



**May '68 and the Emergence  
of *écriture féminine*:**

**The French Centre and  
the Slovenian Periphery**

Maj '68 i nastanak  
*écriture féminine*: Francuska  
i Slovenija – centar i periferija

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This article discusses the relation between second-wave feminism and Slovenian literature, focusing on the poetics of female authors. It begins by addressing the relations between the 1968 student movement and the struggle for women's emancipation, particularly the literary and theoretical innovations of women in France with an emphasis on the symbolic position claimed by the authors around the *écriture féminine* circle. After presenting the second wave of the women's movement in Slovenia, the article sketches out the Slovenian reception of *écriture féminine* and sets up the framework for a further exploration of the emergence of *écriture féminine* among poets in the period 1964–1980. During that period, there was no Slovenian equivalent of *écriture féminine*. However, as *écriture féminine* was emerging in France, some emancipatory stirrings in Slovenian poetry were felt, particularly in the work of two female poets of an earlier generation and one author who had participated in the student movement.

MAY '68, WOMEN'S LIBERATION  
MOVEMENT, *ÉCRITURE FÉMININE*,  
SLOVENIAN FEMALE POETS,  
SPEAKING OUT

Članak proučava odnos drugog talasa feminizma i književnog sistema s fokusom na pesničke prakse autorki. U prvom delu analizira se relacija koja se uspostavlja između studentskog pokreta '68, borbe za emancipaciju žena i književnih i teorijskih inovacija u Francuskoj s naglaskom na simboličku poziciju za koju su se izborile autorke kruga *écriture féminine*. Nakon predstavljanja drugog talasa ženskog pokreta u Sloveniji, daje se skica recepcije francuskih teoretičarki, kao i okvir za buduće proučavanje ženskog pisma u slovenačkoj poeziji u periodu 1964–1980. Tokom analize dolazi se do zaključka da u slovenačkom književnom sistemu nije moguće govoriti o *écriture féminine* kao o posebnom pokretu ili književnom toku, ni kada je reč o književnom stvaralaštvu ovog perioda uopšte, ni unutar podsistema poezije, što ne znači da nije bilo pojedinačnih slučajeva, odnosno, glasova snažnog emancipatornog potencijala i nesumnjive umetničke vrednosti koji su se javili istovremeno s francuskim pokretom.

STUDENTSKI POKRET '68,  
POKRET ZA OSLOBOĐENJE ŽENA,  
*ÉCRITURE FÉMININE*, SLOVENAČKE  
PESNIKINJE, SPEAKING OUT

**THE STUDENT REVOLUTION, WOMEN'S LIBERATION  
MOVEMENT AND *ÉCRITURE FÉMININE***

The question of women's participation and the division of gender roles in the 1968 student uprisings received increased media attention in May 2008 and May 2018, the fortieth and the fiftieth anniversaries of the revolt. In terms of leadership, May '68 was an overwhelmingly male affair: women rarely had access to public forums or important leadership positions. A series of personal testimonies reveal a sharp polarisation in so-called practical activities: while men were discussing, women were making coffee; while men were standing at podiums making speeches, women were distributing leaflets. The subject of May '68 was, as Florence Prudhomme argues, the male subject, the subject of male sexuality, the subject of the phallic libido that has never been threatened by the danger of an unwanted pregnancy or a potentially fatal backstreet abortion. At the same time, by shifting to the personal, the spirit of the revolution produced a new conceptualisation of politics and this in turn caused the woman's question to be asked again, this time in a new and more subversive manner. To a large extent, the new wave of western feminism—as an autonomous movement a landmark of which remains the birth of the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (Women's Liberation Movement) in France—was the result of the diversification of the student movement. As historian Bibia Pavard put it: 'Everybody, the historians and the protagonists, agree that the history of the MLF begins in 1968. The MLF was born in the wake of May '68 even if it rose in opposition to it.' (Pavard: 36)

The Neuwirth Law, which partly lifted the ban on birth control methods in 1967, was among the first steps towards women's emancipation in France. The law, replacing a law that had been passed in 1920

under the Vichy Government, did not lift the prohibition of abortion and in any case was never fully implemented. MLF's slogan *Mon corps est à moi* (My Body Is Mine) and the 1971 *Manifeste des 343* (Manifesto of the 343), in which 343 women admitted to having had abortions, paved the way to the passage of the Veil Law in 1975, finally lifting the ban on artificially terminated pregnancies. This was the most concrete accomplishment of the second wave of the women's movement in France.

In May 1970, the journal *Partisans* announced the birth of the MLF by dedicating a special issue to it. The movement was the result of a rethinking of May '68 carried out by female participants of the uprising on the basis of their own experience. In this process, female participants of May '68 sought to understand the social, political and psychological reasons for the silence of women during political assemblies, and for the overt arrogance of their male comrades. More generally, they wanted to confront the oppression of women in society, to build an effective (and also theoretical) platform for fighting it. In the words of Françoise Picq, one of the movement's main protagonists, the movement fought for the 'abolition of patriarchy and capitalism, of relations of oppression, exploitation, alienation and the bipolarisation of genders' (Picq: 220).

