

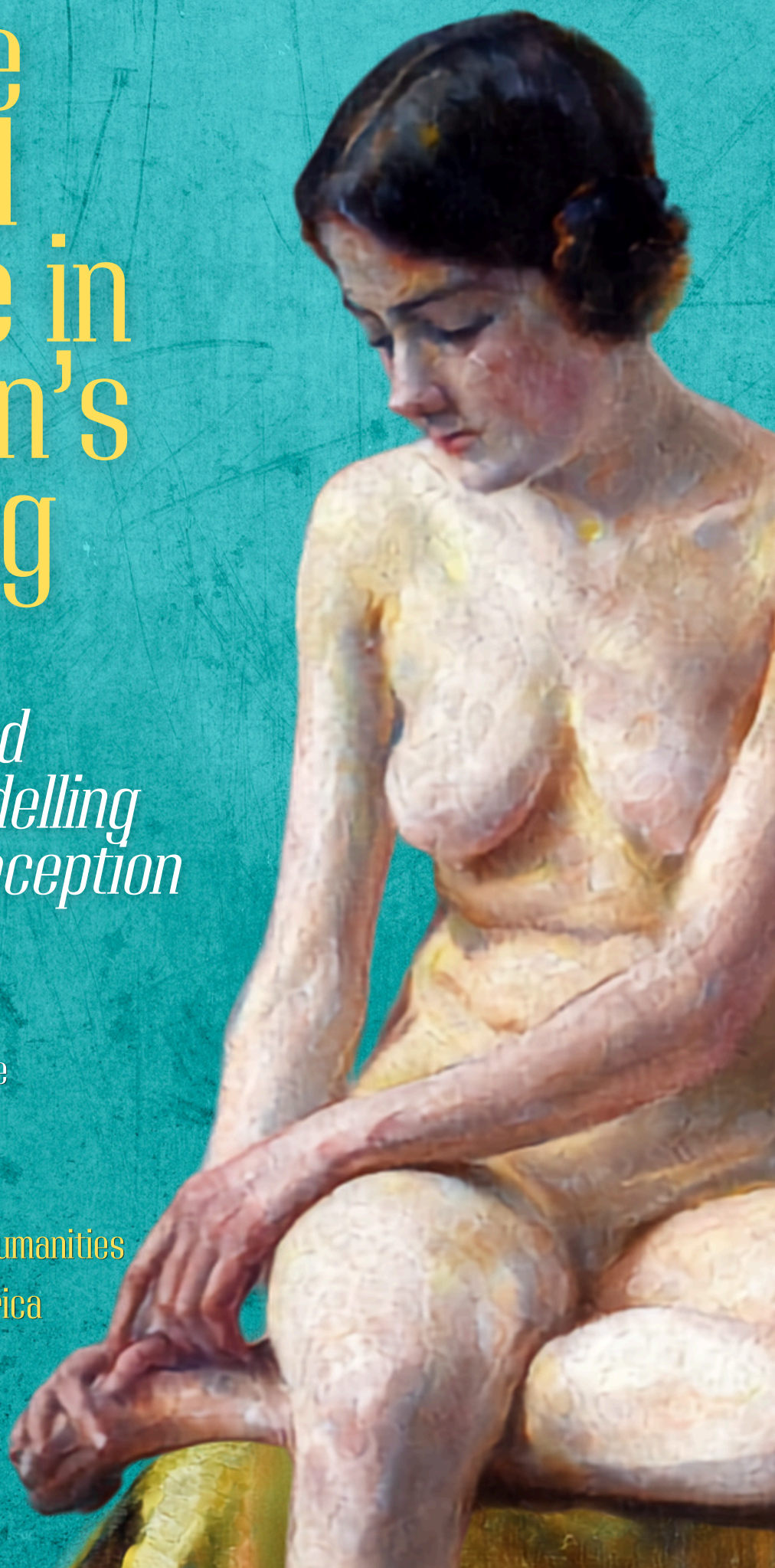
Female Sexual Desire in Women's Writing (pre 1940)

*Exploring and
Digitally Modelling
Texts and Reception*

book of abstracts

International conference
23-24 September 2026

Research Centre for Humanities
University of Nova Gorica



International Conference

FEMALE SEXUAL DESIRE IN WOMEN'S WRITING (PRE 1940):
EXPLORING AND DIGITALLY MODELLING TEXTS AND
RECEPTION

Nova Gorica, 23–24 September 2026

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Edited by

Leonora Flis, Darko Ilin, and Katja Mihurko

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The cover features Ivana Kobilca's painting *Female Nude* (1929)

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Keynote Lecture

Heritage and Confluence: Fin de Siècle Female Desire as Mimetic Desire

Viola Parente-Čapková
University of Turku

This talk explores how women writers at the turn of the twentieth century approached the multifaceted issue of female desire, both sexual and otherwise. I will highlight how this exploration of desire can be viewed along a continuum of influence among women writers who were actively aware of one another's ideas and texts. I will address women's cultural transmission, heritage, and tradition, while also examining instances where direct influence is unproven. In these latter cases, it is more accurate to speak of a "confluence"—a concept describing how women writing in different countries during the same period organically gravitated toward similar topics concerning women's lives (Mac Kay). The central analytical lens I employ in this approach is mimesis. Understood broadly, and with a specific focus on *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic strategies, mimesis here encompasses imitation, contagion, identification, and intertextuality, as theorized within the feminist tradition, particularly through the work of Luce Irigaray.

The *fin de siècle* was an era when female sexuality was, as Anthony Giddens (drawing upon Michel Foucault) observed, "recognized and immediately crushed," frequently treated as the pathological root of hysteria. Because female sexuality was demonized and mythologized in myriad ways, women writers who tackled the issue explicitly were often conflated with their heroines and easily accused of indecency or pornography. I will primarily focus on these writers' mimetic strategies, which are characterized by a disturbing yet highly productive tension. These contradictions were frequently catalyzed by the "end games" of early modernism—namely, Decadent and Symbolist literature and art. Although I will reference "major" European literatures alongside examples from beyond Europe, my specific interest lies in women writers from the "small literatures" at the so-called peripheries of Europe. In these regions, the *mélange* of *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic trends was frequently infused with Nietzschean thought, which uniquely inspired and subverted various facets of mimesis in women writers' explorations of female sexual desire.

Keywords: female desire, mimesis, literary heritage, women's writing, decadence

23. 9. 2026

Session 1: Session dedicated to Zofka Kveder (10:15 – 12:30)

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What's Dress Got to Do with? Clothing, Desire, and Female Self-Fashioning in the Works of Zofka Kveder and Her Contemporaries

Katja Mihurko

University of Nova Gorica, Research Centre for Humanities, School of Humanities
katja.mihurko@ung.si

This paper examines clothing as a literary device through which women writers at the *fin de siècle* articulated, mediated, and constrained female sexual desire. Focusing on the works of Zofka Kveder alongside texts by Frieda von Bülow, Gjene Vojnović, and Maria Janitschek, it argues that sartorial representation formed a shared concern within Central European women's writing across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Rather than serving merely as decorative characterisation, dress functions as a complex symbolic language through which authors negotiate bourgeois femininity, erotic subjectivity, social respectability, and female agency.

