

Julka Chlapec Đorđević's *New Woman*

The paper presents the concept of the *new woman* by Julka Chlapec Đorđević (1882–1969) as an intersectional figure between the different lines of the writer's feminist thought and social engagement. We dedicate the first part of the paper to the theoretical basis of this concept. In the second part, we analyze the modes of its formation in Chlapec Đorđević's writing. Our research focused on her discursive formulation of the new ethics and politics of sexuality and the related private/public micro-institutions of patriarchy as basic frameworks within which she articulated the concept of the *new woman*. Chlapec Đorđević comprehensively realized the concept of the new woman in the novel *Jedno dopisivanje* [A Correspondence] (1932). We depict its heroine as a paradigm of the writer's theoretical thought on the emancipated woman in correlation with many modern phenomena.

Julka Chlapec Đorđević continuously shaped the concept of the *new woman* during her two decades of activity among the Yugoslav public, starting with essayistic/commentary texts in the early 1920s and ending with books published in the 1930s.¹ Conceptions of the *new woman*, one of the key figures of the feminist imagination, were formatted during the interwar period in Yugoslav public life from different standpoints, growing into a dynamic interdiscursive figure that reflected the stratification of Yugoslav feminist politics and strategies. It is a complex construct that simultaneously unifies feminist thought and operational plans. It is a construct in which feminist demands, negotiations, tactics and their ultimate scope intersect, whether we see them as limitations or the only possible solutions in a given historical moment.²

¹ A biography and bibliography of Julka Chlapec Đorđević are available in the database Knjiženstvo <http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/sr/autorke/julija-hlapec-djordjevic>.

² Moreover, the ideologeme of the *new woman* makes it possible to follow the transnational circulation of ideas, activist translations, cultural mediation types and global perspectives and local nuances. Among Yugoslav feminist circles, the sources for shaping views of the *new woman* came from different cultural environments, mediated by the work of, for example, Henrik Ibsen, Alexandra Kollontai or Sarah Grand. See BARAĆ 2015: 97–109; MILINKOVIĆ 2022: 162–170; SVIRČEV 2021a. Julka Chlapec Đorđević grew up and was educated in southern Hungary, receiving her university education in Vienna. She lived in Prague during the two World Wars. Given that she contributed to both Yugoslav and Czech publications, as well as books in the Serbian and Czech languages, the aspects of her cultural mediation between these two environments merit special research. Alenka Jensterle-Doležal has opened this research field. See JENSTERLE-DOLEŽAL 2020.

In researching the interwar periodical context in Belgrade, especially the genre of female portraits, Stanislava Barać depicted the formative dynamics of the new woman: "Creating the social identity of the new woman was the main but also the most distant goal of the female portrait authors. On the way to that goal, they were often satisfied with the promotion of a more moderate version of the emancipatory ideal."³ By giving the chapter of her monograph in which she reviews the *new woman* concepts the title "feminist ideologue and/or social practice", Barać also acknowledges the discrepancies between media (and literary) representations of the *new woman* and the practical experience of women. Her observations confirm the theses of Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, based on a broader body of Yugoslav periodicals, that the processes of redefinition of femininity after the First World War entailed the establishment of a connection between 'old' and 'new' women and, therefore, women's magazines in that period aimed "to build bridges that will introduce women to the modern age, but at the same time preserve the qualities of femininity which, according to the opinion of the editors (or readership) of the magazine, must not be lost."⁴

We privilege Julka Chlapec Đorđević's conception of the *new woman* for several reasons. Even during the 1930s, Chlapec Đorđević's studies were evaluated as the most original theoretical contribution to Yugoslav feminism.⁵ The figure of the *new woman* is one of the central discursive figures in her work. Discussing, for example, feminism in modern literature in a series of essays and studies, Chlapec Đorđević distinguished it extensively through the figure of the *new woman* (using the terms *modern woman* and *advanced women* synonymously), deeming her representative of the reflection of contemporary emancipatory tendencies. Furthermore, the *new woman* is not only a hermeneutic tool, for it attained its full expression in Chlapec Đorđević's literary work. Above all, her most radical demands placed before interwar Yugoslav feminist thought and action are refracted through the figure of the *new woman*.

Through this conception, she contributed to the reform of sexual morality, which she presented by discussing the micro-institutions associated with manifestations of female sexuality (marital and non-marital models of partnership and intimacy, health-care, prostitution and motherhood). Regarding the significance of this problematic complex within women's interwar periodical culture, Ograjšek Gorenjak writes that "by discussing morality, sexuality, marriage, infidelity and legal status, the women's press essentially examined the boundaries, explored the margins of the framework within which it was situated and defined existence of women at that time. Each of these problems represented the connection between

³ BARAĆ 2015: 96.

⁴ OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014: 153.

⁵ ATANASIJEVIĆ 2008: 194–196.

the women's private sphere and the political reality and a prejudiced society's obligations towards women as individuals. For women, these topics were not only private and intimate; they were the key to their social status and, therefore, the main constraints of 'women's politics'.⁶ These writers articulated sexological discourse as engaged knowledge within the awareness-raising policy and transformation of existing gender constellations. Writing directly or indirectly about sexuality, mainly within the framework of topics such as marriage and prostitution, the contributors to women's magazines reached a consensus that the morality based on double standards governing the sphere of pre-/extra-marital sexuality of men and women had to be reformed, i.e., overcome. However, no unequivocal answer was offered to the questions of whither, how and to what end sexual ethics should be reformed. "The question of morality, immorality and double morality often preoccupied the attention of both the writers and the readership. At the same time, discussion of morality or women's honesty often pertained to their sexual behaviour."⁷ However, within these discussions female sexuality was not subject to scrutiny. In other words, female sexuality was coded by the heteronormative pattern and reproductive function. These issues of sexual morality are precisely where Chlapec Đorđević radically intervened.⁸