Views on the exact date of the emergence of the MLF differ. Some of the key protagonists of the MLF attest that the movement began during the events of May '68, while their testimonies do not always name the same starting point. According to Antoinette Fouque, one of the leading figures of the MLF, the movement was born at the Sorbonne where she met with several female members of the *Comité révolutionnaire d'action culturelle* (Revolutionary Committee for Cultural Action), the central student committee of the May '68 movement. Others name the assembly of the group *Les femmes et la révolution*

(Women and Revolution) organised by Anne Zelensky and Jacqueline Feldman as the MLF's beginning. According to a third account, the MLF emerged in October 1968 when Antoinette Fouque, Josiane Chanel and Monique Wittig had their first meeting.

Disagreements about the date actually reveal profound differences in visions about the women's movement. The MLF, far from being homogeneous at its start, soon split into several factions around differences on political, gender and social questions. During extended debates about whether feminism would ever become revolutionary rather than remain reformist and collaborationist, three main positions were established regarding the questions of how the oppression of women should be understood and how to engage in the political sphere. The first camp advocated an essentialist theory, insisting on the notion of difference with a focus on the woman defined by her sexuality. It advocated for complete political separatism, a position that led to the formation of *Psychanalyse et politique* (Psychoanalysis and Politics), a revolutionary faction which rejected the very notion of feminism. The second camp sought to make the whole left rethink its foundations and include feminism in its analysis and practices. This faction developed the analysis of difference as a social construction and accepted alliances with other political formations. Today, researchers of this period distinguish between revolutionary (differentialist) and egalitarian feminism, to which they add the trade-unionist variant. All three currents would continue to develop in subsequent decades.

### **AVANTGARDES AND *ÉCRITURE FÉMININE***

The role of the French neo-avant-garde literary movement in May '68 was extremely significant. Nonetheless, there is a significant lack of research

on the relationship between writers and revolutionaries during May '68, a lack that we can only begin to make up for with the help of recent studies by Patrick Combes and Boris Gobille. The space that the emerging neo-avant-garde movements began to open in the late 1960s enabled the transmission of the fight for women's rights to the field of literature and opened a new area in the literary field where a younger generation of female authors could gain recognition.

As Boris Gobille puts it, the Tel Quel group, one of the leading neo-avant-garde movements that fought for leadership in the ideological framing of May '68, extended the field of class struggle to language, arguing that it is in the sphere of language that bourgeois domination generates and reproduces itself. For this reason, members of Tel Quel understood writing as action and production rather than mere expression. Textual action was believed to have its own efficiency due to its relation to social struggle. Its primacy, however, is not assured as it destroys the code of the bourgeoisie (Gobille: 116). Thus, language, *le langage*, and writing, *l'écriture*, are both key elements in the revolutionary imagination of May '68; hence, for example, one of the most famous slogans of May '68, *Écriture, subversion, sexualité* (Writing, Subversion, Sexuality). Under the name *écriture féminine*, the emerging women's writing defined the happening of the female body through language and the happening of (female) language through the body as the main domain of its investigation. In her manifesto entitled 'The Laugh of the Medusa' ('Le Ride de la Méduse'), Hélène Cixous (876) exhorts women: 'And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.'

In the 1960s and 1970s, many female authors began to criticise the literary canon for being formed according to a patriarchal and patrilinear reasoning that was perceived as being universal. Methods of fighting male domination in the literary system were various and included the absence

of struggle in literary practice itself. So-called women's literature was seen as being the other, which meant different, second-class and minor in relation to universal literature. For this reason, many female authors did not want to be classified in the category of women's literature at all, a frequent situation which continues to characterise many national literary systems. As Simone de Beauvoir put it: 'We rejected women's literature because we wanted to speak on an equal footing with all the men in the world.' (Quoted in Naudier: 61)

In the period when the concept of *écriture féminine* emerged in France, a polarisation emerged between older female authors and a new generation in search of an entry into the literary field. Female authors who already belonged to the literary establishment, such as Beauvoir, Marguerite Yourcenar and Nathalie Sarraute, rejected the notion of gender difference in literature, while those who were not published until the second half of 1960s embraced gender difference, with its proximity to linguistic difference, as their core principle.