The paper identifies three principal functions of dress. First, dress serves as a means of liberation; second, dress functions as a medium for decrypting desire. Finally, dress becomes a mode of performance and self-fashioning. However, sartorial self-fashioning does not necessarily yield autonomy: within bourgeois *fin-de-siècle* culture, dress may also discipline, aestheticise, sexualise, and contain the female body.

Keywords: fin de siècle, dress and fashion, female sexuality, bourgeois femininity, Central European women's writing, sartorial symbolism, gender and the body

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Regulating Desire: Gender, Sexuality, and Marginalized Bodies in Zofka Kveder

Ivana Zajc

University of Nova Gorica, Research Centre for Humanities, School of Humanities
ivana.zajc@ung.si

This paper examines how sexual desire is represented in literary texts that thematise bodily non-normativity, with particular attention to the ways in which these representations intersect with the historical marginalisation of women. It focuses on the relationship between sexual desire and shame in representations of marginalised and non-normative bodies, examining the regulation of sexual agency in Zofka Kveder's *Right to Live* (1901) and *Eva* (1904). Both works were written at a time when being a woman already meant occupying a marginalised position within a patriarchal society that strictly regulated women's bodies and sexual desire.

By examining representations of sexual desire, shame, and non-normative bodies, the paper shows that Kveder represents marginalised bodies as subject to forms of control that include silencing, pathologising, desexualising, and instrumentalising sexual desire. This engagement with non-normative bodies forms part of a broader feminist critique of gender, sexuality, and social exclusion. From an international comparative perspective, the analysis situates Kveder's representations of disability, gender, and sexuality within broader European literary discourses of the period. Sexual desire is a site through which Kveder's works explore bodily autonomy and the social value assigned to different forms of embodiment and desire.

Keywords: sexual desire, Zofka Kveder, voice, shame, feminist disability studies

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“That’s Women’s Business”: Narrating Women’s Experiences of Abortion in Early Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing

Sara Vukotić

Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, The Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of
Sciences and Arts
sara.vukotic@zrc-sazu.si

This presentation examines how women’s experiences of illegal abortion are narrated in selected works by three women writers from the former Yugoslav region: Zofka Kveder, Anđelija Lazarević, and Milena Mohorič. Written and published between 1908 and 1940, the texts portray women from different social backgrounds whose unwanted pregnancies expose them to unequal gender relations, social stigma, economic vulnerability, and physical danger. While questions of female sexuality, desire, and intimacy in early twentieth-century women’s writing have received increasing scholarly attention, abortion as a specific literary experience has remained comparatively underexplored. Bringing these three works into dialogue reveals both important differences in their treatment of abortion and striking similarities in the ways women’s experiences are shaped by secrecy, limited choices, social position, and the unequal consequences of sexual relationships. Particular attention is therefore paid to how women themselves are represented, as well as to what can and cannot be openly narrated about abortion. I argue that by bringing an experience largely confined to the private sphere into literature, these writers challenged its social and literary invisibility, while the narrative distance and indirectness surrounding abortion simultaneously preserve traces of the silence in which it was historically embedded.

Keywords: (Illegal) Abortion, Twentieth-Century Literature, Zofka Kveder, Anđelija Lazarević, Milena Mohorič, "women’s business"

23. 9. 2026

Session 2: Speaking Desire Indirectly: Language, Silence, and Narrative Strategies
(13:15 – 14:45)

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***Between Voices and Gazes: The Enunciation of Desire in La
Princesse de Clèves (1678)***

Giada Silenzi
University of Udine
giada.silenzi@uniud.it

This paper examines how female sexual desire is articulated in Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), one of the most influential novels of the French classical tradition. At first glance, the novel appears to conform to the strict moral and aesthetic norms of its time. In a sociocultural context shaped by the imperatives of *bienséance*, female sexuality could hardly be expressed openly without transgressing moral, religious, and aesthetic conventions. Yet Lafayette does not simply silence desire. Rather, I suggest that the author constructs a complex enunciative configuration in which desire emerges obliquely, conveyed through subtle narrative strategies.

Drawing on Alain Rabatel's pragma-enunciative approach and Dominique Maingueneau's discourse analysis, this study investigates how shifts in focalisation, modalisation, and narrative distance contribute to the expression of desire. Through carefully modulated changes in point of view, the text allows female desire to surface within a polyphonic interplay of voices and perspectives. The analysis shows that Lafayette displaces the representation of desire from the lexical level – constrained by euphemism, ellipsis, and allusion – to the enunciative level. Through shifts in point of view, the modalisation of inner discourse, and the strategic use of silence, the novel constructs a form of female subjectivity in which desire is neither fully repressed nor openly expressed, but is constantly negotiated within the limits of *decorum*.

This reading suggests that *La Princesse de Clèves* does not suppress female eroticism but rather transforms it into a tension that saturates the text, showing that in seventeenth-century women's writing, multiple enunciative mechanisms converge to produce layers of meaning that the reader is invited to reconstruct.

Keywords: La Princesse de Clèves; desire; enunciation; point of view; subjectivity.

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Desire, Respectability, and the Poetics of Restraint in Early 20th-Century Latvian Women's Writing

Eva Eglāja-Kristsone

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia

eva.eglaja@lulfmi.lv

Articulations of female sexual desire in early twentieth-century Latvian women's writing often surface not as explicit erotic vocabulary but as a recurring problem of narration: how to register intimacy under social surveillance, moral gatekeeping, and the demand for respectable femininity. In this peripheral literary field where women's authorship remained contested, desire is frequently encoded through metaphor, euphemism, and formal restraint, intersecting with other emotions, especially shame, pride, and moments of fragile joy.

This paper examines how Latvian women writers negotiated the tension between erotic selfhood and normative scripts of femininity across genres: autobiographical writing, prose fiction, and lyric poetry. Marija Stalbova's self-writing and Ivande Kaija's fiction serve as focal points within a broader comparative frame that also includes Austra Skujiņa's lyric intensities, Alija Baumanē's prose of modern intimacy, and Mirdza Bendrupe's interwar contributions. Motherhood is a key node, alongside marriage, reputational risk, religious-moral discourse, and the gendered "right to speak," through which desire is narrated, displaced, or disciplined.

Methodologically, I trace a repertoire of textual moves that cluster at moments when desire becomes risky: moral "accounting," self-reproach, abrupt topic shifts, typographic and narrative interruptions (ellipsis, omission, restraint), and metalinguistic refusals ("I will not write this"), in which silence functions as a meaningful rhetorical act.

