

FINDING FREEDOM IN VERSES: THE REPRESENTATION OF LOVE IN THE EARLY POETRY OF SLOVENE KRISTINA ŠULER*

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Abstract:

The topics of the paper will be the poetry of Kristina Šuler (Kristina Schuller, 1866–1959), who was one of the most distinguished poets of the female circle of *Slovenka* (Slovene Woman, published in Trieste, 1897–1902), the circle of young female writers of prose and poetry, which was founded even before the organised Slovene feminist movement in 1901. She wrote and published her poems at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century as part of the “Habsburg myth” and in the shadow of great historical and political changes in Central Europe: the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, the First World War, and the beginning of the new Yugoslavia, of which Slovenia was a part after the end of the war.

In the paper we will analyse her love poems written in a realistic manner with the touch of modernity. Šuler’s poems uncompromisingly depicted the female experience and the ambivalence of the modern, nervous subject of the fin-de-siècle period: she discovered intimacy through her original lyrical voice. In her autobiographical poems, she also connected love confessions with nature motives: the outer landscapes represented her inner world. Although her intimate poetry promised to offer one of the most original and courageous

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lyrical poetics in Slovenian culture, in her lyrical forms, she stayed traditional, and she preferred a realistic style of discourse. Šuler in her first period searched for language and authenticity to express the feelings of her autobiographical lyrical subject. In her expressions of intimacy in poetry, we will research her poetics and the construction of the authorship of the young female writer in the Central European space and in the crossroad of influences of South Slavic, German, and Italian cultures. In her case, the themes of intimacy were not just a literary concept but also functioned as the place for freedom and the representation of the female voice.

Keywords:

Kristina Šuler, Slovene women writers, Slovene „moderna“, Intimacy in poetry, Slovene literature

I.

In a torn, suffering soul
unbridled passion was awakened – ¹

The topics of the paper will be the love poetry of Slovene Kristina Šuler (or Schuler, 1866–1959) who in her intimate lyrics courageously searched for expressions of her passion at the end of the nineteenth century in Slovene culture. The *fin-de siècle* female poet was part of the public space for years and she published in different newspapers and journals very courageous love poetry, but nevertheless she did not have luck with the book publication, and her voice was silenced until the twenty first century, when her legacy and her testimony in Slovene literary history was revived. That was unfortunately the obvious fate of the neglected Slovene women writers from the past.

She was one of the first Slovene female poets, who depicted romantic love and ‘amour passion’ in her poetry. According to Giddens, romantic love, which began to make its presence felt from the late eighteenth century onwards, drew upon such ideals and incorporated elements of amour passion, while nevertheless becoming distinct from both. Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual’s life, a formula which radically extended the reflexivity of sublime love. The telling of a story is one of the meanings of ‘romance’, but this story now became individualised, inserting self and others into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes. [...] The complex of ideas associated with romantic love for the first time associated love with freedom, both being seen as normatively desirable states. [...] It was precisely this quality of amour passion which set it apart from existing institutions. Ideals of romantic love, by contrast, inserted themselves directly into the emergent ties between freedom and self-realisation. (Giddens 40, 41)

Slovene literature began in the sign of poetry. France Prešeren (1800–1848) wrote romantic poetry, in which he idealised love. He introduces the portrayal of a woman as a love object influenced by Italian Renaissance poetry. The love dialogue for him was also essential for the construction of the national identity and for the myth of the

¹ “V razdvojeni, trpeči duši / neukročena strast se je zbudila –” (“Strast”, (Passion), Šuler 1899: 210). (Translation of poems from Slovene to English by Alenka Jensterle Doležal).

poet as an exceptional visionary person. His voice influenced the other Slovene poets in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most subtle among them were the love poems by Simon Jenko, who in his tragical voice composed the love dialogue with a woman. Jenko still took a romantic approach to the theme: love was associated with the death of the loved one and a matter of the past.