In the decade from 1975 to 1985, there was widespread belief in the idea of literature written by women based on the premises of gender difference and the specificity of female writing. In the 1974 best-selling book *Parole de femme* (A Woman's Word), Annie Leclerc wrote:

*They said that the Truth did not have a sex. They said that art, science, philosophy were truths for all... No, no, I do not ask for access to the Truth, knowing all too well what a powerful lie men possess. I only ask for the word. You give it to me, very well, but I do not want it. I want my own... Because it is not sufficient to speak about me in order for me to find my own word. Women's literature: feminine literature, very feminine, of a delightful feminine sensibility... A man speaks in the name of a man, a woman in the name of a woman. (Leclerc: 11-12)*

In France, this new phenomenon was addressed also by Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Wittig, Xavière Gauthier, Chantal Chawaf, Jeanne Hyvrard and Michèle Montrelay. Several of these writers proposed a new conceptualisation of *écriture féminine*. An argument could be made, though, that the term had different meanings. In a narrow sense, *écriture féminine* depicts a literary current and a literary movement traversing the subfield of the neo-avant-garde, which in many aspects ideologically defined May '68. In a broader sense, *écriture féminine* is a transhistorical phenomenon theorised by these authors as a way of writing related to the feminine.

In the narrow sense, *écriture féminine* developed its own style in producing typical post-structuralist texts—blurring fiction and essay, mixing poetry with theory, and investigating specific topics to reject presupposed characteristics of women's literature, including fragility, tenderness, submissiveness, sensitivity and sentimentality. These new strategies share a common goal: they are all dedicated to challenging the oppression of women by the dominant ideology using language and writing that by necessity deals with the body. Literary tradition, cultural practices and dominant ideological forms are challenged in the attempt to put forward a linguistic difference produced by gender difference, which would in turn lead to the deconstruction of the symbolic order of the patriarchal discourse. The female body in all its aspects, and with a specifically strong emphasis on sexuality and its connection to language, becomes the main thematic paradigm. Issues to be explored include sexual pleasure, pregnancy, labour, menstruation, lactation and masturbation.

In *Parole de femme*, Leclerc writes:

Too bad for him, I will have to speak about it, about the pleasures of my sex, no, no, not about the pleasures of my soul, my virtue,



or my feminine sensibility, but about the pleasures of my woman's womb, of my woman's vagina, of my woman's breasts, about the sumptuous pleasures of which you have no idea. I will have to speak about it because only in this way will a new word be born, a woman's word. (Leclerc: 15)

The reinvention of women's writing is based on the capture of speech (*prise de parole*) as a form of occupying public space. To begin to speak as a woman, to utter the feminine, is the main goal of the works of *écriture féminine*, be they theoretical treatises, literary texts or hybrid forms. When women capture speech in their own way and present their dark continent, which, according to Cixous, is unexplored by men, they are not babblers (*bavardes*), but speakers (*parleuses*). This is the idea that provided the title of the famous book of conversations between Gauthier and Marguerite Duras, *Les Parleuses*. Certain authors, particularly Hyvrard, preferred to categorise their works as words (*paroles*) rather than poems or stories, while Cixous coined the term *sext* to combine *sex* and *text*. *Parole* and *sext* thus became specific genres created by *écriture féminine*.

*Écriture féminine* developed with the symbolic support of the neo-avant-garde. In 1974, issue 58 of *Tel Quel* was dedicated to women's writing and one of the special issues of *La Quinzaine littéraire* was entitled *L'écriture a-t-elle un sexe ?* (Does Writing Have a Sex?). As a part of the neo-avant-garde, the feminine became one of the emblems of literary subversion and a key practice of the aesthetic innovation by which emerging younger female authors began to achieve greater symbolic power in the literary system. In this respect, *écriture féminine* participated in the symbolic occupation of the literary field. The production of texts was accompanied by the establishment of a publishing infrastructure, a network of journals, and so on. Antoinette Fouque created

the Des femmes publishing house, Gauthier founded the journal *Sorcières*, Cixous co-founded the Centre for Women's Studies (Centre d'études féminines) at the experimental University of Vincennes, the first of its kind in Europe.

Regarding the connection between the neo-avant-garde and *écriture féminine*, I would like to briefly mention an important difference that emerged from different responses to the question of who writes literature. Those parts of the neo-avant-garde that were associated with Union des écrivains, a writers' union which played a crucial role in May '68, put forward the necessity of anonymity. In contrast, *écriture féminine*, whose advocates were closer to the Tel Quel group, which was in overt conflict with a part of Union des écrivains, rested on the principle of identity. In their view, there is no possibility of dethroning when enthroning has never occurred. The deconstruction of the *Auteur*, theorised at the time by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, specifically meant the death of the male author at a time women were 'coming to writing', to use the title of a Cixous essay. If the speaking subject of May '68 was still male, that is, the phallic subject, it was subsequently subverted by the feminine in the field of literary discourse. This went beyond the dichotomy of biologism, because here the feminine was established as a marginal discursive position aimed at subverting the dominant logo- and phallogocentric discourses. For this reason, Kristeva, in her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (*La révolution du langage poétique*), assigned a profoundly revolutionary nature to the feminine principle at the core of what she called *the semiotic*.

