstasy. A woman beloved by the poet is his muse and inspiration, a modern Eurydice. In this way, the *Wreath of Sonnets* explicitly defines gender roles in the creative process – man is the creator, woman is his muse. Since the male poet's role is to empower the nation, any female literary contribution means rebellion. In fact, in Prešeren's age (the first half of the 19th century) although Slovene women may have written, they did not publish their work, nor did they circulate it by any other means. It was only in the revolutionary year of 1848 that the first poems written by Slovene female poets Fanny Hausmann (1818-1858)⁵, Josipina Turnograjska (1833-1854), Milica Žvegelj and Lavoslava Kersnik⁶ appeared in print.

The poems of these early Slovene women poets are concerned with patriotic themes, which sometimes withdraw to give space for lyrical descriptions of nature or disappointment in love. The first Slovene woman writer, whose authorship cannot be disputed, was Josipina Turnograjska; she wrote mainly in prose, and died at the age of twenty-one after giving birth. More poems were written by Luiza Pesjak, making it possible to more accurately analyse her poetical work, in which the theme of maternity is recurrent. However, according to the latest research done by Irena Novak Popov, an influential Slovene literary historian who has carried out many important analyses of poetry, her poems are often stylistically weak. Even though Pesjak tried to present her poems in a formally perfected way, the Slovene language does not appear to come to life, which is understandable given that she normally spoke German and only learnt Slovene with her daughters when she hired a Slovene teacher. The volume entitled *Pesmi* (Poems, 1878) by Pavlina Pajk is, as Novak Popov states, "thematically diverse, formally accomplished (though syntactically awkward) and in parts a sentimental chronicle of original expression, which includes also the conventionally expressed

⁵ Fanny Hausmann (1818-1858) was hailed as the first Slovene poetess. However, in 2001 the Slovene literary historian Igor Grdina (in *Vladarji, lakaji, boemi* (Rulers, servants, bohemians), Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis), refuted the claim of Hausmann's authorship, based on the discovery of a letter in which one of her contemporaries wrote that Hausmann did not master Slovene well enough to have written the poems published under her name. The reason that the patriotic Hausmann signed the poems, which she herself perhaps wrote in German and then had translated, may have been that Hausmann and/or the real author of the poems wanted to show that not only Slovene men, but also Slovene women, possessed the talent for poetry.

⁶ For both the latter, no dates are known for birth and death.

love for the homeland and maternal love, the latter marked with a higher degree of ambivalence”⁷.

Male contemporaries considered the lyrics of women to be an interesting accompaniment to Slovene literature, but they were not appreciated as artistic works. They therefore did not feel that their own position in Slovene cultural life was under threat. Moreover, female lyrics appeared so rarely in literary journals that men did not see them as competition. Poetry genres held the most important place in Slovene literature in the first half of the 19th century, due in part to Prešeren. His successors in the second half of the 19th century were aware of the fact that they could not reach or exceed his genius, and thus the fight for primacy was happening elsewhere – in the area of narrative prose. Indeed, Slovene drama reached its first peak only after 1900. Between 1850 and 1900, prose was dominant in Slovene literature and included both the *novel* (the first Slovene novel was written in 1866 by Josip Jurčič (1844-1881)) and *short fiction*. In the 19th century, the short fiction genre mainly consisted of the novella, short story, sketch and the so-called “slika” (*portrait*), a very short text that usually depicted a fictional person or an event in an objective way.

The novel was considered to be the most important. In structuring their plot, Slovenian male authors followed the pattern of the *quest plot*⁸, in which, as Andrea Gutenberg explains, a male protagonist often tries to integrate into society and has to overcome many obstacles to reach his goal. Gutenberg also states that in the 18th and 19th centuries, women novelists preferred the romance plot in which the heroine’s goal is marriage⁹.

This also applies to Slovene novelists. As for the male writers, there is often a male hero who rebels against the surroundings of his peasant

⁷ Novak Popov, Irena: *Sprehodi po slovenski poeziji* (Walks through the Slovenian poetry) Maribor: Litera 2003, p. 238-239. Novak Popov also noticed: “In her work we can also track a – unexpected for the time – dialogic relationship to the stereotyped notions of woman as a being without emotional self-control, and the notions of men, who are not supposed to show their emotions. Her first reviewers attributed the highest value to her series *Mother’s Voices*, even though they all failed to see that the most open places in it are the ones in which the mother’s speaking mingles with the speaking of an all but happy woman” (all Slovene texts were translated by the author, unless otherwise mentioned).

⁸ Carolyn Heilbrun saw in the quest plot the prototypical pattern of male narratives and confronted it with the “female erotic plot” (Heilbrun, Carolyn G.: *Hamlet’s Mother and Other Women: Feminist Essays on Literature*, London: The Women’s Press 1991, p. 10).