The period of ‘moderna’ in Slovene (1898–1918) marked the beginning of Slovene modernism in literary history, characterised by a shift toward modern literature. It began with poetry, in 1899 when two anthologies (Oton Župančič’s *Čaša opojnosti* [*The Goblet of Inebriation*], and Ivan Cankar’s *Erotika* [*Erotics*]) were published – and ended in 1918 with the death of the prominent modernist figure Ivan Cankar. Although arriving later than other Central European movements,² the ‘moderna’ nevertheless had a significant impact on the evolution of the Slovene literature.³ As was the case with other European cultures at the time, it encompassed all literary varieties, including lyric, epic, and dramatic. Slovene culture has always been situated between various cultures on the borderlines; nevertheless, prior to the twentieth century, its political circumstances were mostly influenced by the German (Austrian) world. This multicultural space was strongly reflected in the Slovene literature. The Slovene ‘moderna’ was part of the Central European art movement and exhibited all characteristics of this movement. Through the creative process, the authors demanded autonomy in art, emphasising the author as an individual. In the process of writing, they sought to free themselves from stereotypical social and didactic roles to “escape” from the ties and methods of the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century, individualism ideas appeared in art, similar to other Central European ‘modernas’, as early as 1898. (Jensterle Doležal 2014: 48, 49) The most prominent male authors of the Slovene “moderna” were: Ivan Cankar (1876–1918), Oton Župančič (1878–1949), Dragotin Kette (1876–1899), and Josip Murn-Aleksandrov (1879–1901). Franc Zadavec referred to the work of the four representatives as ‘subjectivism’, a term that he used to describe the change in the perspective of the author from a realistic depiction of an external reality to the inner world, a modern

² “Moderna” is a common name for a literary movement in different national literatures of the Central European area. It first appeared in Austrian culture and then spread elsewhere. In this movement, we find different styles such as Decadence and Symbolism. It marks the beginning of modernism.

³ The Croat “moderna” lasted from 1892 to 1914, the Czech “moderna” from 1895 to the beginning of the 20th century, and the Polish “moderna” from 1890 to 1918.

interpretation of the term ‘soul’. (Zadravec 1999: 15)

II.

In Slovene culture, women started appearing in public life as late as the nineteenth century. (Vodopivec 30–40) The Slovene nation had a very poor tradition of Slovene women writers. The first Slovene woman poet, Fanny Haussman (1818–1853), published her first poem in October 1848 (“Vojakov izhod” [Soldier’s Entrance]); in the Slovene period between 1848 and 1890, only two women writers, Luiza Pesjak (1828–1898) and Pavlina Pajk (1854–1901), produced written work of sufficient artistic quality. Luiza Pesjak wrote both prose and poetry, and her poetic works are often interwoven with patriotic sentiments, yet her poetry also contains intimate themes and modern depictions of nature, landscapes, and changing time periods. The first generation of female authors connected their work with the raising national idea and construction of the identity of the small Slavic nation: they wrote patriotic poems as their male contemporaries.

Kristina Šuler (1866–1959)⁴ was one of the most distinguished poets of the female circle of the revue *Slovenka* (Slovene Women, published in Trieste, 1897–1902, first editor Marica Nadlišek)⁵, the circle of young female writers of prose and poetry (and also the first Slovene feminists with the rebellious ideas about the position of women in the patriarchal society), which was founded even before the organised Slovene feminist movement in 1901. (See Boršnik 115–150, Verginella) The authors represented the second generation of Slovene women writers. After the “*Slovenka* period” Šuler published her poems in various journals and newspapers as part of the Slovene culture in the beginning of the twentieth century: *Dom in svet* (Home and World), *Ljubljanski zvon* (The Ljubljana’s Bell), *Slovenski narod* (Slovene Nation), *Glas Naroda* (Voice of the Nation) and *Domači*

⁴ Kristina Šuler (Schuller) was a teacher all her life. That was for a Slovene woman writer of that time the only possible profession. She stayed in Bohinjska Bistrica from 1889 until 1899, then she moved into Šmarje next to Ljubljana (she lived there from 1899 until 1901). She gave birth to an illegitimate child (the female teachers of that time in Austro-Hungary were not allowed to marry), so she had to move to the east north of Slovene lands: from 1901 until 1924 she stayed in Stara Gorica in Steiermark. After the retirement (1919) she lived in the Slovene capital Ljubljana. See also <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi676502/> (by Ema Muser). Accessed 6. 6. 2023.

