Balkan Landscapes and Female Desire in Three Novellas by Women Writers from the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

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Članek obravnava reprezentacije ženske spolne želje v delih treh avtoric, ki se odvijajo na Balkanu. Izhaja iz teze, da je bil pojem Balkana v 19. stoletju šele v nastajanju, zato je nudil možnosti za projekcije različnih podob. Kot takšen je služil tudi kot ozadje za tri zgodbe, v katerih so avtorice (Mara Čop Lenger- Marlet, Milena Mrazović-Preindlsberger in Zofka Kveder) predstavile tri ženske like, ki prestopajo meje normativne ženskosti.

This article analyses the representation of female sexual desire in the works of three authors set in the Balkans. It is based on the hypothesis that the concept of the Balkans was still in its formation in the 19th century and therefore offered opportunities for the projection of various ideas. As such, it also served as a backdrop for three stories in which the authors (Mara Čop Lenger- Marlet, Milena Mrazović-Preindlsberger and Zofka Kveder) featured three female characters who transcended the boundaries of normative femininity.

Ključne besede: Mara Čop Lenger-Marlet, Marie von Berks, Milena Mrazović-Preindlsberger, Zofka Kveder, ženska spolna želja, intimnost, Balkans, družbeni spol, vmesna identiteta

Key words: Mara Čop Lenger-Marlet, Marie von Berks, Milena Mrazović-Preindlsberger, Zofka Kveder, female sexual desire, intimacy, the Balkans, gender, in-between identity

Introduction[1]

The present article explores three novellas featuring extraordinary women protagonists, written by three authors who, at different times, lived in the

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Balkans in the late 19th and early 20th century:[2] Mara Čop (also Tschopp, Marie Cop Lenger Marlet and Marie von Berks) (1858–1910),[3] Milena Mrazović-Preindlsberger (1863–1927)[4] and Zofka Kveder (1879–1926).[5]

Intimacy in the Literary Discourse of Slovene 'Moderna'" (J6-3134). Special thanks go to the members of the Research Centre for Humanities (University of Nova Gorica) mag. Darko Ilin and mag. Sara Vukotić for their valuable comments on this article.

[2] Mara Čop Lenger-Marlet: Goldjana, *Gesellschaft* 1886 11/4, 193–230. Also published in *Aus den Edelhöfen des Balkan* [*From the Manor houses of the Balkans*, 1887].
Milena Mrazović-Preindlsberger: Eine bosnische Semiramis. Historische Novelle. *Wakit. Kalender für das Jahr 1890*, 27–51, also published in *Selam; Skizzen und Novellen aus dem bosnischen Volksleben*, 1893 [*Selam. Sketches and Tales of Bosnian Life*, English translation, 1899].
Zofka Kveder: *Eva*, Ljubljanski zvon 1904 24/11, 642–648.

[3] In the continuation I use the name Čop, under which we can find her in the Croatian Biographical Lexicon. Born in Livorno, Italy, in 1858, her father came from the Croatian town of Karlovac and her mother was German. In 1886, Mara Čop married the French lawyer Charles Lenger Marlet. They moved to Brussels and then to Algeria. Their marriage was short-lived; they had a daughter who died. Mara Čop returned to Croatia. In 1894, she married again, this time to Hugo Berks, a Slovenian landowner and member of the Austrian Imperial Council. After that, Mara Čop, her husband and her son lived mainly on their two estates, either in southern Styria (near Celje) or in Vienna. She entered the world of literature with her short stories about Croatian history in German. She translated her German texts into French. She was particularly interested in South Slavic women, African and Roma women, whom she wrote about in her ethnographic studies. Her literary works contain folkloristic and ethnographic elements. She wrote novels, novellas and plays, which were well received in Vienna, Prague, Brno, Olomouc, Stuttgart, Munich, Ljubljana and elsewhere. She died in Gorizia in 1910 (Žura Vrkič: 2003).

[4] Milena Mrazović-Preindlsberger was born in 1863 in Bjelovar (Croatia). She came from a middle-class family and received her education in Budapest. In 1878, she moved with her family to Banja Luka, where her father was appointed administrative official. The following year, the family moved to Sarajevo. Mrazović-Preindlsberger was a journalist, writer, pianist and composer. It is thanks to her that Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she lived for 40 years, was introduced to the German-speaking public. She was the first female journalist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After selling her newspaper Bosnische Post [Bosnian Post], she married a prominent Sarajevo doctor Josef Preindlsberger. She continued to write stories, travelogues, travel guides, and she collected and published fairy tales. Mrazović-Preindlsberger was very interested in ethnography. She was one of the founders of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1888 (Lindemann 2015).