⁹ Gutenberg, Andrea: Handlung, Plot und Plotmuster, in: Nünning, Vera/ Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Erzähltextanalyse und Gender Studies*, Stuttgart: Metzler 2000, p. 98-121; p. 2.

origins by following his own beliefs¹⁰. He is often hindered by objective circumstances, such as class and material differences, dark secrets or political reasons. The hero withstands this and either wins or loses. When love is involved, the plot often resolves agreeably if both lovers are Slovene people, but if not the hero dies or leaves.

The plots of the novels written by Pesjak and Pajk do not greatly differ from the narratives of their male contemporaries. Pesjak's and Pajk's principal characters have to fight for their happiness and they cross class boundaries in marriage, just like the heroes in novels by male authors. There is, however, an important difference: the protagonists are female.

Up to the year 1887, when *Beata's Diary* was published, no independent female protagonist appeared in the male middle-class Slovene novel: the attitude towards autonomous and independent women was dismissive, and they were often depicted as negative figures.

More significantly, even non-independent female figures rarely appeared as protagonists. Among the exceptions to this is the short novel *Lepa Vida* (The Fair Vida, 1877) by Josip Jurčič, a rewriting of the popular Slovene folk motive of a woman who leaves her old husband and a sick child for a stranger who offers her a better life. George Sand's writing strongly influenced Josip Jurčič's novel. Jurčič was shocked but also inspired by Sand's depiction of marriage infidelity, and wrote in his private notes that her female characters "throw men away like squeezed oranges, and fly like bees from flower to flower, never sated"¹¹. Jurčič thought that their infidelity came from sexual dissatisfaction. This idea of a woman's promiscuity – which was a sin when perceived through the prism of a Christian ethos – inspiring her to commit infidelity resulted in Jurčič's *Vida* being presented as an adulteress, who should be punished. Despite conservatism, Jurčič's *The Fair Vida* is interesting when compared to other novels by Slovene writers in the 19th century, because the central story describes a female character and her search for happiness, even though this search ends tragically: *Vida* eventually goes mad and dies. Other prose texts, by men, with a female protagonist follow traditional patterns of love peripeteias, treating her as an object for men which

¹⁰ Bogataj Gradišnik, Katarina: Ženski roman v evropskem sentimentalizmu in v slovenski literaturi 19. stoletja (Women's novel in European Sentimentalism and in Slovenian Literature of the 19th century), in: *Primerjalna književnost*, 12, 1989, p. 23-41; p. 116, states the influence of Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*.

¹¹ Jurčič, Josip: *Zbrano delo VI* (Collected Works), Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije 1953, p. 338.

prevents her from having her own will and makes her incapable of making her own decisions. Usually these texts also end tragically¹².

This traditional pattern seems to appear in the writings of our three women. But interestingly, an analysis based on feminist narratology unveils deviations in some of these works that were not present in Slovene literature before Luiza Pesjak and Pavlina Pajk. Most critics and literary historians appear to have been blind to their inventions for a long time.

THE CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON PESJAK, PAJK AND KVEDER

Pesjak's *Beata's Diary* (written 1877) received only one review in 1887 when the book was initially published. It was written by a colleague: the respected Slovene novelist Janko Kersnik (1852-1897), who stated that this novel brought something new into Slovene literature – but something that nobody had missed and nobody had specifically looked for. These kinds of plots could be found in the novels of Eugenie Marlitt (1825-1887), a German writer who was very popular with Slovene readers who read her works in German (we find the entries about Marlitt in the catalogue of the lending library of Hedwig Radics from the year 1898)¹³. For Kersnik, Pesjak was no more than an imitator of the German novelist, and one lacking the brilliant talents which Marlitt showed in her creativity: technique, complexity of action, strength and passion. Over three pages he quoted the events of the story as being unlikely¹⁴. Many years later, as women authors started to be discovered, Anton Slodnjak (1899-1983), a well-respected literary historian, commented on Kersnik's

¹² Some of these works are: Josip Stritar: *Svetinova Metka* (1868), *Rosana* (1877), Janez Mencinger: *Jerica* (1859), Ivan Tavčar: *Madama Avrelija* (1870), *Dona Klara* (1871), *Gospa Amalija* (1875), *Margareta* (1875), *Holekova Nežika* (1876).

¹³ In 1886, Hedwig von Radics-Kaltenbrunner established the first private lending library in Ljubljana. She had over 3,586 books and thus offered a wide choice of novels, plays, poem collections, and youth books. The library had five hundred to one thousand members who paid either a monthly or annual membership. In the catalogue from the year 1898, the books were classified by genre – novels, novellas, plays, poems – and then further defined, whether it was a comedy, a crime novel, etc. Furthermore, the books were arranged into different collections.

¹⁴ Kersnik, Janko: *Zbrano delo* (Collected works) V, Ljubljana: Državna založba 1952, p. 292. It is interesting that Kersnik praised Marlitt, who was considered to be the author of popular literature.

review and even found that it was over-polite, adding that Pesjak “disregarded all the elements of artistic persuasiveness and life plausibility”¹⁵.