Chlapec Đorđević, with a tremendous epochal self-awareness, diligently presented feminist ideas from the standpoint of history and their drivers. Her work provides material both for the history of feminist ideas and figures, as well as insights into her dialogue with heritage, that is, how she made history usable. Within the context of the *new woman* ideology, her essays on her predecessors, Draga Dejanović and Zofka Kveder, are representative. Chlapec Đorđević highlighted the formative experiences of the authors with the titles of her essays: "Omladinka Draga Dejanović" [Youth Activist Draga Dejanović] (1919, *Misao*, Belgrade) and "Iz praških dana Zofke Kveder" [From the Prague Days of Zofka Kvederova] (1928, *Letopis Matice srpske*, Novi Sad). The essays include self-reflection on a feminist practice whose focus is the relationship between the national and international experience of thinking and acting, the politicization of privacy and intimacy, and the coupling of feminist collaborations with other ideological projects and movements. In portraying both authors, Chlapec Đorđević referred to emancipatory characteristics that are part of the general feminist agenda of her time: the formal and informal education of women, the professionalization of women's

⁶ OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014: 186.

⁷ OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014: 177.

⁸ In the Yugoslav context, Kosta Novaković's film *Grešnica bez greha* [A Sinner Without Sin] (1930) represents the most glaring example of condemnation, criminalization and anathematization of the new woman as an erotic being. This film was highly successful with both the public and critics. See VUČETIĆ 2011.

work, the occupation of public space and activist interventions, women's mobility and cosmopolitanism.

Chlapec Đorđević expressed affection for specific characteristics of both Draga Dejanović and Zofka Kveder, i.e., their fearlessness in living the ideas they propagated. She particularly underscored this courage in connection to their professional and intimate decisions. Draga Dejanović, despite her family's opposition, joined the ensemble of the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad at a time when the profession of actress was morally dubious. Also, despite family opposition due to class differences, she married the man she loved (and then left him, dissatisfied with the marriage). Kveder, on the other hand, lived in an informal partnership and, as a single mother, earned her living by writing. However, it was precisely the field of intimacy that set boundaries that Kveder failed to cross.⁹ Accordingly, Chlapec Đorđević noticed the intensively developed features of the 'old' and 'new' woman in her personality. Therefore, the task of contemporary feminists was to emancipate the sphere of privacy, morality, partner relationships (formalized by marriage or not), and eroticism.

Julka Chlapec Đorđević initiated her sexological discourse in the text "O problemu ljudskog plodenja" [On the Problem of Human Reproduction]. Her key idea is the need for the rationalization of childbirth, that is, "the rationalization of human reproduction is the *conditio sine qua* non of the feminist movement."¹⁰ She viewed the concept of rationalization of childbirth with regard to abortion and prostitution, then the dominant sexological topics of the Yugoslav feminist counter-public. Criticizing the dual morality that dictated the gender asymmetry of sexological policies, Chlapec Đorđević also introduced a novelty to the contemporary sexological discourse: the understanding of sexuality from the physiological standpoint. She did not position the reform primarily in the field of economic and

⁹ "For the sake of a meeting with women writers, for the sake of feminist congresses and journalistic meetings, she neglected the duties of a patriarchal wife, but she was out of her mind when her husband sought comfort and entertainment from women who are content to be only women"; "Although she underlined in the *Mystery of the Woman* that the husband sees in the woman an angel or a beast, she also looked for a hero, an artist, but not an ordinary man in her husband." HLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1937: 184, 185. The figure of Zofka Kveder will appear at the beginning of the novel *Jedno dopisivanje*, concealed by the initials ZK. Furthermore, the first published literary text by Chlapec Đorđević, "List" (*Ženski pokret*, 1/2, 1924, 69–72) recalled Zofka Kveder into its circle. It is, as stated in the note attached to the text, "an authorized, free translation from the poems of J. Machar, *Zde by maly kvést růže*." The central themes of the cycle of "lyrical dramas" *Zde by maly kvést růže* by Josef Svatopluk Machar, written in the period from 1891 to 1894, are the unequal and traumatic status of women in contemporary society, women as victims of the moral norms that shape her as a passive and subordinate being, and criticism of the institution of marriage, i.e., obedience in marriage as the source of a woman's suffering. The template by Chlapec Đorđević is the ninth text from the cycle. Machar and Kveder were friends.

¹⁰ CHLAPEC-ĐORĐEVIĆ 1922: 308.

social mechanisms for the production of sexuality. She insisted on redefining the biological and physiological mechanisms of sexual functions (and, through them, subsequently, politicizing the political and economic spheres). According to her, women's social and economic liberation cannot be achieved while there is "perfidy between the sexes": a woman must either give birth or abstain. The rationalization of childbirth, that is, the individual reproductive stance of women, accords complete legitimacy to non-reproductive female sexuality.

Chlapec Đorđević outlined some of the ideas introduced or implied in the text "On the Problem of Human Reproduction" more precisely in her review of the novel *Love* (1926) by Helene Stöcker. Resolving the sexuality, that is, the eroticism of the modern woman, she saw it as "the main nerve of the human being."¹¹ For Chlapec Đorđević, eroticism was the crucial point for feminist intervention, and she was explicit in her view that the feminist movement does not solely strive for social and economic change. She also believed that "husbands and wives feel that here they will fight for the hardest, most difficult thing to secure for the woman: a place in the sun." Therefore, interested in presenting to readers how "a modern woman represents love," Chlapec Đorđević focused a critical eye on the relationship between two lovers. She was particularly receptive to Irene, the free-thinking, intellectually independent girl, who is enthusiastic about Nietzsche's ideas, propagates the social ideas of Marx and Babel, and modernism in art. In the portrait of Irene, we can recognize the features of its author, who, under the influence of Nietzsche, developed the ideas of liberal individualism and personal morality that shaped her concept of love. In agreement with socialist currents, Stöcker initiated a discussion about sexual morality and practices within German bourgeois feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹²

For Julka Chlapec Đorđević, Irene was the "ideal type of a modern woman" precisely because of her attitude towards erotica: "she does not give away her

¹¹ CHLAPEC-ĐORĐEVIĆ 1927: 3–4.