*Écriture féminine* is a literary movement whose production reached its peak between 1974 to 1985, yet its most important theoretical contributions allow us to define it also as a transhistorical concept that can be useful as a critical tool in studying literature written by women.

Probably the most important difference between the various conceptualisations of *écriture féminine* derives from the question of whether *écriture féminine* can occur in the literary practice of male authors. It should be noted that such conceptualisations already mark a shift from the biological difference between the sexes towards the notion of the social construction of genders. The most complex and widely disseminated discussions were put forward by authors with post-structuralist and psychoanalytic backgrounds, notably Cixous in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (*Speculum : de l'autre femme*) and Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

Feminist critics of a later generation reproached the concept of *écriture féminine* for reproducing a biologism based on a Eurocentric and essentialist universalisation of the experience of a white western woman (see Moi, Jones). They claimed that *écriture féminine* insisted too much on difference understood in an essentialist manner, whereby the values assigned to each side of the male/female polarity are reversed but the polarity itself remains, as does the male as the determining referent. Critics also reproached *écriture féminine* for its lack of practical activism. Nonetheless, some critics, particularly Toril Moi, acknowledged the theoretical depth that was missing in American feminism (see Moi). Later critics, notably Judith Butler, argued that *écriture féminine* restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity, and that it idealised a particular expression of gender, namely the feminine, thus producing new forms of hierarchy and exclusion (see Butler: viii).

*Écriture féminine*, new literature written by women which began to emerge in France in the late 1960s, was the first literary movement to establish itself on the basis of gender difference. Its founders and advocates took a differentialist stance and were subsequently criticised

by egalitarian feminists for renouncing the practical struggle against discrimination and the oppression of women. It is true that *écriture féminine* as a movement distanced itself from activism, but this does not mean that it gave up the fight. Instead, it relocated the fight in one of humanity's primary discursive and symbolic practices: the art of literature. It introduced the principle of gender difference into literature, re-evaluated, and made it an emblem of artistic creativity. By exploring the female body with a special emphasis on its sexuality, *écriture féminine* did not bracket out the issue of the social and political position of women, but rather relocated the problem of the political within the literary discourse; hence one of the key insights of second-wave feminism, condensed in the famous slogan *The Personal Is Political*. In so doing, it followed the main principle of one of the wings of the neo-avant-garde literary movements that participated in May '68, namely the idea of subverting the social order not through direct political action, but through writing as a practice with transformative social effects (see Naudier: 59). *Écriture féminine* opposed logo- and phallogentrism, emphasising the feminine in all of its aspects, and thus contributed importantly to the symbolic and aesthetic revolution that put into question language itself.

#### **THE NEW FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN SLOVENIA**

New feminism, which began to criticise the dominant state feminism, had been present in Yugoslavia since at least the mid-1970s, when a number of emerging groups began to address issues such as domestic violence against women and children, enforced gender roles, gender pay gap and gender-based political marginalisation. These Yugoslav developments were felt also in Slovenia, its northernmost republic. As a united movement acting under the influence

**1** Here I would like to refer to a statement made by Monika Žagar during a recent discussion about her own experience of participating in neo-avant-garde groups connected to the student movement. To paraphrase her description: the eccentric behaviour of men was viewed as luddite, while women behaving in a similar manner were criticised for being hysterical.

of western feminism and the slogan *The Personal Is Political*, Yugoslav feminism aimed at securing sexual and reproductive rights, and acted on two primary fronts of resistance: against the socialist treatment of women's issues and the single-party system, and against the rising ethno-socialist thematisation of birth rates (inextricably connected to reproductive freedom) in the construction of the national agenda. According to Vlasta Jalušič (17), new feminism in Slovenia belonged to a group of civil-society movements that emerged during the 1980s by following the post-1968 models of peace, environmental and other alternative Western movements as well as Eastern European ideas of civil society and anti-politics.

As a platform, new feminism in Slovenia was also inspired by local student movements of the 1970s. After Tito's death in 1980, a period of liberalisation in politics and culture ensued, stimulating the formation of alternative groups in which a young generation of intellectuals joined forces with those from the student movement. However, not unlike the MLF in France, female protestors did not begin to push for the creation of women's groups until the end of the 1970s, as they were deeply disappointed with their male comrades from the 1968 sequence.<sup>1</sup> Sociologist Tanja Renner states that women understood their initiative as a counter-front to the liberal movement of the New Left and as a response to the unresolved personal conflicts in the relations between the sexes (see Jalušič: 105). In an article published in the mid-1980s in the left-wing magazine *Mladina*, Jaša Zlobec, one of the most vocal male participants in the student movement in Ljubljana, described the student movement as a failure; specifically, he regretted the fact that post-1968 generations retreated into privacy, which resulted in the loss of not only human solidarity but also the solidarity between men and women (see Jalušič: 32n49).