Keywords: Latvian women's writing; female sexual desire; respectability; poetics of restraint; narrative silence

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The Triumph of Reason over Desire: A Conflict at the Turn of the Century (Zdenka Hásková, *Mladí* (Youth))

Alenka Jensterle Doležal

Faculty of Arts, Charles University

alenka.dolezalova@ff.cuni.cz

This paper analyses the representation of female sexual desire in the literary works of Czech writer Zdenka Hásková, also known as Dr. Hásková–Dyková (1878–1946), a Czech literary critic, journalist, and writer, the wife of the prominent Czech writer Viktor Dyk, and also the main Czech translator of the literary works of Zofka Kveder.

We will analyze her only novel *Mladí* (Youth), from 1909. Set at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it portrays the interwoven stories of four women. It features female characters who embody the limits of normative femininity. The main protagonists are three students—Ivana Zemanová, Markéta Rydvalová, and Sylva Langrová. The fourth heroine is an older woman, Mrs. Marušičová. Each of the four female protagonists longs for love and, in her own way, attempts to struggle against her fate, though with little success. They are all inclined to resign themselves to life and no longer believe that their situation can improve. We can observe the complexity of the female emotional world, in which feelings and love stand in opposition to intellect and reason. Although the heroines yearn for love, reason always prevails, placing education first. The expressions of heterosexual desire among young girls depict social and moral boundaries of that period. The representation of sexual desire links to the question of how femininity (and masculinity) is constructed at the *fin de siècle*.

Keywords: Literature by Zdenka Hásková, Czech prose, Fin-de- siècle Czech Women writers, Erotics in literature, Female sexual desire in literature

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Feminine Desire as Cruel Power and the Deep Otherness in the Fin de Siècle Ballads of Růžena Svobodová

Libuše Heczková

Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague

libuse.heczkova@ff.cuni.cz

One of the most celebrated and acclaimed texts of Czech fin-de-siècle literature is Růžena Svobodová's neo-Romantic collection of short stories, "Černí myslivci" ("The Black Hunters"). Its neo-Romantic classification is generally justified by its balladic form and its heroes, who are immersed in—and yet resist—their natural surroundings. At the centre of the stories, however, are primarily the heroines—women whose passion and desire are constantly broken, suppressed, and destroyed, as if their archetypal femininity and their naturalness were meant to be subordinated not only to men but also to those who are supposed to control the forest—that is, the gamekeepers. In one of the stories, the main heroine, likened to the legend of Melusina, rebels fiercely, and her desire proves destructive to everyone—including herself. The son she bears from a relationship with one of the hunters symbolizes the demise and disruption of a world that does not respect female desire and her natural essence. A woman's abused desire drives the narrative; it is expressed as a nonlinear ornament that defies the order imposed on the female and natural worlds. This paper focuses on the narrative strategies of the short story "Meluzína," in which cruelty and strangeness ambivalently transform into their opposites; ornament, as pure artifice, has the ability to halt the pride of logos and myth (in the original Greek sense).

Keywords: Femininity, nature, ornamental writing, Czech literature

23. 9. 2026

Session 3: Modernism, Experimentation, and the Rewriting of Female Desire
(15:10 – 16:25)

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**(Veiled) Urban Appetites and Transgressions in the Interwar
New York Novels by Fannie Hurst, Nella Larsen and Tess
Slesinger**

Leonora Flis

School of Humanities, University of Nova Gorica
leonora.flis@ung.si

The paper examines the instances of female eroticism, as well as feelings of shame and guilt connected to it, in the works of three pivotal New York City writers—Fannie Hurst, Nella Larsen, and Tess Slesinger. All of them work within the binary of “Virgin vs. Eve” and transgress it. The novels that are analysed are Larsen’s *Passing* (1929), Hurst’s *Imitation of Life* (1933), and Slesinger’s *The Unpossessed* (1934). These stories mostly articulate the sexualities of women from racially and ethnically marginalized peripheries, adding another layer of complexity to the questions of desire, shame, and guilt. In *Passing*, we witness the pressures of racial liminality (light-skinned Black protagonists who live at the intersection of both white and Black societies) and homoerotic tension between the female protagonists, which could lead to social and economic “abjection,” to use Julia Kristeva’s term. Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) argues that Larsen’s novel is not only about racial deception, but also an exploration of how race and sexuality are socially constructed, performed, and repressed. We can see parallels with the novel *Imitation of Life*, where female sexuality is often narrated as an attempt at women’s sexual autonomy and freedom to make themselves desirable. Moreover, Hurst, who can indeed be seen as a feminist critic of her time, also explores the rejection of traditional maternal roles. Hurst explicitly argues that female sexual power is rooted in sexual autonomy rather than just being desirable to men. Additionally, Hurst describes a queer or alternative family structure that replaces the traditional patriarchal marriage. Lastly, in Slesinger’s novel *The Unpossessed* the female protagonists try to embody the New

Woman(hood), the early 20th-century concept of liberated female subjectivity, but they end up disillusioned and ultimately unsure about what they (should) desire, largely also due to social and cultural pressures. By positioning these narratives as vital to Modernist discourse, I will show how these writers, with varying success, sought to move beyond “veiled” images and metaphors to construct a language of eroticism with which they could dismantle patriarchal structures and reclaim female desire from the social periphery.

Keywords: Fannie Hurst, Nella Larsen, Tess Slesinger, interwar New York novel, female sexual autonomy, New Woman(hood)

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Sexual Desire from the Digital Archive: Mina Loy’s “Brontolivido”

Nicoletta Ascuto
University of York
nicoletta.ascuto@york.ac.uk

Mina Loy (1882-1966), the “brilliant literary enigma of modernism”, was a writer, painter, visual artist, fashion designer, lampshade maker, feminist, as well as Futurist, Dadaist, and Surrealist.¹ While some facets of her work as an artist and literary figure have been examined by critics, many others remain uncharted. In this paper, I will consider an unpublished, fragmentary piece of prose held at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Yale University), and now digitised and available online. These fragments, collectively titled “Brontolivido”, make up a prose narrative detailing a woman’s coming to terms with her confusing relationship with two men. The prose is autobiographical, based on her liaison with Italian philosopher Giovanni Papini (1881-1956) and with the founder of Italian Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), whom Loy befriended in Florence in the 1910s. How can this partly autobiographical text help us better understand her poetry from the same period, which consistently revolves around female sexual desire (as, for example, in

¹ Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson, “Introduction,” in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy* (Cromer: Salt Publishing, 2010), 1. Roger L. Conover, in Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996), xiii.

Songs to Joannes, from 1917)? How does it square with her “Feminist Manifesto” of 1914, in which she encourages women not to give up to their bodies, reminding them that “there is nothing impure in sex”?² (The text from footnotes in the actual abstract would be better perhaps, but we can keep the footnotes if that is the consensus.)