[5] Zofka Kveder was born in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana in 1878. She was a multicultural, prolific author and ardent feminist. She wrote prose texts, dramas and magazine articles. After leaving the Slovenian ethnic area in 1899, she published various articles in German, Croatian and Czech about artists from the cultural circles in which she lived. At the same time, she tried to familiarise readers not only with her own literary work, but also with translations of other Slovenian writers into German, Croatian and Czech. Translations of short stories from her first collection of prose Misterij Žene [The Mystery of Women, 1900] were published in German, Czech, Croatian and Polish

The goal is to investigate how they portray extraordinary Balkan women who transgressed boundaries, set to be respected by the women in Central European culture, to which all three authors belonged. The theme of the representation of women in the Balkans is for this purpose linked with the representation of sexual desire. This approach also links to the research question of how femininity is constructed in discourse in the Balkans, to the attributes with which it is described, and to defining the extent to which the representations of Balkan women and Orientalist representations of women overlap.

Some of the questions discussed in this paper are: Why did the authors choose the Balkans as a literary space? How did the fulfilment of sexual desire affect the lives of their protagonists? And how did the position they occupied in society relate to the plot and the ending of their stories?

Čop, Mrazović-Preindlsberger and Kveder shared the position between the Slavic and German cultures or, in the words of Homi K. Bhabha (*Location of Culture*, 1994), they had an in-between identity. They were connected to the Slavic culture through their parents (or at least one parent, as in Čop's case) and were fascinated by it, but they were educated in German schools and thus wrote in German.[6] All three lived and travelled extensively across the Balkans and wrote not only literary but also ethnographic texts and/or travelogues.

Čop wrote an ethnographic book *Südslavische Frauen* [Southslavic Women, 1888], in which she portrayed Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Montenegrin and Roma women. The author depicted women defined by their national identity; however, she did not write about the differences between individual women within one nation.

Mrazović-Preindlsberger thoroughly studied the Bosnian-Muslim culture which resulted in "[b]oth dichotomies of the 'orient' being presented in her work: the colourful, exotic Bosnia – and the poor one" (Lindemann 2015: 167). She wrote a travelogue of sorts entitled *Bosnische Skizzen* [*Bosnian Sketches*, 1905].

Kveder, like Mrazović-Preindlsberger, was also very interested in the lives of Muslim women and described how they lived. On her travels to Sarajevo, she visited the female part of the house (the harem), and described it in the text *Žene Mohamedanke v Bosni in Hercegovini* [*Muslim Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 1907].[7] She also travelled around Serbia, Macedonia and northern

newspapers and magazines. She was also the editor of two magazines and the supplement to the Agramer Tagblatt Die Frauenzeitung [The Women's Newspaper] (Mihurko Poniž 2006).

[6] Kveder mainly wrote in Slovenian, but also also resorted to German and Croatian. Throughout her life she had many contacts with intellectuals from the German-speaking cultural area.

[7] As Sara Abrahamsberg writes, Kveder mentions the lack of female education in Bosnia, and the harem became a metaphor for a prison in which the women's entire lives took place. Kveder also mentions the covering of the face. However, the harem appears only once as the metaphor of the dungeon, which indicates that this was not of great

Greece and wrote articles about these journeys. Furthermore, Kveder was, like Čop, interested in Croatia which is why she set some of her stories in Slavonia, a region in present-day Croatia.

The Balkans in the Literary Imageries of the Nineteenth Century

Western European art often drew creative inspiration from Eastern cultures, something that is reflected in many literary texts and other works of art. The most prominent response to these kinds of representations of the Orient is Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978). Maria Todorova frequently refers to this work in her study *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). She, as the title of her work suggests, also understands the Balkan area as a space in which Western European travellers discovered their opposites, their Other. However, Todorova also points out important differences between the Balkans and the Orient: "Notably, there is the historical and geographical concreteness of the Balkans as opposed to the intangible nature of the Orient" (Todorova [2]2009: 11). The Balkans did not give the impression of abundance that charmed visitors to Eastern lands. "Its unimaginative concreteness and almost total lack of wealth, instead, induced a straightforward attitude, usually negative, and rarely nuanced" (Todorova [2]2009: 14).

Vesna Goldsworthy also points out that the Balkans themselves "as a distinct geographical entity, represent a historical construct and a series of overlapping imaginary spaces in which certain countries are sometimes included and sometimes excluded" (Goldsworthy 1998: 3). Despite it being almost an impossible feat, Todorova attempts to geographically outline the borders of the Balkans by including among the Balkan peoples the Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, and most of the former Yugoslavia, including the Croats since

importance to the writer. In this way, she departs from the Orientalist feminst discourse of her time in which, as Frank showed, the veiled woman becomes a metaphor for the oppression of women. Firstly, she informs the reader that the majority of Muslims in Bosnia had only one wife, with multiple wives being the exception. In the text *Žene Mohamedanke*, the part of the house where the women live is depicted as the dining area for the whole family. She also describes the harem in a very atypical way, without much enthusiasm. She mentions that there was no furniture, but at the same time she notes European home accessories: a clock and a mirror. Unlike most Western travellers, at least those studied by Reina Lewis, the Slovenian writer does not mention the harem in her texts as a space that would have given women the opportunity to engage politically or disseminate information in a meaningful way, nor does she mention the many visits to the harem by those outside it. She also does not see Muslim women as financially freer and therefore at an advantage over European women. She perceives Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina as conservative and uneducated, which according to Reina Lewis is one of the three prejudices (along with laziness and passivity) with which European women entered the harem. (Abrahamsberg 2021: 51).