## ÉCRITURE FÉMININE IN SLOVENIA

In Slovenia, the student movement established a space of reflection that became an important source for the emergence of civil society and democratisation in the 1980s. This was also the space from which new feminism would later arise, established on the foundation of post-Marxist, post-structuralist and psychoanalytical paradigms. For French feminist theorists, the theorisation of women's writing emerged above all from post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. Despite the early and exceptionally fruitful reception of French structuralism and post-structuralism, which, among other things, resulted in the establishment of what is now known globally as the Ljubljana Lacanian school, writers associated with *écriture féminine* were not widely read in Ljubljana until the early 1990s, and writers and poets such as Leclerc, Hyvrard and Gauthier remain largely unknown today. The sole exception was Kristeva, whose research reached beyond feminist theory. In the 1970s, *Problemi*, *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, *Tribuna* and other journals published translations of a number of her texts on themes that were also studied by Slovenian Lacanians at the time.

But these were topics that had no specific connection to women's writing, a theme that Kristeva, however, introduced in her key work, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Kristeva's feminist theory began to penetrate the Slovenian intellectual space during the mid-1990s, especially through *Delta*, the first Slovenian journal of women's studies and feminist theory, founded by Eva Bahovec and Milica Gaber Antić in 1995. In *Delta*'s first editorial, significantly entitled 'A Journal of Their Own?', the editorial staff established a critical distance towards essentialism (Uredništvo: 6)—for which, as mentioned above, American feminists had already reproached the French post-structuralist

2

In 1986, Maca Jogan, Mirjana Ule and Tanja Renner established a seminar on women's studies at the University of Ljubljana (see Jalušič: 111 and Verginella and Selišnik).

3

The scholars mentioned here belong to the generation of the student movement. I do not include the feminist literary-pedagogical approaches of later generations of female scholars, such as Silvija Borovnik, Katja Mihurko Poniž and Lilijana Burcar.

theorists—while also indicating their inclination towards psychoanalytically-based feminism (for which see Jalušič: 55–56n94). The first issue of *Delta* opened with a translation of Kristeva's essay 'Stabat mater'. In the third and fourth issues, an overview of the work of Luce Irigaray written by Paula Zupanc Ečimović appeared. Two years later, Mateja Gajgar also wrote about Irigaray. Cixous, in contrast, received much less attention. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' came out in Slovenian translation as late as 2005, published in *Apokalipsa*. On the initiative of the journal's editor, Stanislava Chrobáková Repar, *Apokolipsa* began to put out regular issues on gender issues in 2003 as part of the project of a journal within a journal.

In the mid-1980s, the women's movement in Slovenia began to receive institutional support and its main advocates started to introduce women's themes into university programmes.<sup>2</sup> In the mid-1990s, several Slovenian female scholars who belonged to the generation of the student movement started to lecture about women's writing and literature from the perspective of feminist theory in literature university departments both in Slovenia and internationally. Specifically, Metka Zupančič lectured on French writers and Monika Žagar on Scandinavian writers at American universities, Nadežda Čačinović in Croatia, and Neva Šlibar and Irena Novak Popov in Slovenia.<sup>3</sup> Metka Zupančič remained focused on French post-structuralist feminism and particularly on Cixous.

### **FEMINIST TONES AND *ÉCRITURE FÉMININE* IN SLOVENIAN WOMEN'S POETRY 1964–1980: EARLY OBSERVATIONS**

In 1977, Elaine Showalter, the first practitioner of gynocriticism, defined three historical phases of women's writing in English literature. First, there was the long phase of imitating methods from the dominant

patriarchal tradition. This was followed by a second, intermediate phase, a period of radical resistance and demands for autonomous minority status. The third and final phase was that of self-discovery and self-liberation accompanied by the effort to create a positive construct on the basis of traditional asymmetrical relations. In Slovenian poetry, the second phase (see Novak-Popov 2014: 72) only began in the second half of the 1960s, and was soon followed by the third phase.