⁵ *Slovenka* (*Slovene Woman*) was the first Slovene women’s newspaper, and it had the subtitle *Newsletter for Slovene Women*. It was published on January 1, 1897, in Trieste, first as a fortnightly supplement of the Trieste political newspaper *Edinost*, and from 1900 as an independent monthly. Until 1899, the editor was Marica Nadlišek Bartol, and after that year, Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič. After six years, *Slovenka* ended publication at the end of 1902. (See also [https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovenka_\(%C4%8DDasnik\)](https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovenka_(%C4%8DDasnik))). Accessed 6. 6. 2023.

prijatelj (Home Friend). The bilingual writer,⁶ active in the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, wrote and published her Slovene poems as part of the “Habsburg myth”. Later she experienced great historical and political changes in Central Europe: the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, the First World War, and the beginning of the new Yugoslavia, of which Slovenia was a part after the end of the war. Unfortunately, her poems were published in a book not earlier than in 2008. (Šuler)⁷

III.

According to Felski, the *fin de siècle* was a period in which conflicting attitudes to the modern were staged with particular clarity, where invocations of decadence and malaise were regularly interspersed with the rhetoric of progress and the exhilarating sense of the birth of a new age. In this sense, of course, it is a time that invites inevitable parallels with our own. It was also a period that saw an increasing differentiation of discursive fields, as art became increasingly self-conscious and aware of its own status as art at the same time as such disciplines as sociology, psychology, and anthropology sought to establish themselves as autonomous disciplines and scientific accounts of reality. As a result, it was in the late nineteenth century that many competing accounts of the modern received their first systematic articulation. Caught between the still-powerful evolutionary and historicist models of the nineteenth century and the emergent crises of language and subjectivity which would shape the experimental art of the twentieth century, the turn of the century provides a rich textual field for tracking the ambiguities of the modern. (Felski 30)

In the paper, we will analyse love poems by Kristina Šuler from her early period, mostly from the *fin de siècle* – written in a realistic manner, with the touch of modernity. All were published in the *Slovenka* newspaper (1897–1901)⁸ and unfortunately never published in book form. In her expressions of intimacy in poetry, we will research her poetics and the construction of the authorship of the young female

⁶ Kristina Šuler first started writing German poems at the age of 14 under the influence of the German school in Škofja Loka. At this teacher’s school, with only one hour of Slovene per week, she acquired a knowledge of this literary language through her own diligence and reading which allowed her to begin writing poems in Slovene.

⁷ Due to unfortunate circumstances, the anthology of her poems was not published until 2008. Before the First World War the writer Ivan Lah (1881–1938) intended to publish her poems, after the Second War in sixties the literary historian Marja Boršnik (1906–1981) unsuccessfully intended it. (Cesar 100–101)

⁸ She didn’t publish any poems in the last year of *Slovenka*, which was due to the changing editorial politics of the revue (and new editor Ivanka Ambrožič Klemenčič).

writer in the central European space, which was the crossroad of influences of South Slavic, German, and Italian cultures.

The most profiled and known female lyrical poet among the female poets of the *Slovenka* circle was Vida Jeraj (1875–1932),⁹ but the most productive female poet who published the highest number of poems in the revue *Slovenka*, was Kristina Šuler with 85 poems. She was also the first Slovene female poet to explicitly write about erotic, passion, and heterosexual love relations. Her writer's identity was still shyly in the background, she signed her poems just with her first name Kristina and so skillfully hid her identity (the other Slovene women writers also behaved like that at that time).¹⁰

According to Verginella, the determination and vision of young women writers (in *Slovenka*!) collided with the limitations and back-mindfulness of the Slovene society, which, among other things, is eloquently confirmed by the fact that most of the female authors used a pseudonym when publishing in Slovene newspapers or just a first name without a surname. The fear that a women's initiative would destroy the foundations of a Slovene patriarchal society was overwhelming [...]. (Verginella 15)¹¹

Šuler's poems uncompromisingly depicted the female experience and also the ambivalence of the modern subject of the *fin-de-siècle* period: she discovered intimacy through her original lyrical voice. (See also Pavlin Žerjav 58, 59)

Šuler in her first period searched for language and authenticity to express the feelings of her autobiographical lyrical subject. In her case, the themes of intimacy were not just a literary concept, but also functioned as the place for freedom and the representation of the female voice. Already in her first poems, she also expressed a keen social sense for the negative social phenomena of her period: the problem of the poor and people on the edge of society in the Slovene country of her time.