After Slodnjak, the first person to treat Pesjak’s work was Miran Hladnik in 1981. He explored her work in the context of his research on Slovene trivial literature. According to Hladnik her works belong to a subgenre he called “trivialni ženski roman”. A literal translation would be “trivial women’s novel”, but in his English abstract we find the term “petticoat novel”, invented by Vladimir Gjurin, the translator of the abstract. However, neither Hladnik nor Gjurin tried to launch this term in literary theory and it therefore remains nothing more than a sign for the “unbearable lightness” of issues surrounding women’s literature. It is noteworthy that Hladnik would later change his opinion about Pesjak’s work. Some 25 years later, in 2007, he wrote that *Beata’s Diary* was “a cultivated work written skilfully, enigmatically, and sometimes even with witty irony”¹⁶. He deplored that Pesjak had been faced with rejection due to her choice of genre.

Pavlina Pajk was no better accepted by critics than literary historians. Her contemporary Fran Levstik (1831-1887), who was an authority in Slovene criticism in the second half of the 19th century, described her as a woman whose head was turned by emancipation. Another critic, Fran Govekar (1871-1949), wrote of Pajk’s texts that “almost all of them follow the same pattern of German women belletrists”¹⁷. Most probably Govekar was again referring to authors such as Eugenie Marlitt or Nataly von Eschstruth (1860-1939), who were very popular among Slovene readers in the late 19th century. Almost hundred years later, Anton Slodnjak still expressed a similar opinion about the novels of Pavlina Pajk:

This was more or less typical central European reading for provincial women¹⁸, in which haste and emotional drive often created extremely unbelievable accidents and strange situations. Due to the naively constructed and forcibly idealistic content it evoked derision and opposition in the realists and particularly in the heralds of the new stream.¹⁹

¹⁵ Slodnjak, Anton: *Obrazi in dela slovenskega slovstva* (The writers and the works of Slovene literature), Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga 1975, p. 211.

¹⁶ Hladnik, Miran: Pozabljena polovica, “Luiza Pesjak”, in: Šelih, Alenka et al. (eds.): *Pozabljena polovica: portreti žensk 19. in 20. stoletja na Slovenskem*, Ljubljana: Tuma SAZU 2007, p. 42.

¹⁷ Govekar, Fran: *Portretne karikature* (Portrayal caricatures) in: *Edinost*, 110, 1896, p. 3.

¹⁸ By “provincial women” Slodnjak meant Slovene female readers and emphasized with his words that Pajk’s works were not cosmopolitan and interesting for a wider reading audience.

¹⁹ Slodnjak: *Obrazi in dela slovenskega slovstva*, p. 211.

It is interesting to note that twelve years before, Slodnjak had written that although Pavlina Pajk's *Accidents of Fate* was an *immature* piece of work, she was the only Slovene novelist at the time who had the courage to represent central European aristocratic-bourgeois society. He also said that at its publication in 1897, critics should have noticed that the personality of the main character, Malvina, was, after all, "alive from a literary and social perspective as a manifestation of the author's study of herself"²⁰.

Miran Hladnik also explored the works of Pavlina Pajk in his 1981 study of Slovene trivial literature. He surmised that the works of both authors would have belonged to the genre of the popular entertainment novel, if they had reached a wider audience; since they had not achieved this, and because Slovene readers preferred German women's novels, they could not be classed as anything other than cultural historical documents.

Almost thirty years later, Hladnik emphasized that the harsh rejection Pajk's received from her contemporaries was due to the following reasons:

She was absolutely too prolific and persistent and her opus was too large to allow it to be quickly dismissed with polite praise of woman's zeal; in fact she represented *a serious competition to the male literary monopoly*. In addition, Pavlina Pajk engaged in the genre of the women's novel, for which there was no place in the national genre system. A model and nationally strategic role was performed by a novel with a male central character, preferably a young educated man with a peasant background who tries to change and strengthen his social status through marriage with a wealthy middle-class woman. The story pattern of Pavlina Pajk, whose central character is a poor young governess who ends up happily married, was useless and disturbing to the male view.²¹

He now also recognized artistic ambitions and talent in Pavlina Pajk, and wrote:

The most important of the minor aspects seems irony, which appears in some of the novellas by P. Pajk. The ironic narrative perspective is incompatible with classic kitsch and therefore its presence in the works above is a sign of artistic ambition and talent.²²

²⁰ Slodnjak, Anton: *Zgodovina slovenskega slovstva*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica 1963, p. 108.

²¹ Hladnik, Miran: Pavlina Pajk, in: *Pozabljena polovica: portreti žensk 19. in 20. stoletja na Slovenskem* (The Forgotten Half: the Portraits of the Women in the 19th and 20th Century in the Slovenian territory). Ljubljana: Tuma, SAZU, 2007, p. 42.