The most important shifts in tone can be observed in the poetic practices of two central representatives of the so-called critical generation, which is also referred to as alienated lyricism, namely Saša Vegri and Svetlana Makarovič. Unlike most of the French authors associated with *écriture féminine*, neither Makarovič nor Vegri belonged to the generation of the student protest movement.<sup>4</sup> The time frame chosen here, 1964–1980, corresponds less to the *longue durée* of May 1968 and more to the publication of two important collections, namely *Somrak* (Dusk) by Makarovič in 1964 and *Konstelacije* (Constellations) by Vegri in 1980. Nonetheless, it cannot be said that either of these older-generation female poets consciously made the choice to systematically transform gender into an aesthetic value as was the case with *écriture féminine*. Like Beauvoir, Makarovič rejected the categorisation of her creativity into women's writing, which she mockingly defined as the work of gentle poetesses writing erotic lyrical poetry. Makarovič decisively broke with this tradition in her debut, and even more radically in subsequent poetry collections, especially from her 1972 book *Volčje jagode* (Mock Strawberries) onwards. Both authors, but especially Makarovič, had a visible place in the established literary system, and yet they were not freed from stigmatisation based on their gender, which continued to be understood within a patriarchal system based on the fundamental asymmetry between men (the universal standard)

**4** The situation of Makarovič and Vegri could best be compared, in terms of the poetic creativity of French female authors, to that of Thérèse Plantière, one of the most unique poets who became increasingly radical in her aesthetic feminism.



5 This is clear from mainstream book reviews of Vegri's work, starting with her 1958 debut *Mesečni korj* (see Hofman, Konjar, Grafenauer 1959, Grafenauer 1961–1962, Zlobec, Rupel 1962 and Rupel 1967). Any mention of sexual difference is categorised by male critics as feminine and therefore less valuable. Even positive book reviews characterised those elements of her work which did not seem to be in agreement with patriarchal models of femininity as either masculine or unusual (unusual for a woman, that is).

and women, where the latter would always remain other, secondary and second-class.<sup>5</sup>

Makarovič and Vegri, each in their own way, challenged discrimination against women and the enforced image of female identity, in particular by deconstructing the myth of the wife and mother. Makarovič searched for women's genealogies in archaic traditions and used them to construct a unique symbolic language and identity for her female protagonists, including those of the moth, the miller girl, the *žalik žena* (a willy-like fairy in Slavic traditions), the tenth daughter and the Fates, all defined within the criminal/victim opposition. Chrobáková Repar, who wrote one of the most valuable studies on Makarovič's poetry on the basis of gender characterisation (see Chrobáková Repar: 94–103), argues that women's resistance in Makarovič's poetry is tragic because her protagonists ultimately are not liberated from the (self-)destruction that patriarchal society projects onto them.

Vegri puts the position of women, female roles and femininity in contemporary society, and the search for female identity outside of enforced patriarchal patterns and into the context of the everyday life of the middle class and the fragmentation of identity that is the postmodern condition. Her third poetry collection, *Zajtrkujem v urejenem naročju* (Breakfast in a Settled Lap), published in 1967, puts into poetry the consequences of the systematic asymmetrical functioning of gender norms in society, transcends the idealised love relationship, and deconstructs the maternal myth from within in such a way that she also openly poeticises the negative aspects of the parental relationship (for example, the loss of identity that is not part of the maternal role). The last poem of this poetry collection confronts the emptiness that a jump out of this paradigm promises, an emptiness

that includes freedom of choice together with the beginning of a more equal gender relationship:

*Od kod si namenjena tja, kjer je  
prepovedano biti?*

[...]

*Moj dragi ostaja brez verig.*

[...]

*On nima verige v ustih.*

*Prosta si.*

*Tu pred teboj je brezno.*

[...]

*Lahko bi ostala nema.*

*Nema žena.*

*Vogali te zazidujejo in ne moreš pasti.*

[...]

*Razmisli o možnosti, ki zija iz prepada.*

*(Vegri 1967: 76-77)*

Or, in English translation:

*From where are you going there,  
where it is forbidden to be?*

[...]

*My beloved has no chains.*

[...]

*He has no chains on his mouth.*

*You are free.*

*The abyss is in front of you.*

6 An early discovery of the spaces of her own femininity through erotic pleasure, pregnancy and giving birth is accomplished in *Naplavljeni plen* (Stranded Prey), a 1961 book that offers an in-depth exploration of the female body as well as a demythologisation of the maternal role and the roles of the spouse, projects integral to *Zajtrkujem v urejenem naročju*.<sup>7</sup>

[...]

*You could remain mute.*

*A mute woman.*

*Walled into corners you cannot fall.*

[...]

*Think about the possibilities gaping from the abyss.*

The subject in this poem is not entirely certain that she will jump into the abyss. She is still anchored in the apparent order of false relationships, thus leaving the reader in suspense. The title of Vegri's next book of poetry, *Ofelija in trojni aksel* (Ophelia and the Triple Axel), makes it clear that the subject will not only jump but jump with the skill of a figure skater. In the poetry collections that follow, the deconstruction of the patriarchal ideology and the search for the discursiveness that Vegri's previous poetry performed mainly on the thematic level<sup>6</sup> begin to take place also on the signifying level of the poetic discourse.