In the beginning, as a typical *fin-de-siècle* poet, she searched for the new poetics. In her in-time lyric, we find different spectrum

⁹ Vida Jeraj and Ljudmila Poljanec were the only Slovene female poets in the second generation, who succeeded to publish anthology of poems (1906, 1908) but the critics criticised the artistic quality of their poems with the misogynist views, which stopped them in their later creation.

¹⁰ She published some poems in *Ljubljanski zvon* under the name Gorska.

¹¹ Original quotation: "Odlonost in vizionarnost posameznice je trčila ob omejenost in zaprtost slovenskega prostora, kar med drugim zgovorno potrjuje dejstvo, da je večina sodelavk pri objavah v *Slovenki* uporabljala psevdonim ali pa samo ime brez priimka. Strah, da bi ženska pobuda porušila temelje slovenske patriarhalne družbe, je bi premočen [...]."

of various themes and motifs. In the beginning she was traditional in her content and form: she wrote confessional lyrical poems in which she recorded autobiographical experiences and emotions. As the other male poets of her generation (her mentor was the formalist poet Anton Medved (1869–1910), she preferred simple style and clear expressions, just occasionally her style became more poetical and metaphorical. Intime themes were often accompanied by nature. Various feelings were depicted in the realm of nature and countryside: in her autobiographical poems, she connected love confessions with nature motives: the outer landscapes represented the turbulent life of her inner world, she connected her feelings to the outer space of landscape.¹² Although her intimate poetry promised to offer one of the most original and courageous lyrical poetics in Slovene culture, in her lyrical forms she stayed traditional and she preferred a realistic style of discourse.¹³ Like her predecessors, she still wrote in the traditional form and at the beginning adapted the language and style to conventional inspirations from the 19th century.

Sometimes she uses conventional stereotypical phrases on love – influenced by the tradition of Slovene realistic poets from the end of the nineteenth century who adopted poetic solutions from the romantic tradition. Love is stereotypically connected to the motifs of flowers, birds, and stars; it is presented with the motif of the heart and is pictured as a flame and a fire ... Often the poet anthropomorphises motifs from nature as the frame of that love dialogue, or sometimes nature is the addressee and the silent witness to the love situation. She is in dialogue with it; parts of the landscape become her friends who help her: for example in the poem “Toži meni se ...” (I Am So Sad...) the stars are the living beings who comfort her in her sadness.

The realistic experience of erotic dialogue is reinforced by the new perception of time and space. Similar to other impressionists from the period of “moderna”, she records moments and her autobiographical lyrical subject takes landscapes as a backdrop for her emotions and as a space for her love dialogue. She depicts the images of the landscape and situates the lyrical scene between mountains, fields, lakes, and meadows (geographically recognisable from the Bohinj region, where she lived

¹² That was very typical for the impressionist poetry of the Slovene “moderna”, especially for the poetry of Josip Murn-Aleksandrov and Dragotin Kette.

¹³ She belonged to the so-called formalistic style of expression in Slovene lyrics which was also due to the influence of her teacher and mentor Andrej Medved (1869–1910). In the period of the “moderna” the poets were not so keen on the obligation of rhythm and rhyme, and some of them began to use free verse. On the contrary Suler was very strict in using the formal meter and searching for the correct rhyme.

at that time) and the landscape sometimes expands into the infinity of the universe. Time is connected to space precisely with the model of the universe and with the motifs of the moon and stars.