²² Hladnik, *Pozabljena polovica*, p. 67-68. Hladnik wrote both the above reviews in 2007, while in 1981 he had seen both of the women authors, like their contemporaries, as only bad imitators of Eugenie Marlitt, which meant that their work was classified as trivial literature.

In the most recent essay on the creativity of Pavlina Pajk's prose, written in 2001 by Matjaž Kmecl²³, we can sense a desire to overcome the misogynistic underestimation of female creativity – but even here the only things for which she is acknowledged are her large opus and texts which bring “womanhood in all its proportions” into Slovene literature²⁴.

The first critic to compare Slovene women's novels to European examples, and not just with Eugénie Marlitt, was Katarina Bogataj Gradišnik. In her study, published in 1989, she suggests that the rise of Slovene novels written by women coincides chronologically with the development of the Slovene women's movement. This she proves by connecting it to the works of George Sand and Sophie Cottin – a link that Hladnik overlooked. Bogataj Gradišnik also defined the notion of the women's novel more appropriately. While Hladnik understood the female novel as determined by the plot: “a novel in which the central described character is female, hence a story in which a woman experiences her own novel (her love story)”, Bogataj-Gradišnik pointed out the inadequacy of such a definition: “This limitation seems very questionable since the enlightenment and sentimentalism produced a large spectrum of women's writing, which could be divided into several genres: the ethics novel, the marriage novel and the *Bildungsroman*, and in the 19th century also the social novel and the novel of the times (*Zeitroman*)”²⁵.

Bogataj-Gradišnik defined these different women's novels as a branch of the psychological novel (and, particularly in the 19th century, as a branch of the social novel) and in it she discovered a number of recurring motifs: the question of freedom to choose a husband, the question of obedience to the father and then to the husband, the question of marriage out of convention or self-interest, and the question of personal realisation in love and marriage. She states that the Slovene women's novel was influenced by the tradition of sentimentalism, indirectly by Richardson's *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), and of course Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). She also listed novels by women – those written by George Sand, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, *Marta* (1872) by

²³ Prof. Matjaž Kmecl taught Slovene literature at the University of Ljubljana. He is author of many articles and books on the Slovene literature (especially from the 19th century).

²⁴ Kmecl, Matjaž: Pavlina Doljak Pajkova, pogled nanjo ob stoletnici smrti, in: Marušič, Branko (ed.): *Jako stara vas na Goriškem je Solkan* (Solkan is a very old village in Gorica district), Solkan: Krajevna skupnost 2001, p. 395.

²⁵ Bogataj Gradišnik: *Ženski roman*, p. 23-41.

the Polish writer Eliza Orzeszkova – as possible additional influences. Bogataj-Gradišnik's study is important for two reasons. The first is her rejection of the narrow-minded criticism of Luiza Pesjak's and Pavlina Pajk's narrative prose, which disregarded their work as poor imitations of Eugenie Marlitt. The second reason is the attention she gave to the new central character in the novel, a relatively educated and independent woman who is a positive figure rather than a conventional seductress.

Another attack on the national genre system as perceived by the Slovene cultural public was a collection of short stories by Zofka Kveder, *The Mystery of Woman* (1900). The collection includes twenty-eight extremely short texts²⁶ presenting portraits of women in Slovenian society at the turn of the century. Oton Župančič, one of the most successful, and who to date is still one of the most highly acclaimed Slovene poets from the turn of the century, wrote:

The Mystery of Woman by Zofka Kveder doesn't really belong to literature but to cultural-social history. Those pieces are bad taste from a literary perspective; her visionary pictures are exaggerated, her symbolism is shallow. *The Mystery of Woman* is part of the so-called verist literature, with tendencies which remind too much of demagogy and have nothing to do with literature.²⁷

The only one to take her side was the writer Ivan Cankar, who himself had to fight prejudice with respect to his own writing. He wrote:

Zofka has left a beaten path; she is independent; she wanted to say something she herself saw and she herself felt; her work is not pictures, not copies of works created by male artists: she looked through her own eyes, not through spectacles patented by our worthless tradition. And that is her 'tragic guilt'. Even before I read any of the reviews I knew exactly what would happen; but that they'd storm on the author with such a stinky weapon, well, I didn't expect that. They attacked her from all sides, sticks were flying onto her from all corners. The method was different but the reason was one and only. Dirty grumblers and hypocritical moralists united in the 'destruction' of individuality.²⁸

LUIZA PESJAK

Nowadays Luiza Pesjak is known only, in Slovenia, for her opera libretto *Gorenjski slavček* (Songbird from Gorenjska, music by Anton

²⁶ The genre of a very short story is in Slovene literature called "črtica" (sketch).

²⁷ Oton Župančič, *Moderna črtica* (The modern sketch), in: *Slovan*, (1902/03), p. 25.