"parts of Croat-populated territories were under Ottoman rule for considerable lengths of time" (Todorova [2]2009: 31). Todorova, however, excludes the territory of present-day Slovenia from the picture. Among more recent scholars, Ana Foteva (2014: 148) agrees with Todorova in that she justifies the placement of Croatia in the Balkans on the basis of the country's political and national ties with the South Slavic peoples of the Balkans.

Goldsworthy draws attention to another important feature of the Balkan peninsula, namely its ambivalence: "[i]f it has often been seen as insufficiently different to play the role of an exoticised Oriental Other, it has nevertheless continued to be seen as too 'polluted' by this Otherness to be (properly) 'European'" (Goldsworthy 1998: 6). Yet, because of its proximity to the West (as opposed to the far East), it also bears the traits of the familiar.

Todorova, on the other hand, maintains that the imagery of the Balkans consists of characteristics such as cruelty, boorishness, instability and unpredictability ([2]2009: 119), and some other features shared with the imagery of the Orient. Conversely, at the end of the 19th century there was no common Western stereotype of the Balkans because there was no common West (Todorova [2]2009: 115). In this context, the imagery of the Balkans was more open to intervention, particularly in relation to gender, compared to the imagery of the Orient, which was strongly associated with femininity and masculine sexual desire. The Oriental imagery also emphasized a passive, highly subordinate form of femininity, often portrayed in plural, especially in depictions of the harem.

David A. Norris states that on the one side there is Western Europe, which imagines itself as a civilized world, while on the other side there are the Balkans, the threatening Other, and thus

> *[a] gap has been produced separating these two worlds. They are not linked by the common spaces of a geographic or historic continuum, instead the Balkan world has been cut off and is in a freely floating region. This is the world of the Balkan Myth. It does not really exist, although this is not to say that it does not exert a meaningful influence on the processes of meaning-making production. This region is the invention of that Western self* (Norris 2015: 35).

Writers, who confronted the gap between their expectations and the real world often tried to fill this gap with "a condensed combination of myth, metaphor and fictional memory" (Norris 2015: 35).[8]

[8] Todorova writes about the Balkan depictions of Douglas Howden Smith, Mary Douglas, John Morritt, Salomon Schweiger, Georgine Mackenzie, Adeline Irby, William Curts and others.

Todorova argues that "[u]nlike the standard orientalist discourse, which resorts to the metaphors of its object of study as female, the balkanist discourse is singularly male" ([2]2009: 11). This statement has been argued among others by Allcock and Young (2000) and Matešić and Slapšak who highlight the work of female authors who have written about Balkan women in their book *Rod i Balkan* [*Gender and the Balkans*, 2017]. They focus on writings from the early period of the emergence of balkanist discourse and on authors who were not born in the Balkans (with the exception of Dora d'Istria and Jelena J. Dimitrijević), but who came there as travellers. Matešić and Slapšak argue that their travelogues contributed significantly to the visibility of this region in terms of the perception of ethnic groups and their relations with each other, as well as to certain notions of Balkan gender identities, and the position of women and their intimate lives (Matešić and Slapšak 2017: 19–20). Indeed, these women writers gave a voice to a region that was scarcely known at the time. As Matešić and Slapšak note, it is characteristic of travelogues by female writers that their authors establish themselves as dominant figures (at least vis-à-vis women). Furthermore, in female travelogues the position of women in the Balkans is depicted as either clearly subordinate, especially when writing about Muslim women (and thus portraying their own culture as superior and progressive), or as extremely positive, as is the case of Dora d'Istria. The latter describes the women of the Slavic nations with superlatives, both in terms of their appearance and their special role as bearers of national culture and pride (Matešić and Slapšak 2017: 106).[9]

Similarly, the three protagonists of the novellas examined in the following section of this article are portrayed as exceptional and extraordinary women.