In love poetry, she describes the courtship of a young girl and the union between two unmarried lovers, a man and a woman. The couple is presented in a village with typical rituals at the end of the nineteenth century, also known from Slovene folk tradition and oral poetry, where boyfriends at night court the beloved girl “under the window” (the poem “Na okencu”, On the Window). Occasionally, she uses the tranquil nature scenery as a contrast to a violent passion.

The lyrical dialogue of the female subject with her male partner is normally in the first- person singular form: she addresses the man (in I – you form), which was typical for Slovene 19th century love poetry. In some poems, we can also find a novelty, a new poetical strategy in addressing the love object: she constructs the form for the metaphysical union of two: a woman and a man: the lyrical subject in her love poems is often in the second person of duo – we two.¹⁴ The pronoun emphasises the fundamental union and commitment of the lovers. Already in the poem “Slovo” (Farewell) she establishes a duet with her lover. Love exists in the space and moments of the night, the landscape is full of small movements, and it is framed by the alternation of light and darkness that stretches beyond the horizon (here are also the characteristic motifs of stars as the framework of the love union). In the second verse of the poem, the moon dominates; in the third the willow involves the motif of mourning, which introduces the farewell and also the motif of embrace:

We(two) looked at the silent garden,
 Various flowers were blowing,
 It is in the vault of heaven
 A thousand golden stars were burning.¹⁵

In expressing her commitment to her lover, she sometimes uses stereotypical phrases and motifs from love poetry: love is connected with the motifs of the heart. Since the poems of the Slovene romantic poet France Prešeren (1800–1849), eyes have been the mirror of love

¹⁴ Slovene language still has the possibility to express dual form, which is seen also in the use of pronouns and other grammatical forms.

¹⁵ “Zrla sva na vrtec tihi, / Bujno cvetje je duhtelo, / Na oboku je nebeškem / Tisoč zlatih zvezd gorelo.” (Šuler 1897: 3)

and also the entrance into the soul of the counterpart. In the poem “Očesi tvoji” (Your Eyes) she glorifies the object of love. In the poem, typical metaphors and examples appear: eyes are burning stars, love is a flame, and there is a fire in the heart.

In the flames of these glowing stars
My heart is burning
But in the deep, dark sea
The sad soul is sinking.¹⁶

A very unusual expression of love recognition and a very subversive poetic solution at that time is a change of the gender in the confession, which we find in the poem “V noči” (In the Night). A man confesses his longing for a woman. The love story is again placed in the shelter of the night with the attributes of the stars and the moon. Sunset as the beginning of the night is a typical frame for presenting the beginning of great love and also introduces the parallel of the lovers’ eyes:

There was a faint pulse of light in the sky.
The gold of the stars was fading,
But I locked it in the bottom of my soul.
The sky of your beautiful eyes.¹⁷

In the poem “Za vasjo” (Behind the Village), we recognise a typical shift of the love description: we follow the movement of the lyrical scene from external nature into the inner world of feelings. The poet builds the composition on the contrast of the silent night and the calm landscape on one side, and on the other side the “storm” inside the subject. The lyrical subject, the loving couple, is again presented in the second person. The erotic motifs are also exposed: kisses and passionate embraces are part of the dialogue:

But the quiet night
does not calm our hearts,
When despair swirls in them,

¹⁶ “V plamenih teh – žarečih zvezdah / Srce mi zagori, / A v morje temno to globoko / Se duša žalna zatopi.” (Šuler 1897: 9)

¹⁷ “Bledel je ščip svetli na nebu, / Bledelo je zvezdic zlato, / A jaz sem v dno duše zaklenil / Oči tvojih krasnih nebó.” (Šuler 1897: 8)

Because of our love.¹⁸

In her confession, love becomes a passion that cannot be stopped, the poet expresses eroticism in movement with the motif of dance of the lovers, for example in the poem “Na plesu” (At the Dance). Moments thus turn into eternity, love into never ending passion, which takes the main place in life, which wins life with its irrationality.

Between them we spin,
You hug me tight-
Ah, the world of fools remains.
May it be so for all eternity...¹⁹

Her love confessions in time became more and more courageous. In the foreground of the lyrical event in the poems “Nekdaj” (In the Past) and “Pesem” (Poem) is a realistic description of a night of love spent with her lover.