²⁸ Cankar, Ivan: *Zbrano delo* (Collected Works), vol. 28, Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije 1973, p. 125.

Foerster, 1872), although she also wrote poems and a tragedy on France Prešeren, which remained in the form of a manuscript. We can only speculate on the reasons behind this, but her fear of a critical response (or no response at all) is certainly a possibility: tragedy was not a practised form of drama in Slovene territory when it was completed in 1871, and Slovene playwrights preferred other, lighter genres.

In 1877 Pesjak wrote her most important prose work, the novel *Beata's Diary*, but it was not until 1887 that she managed to convince a publisher to publish it. The novel is written in the form of a diary; it does not have an introduction and is presented throughout in the first person by the title character. In this sense *Beata's Diary* is very close to nature to *Jane Eyre*, where

the plain little governess dominates the whole book and fills every page. Everything and everyone appears, not as we see them and know them in the world, but as they look to a keen-eyed girl who had hardly ever left her native village.²⁹

Pesjak combines the governess theme with incest. She introduces the motif with a reading scene in which Beata, Rihard, and a lady of the castle read Byron's *Manfred*. Rihard is a young, attractive man living near the castle, still in love with Dora, unhappily married stepdaughter of the lady of the castle. As he is reading aloud Manfred's words, Byron's character appears in a completely different light to Beata; she feels as if Rihard was not reading another person's thoughts, but expressing his own feelings instead. He appears as Manfred even in her dreams, where she finds herself in a miraculous garden echoing Rihard's recitation of Manfred's words. The dream then moves to a dark hall, where Dora appears under her father's portrait and announces to Rihard, "to-morrow ends thine earthly ills!"³⁰. The dreams also include words from a conversation Beata had with a mad old lady whose daughter Anica committed suicide when Dora's father left her pregnant to marry Dora's mother who was of his social rank. Under the influence of these dreams Beata starts translating *Manfred* from English into Slovene. In chapter four (out of five), when Dora dies as a result of a miscarriage, the narrator expertly amplifies the suspense with a revelation that Rihard, whom we find kneeling over her body, has blood ties to Dora. The wake is held in a hall with portraits of ancestors under the image of Dora's father. Beata writes down in her diary what she saw in the hall:

²⁹ Frederic Harrison, cited in Lanser, Susan S.: *Fictions of Authority*, Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press 1992, p. 176.

³⁰ *Manfred*, Act II, sc. 4; in: Pesjak, Luiza: *Beatin dnevnik*, Novo mesto: Josip Krajec 1887, p. 44.

Rihard, the image of despair, stood beside the coffin and leant down to Dora. He was as pale as ash, his blood drained from his manly, tanned face. His silent, ineffable, tearless pain was breaking my heart. The light was shining upon both faces – oh, my God – what is this? No, no, this is not possible, I'm mistaken! I gaze and gaze, I don't want to believe my eyes, but... but – what life had hidden, death has revealed:

Manfred and Astarta!!

[...] I lifted my eyes from the pale couple up onto the beautiful, dark image in a black coat, and it felt as if tears were quivering in her eyes.³¹

This scene is the first intercultural quotation in the novel; but there are others, one of which refers to French literature, and, possibly, to George Sand. Alongside Beata in Luiza Pesjak's novel appears the Frenchwoman Zoé, whom the writer describes as a patriot who left her country after the downfall of Napoleon. She describes Zoé's grandfather as an officer who was awarded an aristocratic title at Waterloo and her mother as an educated and talented actress of the *Comédie Française*. Although we cannot see it as a proof of Sand's influence, a similar relationship – a father from aristocratic circles and a mother from the world of theatre – also appears in the family tree of George Sand, described in her own *Histoire de ma vie*, which Pesjak might have read. She did not, however, make any concrete remarks with regard to the French writer. She presents Zoé as a companion of an elderly princess who is equally comfortable at court as she is among simple people.

Another unusual feature for a Slovene novel is the friendship between two women: Zoé and Beata. Historically, criticism has almost completely overlooked this theme, which is indeed absent in the texts of other 19th century Slovene authors in which women are more commonly presented as *rivals* in the fight for a man. In *Beata's Diary* female friendship is not limited to the two above-mentioned characters, since Beata also considers Dora and the lady of the castle to be her friends. The community in which the story unfolds is a distinctively female community and there are only three male characters in the novel: the servant Mirko (who is a completely marginal figure), the kind-hearted doctor Kosec, and, of course, Rihard. This can be understood as a special narrative strategy of deviation from the traditional Slovene novel with a central male character underlining his national allegiance. All of the female characters, with the exception of the Princess Pavlovna whose class pretensions the narrator rebukes with witty irony, are represented in a very positive way.

³¹ Pesjak: *Beatin dnevnik*, p. 117-118.