The novella *Goldjana* (1886) by Čop was first published in the German newspaper *Gesellschaft* [Society,] and then in the collection of texts *Aus den Edelhöfen des Balkan* [*From the Manor Houses of the Balkans*, 1887]. The story begins with introducing Goldjana as a Roma girl being raised within a Croatian family. She later falls deeply in love with Vladimir, a fervent supporter of the Illyrian movement, which took place in the first half of the 19th century. Inspired by Vladimir's passion for Illyrianism, Goldjana herself becomes a Croatian spy. The story brims with patriotism. Čop's portrayal of the Roma is sympathetic, but she also presents them as distinct from other (Croatian) characters in the story. Goldjana, described as a child of nature, embodies a sincere connection with the natural world, and all the Roma are portrayed as profoundly respective of the force of nature and deeply superstitious. Čop

[9] Nevertheless d'Istria presents an extremely negative image of the women of Islam. For d'Istria, women are the guardians of national identity and their harem is the space in which the renewal of the East is born (Matešić and Slapšak 2017: 109).

characterizes them as "a poor mysterious people, wild in their joy and their pain" (Cop Lenger-Marlet 1887: 84).

Mrazović-Preindlsberger sets her story *Die bosnische Semiramis* [*The Bosnian Semiramis*, 1890] in the 11th century in the Bosnian town of Zvornik. The narrative revolves around Jelena, a noble Serbian woman renowned among her people for her power and cruelty. Mrazović-Preindlsberger was obviously inspired by the legend of Jerina Branković,[10] who lived four centuries later as there are some similarities between the legend and the novella.

The dark-haired, proud and passionate type of beauty is also the protagonist in the short story *Eva* [Eve, 1904] by Zofka Kveder. The tale unfolds in Croatia, in "a village on the Slavonia plain" (Kveder 1995: 49). Kveder depicts Eve as a woman admired for her radiant beauty and strength:

> *She walked with real dignity, touching the ground softly. She embroidered colorful flowers into silken kerchiefs that were as delicate as a spider's web; but she could also fell a tree with swift power that left hired hands gasping. Her arms were white and solid like marble.*
>
> *One day men were setting up the maypole in the village.*
>
> *Eve stood watching them with other village girls. Suddenly she began to laugh, stepped closer to the men, lifted the pole together with its green crown with her beautiful arms and lowered it into the hollow.* (Kveder 1995: 48)

All three protagonists of the novellas stand out from their female contemporaries not only for their extraordinary beauty and unique position within their community but also for their strong sexual desire.

Female Sexual Desire and Three Balkan Heroines

In the modernist literature of the late 19th century, the theme of sexual desire becomes more prevalent than ever before.[11] This period has men and women

[10] See also Donald M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460: a Genealogical and Prosopographical Study* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1968), pp. 176–187.

[11] Articulations of sexual desire and eroticism had been rare for centuries because of the role and position of women in society (Bock 2002, Offen 2000). Among the voices that expressed female sexual desire, including those of Sappho, Marie de France, Trobaritz, Aphra Behn, Louise Labé, Teresa of Avila, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and others, there were discontinuities. Women writers often had to invent the language of female eroticism, of female desire anew, not knowing what had been experienced and written before. The Romantic era, with its demand for individual freedom, also opened up the debate on the individual's freedom to choose a partner, it is thus no coincidence that the discourse on free love begins in the first decades of the 19th century (Hayden 2013: 2). In her novel *Indiana* (1832), George Sand depicted a loveless marriage in which the wife is completely subjected to a violent man, prompting her to engage in an extra-marital affair. However, the happiness of the eponymous heroine in this relationship

confronted with new social roles.[12] The beginnings of the women's movement in the second half of the 19th century were characterised by their demand for participation in public life (education, social life, public speaking, employment opportunities), while at the same time the "sexual question" took centre stage in fin de siècle literature (Matysik 2008). Female authors began to write about love, eroticism and sexuality and the boundaries between these themes were often blurred. The reality of heterosexual relationships was worrying as it demanded sexual inexperience; abstinence was required of girls and sexual coldness was demanded of middle-class wives, while men were allowed to visit brothels or have extramarital affairs with women from the lower classes. Therefore, the authors often addressed the divide between men's and women's ideas about desire, love relationships and sexuality (Bittermann-Wille 2002: 146).

Due to different historical and social circumstances, as described in the first part of the article, the literatures of the Balkan countries addressed topics related to sexuality in a specific way. In this context, Matešić and Slapšak (2017: 21) examine the works of Jelena Dimitrijević, including *Pisma iz Niša o Haremima* [*Letters from Niš about Harems*, 1897] and the novel *Nove* [*The New Women*, 1912], which present an alternative portrayal of the harem. The latter is represented in the works of Western European, predominantly male, authors as a space of male desire and phantasm. Interestingly, as Matešić and Slapšak also note, Dimitrijević does not relate to the women writers who have dealt with the harem in order to show its misperception by men nor does she want to define the harem as a space of familial relations between women that corresponds to the Western European space of the female private sphere. She does not thus convey a new (female) view of the harem. Dimitrijević's innovativeness is expressed more in her writing about the desire of women in the harem and expressing it in a symbolic language and gestures that are incomprehensible to the outside observer. In doing so, she deconstructs orientalist narratives and sexual fantasies. In this way, Muslim women are not, as Matešić and Slapšak argue, the erotic dream rising from the tobacco smoke and alcohol fumes in the circle of those Balkan authors who can only articulate eroticism and female