But when you came to the village in the evening,
All anger was gone.
At that time, we were used
To make sweet love.²⁰

In the poem “ Na jezero” (On the Lake) the sunset on the lake becomes a vivid framework of the loving couple. This is also the moment when love is first associated with great suffering and pain:

We sat quietly on the boat,
The happy half and the sad half,
The early divorce was approaching young happiness,
It was so painful.²¹

In some poems, the motifs for jealousy and the infidelity of the male partner appear. She is critical of the male position in the gendered

¹⁸ “A nama pa srca / Noč tiha ne umiri, / Ko v njem obup vihrá, / Kí ga ljubezen širi.” (Šuler 1897: 7)

¹⁹ “Med nimi se vrtiva, / Objemaš me tesno- / Ah, svet norčav ostane / Vso večnost naj tako...” (Šuler 1898: 109)

²⁰ “A, ko si zvečer v vas prišel, / Vsa jeza je minila. / Po najini navadici / Sladko sva se ljubila.” (Šuler 1898: 407)

²¹ “Tiho v čolnu sva sedela, / Srečna pol in tožna pol, / Bližala se mladi sreči / Zgodnje je ločitve bol.” (Šuler 1897: 5).

patriarchal society. In the poems “Taki so” (They Are Like That), “Ne trdi...” (Don’t Say That...), “Požigalec” (Arsonist), “Pisemce” (Small Letter), she describes the promiscuous behavior of her lover within the society of the village, followed by the feelings of betrayal on her side. The poet treated the situation lightly, not with condemnation.

The poet was also critical of the gendered power relations and the poor position of Slovene women in patriarchal society: in her poems, the new theme of the moral pressure of society on a woman appears. Society condemns extramarital love before marriage as a great sin in the poems “Obsodba” (Condemnation) and “Obup” (Despair). However, the social pressure does not extinguish the “flame from the eyes” as a metaphor for the great passion that takes over the couple in love. The female poet reveals how at that time a woman had to face a burden of moral prohibitions; the village community, within the framework of Christian morality, condemned extramarital love as a great sin. In the poem “Sen” (Dream) Šuler constructs a grotesque dream scene, when a young woman is sentenced to death by village community for her love. They took her to the place of execution, and only her lover (who appears in the crowd) saves her from the death sentence and forgives her everything. She eventually wakes up and realises that it was just a dream.

In relation to social themes and the picture of women in a patriarchal society, the motif of an illegitimate child as the result of the inconvenient relationship also appears in some poems.²²

The most poignant are the poems about the loss of the lover and their separation, the emptiness of the soul, and the great despair, sorrow, and depression that follow, which appear in her last love poems published in *Slovenka*, for example in the poem “Spomini II” (Memories II). Šuler’s last poems published in *Slovenka* became solemn and sombre. In the poem “Jesen” (Autumn) we have the symbolic motif of the crow, which is the metaphor for the subject’s despair and the unlucky fate without love in the future. The black bird triumphs in her painful soul:

Monsters - are the days, the years
Living without you -

²² This was also her crucial motif in her autobiography: in 1901 she gave birth to an illegitimate child (Krista Šuler), and that was the cause of her tragic fate. Teachers were not allowed to get married. She had to move from the Gorenjska area to Sveta gora in Steiermark, where society was more liberal and they allowed her to raise the child by herself.

Those days, those years, oh my love,
I am so afraid of.²³

Her subverse love poems were in public life also noticed by Catholic editors and intellectuals; she experienced an attack on her poetry.

IV.

Gavin and Oulton in their preface to the women writing at the end of the 19th century claim that while a number of women writers (in this period!) actively engaged with the debate on feminine social roles, others reverse the term of the debate by rewriting male plot lines in their novels and stories. In challenging norms of masculinity, they obliquely contest the shaping of a female experience dominated by male expectations. (Gavin – Oulton I) The same was true for the poet Kristina Šuler. At her time, she presented a completely new voice in Slovene poetry, but nevertheless she also followed the male tradition. She continued the rich tradition of Slovene (male) poetry depicting love dialogue and eroticism, but with the specific female experience at a time when male power relations dominated society and also in the sphere of sexuality, regarding female sex, eroticism, and desire.