¹² The work of Helene Stöcker, one of the most influential activists of German left wing of bourgeois feminism, was well known to Julka Chlapec Đorđević, and she shared many ideas with her. In 1906, Stöcker was the co-founder and leader of *Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform* [League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform], which promoted a new paradigm of motherhood, while Stöcker herself promoted her conception of the "new ethics". She based "new ethics" on a critique of civil society's double morality. To overcome it, she insisted on the necessity of reforming sexual morality and the laws that regulate it. Stöcker was an advocate of female sexual autonomy, rejecting chastity as a woman's natural state and the only moral state, and informal, intimate communities built on emotional and physical relationships between partners, the idea that marriage and prostitution are institutions that exploit female sexuality, decriminalization of female homosexuality, the use of contraception, the legalization abortion, and the destigmatization of illegitimate children. See SMITH 2013: 65–107; TAYLOR ALLEN 1985: 418–438.

sensitivity in flirtations, she does not identify sensuality with love, but she still does not underestimate the importance of permanent union, and this is the great contradiction of Kollontai's Genius, whose reckless and unbridled sexuality is abominable." A modern woman freely satisfies her sexuality in intimate relationships that perfect and ennoble her personality. Chlapec Đorđević most directly addressed the transformative power of eroticism on the Yugoslav public stage. Although in her review of *Love*, she subordinated Alexandra Kollontai's Genia to Helene Stöcker's protagonist, Kollontai is an author whose many ideas Chlapec Đorđević shared. Kollontai's conception of the *new woman* exerted a decisive impact in the Yugoslav context, and Chlapec Đorđević most consistently adhered to that radical path of sexological discourse.

In the review of the book *New Woman* (1922) by Alexandra Kollontai in the magazine *Ženski pokret* [Women's Movement], Desanka Cvetković introduced an alternative sexological discourse. Cvetković focused on the phenomenon of "unmarried women," which proves that "we are facing one of the most complicated, burning issues today, the sexual issue."¹³ She critically re-examined the patriarchal ideal of chastity and passivity, premarital abstinence as a supreme quality that makes a woman a candidate for a good marriage, and marriage as a legitimate framework for female sexuality. The alternatives offered to women are unacceptable: female submissiveness, sanctioned relationships, and sexual abstinence. Girlhood, marriage, and spinsterhood are micro-institutions for controlling and disciplining female sexuality. The *new women* are independent and engaged in sexual and amorous experiences that enrich their personality, but "they do not exhaust their spiritual wealth in amorous experiences. They are capable of love and what else! However, they do not come out of it with broken wings but with hardened souls. The ideal remains a monogamous relationship based on great love. Nevertheless, by no means immutable, constraining."¹⁴

The capital ideas that Desanka Cvetković, through Alexandra Kollontai's work, introduced to sexological discourse in the margins of her text are the separation of sexual and reproductive drive, i.e., sex motivated by a woman's pleasure and the non-submissiveness of the female sexual drive. These concepts are the foundation of Chlapec Đorđević's sexological discourse and demand for the reform of sexual morality. Although she does not refer to Kollontai in her studies, the reference in her works is an author whose ideas are the basis of Kollontai herself: Grete Meisel-Hess. Meisel-Hess is one of the key authors who, at the beginning of the century, politicized sexological discourse from the feminist standpoint in the German-speaking world. It was precisely the German feminist sexological

¹³ CVETKOVIĆ 1922: 346.

¹⁴ CVETKOVIĆ 1923: 35.

discourse of the first decades of the 20th century that shaped Chlapec Đorđević's reform of sexual morality.¹⁵

At the beginning of the 20th century, women authors who worked in the German cultural sphere – as Kirsten Lang has shown in her extensive research – not only actively created scientific knowledge but also made significant and influential interventions in the then nascent field of sexology. One of them was Greta Meisel-Hess, and Chlapec Đorđević also consulted the works on sexology by Rosa Mayreder¹⁶ and the already mentioned Helene Stöcker. “Their research and theories underscored empowering representations of autonomous, active, female sexual desire, gender expressions that exceeded the masculine/feminine binary, and new forms of heterosexual relations beyond contractual marriage and prostitution.”¹⁷ These female authors saw sexology as a fertile field for innovative visions of sexual subjectivities. However, their sexual politics were not a universal emancipatory project, as evidenced by, for example, the coupling with eugenics discourse or sexual heteronormativity as a paradigm. The progressive wings of the movement “identified sexual relations as a source of women's broader social, political, and economic oppression, and recognized that beliefs about female and male sexuality served to determine and justify limitations on women's legal rights, social being, and access to public spaces—limitations that inhibited women's broader powers of self-determination,”¹⁸ and their “research suggested that the biological body did not constitute a limit on the social role of

¹⁵ Greta Meisel-Hess and Julka Hlapec Đorđević studied philosophy in Vienna at the same time. Imperial Vienna was a “laboratory for sexual knowledge” and “the sexual knowledge produced by sexology and psychoanalysis in the fin-de-siècle was interpreted by a wide variety of social reform groups in the early twentieth century. In the German-speaking world, the movements involved in appropriating and spreading sexual knowledge included social purity campaigns against prostitution, Neo-Malthusian birth-control supporters, feminists, antifeminists, Monists, and proponents of eugenic.” McEWEN 2012: 13. In the book *The Sexual Crisis* (1909), Meisel-Hess, criticizing double-edged moral standards, postulated that sexual liberation was the ultimate goal of the women's movement. A healthy sex life and erotic fulfilment are crucial to women's psychological and emotional health, intellectual development, and social and economic equality. She elaborated these ideas in the novel *Fanny Roth* (1903; by 1913, the novel had thirty printings). See SCHWARTZ 2008: 66. Gerta Meisel-Hess and Helene Stöcker were collaborators, Stöcker representing her Bund, Meisel-Hess her Allgemeine Österreichischen Frauenvereins.