Scholars have described *Ofelija in trojni aksel* as a remarkable example of double-voiced women's writing (see, e.g., Novak-Popov 2014: 264). The sixteen poems are written in two typographies (small and capital printed letters) which break the verses into two parts. Each poem is made of two linked columns without spaces. On the discursive level of the recitative (for which see Balžalorsky Antić), this typographical duality is a rhythmic and semantic reflection of the division that occurs in the subject's configuration on another level, in the relation between the subject of enunciation and the lyrical persona. The poems are mostly written in the second person, addressing a person of the female gender. The use of the second-person pronoun can be interpreted in two ways: as an address to the

self where Ophelia, as the recipient, is the objectified version of the speaking subject, or where Ophelia is actually another person who is not the alter-ego of the speaker. This second interpretation invites the hypothesis that the collection actually continues the inquiry into the maternal role. This is very obvious, for example, in the poems 'Kadar te gledam' (When I Look at You) and 'Ravno je zrasla detelja na zelenici' (The Clover Just Grew on the Meadow), which address the relationship between the mother and her young daughter (see Vegri 1977: 7, 8). The figure of Ophelia thus represents a transgenerational intersection, fusing both identities. The older I/you displays the admiring awe of the younger figure in the pairing, a relationship established on the tolerance of otherness and the encouragement of a feeling of freedom, both of which should inform the behaviour of an emancipated young woman: 'TU PUŠČAŠ s podplat / DRUGJE in drugačne sledi / KAR puščaj / ZNAMENJA / SMERI' (Vegri 1977: 12; in English: 'YOU LEAVE footprints/ ELSEWHERE and other traces/ JUST leave/ SIGNS/ PATHS').

In *Konstelacije*, a book of poetry from almost a decade later, Vegri actualises the (late) peak of the poetic neo-avant-garde to which she had belonged neither poetically nor generationally. In this book, she summons several principles of *écriture féminine*, though less in theme than in structure. With its multiperspectivity and fluidity paradoxically constructed on the most detailed and deliberate architectonics that flirt with the possibility of multidimensionality inherited from Srečko Kosovel's constructivism, *Konstelacije* represents one of the most daunting interpretative challenges in Slovenian poetry, which alone calls for an analysis of the book in the context of *écriture féminine*.

Here I will only note that Vegri, with her feminist tones convincing integrated into her poetry, is even more radical than her younger colleagues who began publishing during the *longue durée* of May 1968, including Ifigenija Zagoričnik Simonović, Bogdana Herman, Majda Kne, Maruša Krese and Berta Bojetu. In the work of most of these female authors, we see neither a liberation from the patriarchally dictated patterns of social and intimate relations nor a reformulation of symbolic language. Even overt signs of resistance against domination and discrimination are difficult to find. However, this generation of poets ushered in a significant and hitherto invisible theme that would be revealed in radicalised representations of the anomalies and pathologies that are the consequence of the most negative elements of patriarchal relations, namely the psychological and physical violence culminating in sexual abuse of women and children. Thus, they established a new poetic space to openly and inexorably confront these traumas. The lyric speaker in Zagoričnik Simonović's poem 'Misterij žene' (The Mystery of a Woman), whose title alludes to the eponymous collection of short stories by Zofka Kveder, asks:

*Od kje ta bledost  
 Od kje ta mir  
 Od kje ta ponižnost  
 Bojim se zgubiti nenadoma  
 Bojim se zapraviti si nenadoma  
 Bojim se biti nezadostna nenadoma  
 Komu glede na kaj*

*Ljubica sem vdana  
 Križem kražem razorana.*

In English:

*From where this pallor  
 From where this calm  
 From where this humility  
 I fear losing myself suddenly  
 I fear wasting myself suddenly  
 I fear being insufficient suddenly  
 To whom according to what*

*I am a devout lover  
 Criss crossed furrowed.  
 (Quoted in Novak-Popov 2005: 240)*

The poem, written in 1973 by the main female representative of neo- and post-avant-garde poetry and published in the student journal *Tribuna*, asks about the reasons for the submissive position of women in intimate relations, the consequence of which is internal destruction. In 1977, in her autobiographical prose poem 'Voda mi je vzela moža in otroka' (The Water Took my Husband and Child), in which we detect both thematic and structural characteristics of *écriture féminine*, the poet openly addresses her experience of sexual abuse as a child (see Zagoričnik 1977: 46–63). With a few exceptions (for which see Novak-Popov 2014: 66), Slovenian literary history remained silent about this—perhaps out of consideration and discretion, or perhaps because of the complicity of other writers in the Slovenian literary field. The silence of the literary community is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the poet herself decided that she would put the traumatic experience into her poems and publicly speak about the abuse on several occasions

7 Speaking out was one of the key elements of second-wave feminism, inspired by the slogan *The Personal Is Political*. Zagoričnik Simonovič's poem was published at a time when the Western public sphere slowly began to acknowledge sexual abuse of children as a social problem (see Wright). New feminists accomplished a great deal by encouraging the gesture of speaking out, and sexual abuse of children became a central theme of feminist texts in the 1970s and 1980s. In Slovenia, new feminists established an SOS hotline for women and children who were victims of violence (see Jalušič).

in subsequent decades. By writing and publishing this poem—the title of which probably alludes to the consequences of the trauma: the impossibility of a healthy love relationship and the decision not to become a mother—Zagoričnik Simonovič performed an aesthetic, political and therapeutic act. The text appeared at a time when the emerging women's movements in the West placed the notion of speaking out on their agenda.<sup>7</sup> The wider testimony of survivors of abuse in the discursive field of literature, above all in memoirs, would have to wait until the 1990s.