Keywords: Mina Loy, autobiography, modernism, sex war, desire

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Female Desire in George Egerton’s and Adela Milčinoić’s Short Fiction

Kristina Grgić

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

kgrgic2@m.ffzg.hr

Although not directly related, the work of George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright, 1859-1945) and Adela Milčinoić (1879-1968), two significant, yet not widely recognised early modernist women writers, invites comparison in terms of their analogous, at the time still pioneering (literary) explorations of “the *terra incognita*” (Egerton) of female experience and consciousness. Given that both authors were also prominent supporters of female emancipation, the paper investigates their textual representations of female desire and female subjectivity, for which the then-burgeoning form of the (modernist) short story provided a suitable framework. As was common in women’s short fiction of the period (D’hoker and Eggermont 2015; Mihurko Poniž 2023), Egerton and Milčinoić blended modernist techniques (impressionism, fragmentariness, open-endedness, a focus on consciousness etc.) and realist features (elements of traditional narrative, social criticism), creating a gallery of female figures with various sensibilities, individual experiences and social positions. The proposed analysis will focus on a representative sample, in order to describe and discuss the key textual strategies for representing female sexual desire and associated forms of desire (i. e. for emotional fulfilment, independence), particularly in relation to interpersonal connections and (traditional) social roles such

² Loy. *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, 156.

as motherhood and marriage/ romantic relationships with men. The aim is to explore significant similarities and differences and position them within the two authors' common modernist context, taking into account its heterogeneous artistic, cultural and social makeup (Felski 1995), with its specific, British/Irish and Croatian, inflections, as well as Egerton's and Milčinović's departure from the typical representations of women in modernist male writing.

Keywords: George Egerton, Adela Milčinović, female desire, early modernism, representation, short story

23. 9. 2026

Session 4: Queer Desire, Ambiguity, and Non-Normative Attachments
(16:35 – 17:50)

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Oblique Configurations: Queer desire under narrative constraint in Fausta Cialente's *Natalia*

Irina Talevska

Faculty of Philology, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje, "Blaže Koneski"
irinatalevska@flf.ukim.edu.mk

This article investigates the representation of same-sex female desire in Fausta Cialente's *Natalia* (1930) through a queer theoretical lens, with particular attention to the historical conditions of censorship and self-censorship that shaped women's writing in twentieth-century Italy. Rather than articulating lesbian desire as a stable or openly named identity, *Natalia* figures it as an affective undercurrent – fragmented, displaced, and mediated through silence, ellipsis, and emotional intensity. Drawing on queer theory, particularly approaches that foreground epistemologies of the closet and non-normative temporalities, the article argues that Cialente's narrative strategies constitute a mode of oblique resistance to heteronormative and patriarchal constraints. At the same time, these strategies register the internalization of moral, cultural, and institutional pressures that rendered female homoeroticism unspeakable within both literary and social discourse. By situating *Natalia* within the broader context of Italian modernity, moral regulation, and literary respectability, the analysis shows how queer affect emerges at the intersection of repression and expression. The article ultimately proposes *Natalia* as a key text for understanding how female same-sex desire survives and signifies under conditions of constraint, contributing to a re-mapping of Italian literary history that foregrounds affect, silence, and the politics of narration.

Keywords: configuration, non-normative temporalities, constraint, censorship, silence.

“Everything Here Is Saturated”: Littoral Atmospheres and Sexless Queer Longing in Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa’s Modernist Diary

Martyna Miernecka

University of Regensburg

martyna.miernecka@sprachlit.uni-regensburg.de

This paper offers a close reading of Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa’s diary sequence (written 1925-1926; published posthumously in 1993), focusing on her encounter with the actress Maria Morska at Cap Ferrat in April 1925 and its afterlife over the following year. I argue that Iwaszkiewiczowa constructs female desire through a sexless queer longing constrained by patriarchal Catholic frameworks that suspend femininity between Marian purity and the stigmatization of eroticism. Yet, the text does not simply narrate repression. Rather than presenting a “closeted romance” organized around thwarted genitality, the diary stages what Benjamin Kahan calls a celibate plot: attachment sustained by the refusal of bodily consummation. “Pure desire” functions in this diary as both a constraint and a generative narrative technique. Here, desire is structurally displaced from bodies to the littoral landscape and voiced through atmosphere (“everything here is saturated with my thinking of her”). Drawing on Hannah Freed-Thall’s account of the beach as an unstable ecotone, vernacular modernist theories of situational sexuality, and on asexuality studies (e.g. Ela Przybylo), I treat the shoreline as a “queer stage” that enables alternative, non-genital rhythms of intimacy. Finally, I link desire to women’s authorship. In a diary filled with shame about the “vanity” of self-exposure – shame intensified by the author’s mental illness – the Cap Ferrat episode nonetheless catalyses a hesitant, fragile emergence of a writing subject – visible, for instance, in a queer grammatical shift, when she rewrites a line from her husband’s sonnet into the feminine plural. Iwaszkiewiczowa remains under-read, long eclipsed by the male modernist canon and by her famous husband (a central figure in Polish literary life and a frequent reference point in queer Slavic studies). This marginal position makes the diary unusually revealing: it shows how female desire, shame, and authorship are also negotiated through a celibate, spatial narrative form, not only through erotic confession.

Keywords: Queer ecology, beach writing, homosexuality of place, Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, Marcel Proust, Polish literature, environmental studies

Between Love and Friendship: Margit Kaffka's Anthill

Edit Zsadányi

Department of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at the Eötvös Loránd
University

zsadanyi.edit@btk.elte.hu

In my paper, I will analyse the Hungarian modernist, Margit Kaffka's novel *Anthill* (*Hangyaboly*) from the perspective of feminist narratology, focusing primarily on the works of Susan Lanser and Rita Felski. My approach aligns with the conference topic of examining the language used in women's writing as a means of articulating sexual desire. Margit Kaffka is an important Hungarian woman writer of the modernist period. Her characteristic artistic language, including interior monologue, free indirect discourse, detailed descriptions, and unusual word order that expresses inner thoughts and feelings, can be compared to the representation of female characters, such as Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's canonical novels. Relating Margit Kaffka's narrative technique to that of Virginia Woolf might serve as a reference point for comparing Kaffka's writings with those of other European female writers.

The examined novel (1917) takes place in a Catholic convent. In this community, identity is built from mosaics; however, the focus is on the individual's feelings. The novel presents a wide range of emotions, including respect, adoration, care, special attention, friendship, desire, and love in all its forms. In this emotional whirlwind, the emphasis is not on differences, but on the blurring of sharp emotional boundaries. The difference between heterosexual and homosexual attractions seems insignificant, and the text is more concerned with the difference between friendship and love, despite the closeness of these feelings. I will analyze dramatic moments in which love is not reciprocated when one feels love and desire, and when the desire crosses the boundary of friendship.