¹⁶ In the book *Towards a Critique of Femininity*, which we find among Chlapec Đorđević's references, Rosa Mayreder set forth from the position that femininity and masculinity are socially conditioned categories. However, she stuck to an essentialist position because she offered a static typology of women (based on the degree of compatibility of sexuality and intellectual development). According to Meyreder, one must restrict sexuality to a relationship with one person, and she conceived love as transgressing the boundaries of the self. See SCHWARTZ 2008.

¹⁷ LANG 2018: 8.

¹⁸ LANG 2018: 28.

women, but rather served as a site of multiple subjective possibilities.”¹⁹ Female writers engaged in the field of sexology brought out the political repercussions of the new understanding of the sexual drive in the direction of the foundation of a new female subjectivity: an autonomous woman who is engaged in an enriching personal sexual experience.²⁰

In two studies from 1930, *Sudbina žene. Kriza seksualne etike* [Fate of a Woman. The Crisis of Sexual Ethics], Chlapec Đorđević examined sexual differentiation from diverse perspectives, i.e., the biological and sociological potential (conditions) for women’s emancipation. Insisting on the rationalization of childbirth as the foundation of women’s emancipation, she affirmed (female) sexuality beyond

¹⁹ LANG 2018: 35.

²⁰ In 1923, Aleksandar Kostić, a professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade, launched the series *Biblioteka za izučavanje seksualnog pitanja* [Library for the Study of Sexual Issues], which he also edited. Its first published book was a collection of his articles and essays *Iz seksualnog pitanja* [From the Sexual Question]. Kostić pleaded for premarital abstinence for both men and women, and he considered sex not motivated by the desire for offspring but rather by personal gratification, to be the root cause of disorders (prostitution and venereal diseases): “Sexual desire and its satisfaction are most closely related to positive and useful reproduction. Its exclusion and concealment before a relationship in which a person wants children leads to egocentric aspirations. That is a threat to the progress of society, but even more so to the individual.” KOSTIĆ 1923: 15. Kostić argued in favour of early marriages, and he based sexual education on the following methods: proper diet, suitable attire, physical exercise, bolstering will power, and healthy reading. The following books were published as part of the Library for the Study of Sexual Issues after Kostić’s studies: Max Oker-Blom, *With Uncle the Doctor in the Country: A Book for Parents* [*Hos morbror doktorn på landet: En bok för föräldrar*] (1924), Remy de Gourmont, *The Nature of Love: An Essay on the Sexual Instinct* [*Physique de l’amour*] (1924), Ivan Bloch, *Free Love* (1924), Hans Meyer-Rieg, *Woman as Mother* (1924), Georges Sirble, *Life of a Girl and Life of a Young Man* (1924), Mary Stopes, *Love in Marriage and Wise Parenthood* (1925), Hermann Rohleder, *Fundamentals of Sexual Pedagogy* [*Grundzüge der Sexualpädagogik*] (1925), Ivan Bloch, *Prostitution* (1925), Hermann Rohleder, *Sexual Physiology* [*Sexual-Physiology*] (1926), Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *On Sexual Desire* [*Psychopathia sexualis*] (1927), L(ucien) Mathé, *Teaching Sexual Hygiene at School* [*L’enseignement de l’hygiène sexuelle à l’école*] (1928), Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Sadism* (1928), and Otto Weininger, *Thoughts on the Sexual Problem* [*Gedanken über Geschlechtsprobleme*] (1929). Women translated the manuals from the field of pedagogy: *With Uncle the Doctor in the Country: A Book for Parents* was translated by the Germanist Julka Janjićka and *The Teaching of Hygiene in the School* by paediatrician and professor Smilja Kostić Joksić. Kostić also translated and published the book by Auguste Forel, *The Sex Question* [*Die sexuelle Frage*] (1924). Let us compare the bibliography of Chlapec Đorđević’s studies with the Library for the Study of Sexuality (respecting the Library’s educational and didactic dimension). It is evident that she consulted more progressive sexologists, especially those who affirmed female sexuality such as August Forel, Ivan Bloch, Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfield. Also, in Kostić’s Library, influential books by female authors in the field of sexology, which were essential to the formulation of Chlapec Đorđević’s views, were absent. The works by Forel, Ellis and Bloch, although their patriarchal conception of sexuality was later pointed out, were very influential in the European context until the First World War. Ana Kolarić has written about the importance of these authors in British feminist periodical culture and about sexological attitudes in Serbian culture at the beginning of the century. See KOLARIĆ 2017: 123–189.

the reproductive context, that is, in the emancipatory key. Setting forth from the attitude that “intellectual masculinity and femininity are artificial creations that are often naturalized,”²¹ Chlapec Đorđević fundamentally reconceptualised the field of sexuality in which she advocated for the idea of personal freedoms and women’s right to choose.²² Her position was that “whatever harms no one, everyone must be free”²³ has not lost its force even today in the context of sexual politics.

Chlapec Đorđević promoted an integralist approach to a woman’s personality. Intellectual work and personal relationships, as well as physical satisfaction are equally crucial to women’s emancipation, i.e., fulfilment: “It is quite justifiable that a modern woman does not want to be either a mother, or a lover, or a public worker... she wants to flicker with happiness with all the cells of her self.”²⁴ She unmasked the patriarchal micro-institutions that oppress women (sexuality, marriage and motherhood), that is, the ethical complex on which they are based. Alternatively, in her words: “Until now, the church, society, and family had created a separate thermometer for a woman’s sexuality, and woe betide her if she did not always have the temperature that public opinion dictated!”²⁵

Not only did she promote birth control and family planning, seeing it as a prerequisite for women’s emancipation,²⁶ she also discarded the very concept of patriarchal motherhood: “A woman gets carried away by the incense she burns before the altar of motherhood, and she does not feel that man is using that aggrandizement as a narcotic so that he can exploit her more efficiently.”²⁷ Observing the manipulative strategies of patriarchal rhetoric about the sanctity of motherhood and their indoctrinating effects, Chlapec Đorđević laid bare the mechanisms of

²¹ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 13.