Their characteristics are not limited to nobility of heart and the ability to empathise with other people's feelings, but also include intellectual inquisitiveness and cultivation (Beata describes her reading experience and she translates English classics). From a narratological point of view, it is important that the narrator reveals herself as a female figure and even stresses her narratorial activity. When she finds out about the love story between Dora and Rihard, she writes:

My diary! A woman is writing you, so there is no need to explain that this conversation awoke my curiosity. At no price would I have questioned the children, but a lyrical novel with the happiest beginning and, unfortunately, a tragic end was suddenly accomplished.³²

The narrator is in a dialogic relationship with the diary; she addresses it as a friend who knows her life story and whom she can trust.

Beata is not the only focalisor: other focalisors include the servant Ivana, Anica's mad mother, Dora, Zoé and also Rihard and Dr Kosec, which give Beata's narrative a multidimensional outlook and contribute to the polyphonic structure of the novel. As a result, there is no space for an authoritative voice, which would have blocked other voices.

The criticism of current issues is also evident in the critical attitude towards the traditional role of women. Although the narrator does not refer to this directly, it can be traced in Dora's prearranged marriage, her death during childbirth, as well as Anica's naivety, abandonment, abuse at the hands of a young aristocrat and her subsequent death. All these events testify to the fact that in the 19th century women were not in control of their own lives. Despite Beata's reversal of fortune at the novel's finale, Pesjak is able to narrate the story of woman's captivity within the four walls of the domestic setting and their desire to overstep the threshold and experience different spaces. *Beata's Diary* includes numerous scenes in which Beata watches events in front of the castle through her window. Natascha Würzbach suggests that looking through a window, which not only marks the border between the outside and the inside world, but also between the public and private spheres, symbolises woman's difficulty to step from one space into the other³³. In *Beata's Diary* the interior often has negative connotations; it is described as dark and promotes anxiety, while the exterior (especially the garden) is a space of freedom and creativity. Another narrative strategy is revealed when Beata

³² Id., p. 17.

³³ Würzbach, Natascha: Raumdarstellung, in: Nünning/ Nünning (eds.): *Erzähltextanalyse*, p. 54.

hears of the relationship between Anica and the Count in a space that is completely opposite to those observed in the rest of the novel. Beata hears the story when she dares to step over the marked line and leaves the immediate environment of the castle. Her approach to the place where Anica experienced happiness in love, as well as death, is described as the discovery of a new world, which leads to the revelation of the secret:

The valley was becoming narrower, we were walking right between the mountains, always along the rustling creek, which rises there substantially. The path will end, I thought, the hills sticking together like a wall, but the track turned, the world opened and more mountains piled up in front of us. I was drawn ahead into this solitude [...] The hollow widened suddenly, the gorge had come to an end and like a large colourful island the vast field spread among the green hills.³⁴

Beata sees nature as a space of happiness, as an echo of her feelings:

That mute melancholy, which saddens creation, ruled over nature. It started to rain, tiny drops were falling, and it rained constantly as if it would never stop. It corresponded to me so well!³⁵

This quotation shows Beata's acute perception of the events in her environment and her reaction to them. In the two years she spends writing the diary, she matures emotionally and her encounters with different life stories shape her outlook on the world. From the girl whom Rihard initially did not even notice, she develops into a woman who proves she is independent and dedicated to her work, which she carries out successfully. Even though she also conquers Rihard's heart by looking after him in his illness, all of Beata's activities derive from personal motives. In the end she marries a man she loves and who loves her, which can be seen as a typical ending to a romance novel, but could also represent the author's desire for female independence and ambition to be compatible not only with censure and even death but also with happiness in love. A similar motivation seems applicable to the ending of Pajk's novel *The Accidents of Fate*, which also ends with the marriage of the central female protagonist.

PAVLINA PAJK

Milan Pajk, the author's son, who strongly defended his mother's writings against attacks by both male and female contemporaries – despite

³⁴ Pesjak: *Beatin dnevnik*, p. 24.

³⁵ Id., p. 105.

not being a literary historian himself – found the ending of *The Accidents of Fate* badly motivated. In his memoir after Pavlina's death he wrote about the novel's heroine Malvina: "It is therefore unbelievable that after Leopold's death she rejects Otmar. If she is confident in his love why does she doubt if she can make him happy? Perhaps only because she is older than he is and has been so far pursued by fate? And why does she propose to him later on when she inherits her uncle's fortune and becomes wealthy overnight?"³⁶.