is short-lived, as her lover is only interested in a sexual relationship. Later, she finds happiness in a new relationship with a responsible and sensible man. In contrast to the ending of *Indiana*, works of classic literature from the periods of realism and naturalism often portray tragic stories of women—such as Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Effi Briest, Hedda Gabler, and Miss Julie—who, due to social constraints, are unable to maintain long-term relationships that fulfil their sexual and emotional needs.

[12] In the 19th century, female authorship became a profession. Women writers entered the public sphere in European literatures and a new interest emerged for women writers from the past. Female desire became increasingly problematic, and increasingly demonized, especially in Catholic countries, where femininity is torn between the glorification of Marian virginity and the condemnation of female eroticism embodied in Eve (Warner 1978).

sexuality as the privilege/guilt of the Other (Matešić and Slapšak 2017: 242). Rather, they are subjects who experience and express their own sexual desires.

Such subjective agency can also be found among the protagonists of the three texts by Čop, Kveder, and Mrazović-Preindlsberger. Jelena, the main character of Mrazović-Preindlsberger's novella *The Bosnian Semiramis*, is inspired by the promiscuous protagonist from the legend. In the novella Jelena is surrounded by an entourage of knights. However, many of these knights mysteriously disappeare shortly after joining her retinue, never to be seen again. The two Jugović brothers were among those knights. Their younger brother, Vuk, seeks to find his brothers in Zvornik, however he, too, soon succumbs to Jelena's charms and no longer wants to return to his fiancée, preferring to enjoy his passionate love with Jelena. She, however, demands that he live in a secluded part of the castle, far away from the other knights, in a beautiful garden that functions as a harem. After two weeks, Vuk has had enough of the sexual relationship, and Jelena can no longer make him stay with her as her slave. Jelena realises that he is the same as all her other lovers who had grown tired of her body, and seemingly allows him to leave, like others before him. However, before he leaves the castle, Vuk wants to know if she is the murderess of his brothers:

> *Jelena! By all you hold dear, tell me, were you my brothers' murderess?*
>
> *Once again the lightning flashed. He looked into her face distorted with fury; a bloody foam was on her lips; a horrible meaningless expression was in her eyes.*
>
> *"Yes," she shrieked, wit a burst of wild shrill laughter. "I loathed their kisses, as I loathed yours and those of the others ... I have had my share of the pleasures and enjoyments of the world – now to hell!"* (Mrazovic 1899: 297).

The novella ends with the deaths of Jelena and Vuk; they fall off a cliff into the Drina River, and thus Vuk dies like all of Jelena's lovers.

In Čop's novella *Goldjana* the protagonist's love for Vladimir persists even after he sacrifices his life for the freedom of his nation. However, this enduring love does not prevent her from engaging sexually with other men. Reflecting on this, she asserts her fidelity to Vladimir in her heart but acknowledges the reality of her sexual interactions with another. To her friend Sava she confesses: "Wir Zigeunerinnen geben uns jedem gleichzeitig hin, der seine Arme nach uns offnet und dann – die Männer – bei uns gebrauchen ja halbe Gewalt" (Cop Lenger-Marlet 1887: 94).[13]

In *Eve*, Kveder describes her protagonist's erotic desire as she awaits her fiancé's return from military service:

> *It was not easy waiting because her blood was hot, hot like the earth near the equator, hot like the blood of a lioness waiting in luxurious freedom for her king. Eve was not afraid of men, she was stronger than a tigress in the dark undergrowth of eternal forests.*

[13] "We gypsy women give ourselves to anyone who opens his arms to us, and then – the men – need just half of their force with us."

She was not afraid of men, but her body was like lush fertile soil created to bear seeds and fruit. She remained pure, though, and was proud of her virginity (Kveder 1995: 49).

Her pride, however, crumbles when she succumbs to an irresistible temptation with a servant during the stormy and rainy afternoon: "She wavered only for an instant to shove him away. And then it was too late. Intuitively, her arms embraced him. The fire in her flared and she was overwhelmed by an intoxicating sweetness. The storm outside raged, trees cracked, the earth howled, and the sky, illuminated by violent flashes of lightening, swayed." (Kveder 1995: 51).