Keywords: Hungarian modernism, women writers, queer identities, gender studies, school fiction.

24. 9. 2026

Session 5: Digital Humanities and Distant Readings of Desire (9:30 – 10:45)

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Between Floral Purity and Animal Desire: Regimes of Control in Nineteenth-Century Iberian Women's Press

Antonio Terrón Barroso

University of Barcelona

antonio.terron@ub.edu

This paper explores how images of plants and animals functioned as a poetic language through which female subjectivity was articulated in 19th-century Iberian women's magazines. Drawing on the corpus of periodicals in the GenViPReF database¹, the paper aims to illustrate how botanical symbolism repeatedly intersects with animal imagery to negotiate the complex terrain between purity and desire, as shaped by moral and religious discourses. Whereas flowers were associated with ideals of normative femininity through religious virtue, beauty and weakness —both physical and psychical—, animals evoked expressive registers of sexual appetite, instinct and dissident corporeality that occasionally problematised dominant norms, such as obedience to family and religion, sexual restraint and ideology regarding age, ethnicity and class. Through these figurative regimes of control, intertwined vegetal and animal poetics emerge as mechanisms that consistently sustain heteropatriarchal ideals and enable the opaque articulation of self-assertion and eroticism in contexts where explicit desire was socially proscribed. The negotiation between these regimes illuminates the creative strategies through which intimate experience was mediated, as well as the covert processes by which such tropes were appropriated and re-signified. Situated within feminist and cultural-historical frameworks, this work seeks to contribute to broader discussions of the symbols and rhetorics that articulated normative and dissident female desire, corporality, affect and agency within the Iberian literary cultures mediated by the flourishing 19th-century women's press.

Keywords: Female desire, gendered regimes of control, women's periodical press, symbolic gender violence and misogyny, vegetal and animal imagery.

Digital Analytics for Poems by Delphine Gay and Renée Vivien about Others' Desire

Daniel A. Finch-Race

University of Bologna

daniel.finchrace@unibo.it

This paper compares two of France's most notable women writers from the long nineteenth century. It applies a quali-quantitative framework to the complexities of relations with an intimate yet essentially inscrutable Other. Delphine Gay's 'Le bonheur d'être belle' [The Joy of Being Beautiful] from 1824 and Renée Vivien's 'Attente' [Expectation] from 1906 engage with the shifting sands of desire by recounting excitement and perplexity in connection with a soon-to-be-present lover. Both poets dwell on questions over showing off their charms, much of which evokes fretfulness about desirability. An important difference between the representations is the Other's gender identity, with Gay using male identifiers for her addressee whereas Vivien uses female ones. Through a mix of feminist geography and digital analytics, especially the frequency of vocabulary and phonemes, it shall be demonstrated how such poetry is deserving of greater recognition because of a distinctive style of expressing erotically charged experience.

Keywords: cultural memory, French versification, gender data gap, intersectional digital humanities

24. 9. 2026

Session 6: Desire, Morality, and Self-Narration in Life Writing (11:15 – 12:30)

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“But My Nature Is Fierce and Inclined to Dissipation”: Desire and Moral Negotiation in Dragojla Jarnević’s Diary

Gordana Galić Kakkonen

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split

ggalic@ffst.hr

Dragojla Jarnević (Karlovac, 1812–1875), a Croatian writer and educator raised in the German linguistic and literary tradition, turned to Croatian during the Croatian National Revival, aligning herself with its nationalist cultural project. Her extensive diary, kept intermittently from 1833 to 1874, first written in German and later in Croatian, is one of the most significant documents of female interiority in nineteenth-century Croatian literary and cultural history. In her last will, she stipulated that the diary not be read until ten years after her death, a testamentary act that signals her awareness of the tension between her writings and the public moral order.

Jarnević writes with remarkable candour about male advances and her own sensual preferences, while often positioning herself as an isolated observer among people she finds intellectually and ethically lacking, a stance that reveals both her sharp critical gaze and a sense of personal loneliness. Desire, nonetheless, is never fully surrendered to. It remains present, as confession, as a quiet assertion of individual autonomy, and often as despair. *The Diary* reveals a mirror dynamic: while remaining fully exposed to the scrutiny of others, Jarnević measures her own desires and actions against the Christian conscience, social norms, and, particularly when abroad, her sense of responsibility as a Croatian woman. The moral framework imposed on her is also one she deploys against others, and against herself.

Drawing on gender studies, life writing theory, and the history of female sexuality in nineteenth-century Europe, this paper argues that Jarnević’s *Diary* functions as a sustained practice of subjective moral negotiation, one in which patriotic commitment, Christian faith, and self-examination remain in productive tension. Underlying all of this is a persistent dissatisfaction –chronic illness, intellectual

restlessness, and a growing awareness that neither her provincial environment nor the men available to her could ever meet the standards she set for both her mind and her heart. The result is a text that has been called both “pornographic” and “sincere”, “scandalous” and “modern”, “torn between passion and reason” – and that remains, even now, impossible to fully settle.

Keywords: Dragojla Jarnević, *The Diary*, moral negotiation, self-examination, social norms, patriotic commitment, Christian conscience

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Desire and Sin: A Discourse on Sex in Dragojla Jarnević’s Diary (1833–1875)

Dubravka Zima

Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb

dzima@fhs.hr

The paper examines the narrative of sexuality in the diary of Dragojla Jarnević, a 19th-century Karlovac teacher and writer. Jarnević is the author of several short stories, dramas, poems, and a novel, but her most important work is the extensive diary she kept from 1833 until her death in 1875. In the diary, she recorded details of her daily life in Karlovac, providing insight into the customs, intellectual practices, and everyday life of a middle-class woman in early 19th-century Croatia. A significant part of the diary entries concerns the topic of sexuality, and it is particularly notable that it focuses on extramarital sexuality, given that Jarnević remains unmarried. Female sexuality in her diary is marked by an imagological (and ideological) range from sin to desire, which is somewhat related to maturation, i.e., sexuality is connoted with sin and shame in her youth, while sexual desire is associated with maturity. The discourse on sexuality includes descriptions of the sexual act(s), as well as self-reflection of one’s own sexual desire, and it also includes the author’s thoughts about sexuality as a patriarchal tool used by men to subjugate and control women. Although the diary was not published until the year 2000, Jarnević’s discourse on sexuality did not go completely unnoticed, as it was read privately by the author’s friends and

colleagues after her death. The paper will examine the author's discourse on sexuality, as well as her contribution to 19th-century discourse on sexuality.