The answer to this question lies in the author's deviations from the genre of "Frauenroman"³⁷. Her son and critics at the time considered *The Accidents of Fate* to belong to this genre, while – as I will demonstrate – Pavlina Pajk appeared to undermine the expectations of her contemporary readers by the use of narrative strategy. The first one is the way in which she uses the narrator: a heterodiegetic narrator or – following the terminology of Susan S. Lanser – an authorial voice. This choice of narration is understandable given the attacks Pavlina Pajk's earlier work had been subjected to. It seems that by using the authority of the heterodiegetic narrator she wanted to ensure that the message of the novel was highlighted: the prejudice surrounding the idea that women are weak and incapable of independent survival. The nameless narrator is not specifically gendered, but is constantly engaged in female themes. At the very beginning of the novel, which introduces the family of the clerk Vincenc Kolar, the narrator's attention focuses on the female characters and elliptically omits all events relating to the male members of the family. Already in the first few pages attention is drawn to problems of women's education, forced marriage, exploitation of women in the domestic sphere and their desire to escape these roles. The heterodiegetic narrator often withdraws to provide Malvina with the space she needs to act as the focal character: she is the central consciousness through which the story is transmitted. The narration is therefore often interrupted by free indirect speech, a strategy which opens a space in which questions of gender, authority and propriety can be subtly outlined.

A further narrative strategy is the construction of the central female character Malvina. Malvina is, in fact, not a typical "Frauenroman" protagonist. She is *not* an innocent girl, but rather a woman with bitter

³⁶ Pajk, Milan: Pavlina Pajkova, in: *Dom in svet*, 7, 1902, p. 340.

³⁷ I use here the term in the meaning defined by Gero Wilpert (1979), namely as a special genre of the popular literature, connected to the romance novel (*Liebesroman*). The "Frauenroman" depicts a happy-end love story of a lady from the higher-society.

experience of a previous marriage which was often violent. Before becoming a companion to a lady of the castle in the Tyrol, and after being abandoned by her husband, she leaves with her baby for Graz. A scene shows her suffering in the train compartment where she is subjected to the looks of people who do not know her life story. In Graz she works as a simple dressmaker, experiences the death of her child, and only afterwards becomes the companion of the wealthy lady of the castle. There is no real love triangle typical of the "Frauenroman" because the male protagonist Otmar has recovered from his previous experience in love, so there is no rivalry for Malvina to contend with. Malvina loves Otmar but does not want to marry him, even after her first husband dies and she officially becomes a widow. Otmar does not understand her rejection because he does not know all the reasons behind it. With all the hardship she has gone through, Malvina becomes an independent, mature woman who does not need a marriage to improve her material status. Despite her love for Otmar, his labile character offers her no solid guarantee that one day she will not find herself with a baby and, without anything else, back at her mother's. Even though the author-narrator never explicitly discusses Malvina's attitude to physical love, it can be assumed that she experienced (sexual) violence in her first marriage (her husband is depicted as a cruel man), which renders her hesitation understandable. Hladnik's research into Pavlina Pajk's prose texts noted the categorical imperative of victory of virtue over the body:

Therefore the protagonists do not want to get married, they deny their sexual desires. At the end they are repaid for their renouncement and sacrifices with the very thing they were constantly seemingly renouncing. The guideline of the formula goes: let themselves be tortured to be able to rule; take the more difficult way to make sure they reach their aim; to suffer (renounce) in youth to be able to enjoy in old age.³⁸

It seems, however, that Malvina's attitude towards sexuality is not so one-dimensional in the *Accidents of Fate*, as her virtue does not derive from a desire to preserve her innocence, but is rather a consequence of the negative experience brought about by her first marriage. It is only after Malvina inherits a fortune, and thus becomes equal in all respects to Otmar, that she gets her confidence back, which can then become the basis of their marriage. The last scene in the novel can be seen as a

³⁸ Hladnik, Miran: Slovenski ženski roman v 19. stoletju (The Slovene Petticoat novel in the 19th century), in: *Slavistična revija*, 3, 1981, p. 259–296. Consulted online: <http://lit.ijs.si/zenskir.html> (7 June 2010).

parody of the trivial novel since an older woman (if only by two years) proposes to a younger man. In response to Malvina's proposal Otmar "falls into her arms and hides his face in her breasts"³⁹. The scene is contrary to the "Frauenroman" because the roles are inverted; in the trivial novel the man proposes to an overjoyed woman, who falls into his arms. If we visualise the image of the lovers, we see before us a woman, who is not only morally superior, but also pictured as physically higher than the man. We cannot see his face, especially his eyes, because he has hidden them in her breasts⁴⁰. It is not hard to imagine why Pajk's contemporaries could not accept such a scene and conclusion: there is clear deviation away from the genre, a technique that was sporadic at the time in Slovene literature.

Luiza Pesjak and Pavlina Pajk introduced themes of female friendship and solidarity, while accentuating the determined role of the mother during her child's development, and reflecting upon what it meant if a woman was unable to overcome the stereotypical image of femininity at that time. The readers expected a romance plot, which was typical of the "Frauenroman", but what both writers actually delivered was a quest plot hidden in a love story. This was a novelty which their contemporaries could not accept, and which literary historians have overlooked.