After coitus she is "crazed by humiliation, rage, utter despair" (Kveder 1995: 51). Upon discovering her pregnancy, she decides to die: "To perish! She liked this wild powerful word, she was not afraid of it!" (Kveder 1995: 53) Kveder describes the dramatic manner in which she commits suicide: "Then she pulled the handzar from its sheath, thrust it with all her might into the place beneath her heart so that the hated thing would die before she did." (Kveder 1995: 53)

Čop, Mrazović-Preindlsberger and Kveder lived in an era, characterized by discourses that, as Foucault argues, regulated individuals and reduced them to sexual objects. Foucault demonstrated that sex, love, desire, and passion existed beyond the confines of marriage, and that intimacy clashed with traditional normative structures such as marriage and family (Brooks 2017: 4). All three protagonists (Goldjana, Jelena and Eva) appear wild, exotic, eccentric, bold, intelligent and strange, which is in contrast with the normative femininity of the 19th century.[14] To a certain extent, the characteristics of Eva, Jana and Jelena overlap with the type of the *femme fatale*. Clemens Ruthner believes that Mrazović-Preindlsberger portrayed this popular fin de siècle female type in Jelena (Ruthner 2018: 308). All three discussed works, however, highlight the more virile type of womanhood which bring Goldjana, Jelena and Eva closer to masculinity, signifying a departure from the aestheticised femininity that is close to Orientalist discourses in fin de siècle depictions of the *femme fatale*.[15]

What distinguishes all three female protagonists from normative femininity, but at the same time brings them closer to the *femme fatale* type, is their rejection

[14] Normative femininity can be described as a concept that defines women as disembodied beings, detached from their physicality and senses (Motyl 2017: 173). Motherhood was perceived as their only vocation (Möbius 1902: 23).

[15] The figure of the *femme fatale* emerged in Western and Central European literature as a response to an era marked by rapid technological progress across all areas of life. This accelerated development generated feelings of unease and anxiety, leading artists to seek refuge in a mythological world where alternative representations of women could be found (Pohle 1998: 77). The fin de siècle period is notably characterized by depictions of mythological women who bring about the downfall of men, such as Medusa, Salome, Leda, the Sphinx, Helena, Galatea, Delilah, Mary Magdalene, Circe, the Erinyes, and the Sirens. However, the femme fatale is also defined by her eventual self-destruction, as her actions and instincts ultimately turn against her, restoring the patriarchal order (Pohle 1998: 79). In both Orientalist and fin de siècle discourses, femininity remains under the control of patriarchal masculinity.

of motherhood, because the latter means passivity, dependence, restriction of freedom in the case of Goldjana and Jelena, and shame in the case of Eva due to illegitimate motherhood.

All three authors choosing such unusual heroines may have been done for various reasons. The authors may have wanted to challenge conventional narratives and stereotypes about women and thus chose to depict characters who defy social norms and expectations. Even though Čop and Kveder depicted attempts by middle-class women to fulfil their sexual desire in many of their works, it is in those works that they also adapted the liberal women's movement's view that sexual desire must be linked to emotions and consequently to reproduction.[16] Only when depicting characters who did not belong to the middle-class and urban world or even their time (Mrazović-Preindlsberger's heroine is inspired by the iconic figure of the noble, powerful woman from the Middle Ages) did they feel free to show a different attitude to sexuality, which the bourgeoisie only allowed for men.

All three authors chose spaces and heroines that readers at first sight could not connect with the space and experience of the Central European bourgeois woman. This can be explained by the women writers' position in society. In the 19th and even at the beginning of the 20th century, female authors were often equated with their literary figures (Parente-Čapková 2003: 61), so we could see in the choice of protagonists whose lives were very different from the lives of middle-class women a textual strategy to avoid various kinds of comparisons and even rejections by editors and readers. However, by creating literary characters who are attractive women with feminine attributes on the one hand, but who act in ways ascribed to men on the other, the authors problematised stable cisgender identities. Like Virginia Woolf years later, they also recognised the "falsifying metaphysical nature" (Moi 2006: 13) of fixed gender identities and contributed to subverting the constraints of gendered sexual scripts and gendered behavioural patterns. The latter became a model at the end of the 19th century in numerous facets: the androgynous type became effeminate, it was no longer a man with female sexual characteristics, nor was it a woman with a male body (Bruns 1997).

Furthermore, decision of all three authors to depart from realistic depictions of ordinary middle-class or working-class women who lived in Western or Central European cities could represent a deliberate departure from standard literary conventions. By rejecting the idea that a woman's own experiences are a prerequisite for the telling of her story, the authors also demonstrated a bold approach that challenged traditional notions of female authorship and representation. By rejecting realist depictions of their contemporaries in favour of more unconventional narratives and literary characters, Čop, Kveder and

[16] In the works of Čop and Kveder, the urban middle-class female characters are always in control of their sexuality; for them sexual surrender is a conscious decision, as they are aware of its consequences in the bourgeois society.

Mrazović-Preindlsberger may have aspired to transgress the boundaries of the realist narration.