²² The intense interaction between Julka Chlapec Đorđević’s conceptions and the individual psychology of Alfred Adler, which she presented to the Yugoslav public in her texts, is evident. Adler’s teaching strongly influenced sexological discourse in the German-speaking world between the two World Wars, and Hlapec Đorđević herself wrote about his importance to feminism. Lang noted the epistemological and paradigmatic changes in the German sexological discourse between the two wars under the consequence of Adler’s ideas –focusing sexology on the role of society and culture in shaping sexual roles, relationships and behaviour. The key idea is that femininity and masculinity are constructs and instances of power relations between the dominant and subordinate. Nevertheless, he did not fail to note the mixture of essentialism and constructivism because radical gender contingency was comprehended as a threat to naturalized heterosexuality. See LANG 2018: 265–275.

²³ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 30.

²⁴ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 24.

²⁵ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 30.

²⁶ In this, Julka Chlapec Đorđević was alone in the Yugoslav context, although the discourse on sexuality was commonplace in that era’s European feminisms. Sexual politics were articulated within the scope of nationalist and population policies, and reformatory tendencies were directed towards male sexuality. See OFEN 2015: 365–370.

²⁷ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 26.

violence at their base, which deprive women of any form of integrity. In this regard, she was no less critical of the role of women as educators (individually and collectively): “A woman under the influence of a man believes that the mother raises the generations, but this is not true”; and even more decisively and lucidly: “There are no inherent qualities that make a woman more capable of raising children.”²⁸ Feminists had to insist on the reformation of parenthood to redistribute responsibility and responsibilities. Alternatively, it is time to talk about the sanctity of fatherhood in Masaryk’s words, which Chlapec Đorđević often cited. Critically examining the “sanctity of fatherhood” (or the dominant patterns of masculinity), in her opinion, was an inseparable part of women’s emancipation. At the same time, it was precisely this field into which Yugoslav feminists were not ready to step.²⁹

A separate chapter in the book *Sudbina žene. Kriza seksualne etike* is devoted to the issue of marriage, that is, the adaptation of sexual unions to the new needs of the time. The development of marriage as a social and economic institution primarily led to an unfavourable position for women and the husband’s status as the woman’s custodian and, to some extent, owner. However, “the upheaval of sexually ethical requirements deprived patriarchal marriage of its moral justification, and urbanization and industrialization undermined its economic basis.”³⁰ Chlapec Đorđević saw patriarchal marriage as one stage in the evolution of sexual relationships that contemporary society had to reform because, as she warned, “let us not forget that patriarchal sentimentality was redeemed by the filth of prostitution, the misery of an illegitimate child and the intellectual vapidness of women.”³¹ Marriage, as Chlapec Đorđević saw it, should be based on the economic equality of its partners, on the redistribution of work and social obligations not by gender but by individual qualities (fundamental in the context of parenting),³² and the modern, i.e., subjective importance of sexuality and sexual ethics.

The theme of marriage forms the backbone of Chlapec Đorđević’s most significant literary work, the novel *Jedno dopisivanje* [A Correspondence] (1932). The ideas elaborated in her essays were integrated into the novel’s literary structure.³³

²⁸ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 29.

²⁹ On the debates within the Yugoslav Women’s Movement in which Chlapec Đorđević participated, see SVIRČEV 2021b; KOLARIĆ 2021.

³⁰ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 61.

³¹ CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 73. However, marriage, or a formalized relationship between two people, is still an adequate framework of intimacy for Chlapec Đorđević: “the postulate of exclusivity and the strictest monogamy of sexual ethics must not abandon us.” Because “not love, not morality, not a woman, not sexuality, but the well-being of a child calls for the institution of marriage.” CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 73.

³² CHLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1930: 30.

³³ The interpretation of the novel *Jedno dopisivanje* relies on the analysis of this text presented in the study by Jelena Milinković, “Tematizacija ljubavne priče u romanu *Jedno dopisivanje* Julke Hlapec Đorđević” (see Bibliography).

By choosing a dialogic epistolary novel (J. Rousset's term) as a form and placing a romantic plot in its centre, the author created a platform on which she could elaborate and examine, with specific examples, all of those aspects of sexual ethics that she had discussed in her scholarly work and essays. The embodiment of the *new woman* is represented by the main protagonist, Marija Prohaskova. By giving a voice to Marija and allowing her to shape her ideas and directly convey them to the readers through the intimate form of letters, Chlapec Đorđević gave a voice to the *new woman*. The character of Marija Prohaskova is broadly based on autobiographical elements, and some elements of her fictional biography are identical to the author's.³⁴ It would be worth investigating the presumption that Chlapec Đorđević used her existing intimate correspondence as a template for writing the novel.³⁵

Chlapec Đorđević conceived the novel as correspondence between a man and a woman, Marija Prohaskova and Oton Šrepan. Thanks to this composition, readers are presented with both male and female perspectives. At the same time, writing from a man's perspective, Chlapec Đorđević applied the procedure of gender transgression (Magdalena Koch's term)³⁶, which is one of the fundamental (revolutionary) procedures of women's literature in the first half of the 20th century. Marija is the initiator of the correspondence, the beginning of which seems to be professional: the main character, for her scholarly work, inquires about the details of the biography of a certain ZK and her days in Prague. However, a few letters later, it becomes clear that ZK is just an excuse, that it is a correspondence between two former lovers, and that the correspondence will continue to develop in intimacy and emotionality and not in the direction of professional or scholarly work.