There is the perception of new modernity in her poetry. The representation of the lyrical subject is moving between traditional and modern, but the understanding of gender relations and subjectivity is modern. The more visible is Šuler's turn to impressionist sensibility. She depicted the dialogue of love in connection with the special perception of moments in the spatiality of the natural landscape. She presented a love dialogue in an autobiographical discourse as a confession, and also the narrative of love relations through time with all the passions, desire, and pain. In her discourse, she was subversive, not afraid to illustrate the sexuality of the unmarried couple and the representations of female desire as a crucial point of existence.

According to Irena Novak Popov, during the period of the 19th century and the turn of the century, the female lyrical subject is more and more distinctive and recognisably different from the male. A subject

²³ "Pošati – dnevi, leta so / Ko jaz brez tebe živim – / Teh dnij, teh let, oh ljubeč moj, / Se jaz tako bojim..." (Spomini II 1899: 461)

of imagination and intuition senses and knows even what it wants to remain hidden. It is much more mobile, relaxed, and free than the real life of women could be at that time.²⁴

Šuler began a new era of Slovene poetry; her poetry, as well as the other poetry of the Slovene “moderna”, announced the shift to modernism in the 20th century, and that was also true for Slovene poetry written by women. During her long life, she did not become a recognised Slovene poet because circumstances were against that. There were some reasons for this: there was not a strong, developed book market and there were not enough publishing houses; there was also not a large community of Slovene readers. In fact, there still existed the ‘colonial’ Habsburgian system of state power and Austrian dominance in the sphere of culture, therefore the reading audience was small, and the Slovene language was still struggling for its dominance in the cultural sphere. The main reason was also a strong male dominance in culture and literary society: editors, critics, and all important people in Slovene culture were men; thus there existed a gendered approach to the first generation of Slovene female authors and their publications. When Marijan Dovič analysed the role of the artist in Slovene society he did not see a lot of opportunities for the (male!) writer of that time: “The end of the 19th century, when the so-called “moderna” (Slovene moderna!) arose, is generally marked by the rise of capitalism and its attributes: in the second half of the 19th century, the foundations of all working roles were laid [...] However, for various reasons, this has not yet transferred to a professional literary producer, although of course, it already allowed for various combinations of living with “the pen” (in connection with editorial, journalistic and similar roles). In addition, the model of the author as an aesthetically autonomous artist, which was already strongly established in Europe at the time, had not yet been consolidated here [...]” (Dovič 143) The male writer had to struggle in these circumstances, but the situation was much worse for their female contemporaries. Slovene society at that time did not allow women writers to establish their careers: because of all the obstacles, it was simply not possible to become a female poet in Slovene patriarchal society of that time. Šuler did not realise her career in the beginning of the 20th century, not because she was not good enough, but because it was not possible for Slovene women of that period to become writers.

²⁴ Original quotation: “Ženski lirski subjekt je sčasoma vse bolj razlikovalen in prepoznavno drugačen od moškega. To je subject imaginacije in intuicije, ki sluti in ve tudi tisto, kar hoče ostati skrito. Je mnogo bolj gibljiv, sproščen in svoboden, kot je moglo biti realno življenje žensk.” (Novak Popov 188)

The gendered circumstances within Slovene culture didn't allow her to become a professional women writer. Šuler tried to break "the ice" of Slovene literary life and to fight unfriendly circumstances, but was silenced. She could not realise her talent even after the political changes after the First and the Second World Wars. It did not help her in socialist Yugoslavia when she was nevertheless even recognised as one of the oldest Slovene living poets of that time.

According to Harold Bloom a poetic text [...] is not a gathering of signs on a page, but is a psychic battlefield upon which authentic forces struggle for the only victory worth winning, the devinating triumph over oblivion ... (Bloom 2) Did Kristina Šuler succeeded in her poems in a struggle over oblivion? The answer is still not known.

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