Keywords: Dragojla Jarnević, desire, sin, extramarital sexuality, 19th Century, Croatian literature

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Laughing at Desire: Humor, Transgression, and Social Sanction in Rosalía de Castro's Poetry

María Xesús Lama López

University of Barcelona

lama@ub.edu

This paper will examine manifestations of female desire in Rosalía de Castro's poetry, published in 1863 and 1880. As a pioneer defending women and the minoritized language of her region, Galicia, Rosalía de Castro's work (1837–85) is particularly striking for its modernity in the literary representation of affect and of the tensions generated by social control, gender norms, and the institutional regulation of sentimental relationships. The study focuses on structural devices and the theatrical splitting of the poetic self—through the dramatic monologue or the persona poem—as strategies for transcending the author's subjectivity and giving voice to anonymous women. These rhetorical devices are useful to reveal the “hidden transcripts” of subaltern groups (Scott 1992) and enable the representation of women as active desiring subjects long before the emergence of feminist claims. In Rosalía's poems, women contemplate the male body and describe it as an object of desire, assume an active role in seduction, and challenge both religious morality and social censorship through their joyful participation in festivities and games with a strong erotic charge. At the same time, these texts confront the consequences of women's boldness in living their sexuality, as well as of the concessions they make to male desire: fear of sin, remorse, social condemnation, dishonour, marginalization, and loneliness. Exploring the representation of desire, the article argues that Rosalía de Castro exposes disciplinary strategies for and against the patriarchal system.

Keywords: Rosalía de Castro, female desire, humour, 19th century poetry. Subaltern voices, transgression and punishment.

24. 9. 2026

Session 7: Desire, Agency, and Literary Subversion (13:30 – 15:00)

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Subversion, Female Sexuality, and Affective Aspects of Subjectivity in a Forgotten Hungarian Female Writer's Fiction (Teresa Rudnóy)

Tímea Jablonczay
University of Jewish Studies
jablonczay@gmail.com

Teresa Rudnóy (1910-1947) was a representative of the marginalized Hungarian Jewish intellectuals in Czechoslovakia who wrote minority prose in the 1930s. In 1939, just as she was beginning her writing career, she became a victim of fascist persecution. Rudnóy survived Auschwitz, and her final book is a powerful Holocaust novel (*Szabaduló asszonyok* [*Women in Liberation*]). Her five novels, written between 1939 and 1947, stand out among other female-authored novels of the period, particularly for their emphasis on the female body and sexuality, as well as their linguistic form. This presentation analyses her two novels written between 1939 and 1942 - *Osztott szerelem* (Divided Love, 1939) and *Izzó kemence* (Glowing Furnace, 1941) – to highlight how naturalistic representations of sexuality and the body serve as tools for female subject formation through affect and emotions. The heroines of the novels are maids who link the experience of their own bodies and physical pleasures to their freedom, and their struggles unfold within the web of patriarchal and social subordination. The analysis demonstrates that the emphatically portrayed female sexuality is intertwined with transgressive subjects and shifts in perspective in the narrative, dialogical structure, and forms of silence. Furthermore, the elliptical writing style not only modernizes the novels and disrupts narrative sequences but also reveals the constructed nature of female identity along lines of fracture. Finally, the lecture discusses the ambivalent contemporary reception of Rudnóy's novels, as well as how they were excluded from the Hungarian literary canon and became casualties of oblivion.

Keywords: Female sexuality, Transgression, Agency, Female body, Vulnerability, Maid narratives

**“But, by the way, you’re bearing in mind, aren’t you, that I’ve had a lover?” “Oh, yes. So have I, if it comes to that. In fact, several. It’s the sort of thing that might happen to anybody.”:
Passions in Plain Sight.**

Kilmeny Chernys
University of York
kilmeny.chernys@york.ac.uk

With these lines in *Strong Poison* (1930), Dorothy Sayers introduced the world to Harriet Vane, a sexually emancipated, Oxford-educated, and financially independent woman who supported herself in “a legitimate way” through her writing. On trial for the murder of her live-in lover, Harriet finds her claim of innocence supported by Sayers’s beloved detective, Lord Peter Wimsey. Though the judge presents Harriet as having been spurned by the deceased, it is she who wished to maintain their unmarried status and felt betrayed by his proposal of marriage, thereby turning literary conventions of the heteronormative marriage plot on its head. Through Harriet Vane, Sayers gave voice to women’s desire for self-identity and autonomy. Though Sayers and other middlebrow women writers have been pushed to the periphery of academic research, the analysis of their work reveals the subversive strategies necessary to critique patriarchal actions in a politically hostile post-suffragist period. Speaking through the intimacy of their novels, women writers introduced and normalised progressive social and political actions, promoting financial and bodily agency without undue public attention. By tackling topics and passions not broached in “polite society”— women’s financial independence, non-marital sex, and single parenthood—these subversive novels served as quiet and powerful tools of literary activism.

Keywords: Humour, agency, modernism

24. 9. 2026

Session 8: SHEWROTE Database: A Hands-On Session (15:30 – 17:30)

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SHEWROTE Database: Steps Taken, Steps Forward, a Hands-On Session to Introduce Wikidata Identifiers

Amelia Sanz

Complutense University of Madrid

amsanz@ucm.es

In this session, Professor Sanz will present the evolution and the challenges that the SHEWROTE database is facing, mainly the major issue hampering scholarship on historical women authors, publishers, and readers: the lack of standardized identifiers allowing researchers to manipulate and link data. During the hands-on session, participants will be invited, first, to check historical women writers of every country, and second, to add or to create standardized identifiers for them on the basis of Wikidata identifiers, in such a way that they will be rendered digitally visible and findable. The SHEWROTE database, created in 2023, allows users to stock, share and analyse historical data documenting the international reception of works by women writers before c. 1940. The data includes evidence of book ownership, readership, re-editions, translations, intertextual references and commentary on (works by) women writers. The database is coordinated by members of the international NEWW Network (New approaches to European Women's Writing, created in 2005) and the DARIAH-EU working group 'Women Writers in History'.

Keywords: historical women writers; digital humanities; standardized identifiers; data interoperability; linked data; metadata; reception history; translations; intertextuality

Short Biographical Notes on the Contributors

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Nicoletta Asciuto is Reader in Modern Literature at the University of York. She is the author of *Brilliant Modernism: Cultures of Light and Modernist Poetry* (Johns Hopkins University Press 2025). She has published various articles on modernist poetry and especially on T. S. Eliot and on Mina Loy. She is co-investigator for York on a project funded by the European Commission, “EUTERPE: European Literatures and Gender from a Transnational Perspective.” Nicoletta has also published literary translations, the latest of which are the first Italian translation of Hope Mirrlees’s *Paris. A Poem* and of Kimberly Campanello’s “Moving Nowhere Here”. She has recently been awarded a British Academy Small Grant to work on the first English edition and translation of Zofka Kveder’s short prose.