³⁴ Chlapec Đorđević and Marija Prohaska share a homeland, a place of education, and both live in Prague in their mature years. The public sphere in interwar Prague may be included in a comparative analysis of notions of eroticism and sexual ethics in the novel. Karla Huebner explored attitudes towards sex and sexuality in First Republic Czechoslovakia (1918–1938). Interwar Czechoslovaks were enthusiastic participants in closely linked discourses about hygiene, physical culture, sex education, birth control, sex reform, and the struggle for sexual minority rights. Czech discourse about sex and sexuality was almost always – apart from erotica and pornography – closely tied to discourses about health, hygiene, and social reform. The author concluded that Czech writers and activists were in constant dialogue with German discourses. See HUEBNER 2010.

³⁵ This cannot be proven due to the lack of information about Chlapec Đorđević's papers. As she spent most of her life in the Czech Republic, where she died (her public life ended at the beginning of World War II), the valid address for this type of research would be local libraries and archives. Unfortunately, because of intense negligence regarding women's bequests, Chlapec Đorđević's papers have possibly been irretrievably lost. Connecting researchers active in the various places where Chlapec Đorđević worked would undoubtedly be one of the first steps in an effort to document her potential legacy.

³⁶ See KOH: 2008.

The novel's first reviewer, Ksenija Atanasijević, had already noticed that it is possible to find the key ideas that Chlapec Đorđević wrote about in her essays: "This writer's new book, *Jedno dopisivanje*, is presented in the form of fragments, meaning, in the full sense of the word, transferring her cultural-feminist preoccupations to a more popular literary plan. The book bears the true mark of the personality and spirit of its creator: again, we find a conscious woman with broad-based intelligence, complex spiritual aspirations, and an immediacy untainted by any prejudices."³⁷ The permeation of the ideological and literary in this novel are multiple. They range from explicitly expressed feminist attitudes through the motivational structure of character to the formal characteristics and possible meanings that the novel implies. Thus, in the letters Marija sends to Oton, we can recognize the inserted, more or less adapted parts of Chlapec Đorđević's essay, in which she discussed issues of sexual ethics, women's emancipation and necessary social change, as well as a new understanding of love and eroticism. This work, with its complex structure, is both a renewal of the epistolary romance novel and a new (polemical) version of the sentimental novel.³⁸ Chlapec Đorđević upgraded the inherited literary form with contemporary content, which aligns with her understanding of love and marriage.³⁹

The epistolary structure is significant to Serbian women's literature, considering that the epistolary is one of the favourite forms of modernist Serbian women writers. However, unlike Chlapec Đorđević, who used this form in fiction, other writers such as, for example, Isidora Sekulić and, above all, Jelena Dimitrijević, used letters in non-fictional genres, most often in travelogues. In the interwar period, Vera Ivanić's novel *Sotto Voce* used an epistolary form but privileges exclusively the addressee (we read letters from a woman addressed to her lover). In order to comprehensively present the epistolary tradition and the contemporary context in which *Jedno dopisivanje* can be situated, we can observe the novel through several prisms: (a) within the framework of the European epistolary novel tradition, which is primarily tied to the 18th century sentimental novel, (2) within the framework of the epistolary novel of the South Slavic inter-literary community,⁴⁰ and (3) within the framework of Serbian literature and the epistolary genres written by women.

³⁷ ATANASIJEVIĆ 2008: 197.

³⁸ Unlike the polyphonic epistolary novels of the 18th century, whose tradition this novel implicitly follows, such as Rousseau's *New Eloise*, Richardson's *Clarisse* and *Pamela*, or Laclau's *Dangerous Liaisons*, *Jedno dopisivanje* has a more reduced dialogic form.

³⁹ In addition to trying to write a novel that shapes the fundamental ideas of her own scholarly and essayistic work, Chlapec Đorđević also addressed and problematizes some of the crucial practices and themes of women's literature and its history, such as the use of pseudonyms, fear of authorship, and the social and psychological (pre)conditions of writing. See MILINKOVIĆ 2014.

⁴⁰ Alenka Jensterle-Doležal analyzed the literary connections between *Jedno dopisivanje* and the epistolary novel *Hanka* (1915, 1917) by Zofka Kveder. She concludes that Chlapec-Đorđević was influenced by Kveder and wrote her novel in a dialogue with *Hanka*. See JENSTERLE-DOLEŽAL 2016.

The use of the letter as a means of communication, and the organizing principle of the novel, enabled Chlapec Đorđević to create characters based on direct insight into their thoughts and actions. The first-person narrative and the narrative present supported this specific procedure. Given that each letter is a new event, the protagonists, i.e., the correspondents, determine the pace and flow of the action itself, and the number and tempo of actual events are often inversely proportional to the number and tempo of the letters that accompany them. The more turbulent the external events in which the protagonists participate, the more curtailed the correspondence, and vice versa. Periods of silence, i.e., those without letters, are either when the lovers meet and in which a love story takes place in the literal sense of the word or periods of tumult in their separate lives.

Marija Prohaskova, apart from the observed autobiographical foundation, shares with the author her worldview and an interest in the same topics, which she initiates in her correspondence with Oton. Marija Prohaskova as a heroine was formed on the basis of ideological principles close to Chlapec Đorđević's own. She is university-educated, self-aware, ambitious, bold, sexually active, engaged in socio-political events, and interested in the environment in which she lives. Chlapec Đorđević built her as a new type of woman in literature, as the *advanced woman* or the *new woman*. She is also a feminist version of the traditional literary *femme fatale*.