All three characters in the discussed works belong to more than one world. Goldjana belongs to the Roma people, but is also a Christian and an Illyrian; Jelena is a despot, but also a woman who wants to love; Eva has the characteristics of a man, but at the same time the feeling of shame defines her as a woman who has internalised the traditional Catholic image of sinful femininity. So, on the one hand, there is exoticism, otherness and the view from the outside, while on the other hand, the authors describe what is familiar to them due to their position of women living in a society with double moral standards.[17]

Toril Moi points out that Virginia Woolf used a "'deconstructive' form of writing, one that engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse" (Moi [2]2005: 9). We could assume that, similarly, Čop, Mrazović-Preindlsberger and Kveder wanted to tell a story about extraordinary women while engaging with the difficulties of narrating female intimacy and sexuality.

In all three cases, the authors have shown that, in their time, intimacy and sexuality were unstable categories for a woman. There was no fixed meaning of female sexuality in fin de siècle society, or as Toril Moi argues when she writes about the works of Virginia Woolf: "There is no final element, no fundamental unit, no *transcendental signified* that is meaningful in *itself*" (Moi [2]2005: 9). For the women writers discussed here, female sexuality is not a dark continent in a Freudian sense but a largely unexplored territory, terra incognita, as many parts of the Balkans were in their time.

Balkanism

The choice of the Balkans as the setting by all three authors reflects their particular attitude towards the region. Their portrayals resonate with the concept of balkanism or Orientalism, where the Balkans or the Orient are depicted as the "Other," distinct from the Western self, "as an exotic and imaginary realm, the abode of legends, fairy tales, and marvels" (Todorova[2] 2009: 13).

[17] Matysik discusses the differing moral standards for men and women in the fin-de-siècle Central European context, arguing that the double moral standards (German *Doppelmoral*), "commanded one code of conduct for men and another, more repressive code for women". (Matasyk 2008: 60). Matysik cites Prague philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels, who argued that "[o]n the one hand, social mores demand monogamy from the individual male, even if they tacitly allow him indulgence in extramarital sexual relations. On the other hand, constitutional morality demands that the man seek sexual exploit" (Matasyk 2008: 124). Women, on the other hand "are biologically predispositioned for a sense of modesty and chastity, as indicated by the fact that the genitals are hidden from view […] Because of the physiological differences between men and women, Ehrenfels maintained that there should be dual, sexually differentiated codes of morality" (Matysik 124–125).

Furthermore, the East "epitomized longing and offered option, as opposed to the prosaic and profane world of the West" (Todorova [2]2009: 13). If balkanism is understood as a relationship where the Balkans are always viewed in relation to an outsider perspective, then we can observe some elements of balkanism in all three of the discussed works.

Balkanism could also be seen in the three works' rejection of the modern Balkans and in the focus on distant historical events or the depiction of a village environment devoid of traces of modernisation. The question, however, remains whether the three authors can in any respect be understood as representatives of Western discourse. They do not belong to Western discourse the same way as, for example, British travellers to the Balkans And the question still remains to what extent the woman as an author is an equal participant in the dominant discourse, usually overpowered by the male hegemonic position. Clemens Ruthner, for instance, sees Mrazović-Preindlsberger's situation as an effect of her insular, but at the same time exorbitant, intermediate position in the male-dominated cultural scene of colonial Bosnia and Herzegovina and mentions her coming from a respectable family, which makes her appear like a Bosnian bourgeois realist in the eyes of the public (Ruthner 2018: 308).

It is noteworthy that all three authors lived in the Balkans for a lengthy period of time, thus identifying with the culture of the regions in which they lived. And yet, their depiction of the Balkans contrasts with the nineteenth-century image of the Balkans, which tended to be characterised by negative stereotypes. It is plausible that all three authors sought to challenge and undermine these stereotypes, motivated perhaps by their personal connections to the region, as they consistently depict this setting as wonderful and mystically beautiful. Todorova highlights that discourse about the Balkans was predominantly shaped by male voices. The present study shows that alongside female authors already mentioned by other researchers, the three female authors discussed here significantly contribute to the mentioned discourse. Furthermore, certain characteristic traits of balkanism can still be found in these works, e.g. violence (in the case of Eve even against herself); courage as a common characteristic of Balkan women (which is a generalisation typical of balkanism); and the representation of the Balkans as a place of wild nature and not of the modern, urban world.[18] However, all three texts also serve as a testament to the diverse perspectives and voices within Balkan literature, including those by women writers who have been historically overlooked.