Kilmeny Chernys is currently pursuing a PhD in English and Related Literature from the University of York. Her project is a comparative literature study of British women writers’ use of humour to promote women’s agency through cozy mysteries and popular women’s novels from 1920-1950. Her examination of the parody and satire in these novels reveals a literary activism that moved public forums of protest to an intimate conversation between writer and reader, with the intention to inspire radical concepts of change in a hostile post-suffragette political climate. Kilmeny received her Bachelor of Arts and Master’s of Arts degrees with distinction from Georgetown University, and brings her experiences from a career in publishing with Penguin Books, Viking Press, and WW Norton to her current project. Her Master’s thesis is held at Georgetown University’s digital archive.

Eva Eglāja-Kristsons is director and leading researcher at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia. Her research focuses on Baltic literature, women’s writing, autobiographical studies, Cold War studies, and digital humanities.

Daniel Finch-Race FHEA FRGS PhD is Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Bologna. He is the recipient of a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Global Fellowship in partnership with Laval University in Quebec City, Macquarie University in Sydney, and the University of Angers. His work appears in ‘cultural geographies’, ‘Journal of Historical Geography’, ‘Landscape Research’, ‘Literary Geographies’, ‘The Geographical Journal’, and ‘The Professional Geographer’. He co-edited ‘French Ecocriticism’ (Peter Lang) and ‘Italian Science Fiction and the Environmental Humanities’ (Liverpool University Press). He serves on the editorial

boards of 'European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes' and 'Modern & Contemporary France'.

Leonora Flis, PhD, focuses her research and teaching on literary theory, contemporary English and American literature, film (particularly in relation to literature), graphic novels, and literary journalism. She also writes book and film reviews and translates both scholarly works and fiction. In 2011, she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship for research at Columbia University in New York. She is also a translator, writer, radio programme creator, and moderator of discussions on literature, film, and culture more broadly. She is the author of the scholarly monograph *Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Novel* (2010) and two collections of short stories, *Upogib časa* (2015) and *Enakozvočja* (2022). She regularly publishes scholarly and professional articles in Slovenian and international journals and edited volumes.

Dr Gordana Galić Kakkonen is an Associate Professor at the University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Croatian language and literature. She teaches courses in world literature, literature and globalisation, and comparative topics in Croatian and European Culture and literature. Her research interests are women's writing and the literature and culture of the 19th century, as well as literature in the global age. She has published the monograph *Svjetska književnost – putevi i stranputice*, edited and co-edited three volumes, and published some fifty scholarly articles. She has pursued academic and professional training at the University of Bergen and the University of Eastern Finland, and has taught at Macquarie University in Sydney and Arts Academy in Split. At the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split she has held several administrative and leadership roles: ECTS coordinator, Head of the Department of Croatian language and literature, and Head of the Literature and Culture module of the doctoral programme. She sits on the editorial boards of the journals *Mogućnosti* (Possibilities), *Journal of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split*, and *Croatian Studies Review*. She is also a member of the Croatian Philological Society, Literary Circle Split, and Finnish Literature Society.

Kristina Grgić is an associate professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb University. She graduated in English Language and Literature and Comparative Literature in 2003 at the same Faculty, where she also received her PhD in 2013. Her fields of interest include theory and methodology of comparative literature, as well as historical and comparative research of Croatian literature, especially its links with literatures in English. Her more recent research is also focused on the representation of women in literature, and on the early modernist women's writing. She is the author of two books: *Trajni dijalog. Teorija i praksa komparativne književnosti u djelu Ivana Slamniga* (2017) and *Književna zrcaljenja: hrvatski i anglofoni klasici u prijevodima i usporedbama*, as well as over thirty academic papers.

Libuše Heczková is a professor at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague. Her fields of interest include literature and cultural history of the 20th century, gender studies, literary theory, and didactics of literature. She is the author and co-author of books on modern literature, history, and feminism, including “No scientific field is inherently closed to women.” The complicated paths of women to scientific careers in the first half of the 20th century (with M. Bahenská and D. Musilová; 2023) and co-author of the history of 20th-century Czech literature 1905-1971 (the penultimate, fifth volume, 2026). She focuses on literature written by women, and to a lesser extent on literary criticism, and contributes to contemporary literary magazines such as *Revolver Revue* and *A2*.

Tímea Jablonczay is a lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies, Budapest. She holds a PhD in Literary History and Cultural Studies from the University of Pécs and the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. She has held the position of associate professor at Milton Friedman University, Metropolitan University Budapest, and research fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies (iASK), Kőszeg. Her research is focused on literary studies – including narrative embedding and reflexivity, transnational perspectives in literary studies, and transcultural memory studies. An important area of her research relates to the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary. She is currently working on three major projects: the career of Erzsébet Szebenyi, Holocaust Memory and Discourses during the 1960s, and Hungarian Female Holocaust Memory (1945-1989).

Alenka Jensterle Doležal, PhD, is a full professor at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. She was born in Slovenia, where she studied Slovenian Studies, Comparative Literature, and Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana and completed her doctorate in 2000 with a dissertation on Antigone in South and West Slavic drama after the Second World War. Jensterle-Doležal has been working at the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic) since 2002. She teaches as a full professor in the Department of South Slavic and Balkan Studies, where she lectures on Slovenian literature, Slavic literatures, and literary theory. She is also the author of six monographs (four in Slovene, one in English, one in Czech), has edited five volumes, and has published more than seventy articles. Her topics include Slovenian and Czech women writers, myth in literature, and Slovenian “moderna.” She is also a writer and has published six volumes of poetry and three works of prose.

Martyna Miernecka is a literary and cultural studies scholar, postdoctoral fellow with the Light On! Queer Literatures and Cultures under Socialism project at the University of Regensburg, Germany. Her research interests include 20th and 21st century literature in the context of theories emerging in the wake of the spatial turn, especially geopoetics and geocriticism. She has recently published in *Connexe. Les espaces postcommunistes en question(s)*. Currently, she is working on the monograph project tentatively titled *Queer Ecologies in the Shadows: Rediscovering Queer Authors in Socialist Poland*.

Katja Mihurko, PhD, researches representations of femininity and masculinity in the field of literature and literary studies with a focus on Slovenian literature. She has published articles on the women's movement in the period before the Second World War and has integrated digital humanities approaches into her studies. She teaches courses on women writers and Slovenian literature as well as on topics related to gender studies and feminist theory. She is the editor of the electronic collection Pisma (Letters - www.pisma.org). She is also the coordinator of the CEEPUS network (Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies) Women Writers in History and chair of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Women Writers Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. She has written six academic monographs and edited five volumes of the critical edition of the Collected Works of Zofka Kveder.