Believing in the necessity of a connection between literature and society and mutual reflection, Chlapec Đorđević, in the essay "Feminism in modern literature," wrote about the concord between literature and social circumstances, which leads to the fact that all changes that occur in the social environment are reflected in literature and are processed literarily: "Each literature naturally bears the mark of its proximate environment and the mark of the life that is led immediately around it, but it also creates personalities of general human importance."⁴¹ When the topic is the relationship between the *new women* and literature, modern literature should present a woman who wants to take responsibility, and a woman who is ready to take risks, above all when it comes to romantic feelings, because she wants to experience every facet of them. In this essay, Chlapec Đorđević observed that more and more novels portray a woman who experiences love and erotic adventures unharmed and without adversity and clashes of fate. Considering the selected topic in the novel *Jedno dopisivanje*, it is imperative to understand the author's understanding of love as a phenomenon.

Chlapec Đorđević assumed that the way to express love and the behaviour of a woman in a romantic relationship reveals a great deal about the status of a woman in a particular environment.⁴² The author thematized this essential idea about the

⁴¹ HLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1937: 12.

⁴² HLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 1935: 5–40.

relationship between love and social relationships in *Jedno dopisivanje*, given that the issues of love and marriage are its key themes. She comprehended love as a complex phenomenon not limited solely to liking and eroticism but implied the possibility of self-growth and complete self-awareness of the personality. Chlapec wrote about love: "The love of a cultivated person, even if it usually cannot tear itself away from its roots, grown on the soil of instinct, is full of spiritual elements. It represents the scale of the most diverse psychic emanations, among which the feeling of friendship occupies an important place."⁴³ The polemic in which the protagonists of this novel participate is, therefore, a discussion about love, and the polemic of the text refers primarily to the new understanding of love, which the author presents to us through the character of Marija, contrasting it with Oton's more traditional understanding of romantic relationships.

The linkages that the novel *Jedno dopisivanje* establishes with the aforementioned sociological study "The Crisis of Sexual Ethics," in which the author presented the concept of personal love, are significant. The emancipation and intellectualization of women create "the age of personal love." This is the time in which Chlapec Đorđević lived, and she believed it brought significant changes to the understanding of eroticism, marriage and love, which are precisely the consequences of individualization and emancipation. She pointed out that modern scientific achievements (medical, sociological, evolutionary) have indicated the necessity of individual and not general treatment in all aspects and areas. Intellectualization leads to (self) awareness, whereby sexual power simultaneously becomes a vast power in human society, which must be directed and used. At the same time, with this intellectualization of sexual power and its awareness, man's ethical ideal is changed, and thus sexual-ethical individualism and relativism arise simultaneously. Changes in the spheres of sexual ethics result from growing knowledge about the nature of human beings. In this regard, Chlapec Đorđević stated that love is a luxury that can only be afforded by socially and economically free members of society. The author applied this new understanding of love, marriage and eroticism in the novel *Jedno dopisivanje* precisely and explicitly through the attitudes expressed in the main character's letters. Svetlana Slapšak, therefore, qualifies this novel as a "textbook of new erotica."⁴⁴ Marija Prohaskova believes in love, that which begins and ends in love. She does not seek institutional frameworks for the feeling of love and does not tie love exclusively to a sexual relationship or marriage. She perceives love as the supreme feeling of a human being, which a woman has not sufficiently explored, considering that it is often related to prohibitions, restrictions, expected behaviour and social pressure.

⁴³ HLAPEĆ ĐORĐEVIĆ 1935: 85.

⁴⁴ SLAPŠAK 2004: 162.

The novel details Marija Prohaskova's three love stories: Marija–Oton (Vienna student days and renewed romance), Maria–her husband, and Maria–a young librarian from Prague. None of these romantic relationships are happy, but each represents one of several possible paradigms and common relationships. The conventional marriage of Maria and her husband, created as a result of social pressure, ends in a semblance characteristic of a suitable, decent civil marriage, in which, on the surface, everything is in the finest order and where each actor calmly plays his or her role, dictated by law and customs. However, that relationship is a marriage without love, without the slightest passion and spiritual exchange, which survives only because of the physical separation of the spouses. The husband is invisible, passive and mute in the novel; he is a passing visitor to the family home, and we learn almost nothing about him apart from the fact that he is a politician. Within this loveless relationship, Marija is in search of romantic adventures and experiments, trying to experience that ultimate human feeling. We can compare Marija's marriage to Oton Šrepan's marriage, which also came about through the paradigm of coercion and necessity. The situation here is somewhat different, considering the main character's weakness, who renounced love and ideals and cannot help himself to see himself as a social offender. At the cost of personal misfortune, he endures once-established marital relations.

Another relationship that Marija writes to Oton about is her "affair" with a much younger Prague librarian. This relationship thematizes the issue of platonic love and the relationship between an older woman and a younger man. Their two-year relationship was based on mutual esteem, love, passion, intellectual enrichment, and enjoyment of culture. Maria (or Julka Chlapec) uses this story to talk about the prejudices related to women who marry or have relationships with younger men, citing the examples of writers Madame de *Staël* and George Eliot, known for such relationships. Believing, in line with the new understanding of physicality and sexuality, that women should not perceive their age as an obstacle to initiating erotic or romantic relationships, Marija fully surrenders herself to the relationship with the young librarian. However, as in the case of the student's love for Oton, anticipating silent societal pressure, she leaves this young man, whom she loves very much, almost without explanation and external motivation. Marija also uses this story to decisively and explicitly define herself as a "man-woman" and to reject the inherited ideal of women in Serbian culture: "But you can see, dear Oton, that I am not a woman à la Empress Milica or Mother of the Jugovići."⁴⁵

The most complex romantic relationship Marija realizes is with Oton. Of all the other relationships shown in the novel, theirs stands out because they have a past relationship, a youthful, student, passionate, and, as it will turn out, fatal

⁴⁵ HLAPEC ĐORĐEVIĆ 2004: 36, 37.

love story for both of them. A break-up at a young age led both to melancholy and compromised marriages. The renewal of the Marija–Oton romance is directly related to the understanding marriage and the relationship between love and marriage. This central romance allowed Chlapec Đorđević to show the functioning of her understanding of marriage, its crisis, and sexual ethics in the literary field. However, it is essential to note here that Marija as a woman, does not find happiness in any of the aforementioned relationships. Chlapec Đorđević does not enthusiastically reveal the success and satisfaction of this new woman, who emerged as a result of emancipation at the beginning of the century. Her *new woman* partly capitulates to social expectations, and she experiences defeat in the field of romance.