Indeed, the portrayal of the Balkans differs from the predominant male discourse in all three analysed works: women authors depict extraordinary women and delve deeply into themes of intimacy and sexuality. Each of the

[18] It is interesting that the Count of Bosiljevo in Goldjana sees the Orient as the opposite of the rotten West, whose culture is sick. In the Orient, he says, he would be able to mix with young and fresh peoples, where poetry and romance bubble up from their golden springs and where the pulse of life still beats vividly (79).

three heroines transgresses the boundaries of the prescribed female role of a passive being without her own sexual desire, or at least of an individual who must suppress it. Mrazović-Preindlsberger goes so far as to create a travesty of the harem: the protagonist in her novella is not a passive woman who waits for an active man to have sexual intercourse with her. It is, in fact, the other way round. The garden is a female space in the Balkans, as Matešić and Slapšak show (2017: 247–250), which adds to the subversion of the fixed meaning of this toponym. But even in the mythical past, such a travesty cannot last long and the patriarchal order is soon restored to its previous state. Similarly, Zofka Kveder illustrates that a woman can temporarily adopt a male role, but when Eve dies, the patriarchal order is instantly re-established. She was an exceptional figure in her environment, unparalleled by any other woman, and as such, she will have no successor. Only in *Goldjana*, where the female character is a nomadic subject from the beginning, the female protagonist can survive in her search for love and as a sexual being.

Conclusion

Čop, Mrazović-Preindlsberger, and Kveder' selected novellas present various manifestations of sexuality. They demonstrate that a realist urban backdrop and plot, which reflect contemporary society, might be insufficient in conveying the complexity of the female sexual experience. The multiple meanings of the Balkans, which, as Todorova points out, was a flexible and ambiguous term, their volatility and duplicity (Goldsworthy 1983), and the lack of a stable meaning in the 19th century, when this term regularly emerged (Todorova ^{2}2009), offered an opportune space in which the story of a woman's confrontation with her own sexuality could unfold.

The in-between identity of the three authors discussed in this paper is also evident in their portrayal of Balkan women. All the authors are conscious of traditional notions of femininity, such as female sexual abstinence, the concealment of sexual desire, and the associated shame, as well as the limitations and double standards of this ideology. Their exploration of ways to express sexual desire within the space of the Other, remains distinct and yet familiar due to the authors' personal connections to the region. In this context, the Balkans are not less but rather more. They represent a space where patriarchal norms impose restrictions while also embodying a realm where the imagination of the writers is enabled, producing bold and diverse portrayals of womanhood.

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BALKANSKE POKRAJINE IN ŽENSKA ŽELJA V TREH NOVELAH PISATELJIC S KONCA 19. IN ZAČETKA 20. STOLETJA

Članek je raziskava novel treh avtoric (Mare Čop, Milene Mrazović-Preindlsberger in Zofke Kveder), ki so v določenih obdobjih svojega življenja živele na Balkanu in so v svojih literarnih in strokovnih delih prikazovale balkanske ženske. V raziskovanih treh literarnih delih (*Goldjana*, *Eine bosnische Semiramis*, *Eva*) so v ospredje postavile protagonistke, ki so prestopile meje ženskam predpisanega primernega obnašanja in delovanja. V središču raziskave so reprezentacije ženske spolne želje. Ta pristop temelji tudi na raziskovalnem vprašanju, kako je ženskost konstruirana v diskurzu o Balkanu, s katerimi atributi je opisana in v kolikšni meri se reprezentacije balkanskih žensk in orientalistične reprezentacije žensk prekrivajo.

Čop, Mrazović-Preindlsberger in Kveder prikažejo različne manifestacije spolnosti. Ugotavljajo, da realistično urbano ozadje in zgodba, ki je povezana s sodobno družbo, ne zadostujeta za posredovanje kompleksnosti ženske spolne izkušnje. Večpomenskost Balkana, ki je bil, kot piše Todorova, prožen in dvoumen izraz, njegova nestanovitnost in dvoličnost (Goldsworthy 1983), pomanjkanje stabilnega pomena v 19. stoletju, ko se je ta izraz šele oblikoval (Todorova [2]2009), so bila izhodišča, na katerih so avtorice zasnovale pripoved o ženskem soočanju z lastno spolnostjo.

Vmesna identiteta raziskanih avtoric je neločljivo povezana tudi z njihovimi upodobitvami balkanskih žensk: po eni strani se vse tri avtorice zavedajo tradicionalnih predstav o ženskosti (ženska spolna vzdržnost, prikrivanje spolne želje, sram) ter omejitev in dvojnih meril te ideologije. Po drugi strani pa iščejo načine uresničevanja spolne želje v prostoru Drugega, ki je drugačen, a hkrati znan, saj so te avtorice bivale na Balkanu v določenem obdobju svojega življenja. V tem kontekstu Balkan ni manj, temveč več. To je prostor, kjer patriarhalne norme nalagajo omejitve, hkrati pa je to področje, kjer se za vse tri raziskovane pisateljice odpre pot domišljije, kar omogoča drzne in raznolike upodobitve ženskosti.