ZOFKA KVEDER

Pajk's works were not only valuable for their unique outlook on the world, but especially as an incentive for female creativity. This is not just a supposition. Indeed Zofka Kveder wrote: "I want to write, write a lot. And I will fulfil that ideal of mine, which arose so coily within me when I read the first book by [Pavlina] Pajk, with her portrait, and so rapturously wished to be a writer"⁴¹.

³⁹ Pajk, Pavlina: *Slučaji usode*, Gorica: A. Gabršček 1897, p. 341.

⁴⁰ This image brings to mind the remarkable statue *L'Abandon* by Camille Claudel (c.1905), who created her vision of the union between a man and a woman, which is totally opposite to Rodin's *Eternal Spring* (1906/07) or *The Kiss* (1886). In Claudel's statue, the embracing woman leans down towards the man who is kneeling before her. It was the very positioning of Claudel's lovers that stung the critics, as it represented a break from the traditional subordinated role of women.

⁴¹ Zofka Kveder in her letter to Fran Govekar, 10 August 1926. Ljubljana, National and University Library of Slovenia, Legacy of Zofka Kveder, Ms 1113. Presumably Kveder meant with "the first book by Pajk" the first book of Pajk's *Collected works* (Iz zbranih spisov Pavline Pajkove; 1893).

In her first book Kveder depicts violence against women in the proletarian class and also subtle mechanisms of constraint, including middle-class prearranged marriage. She presents the distress of young women and their fear of giving birth, their suffering in a loveless marriage, the anxiety that comes from giving birth to children they cannot support, as well as prostitutes and mature, worn out women workers who are in everybody's way. Her images of proletarian women, prostitutes, and emancipated women, who do not want to deny their sexuality, upset her contemporaries, and many men, but also some women, even denied the collection's artistic value.

While Pavlina Pajk did not publish another book after the attack on *The Accidents of Fate*, Zofka Kveder was not so easily discouraged. One reason for this might be the fact that she was only twenty-two years old when *The Mystery of Woman* was published, and was also living abroad in Prague, writing in German and Croatian. As such, critical attacks did not have the same effect on her creativity. However, she did not continue to write in the same genre found in *The Mystery*. Gregor Kocijan, now the best Slovene connoisseur of short fiction, suggested that in *The Mystery of Woman* Zofka Kveder tried to alter the traditional model of the short story⁴². He added that she presented her own version of the genre, which she later either refrained entirely from using or used only occasionally. Kocijan appears never to have revealed why her later prose collections only included traditional forms, but it can be assumed that the critical response took away the pleasure she experienced from experimenting with new genres. This is, however, only true for her narrative prose, as just over six months after the publication of *The Mystery of Woman* she published a collection of dramas called *Ljubezen* (Love, 1901), which included six one-act plays and one four-act play. The response to this book was not as harsh as with her novel but she was not awarded many words of praise either – despite the fact that these texts are extremely interesting in their portrayal of scenes from women's lives at the end of the 19th century: they are entirely comparable to the texts of her female contemporaries in other national literature⁴³, but not found in the works of Slovene writers at that time.

⁴² Kocijan, Gregor: *Kratka pripovedna proza v obdobju moderne* (Short prose in the period of modernism), Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut filozofske fakultete 1995, p. 66.

⁴³ Such as Grete Meisel-Hess, Else Kotany, Adela Milčinić...

CONCLUSION

Slovene women writers in the late 19th century chose to write in different genres (the story, novel, sketch) and on themes that did not correspond with the expectations of their contemporaries and of literary critics. Central to the work of women writers are problems connected to the lives of women, which both their contemporaries and literary critics considered to be of sociological, rather than literary merit. The attitude of literary critics and historians is ambivalent: even though they would have liked to judge the work of these writers with the same criteria they used for the works of male writers, they deemed this impossible. Sometimes the margins of these critics' arguments reveal ideas and opinions which are in complete contradiction with what they state more directly, and testify to the fact that there are some qualities which they just cannot deny if they are to remain faithful to the principles of honest research. Modern literary scholars such as Silvija Borovnik, Irena Novak Popov and Mira Delavec explore the writings of early Slovenian female authors with feminist literary criticism, and have contributed important monographs and essays which have enriched Slovenian literary scholarship with new perceptions of the role of the female writer – the first that Slovenian women had in literary history⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Borovnik, Silvija: *Pišejo ženske drugače? O Slovenkah kot pisateljicah literarnih del* (Do women write differently? Slovenian women as writers and protagonists), Ljubljana: Mihelač 1996; Novak Popov: *Sprehodi* 2003; Delavec, Mira: *Moč vesti. Josipina Turnograjska, prva slovenska pesnica, pisateljica in skladateljica* (The power of conscience. Josipina Turnograjska. First Slovenian poetess, writer and composer), Brežice: Parnas 2009; see also my *Drzno drugačna. Zofka Kveder in podobe ženskosti* (Daringly different: Zofka Kveder and the Images of Femininity), Ljubljana: Delta 2003.