Chlapec Đorđević built Marija Prohaskova as a heroine who organizes her life on the principles of the spirit of the times, the emancipatory feeling of the *new woman*, and new love, sexuality, and physicality. Empowered by feminist ideas, she enters into life, love, correspondence, and spirituality and replenishes the inherited forms of opinion and narration with newly learned content. However, she does not find happiness and does not experience true love, and she defines herself as a person prone to melancholy. On the other hand, Oton, a man of traditional views, a slave to his everyday life and environment, and insufficiently emancipated from Marija's perspective, feels and experiences the full force of love's ecstasy. However, he, too, due to Maria's convictions, does not find happiness and (perhaps) ends in Werther's tragedy.

Chlapec Đorđević left the denouement of the novel unfinished without resolving the fate of her protagonists: the novel ends after two letters sent on the same day, Oton's in which he announces his suicide, and Marija's in which she proposes a meeting and compromise. This kind of procedure allowed Chlapec Đorđević to problematize all of the topics she raised in the novel, from the inherited sentimental patterns of speech about love to the nature of the protagonist and the conceptual layer of the text. To show social changes and processes through her ideas about engaging literature, Chlapec Đorđević chose a topic and built protagonists through whom she transferred the ideas of her essayistic-theoretical thoughts into a literary text. The author's views determined the novel's theme and the main plot and decisively influenced its applied narrative procedures, as well as its general meaning and conceptual guidelines.

In this sense, if we say that *Jedno dopisivanje* is a novel about love, then it is a novel that questions love, eroticism, and marriage as traditionally understood, but also a novel that questions the new free love and the possibility of happiness in it. Thanks to procedures like gender transgression, i.e., giving a voice to a man and his feminization and the reversal of male-female roles, Chlapec Đorđević created protagonists who problematize inherited literary and living patterns, but who themselves are problematic in their views and forms of behaviour. They are built so that

they can be used to question entrenched and solidified attitudes about male-female relations and the standard assumptions that grounded such relations. Nevertheless, the novel allows one to argue with those implicitly and explicitly affirmed ideas.

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Nova žena Julke Chlapec Đorđević

Figura nove žene jedna je od ključnih tema u stvaralaštvu Julke Chlapec Đorđević. Ona je ovoj koncepciji posvetila svoje znanstvene radove, eseje i književnu kritiku te je postavila kao središnju temu svog glavnog književnog djela, romana „Jedno dopisivanje“. Ova koncepcija proizašla je iz sufražetskog pokreta te je dalje razvijana u različitim kulturno-naučnim i esejističkim okvirima od Britanije do Rusije. Zbog toga je postala jedan od temeljnih diskurzivnih okvira u (anglo)europskom feminizmu krajem 19. i početkom 20. stoljeća. Zbog internacionalizma ideje koju je prihvatila te posvećenog oblikovanja i nijansiranja, slika nove žene koju je Julka Chlapec Đorđević stvorila važna je za jugoslavenski, ali i širi europski kontekst. U ovom radu predstavljamo način na koji je Julka Chlapec Đorđević oblikovala koncept nove žene u svojim esejističkim radovima. Posebno smo analizirali način na koji je unutar ovog koncepta artikulirala modernu seksualnu etiku, smatrajući da su ova pitanja seksološkog diskursa osnovna. Kroz figuru nove žene prelamaju se najradikalniji zahtjevi autorice pred međuratnom jugoslavenskom feminističkom javnošću, bilo da je riječ o prošlosti i „prethodnicama“ poput Zofke Kveder i Drage Dejanović, bilo da se bavi književnom kritikom ili konkretnim problemima vremena. Analizom odabranih eseja istaknuli smo glavne točke njenog prijedloga reforme seksualnog morala, koji je izložila diskutirajući o mikroinstitucijama u kojima je ženska seksualnost bila artikulirana, poput (ne)bračnih oblika zajedništva i intimnosti, zdravstvene zaštite, prostitucije i majčinstva. Seksološki diskurs Julke Chlapec Đorđević, kao i drugih (međuratnih) feministkinja, artikulirao se kao angažirano znanje koje je imalo funkciju u širim okvirima i trebalo je sudjelovati u svim sredstvima koja doprinose osvještavanju i pomažu u procesima transformacije postojećih rodno-određenih konstelacija. Također, analiza epistolarnog ljubavnog romana „Jedno dopisivanje“ u drugom dijelu rada pokazuje povezanost njenih ideja i načina njihovog prelaska iz jednog u drugi diskurs. Ovaj analizirani roman nije samo vrijedan i značajan u literarnom smislu, već predstavlja najkoherentniju i najradikalniju eksplikaciju koncepta nove žene u jugoslavenskoj književnosti, oblikovanu kroz različite tekstualne slojeve i elemente. Glavna junakinja, sustav likova, odnosi među protagonistima, žanr, sadržaj pisama - svi su ovi elementi i razine na kojima je autorica testirala koncept nove žene i prikazala način, dosljednost i opseg njegove (ne)funkcionalnosti.

Ključne riječi: nova žena, brak, politike seksualnosti, ljubavni narativi, modernizam, Julka Chlapec Đorđević, feministička književnost, epistolarni roman

Keywords: new woman, marriage, politics of sexuality, love narratives, modernism, Julka Chlapec Đorđević, feminist literature, epistolary novels

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