## CONCLUSION

*Écriture féminine*, the new literature written by women which began to emerge in France in the late 1960s, was established on the basis of gender difference unlike any other strand of literature known at the time. The challenges it assigned itself can be summarised as follows: to raise the question of women's emancipation in the arts and introduce the issue of women's rights to the literary scene; to rehabilitate the centuries-long discredited position of female writers in the literary canon; to symbolise in the literary discourse what had been hitherto forbidden because of a general value system based on the male point of view: to transform gender as a mark of stigmatisation into a positive value; to build a theoretical basis for overcoming the oppressive patriarchal framework, challenging the phallogocentric system of literature and developing a theory of women's writing.

In the Slovenian literary system, it is not possible to speak of *écriture féminine* as a specific movement or literary current during the era under discussion (certainly not in comparison with the so-called French cradle). Although during the same period that *écriture féminine* emerged in France, a number of emancipatory stirrings in the poetic

production appeared in Slovenia, in particular by two female poets of the generation that preceded the student movement and by one female poet who participated in the student movement. These small shifts in the poetic discourse did not change the metapoetic production, nor did they offer anything like the theoretic elaboration developed by their French colleagues. Moreover, new poetic practices were not complemented by any extraliterary network (of journals, publishing houses or discussion groups) that might have facilitated their dissemination on the level that, for example, had characterised the first wave of feminism in Slovenia. In contrast to the French case, where *écriture féminine* emerged at the same time as the MLF, the emancipatory shifts that were started by a few female authors in Slovenia between 1964 and 1980 were the precursor to a new wave of feminism that—in opposition to so-called state feminism—would only become organised in the 1980s. Although its production was sporadic and eclectic, poetic practice, therefore, preceded and indeed paved the way for new feminism's activist initiatives and theoretical reflection. ♡



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## Povzetek

Članek ponuja uvod v proučevanje razmerja med drugim valom feminizma in slovenskim literarnim sistemom, pri čemer se osredotoča na pesniške prakse avtoric. V prvem delu se posveti relaciji med študentskim gibanjem ter bojem za žensko emancipacijo in s tem povezano literarno in teoretsko inovacijo žensk v Franciji s poudarkom na simbolnem pozicioniranju, ki so si ga izborile avtorice iz kroga t. i. *écriture féminine*. Po predstavitvi drugega vala ženskega gibanja v Sloveniji članek skicira recepcijo *écriture féminine* in poda okvir za nadaljnje proučevanje vznikanja *écriture féminine* v slovenski poeziji v obdobju 1964–1980. V primerjavi s Francijo slovenski literarni sistem ni razvil *écriture féminine* kot posebnega gibanja ali celo literarnega toka, in sicer ne v literarnem ustvarjanju tega obdobja nasploh ne v podsistemu poezije. Pa vendar se v obdobju, ko v Franciji vznikne *écriture féminine*, tudi v Sloveniji pojavi nekaj pomembnih emancipatornih zastavkov z umetniškim presežkom, in sicer predvsem pri starejših avtoricah Svetlani Makarovič in Saši Vegri ter mlajši avtorici Ifigeniji Zagoričnik Simonovič. Toda teh premikov v pesemskem diskurzu ni spremljala ne metapoetska produkcija ne teoretska razdelava, ki jo prispevajo Francozinje. Poleg tega pesniška praksa ni bila podkrepljena z vzpostavitvijo obliterarne mreže, ki bi olajšala njeno širjenje (revije, založbe, krožki itn.), kot se je to zgodilo v prvem valu feminizma na Slovenskem. V nasprotju s francoskim primerom, kjer *écriture féminine* vznikne sočasno z gibanjem *Mouvement de libération des femmes*, pa so emancipatorni premiki, do katerih pride v delu nekaterih pesnic v obdobju 1964–1980, starejši kakor novi val feminizma v Sloveniji, ki se dokončno vzpostavi šele v osemdesetih letih. Pesniška praksa, četudi zgolj občasna in neenotna, torej prehiti novofeministične aktivistične iniciative

in teoretsko refleksijo, in sicer med drugim z dejanjem odkritega govora o izkušnji spolne zlorabe.

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