Viola Parente-Čapková is a Professor of Finnish Literature at the University of Turku, and a Docent of Theory of Literature at Charles University, Prague. She has published widely *fin de siècle* women's writing, namely decadence in Finland and elsewhere in Europe (L. Onerva, Rachilde, Matilde Serao, Alexandra Kollontai) and on the cultural transfer and transnational networks of *fin de siècle* women's writing in journals and collections such as *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, *LEA – Lingue e letteratura d'oriente e d'occidente*, and *Classiques Garnier*. She has lead several research projects, authored *Decadent New Woman (Un)Bound: Mimetic Strategies in L. Onerva's Mirdja* (University of Turku, 2014), and edited *L. Onerva: Mirdja – A Decadent New Woman* (a critical edition of Eva Buchwald's English translation of the novel, MHRA Jewelled Tortoise 2025). She co-edited volumes such as *Nordic Literature of Decadence* (Routledge 2020), *Women Writing Intimate Spaces: The Long Nineteenth Century at the Fringes of Europe* (Brill 2023), and *Redrawing Europe's Literary Map: Transnational Circulation of Women's Writing 1850–1920* (Brill 2026).

Amelia Sanz is a professor in the Department of Romance and French Studies at the Complutense University of Madrid (Madrid). Her research initially focused on comparative literature, particularly literary relations between France and Spain and literature written by women; in the 1990s, she turned her attention to the challenges of the digital revolution and focused on the analysis and the use of digital tools for literary reading and writing in electronic formats. She has been the founder and head of the UCM's LEETHI Research Group (European Literatures: From Text to Hypermedia) since 2000. She is co-chair of the DARIAH Working Group, Women Writers in History. She has contributed to more than 20 books as an editor or author published by Belin (Paris), Cambridge Scholar Publishing (Newcastle), Anthropos (Barcelona) and Rodopi-Brill (Amsterdam), such as *Women telling Nations* (2014).

Giada Silenzi holds a PhD in French Literature from the University of Udine (Italy). Her doctoral dissertation, completed under the supervision of Alessandra Ferraro, examined the captivity accounts written by the nuns of Port-Royal during the seventeenth-century persecutions. She is interested in women's writing in early modern France and New France, with particular attention to historical, religious, and

autobiographical texts produced by nuns and laywomen. Her research combines discourse analysis with literary and enunciative approaches to investigate how women negotiated religious, social, and institutional constraints through writing. Her recent and forthcoming publications seek to recover and reassess the works of women religious who remain understudied as writers, including Jacqueline Pascal, Marie Tranchepain, Marguerite Bourgeoys, and Gertrude Dupré. Published in journals such as *Noctua*, *Publif@rum*, *Chroniques de Port-Royal*, and *Oltreoceano*, as well as in edited volumes, these studies explore spiritual and autobiographical writing, female authorship, textual transmission, and forms of resistance and agency.

Dr. Irina Talevska is Associate Professor of Italian Literature in the Department of Italian Language and Literature at the Blaze Koneski Faculty of Philology, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. She holds a PhD in Italian Literature, and her research interests span literature and literary theory, Holocaust studies, gender studies and translation theories. She is the author of several monographs, including *Gender and Politics of Writing* (Sigmapress, 2013), *European Holocaust Literature* (Sigmapress, 2018), and *Antisemitism and the Holocaust* (Sigmapress, 2023).

Antonio Terrón Barroso is a researcher and university lecturer specialising in gender, cultural representation and translation. He completed a PhD in Modern Languages at Aston University (UK) in 2022, where his research focused on representations of Spanishness in transnational cinema and their reception in the UK, the US and Spain. He has recently submitted a second PhD thesis in the Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Studies programme at the University of Barcelona, with the defence scheduled for the coming months. His current doctoral research examines the discursive construction of misogyny and gender-based violence in the fiction of nineteenth-century Spanish writer Robustiana Armiño. More broadly, his research interests include gender and sexuality, symbolic violence, popular culture, and the relationship between discourse and the politics of representation.

Sara Vukotić holds an MA in Serbian Literature from the University of Belgrade and an MA in Cultural Studies and Anthropology from the University of Primorska. She previously worked as a research assistant at the Research Centre for Humanities, University of Nova Gorica, on the project *Sexual Desire in Slovenian Women's Writing from a Transnational Perspective* (N6-0322). She is a Young Researcher at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, ZRC SAZU, and a first year PhD student in the Comparative Study of Ideas and Cultures programme at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU. Her doctoral research focuses on humour studies and contemporary folklore.

María Xesús Lama López, Professor of Galician-Portuguese Literature (University of Barcelona), she currently heads ADHUC – Research Centre: Theory, Gender, Sexuality. Her research focuses on gender studies, migrant literatures, and the construction and representation of national identity in Galician literature. She co-directed the GenViPreF project on literary texts in women's magazines of the 19th and early 20th centuries and has been a researcher on a number of projects, currently

working on MUVAN II -The Vanguard of Women's Activism at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries. She has published the biography Rosalía de Castro (1837–1863). *Cantos de independencia e liberdade* (2018 National Essay Prize) and is co-editor of *Papeles del crimen. Mujeres y violencia en la ficción criminal* (Publicacions UB, 2019) y *Ensayos de Historiografía* (castellana, catalana, gallega y vasca) (Gredos, 2022), among others.

Dr. **Ivana Zajc** is a literary scholar and researcher at the Research Centre for Humanities at the University of Nova Gorica. She holds a PhD in Literary Studies from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Her research focuses on digital humanities, literary theory, narratology, the history of emotions, and literature education. She combines computational and corpus-based methods with traditional literary analysis and has published scientific articles and monographs in these fields. Dr. Zajc is the head of two ARIS-funded projects: the research project *Shapes of Shame in Slovene Literature* (2025–2027) and the citizen science project *The Path of Shame: Participatory Co-creation of Representations of Shame in Literature* (2026–2027). At the School of Humanities of the University of Nova Gorica, she teaches courses in academic writing, digital humanities, literature and emotions, critical writing in the arts, and contemporary literary theory. Since 2025, she has served as Director of the undergraduate study programme *Language and Literature in the Digital World*. In 2024, she received an ARIS Excellent in Science Award, together with the other members of the editorial team, for the scholarly monograph *I Love Beautiful Letters: Correspondence of Women Writers of the Slovene Moderna*.

Dubravka Zima works as a Full Professor at the Faculty of Croatian Studies at the University of Zagreb, Croatia. She teaches Children's literature, Croatian literature, and Popular culture courses. Her scientific work explores cultural and historical frameworks of childhood, girlhood, and adolescence in South-eastern Europe in the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries. She is the author of six books on children's literature and the history of childhood and youth

Dr. **Edit Zsadányi**, DSc is associate professor at the Department of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies of Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest. Her fields of research are women writers in the 20th century, modern and postmodern Hungarian and American literature, with particular emphasis on Cultural Theory, Narrative Theories, Posthumanism, and Gender Studies. She is the author of six books, one published in English and five in Hungarian

